

## Past simple and continuous tenses

We use the past tense to talk about:

- something that happened **once in the past**:

*I **met** my wife in 1983.*

*We **went** to Spain for our holidays.*

*They **got** home very late last night.*

- something that happened **several times in the past**:

*When I was a boy, I **walked** a mile to school every day.*

*We **swam** a lot while we were on holiday.*

*They always **enjoyed** visiting their friends.*

- something that was **true for some time in the past**:

*I **lived** abroad for ten years.*

*He **enjoyed** being a student.*

*She **played** a lot of tennis when she was younger.*

- we often use **expressions with ago** with the past simple:

*I **met** my wife **a long time ago**.*

We use the past continuous to talk about the past:

for something which **happened** in the **middle** of an **action**:

*The children **were doing** their homework when I **got** home.*

*Compare: The children **did** their homework when (= after) I got home.*

This use of the past continuous is very common at the **beginning of a story**:

*The other day I **was waiting** for a bus when ...*

*Last week, as I **was driving** to work, ...*

for something that happened **before** and **after** a **specific time**:

*It was eight o'clock. I **was writing** a letter.*

*Compare: At eight o'clock I **wrote** (= started writing) some letters.*

to show that something **continued for some time**:

*My head **was aching**.*

*Everyone **was shouting**.*

for something that **happened again** and **again**:

*I **was practising** every day, three times a day.*

*They **were meeting** secretly after school.*

*They were always quarrelling.*

with verbs which show **change or growth**:

*The children **were growing** up quickly.*

*Her English **was improving**.*

*My hair **was going** grey.*

*The town **was changing** quickly.*

to describe an **action** taking place when **another occurred**.

*While they **were painting** the door, I **was painting** the windows.*

**We do not normally use the past continuous with stative verbs.** We use the past simple instead:

*When I got home, I really needed (NOT was needing) a shower.*