

Activity Type

Grammar Exercises: categorising, gap-fill, matching, writing sentences from prompts

Focus

Past simple vs. past continuous

Aim

To learn and practice how and when to use the past simple and past continuous.

Preparation

Make one copy of the two-page worksheet for each student.

Level

Intermediate (B1)

Time

35 minutes

Introduction

This past simple vs. past continuous worksheet helps students learn and practice how and when to use the past continuous, in contrast with the past simple.

Procedure

Give each student a copy of the two-page worksheet.

Students begin by reading situations and categorizing them based on whether the past simple or past continuous is used.

Exercise A - Answer key

Past simple: b, e, g, i Past continuous: a, c, d, f, h, j

Next, students complete sentences using verbs in brackets in the past simple or past continuous, as appropriate for the situation.

Exercise B - Answer key

- | | | |
|----------------|------------------|-------------------|
| 1. was aching | 5. called | 8. needed |
| 2. was taking | 6. were / doing | 9. was / talking |
| 3. did / got | 7. stopped / got | 10. were planning |
| 4. was getting | | |

Students then match past simple and past continuous sentences with the situations in Exercise A.

Exercise C - Answer key

1. a 2. h 3. e 4. d 5. i 6. f 7. g 8. b 9. c 10. j

After that, students match timelines with the situations in Exercise A. The students then write past simple or past continuous sentences corresponding to the timelines using prompts, adding time adverbs, and other information where appropriate.

Exercise D - Possible answers

1. e Grace went to a football match yesterday.
2. h, i Milo was still cooking dinner when the guests arrived.
3. a Noah was texting his friends for hours last night.
4. g Jacob took three guitar lessons then quit.
5. f Hazel was giving a presentation at 11:00.
6. b Lucy wanted a pony when she was a child.
7. c John was always forgetting his keys.
8. d My daughter, Claire, was growing up so fast!
9. j Kate was planning to go to the library, but her plan changed.

When the students have finished, review their sentences together as a class and give feedback.

Past Simple or Past Continuous?

A. Do you use the past simple or past continuous in these situations? Write the letter in the correct box below.

- You want to emphasize that an action took some time.
- You want to talk about a state or situation that was true in the past.
- You want to emphasize something happened again and again over time.
- You want to emphasize change or growth over time.
- You want to talk about a one-time completed action or event. The duration isn't important.
- You want to talk about a relatively long action that was ongoing at a particular time.
- You want to talk about a repeated, completed action or event. The duration isn't important.
- You want to talk about a relatively long action that was interrupted by a shorter one.
- You want to talk about a relatively short action or event that happened during a longer one.
- You want to talk about a plan that would have been completed in the past but was changed.

Past simple	Past continuous

B. Complete the sentences in the past simple or continuous using the verbs in brackets.

- Oh man, my back (ache) all day.
- I (take) a shower when the package arrived.
- I (do) my homework after I (get) home from school.
- Her chess game (get) better steadily.
- Sorry I didn't answer the phone before. I was driving when you (call).
- What you (do) on the night of the murder?
- I often (stop) for tea in the morning before I (get) married.
- I didn't have lunch, so I really (need) something to eat when I got home.
- He always (talk) about his bowling scores, but no one cared.
- We (plan) to buy you a cake for your birthday, but the bakery was closed.

C. Match the sentences above with the situations in Exercise A.

- | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|----------|
| 1. | 2. | 3. | 4. | 5. |
| 6. | 7. | 8. | 9. | 10. |

