

■ Past time

Past simple

Single completed actions	Sony and Philips invented the CD in the early 1980s.
Repeated or habitual actions in the past	We moved house a lot when I was a kid.
General truths about the past	Early clocks were usually very unreliable.
Permanent situations and states in the past	Did the ancient Egyptians have more advanced technology than other civilisations?
The main events in a story	Frank turned on the TV and sat on the sofa.
The present (in conditional sentences) (see Unit 11 for more information)	If we didn't have computers, what would the world be like?
The present (after <i>wish, it's time, would rather, etc</i>) (see Unit 13 for more information)	I'd rather Michael didn't waste so much time playing video games.

Emphatic past simple

To emphasise contrast in the past	Perhaps our grandparents didn't have e-mail, but they did have the telephone and telegrams.
To emphasise strong feeling in the past	I did enjoy our visit to the Science Museum last summer.

Past simple vs present perfect simple

- In general, the past simple is used to refer to periods of time or moments which are finished. The present perfect is used to refer to periods of time which continue up to the present.
 - ✓ The nineteenth century **saw** many technological advances, such as the camera and the electric light bulb.
 - ✓ There **have been** many technological advances in recent years, the most important being the spread of the Internet.
- The past simple is used to refer to events at a specific time in the past. The present perfect is used when the specific time something happened isn't important or relevant, or when the present result of a past event is important.
 - ✓ I **sent** my first e-mail six months ago.
 - ✓ **Have** you ever **sent** an e-mail before?

Past continuous

Actions in progress at a particular moment in the past	Were you chatting to Matt online at midnight last night?
Actions in progress around a particular moment in the past	At the turn of the twentieth century, many discoveries were being made in physics and other sciences.
Temporary situations and series of actions in the past	At the time, I was working for a large software company in California.
Changing and developing situations in the past	I was getting frustrated with my internet provider so I decided to change.
Annoying or amusing past habits (usually with <i>always</i>)	When she was young, Tina was always taking things apart to see how they worked.
Background information in a story	It was raining outside and people were making their way home after work.
Actions in progress over a period of time	Were you writing e-mails all yesterday morning?
Two actions in progress at the same time	While I was playing a computer game, my brother was doing his homework.
The present and the future (in conditional sentences) (see Unit 11 for more information)	Would you be happier if you were studying computer science?
The present and the future (after <i>wish, it's time, would rather, etc</i>) (see Unit 13 for more information)	I wish we were going to the computer fair next weekend.

Past continuous vs past simple

- We often use the past continuous to describe background events in progress and the past simple for the main events.
✓ We **were talking** about MP3s when Andrea **mentioned** her new music website.
- We normally use the past simple to describe regular or repeated actions in the past, not the past continuous.
✓ When I was a child, I **visited** my grandmother every week.

Past continuous vs present perfect continuous

In general, the past continuous is used to refer to actions in progress during periods of time or at moments which are finished. The present perfect continuous is used to refer to actions in progress during periods of time which continue up to the present.

- ✓ We **were working** on my computer for four hours yesterday.
- ✓ We **have been working** on my computer for four hours so far.

Past perfect simple

Situations and states before the past	Had you had your computer long before it broke down?
Completed actions before a moment in the past	When talking films appeared, the cinema had already become a popular form of entertainment. When Dimitra called, I had managed to fix her computer.
A series of actions continuing up to a moment in the past	By the time of his death, Thomas Edison had invented a number of things that changed everyday life.
Completed actions where the important thing is the result at a moment in the past	I beat Jason at International Captain because I 'd played it a lot with my brother.

Past perfect continuous

Actions and situations continuing up to a moment in the past (or just before a moment in the past)	She 'd been writing computer games for over ten years before she finally had a hit.
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would

Past habits, particularly for the distant past	The ancient Greeks would rely on the power of slaves, rather than machines.
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Watch out!

- *Would* can also be used with a continuous infinitive when we are referring to a habit involving actions in progress.
✓ Whenever I went to James's house, he **would usually be playing** on his computer.
- *Would* is not usually used to refer to past states.

used to

Past habits and states, particularly for the distant past	It used to seem strange to be able to communicate over long distances.
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Watch out!

- Remember that *used to* is not the same as *be used to*. *Be used to* refers to a situation that is now familiar or no longer strange.
✓ At first, people found it strange sending messages by mobile, but now everyone's **used to** it.
- We use *get used to* to refer to the process of becoming familiar with a situation.
✓ It's surprising how quickly people in the nineteenth century **got used to** travelling by train.