



Past Continuous vs Past Simple — A2 exercises

Printable worksheet · 23 questions · answer key with explanations on the last page
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Name _____ Date _____ Score _____ / 23

A. Multiple choice

10 questions

Circle the letter of the correct answer.

- I ____ a shower when the doorbell rang.
A) had B) was having C) have had D) was have
- While she ____, somebody stole her bag.
A) slept B) was sleeping C) sleeps D) were sleeping
- The lights went out while we ____ dinner.
A) ate B) were eating C) eat D) was eating
- Which sentence is correct?
A) I was knowing the answer. B) I knew the answer.
C) I was know the answer. D) I did knowing the answer.
- He ____ his leg while he was skiing.
A) was breaking B) broke C) breaks D) was broke
- What ____ when I called you?
A) did you do B) were you doing C) you were doing D) was you doing
- They ____ television all evening.
A) were watching B) watched at C) was watching D) were watch
- Choose the correctly built background clause.
A) While I walked home, it started to rain. B) While I was walking home, it started to rain.
C) While I was walk home, it started to rain. D) While walking I home, it started to rain.
- The sun ____ when we reached the top.
A) shone B) was shining C) shines D) were shining
- She ____ the door, took off her coat and sat down.
A) was opening B) opened C) opens D) was open

B. Fill in the blank

8 questions

Write the missing word or words in the gap.

- I _____ cooking when the smoke alarm went off.
- While they _____ waiting, the flight was cancelled.

3. She was reading when the lights suddenly _____ out.
4. We _____ walking along the beach at sunset.
5. He _____ his wallet while he was running for the bus.
6. _____ you sleeping when I phoned?
7. I _____ the answer immediately, so I put my hand up.
8. The baby was crying _____ we were trying to eat.

C. Sentence building

5 questions

Put the words in the correct order and write the sentence on the line.

1. called. / I / cooking / was / you / when

Explain why you did not answer the phone.

2. she / driving, / snowing. / was / started / While / it

Set a scene on a road and add a sudden change.

3. arguing / bill. / They / the / about / were

Describe an ongoing restaurant disagreement.

4. while / He / his / arm / broke / skateboarding.

Report an injury during an activity.

5. doing / at / were / you / What / midnight?

Ask about an activity in progress at an exact hour.

Answer key

Every answer carries the reason behind it. Read the reason for the questions you got right as well — that is where you find out whether you were right for the right reason.

A. Multiple choice

1. **B) was having** — The longer background action takes the past continuous; the interruption takes the past simple.
2. **B) was sleeping** — While introduces the background action, which needs the past continuous.
3. **B) were eating** — We is plural, so the past continuous is were eating.
4. **B) I knew the answer.** — Know is a state verb and does not appear in the continuous.
5. **B) broke** — The sudden event inside a longer activity takes the past simple.
6. **B) were you doing** — Asking about an activity in progress at that moment needs the past continuous.
7. **A) were watching** — An activity filling a whole period takes the past continuous with were for they.
8. **B) While I was walking home, it started to rain.** — The clause after while normally carries the past continuous.
9. **B) was shining** — Weather and scenery set the scene, which is the past continuous's job.
10. **B) opened** — A sequence of completed actions takes the past simple throughout.

B. Fill in the blank

1. **was** — First-person singular past continuous uses was plus the -ing form.
2. **were** — They is plural, so the past continuous auxiliary is were.
3. **went** — The interrupting event takes the past simple.
4. **were** — We is plural, so the auxiliary is were.
5. **dropped** — The sudden action inside a longer one takes the past simple.
6. **Were** — Past continuous questions with you begin with were.
7. **knew** — Know is a state verb and never appears in the continuous.
8. **while** — While joins two actions happening at the same time.

C. Sentence building

1. **I was cooking when you called.**
2. **While she was driving, it started snowing.**
3. **They were arguing about the bill.**
4. **He broke his arm while skateboarding.**
5. **What were you doing at midnight?**