



# Past Simple v Past Continuous Use

# Past Tense Use

The past simple and the past continuous tenses are both used to talk about the past time.

# Past Tense Use

Both tenses express a very similar time but there are a few differences. Let's review the uses of both tenses and discuss the differences.

# Past Tense Use

The past simple tense can be represented like this on a timeline.



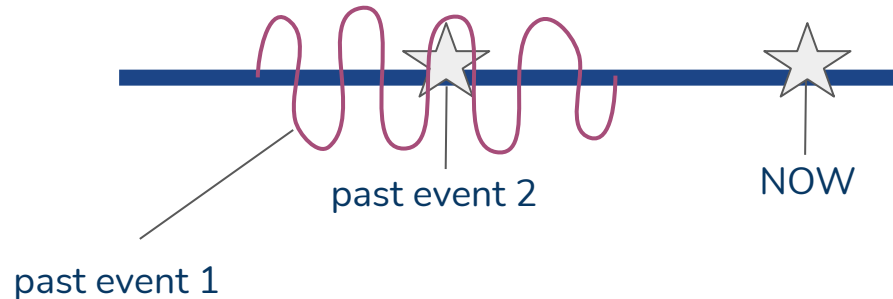
# Past Tense Use

The past simple tense has six main uses.

| Past Simple Use       | Example Sentences  |
|-----------------------|--|
| Single past event     | <i>I went to Mexico last summer</i>                            |
| Series of past events | <i>I woke up, got dressed, brushed my teeth, had breakfast</i> |
| Duration in the past  | <i>I lived in Barcelona for 3 years</i>                        |
| Repeated past event   | <i>I drove to work every day</i>                               |
| Changed state         | <i>She was short as a child, but now she's tall</i>            |
| Stative verbs         | <i>I wanted a puppy</i>  |

# Past Tense Use

The past continuous tense can be represented like this on a timeline.



# Past Tense Use

The past continuous tense has six uses.

| Past Continuous Use     | Example Sentences   |
|-------------------------|---|
| Before/ after structure | <i>It was 7pm and I was having dinner</i>                               |
| 2 simultaneous actions  | <i>I was cooking while he was watching TV</i>                           |
| Long past action        | <i>It was raining all morning</i>                                       |
| Setting the scene       | <i>It was raining, the trees were blowing, the wind was howling ...</i> |
| Change and growth       | <i>They were growing up so quickly</i>                                  |
| Verb “to wonder”        | <i>I was wondering if you’d like to go out with me?</i>                 |

# Past Tense Use

But there are a few similarities in these uses, so we need to choose the tense carefully.



# Past Tense Use

We use the past simple tense to talk about a finished action but the past continuous could represent an unfinished action.

# Past Tense Use

Consider these two examples, what is the difference in meaning?

| Past Simple                         | Past Continuous                           |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| When I arrived, he did his homework | When I arrived, he was doing his homework |

# Past Tense Use

## Past Simple

When I arrived, he did his homework

## Past Continuous

When I arrived, he was doing his homework

The past simple tense tells us that the second event happens after the first event.



# Past Tense Use

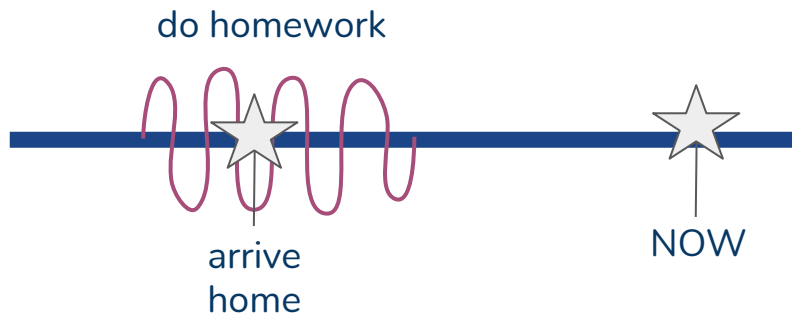
## Past Simple

When I arrived, he did his homework

## Past Continuous

When I arrived, he was doing his homework

The past continuous tense tells us that the two events happened at the same time.



# Past Tense Use

Both the past simple and the past continuous can be used to talk about the time an event happened.

| Past Simple              | Past Continuous                 |
|--------------------------|---------------------------------|
| At 8am, I left the house | At 8am, I was leaving the house |

# Past Tense Use

## Past Simple

At 8am, I left the house

## Past Continuous

At 8am, I was leaving the house

We use the past simple to talk about a specific time the event happened.



# Past Tense Use

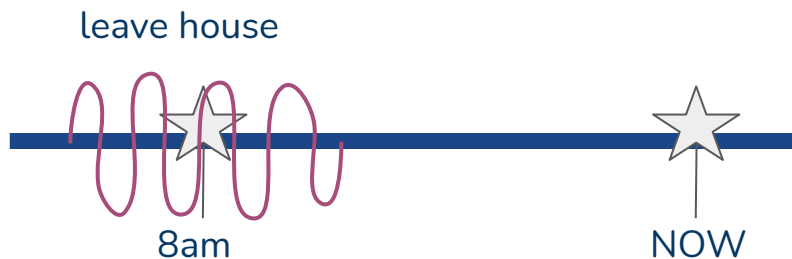
## Past Simple

At 8am, I left the house

## Past Continuous

At 8am, I was leaving the house

We use the past continuous to talk about an approximate time the event happened.



# Past Tense Use

Both the past simple and the past continuous can be used to talk about a change.

| Past Simple          | Past Continuous              |
|----------------------|------------------------------|
| They grew so quickly | They were growing so quickly |



# Past Tense Use

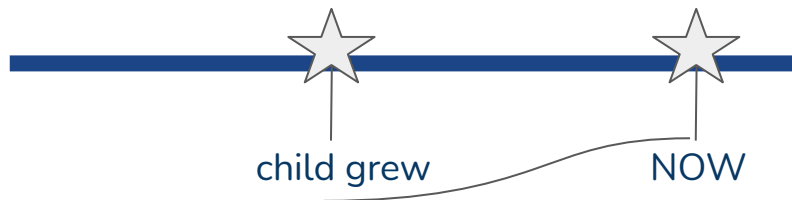
## Past Simple

They grew so quickly

## Past Continuous

They were growing so quickly

The past simple focuses on the end result and compares the past change to the present.



# Past Tense Use

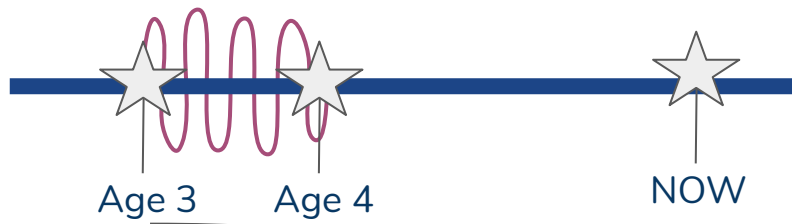
## Past Simple

They grew so quickly

## Past Continuous

They were growing so quickly

The past continuous focuses on comparing two past points together.



# Past Tense Use

The final thing to be aware of is that stative verbs can only be used in the past simple tense.

## Past Tense Use

We cannot say “**I was needing a pen all morning chocolate**” because *need* is a stative verb.



Instead, we must use the past simple tense  
“**I needed a pen all morning**”.