

Past continuous (I was doing)

A

Study this example situation:



Yesterday Karen and Jim played tennis. They started at 10 o'clock and finished at 11.30.

So, at 10.30 they **were playing** tennis.

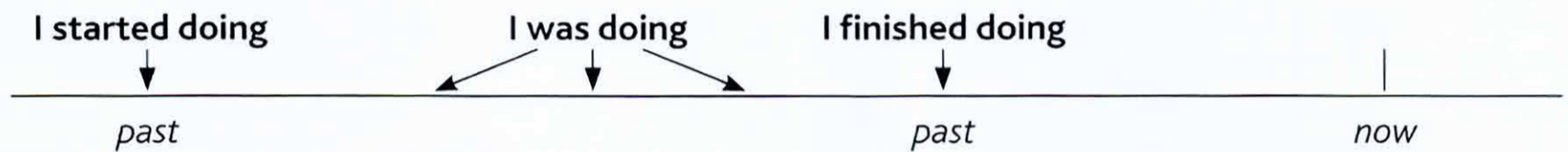
They **were playing** = they were in the middle of playing. They had not finished playing.

Was/were -ing is the *past continuous*:

I/he/she/it	was	playing
we/you/they	were	doing
		working etc.

B

I was doing something = I was in the middle of doing something at a certain time. The action or situation had already started before this time, but had not finished:



- This time last year I **was living** in Brazil.
- What **were** you **doing** at 10 o'clock last night?
- I waved to Helen, but she **wasn't looking**.

C

Compare the *past continuous* (I was doing) and *past simple* (I did):

Past continuous (in the middle of an action)

- I **was walking** home when I met Dan. (in the middle of walking home)
- Kate **was watching** TV when we arrived.

Past simple (complete action)

- I **walked** home after the party last night. (= all the way, completely)
- Kate **watched** television a lot when she was ill last year.

D

We often use the past simple and the past continuous together to say that something happened in the middle of something else:

- Matt **phoned** while we **were having** dinner.
- It **was raining** when I **got** up.
- I **saw** you in the park yesterday. You **were sitting** on the grass and **reading** a book.
- I **hurt** my back while I **was working** in the garden.

But we use the past simple to say that one thing happened after another:

- I **was walking** along the road when I **saw** Dan. So I **stopped**, and we **had** a chat.

Compare:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we were having dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> When Karen arrived, we had dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner) |
|--|--|

E

Some verbs (for example, **know** and **want**) are not normally used in the continuous (see Unit 4A):

- We were good friends. We **knew** each other well. (*not* We were knowing)
- I was enjoying the party, but Chris **wanted** to go home. (*not* was wanting)