

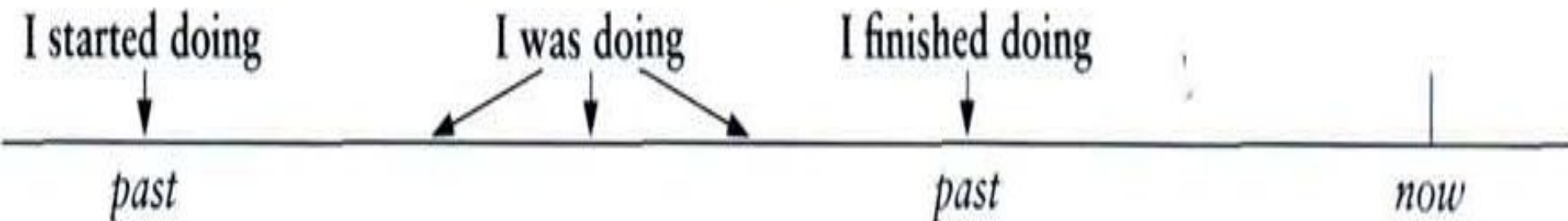
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The Past

Continuous Tense

was/were + V-ing

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.

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 Dave.
(in the middle of an action)
- Kate was watching television 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.

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)

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:

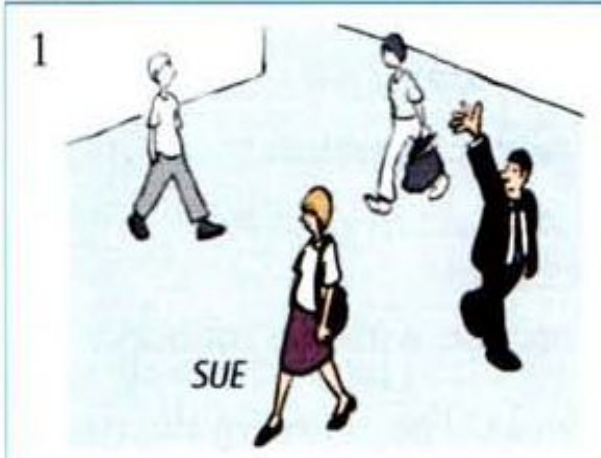
- I **was walking** along the road when I **saw** Dave. So I **stopped**, and we **had** a chat.

Compare:

- When Karen arrived, we **were having** dinner. (= we had already started before she arrived)

- When Karen arrived, we **had** dinner. (= Karen arrived, and then we had dinner)

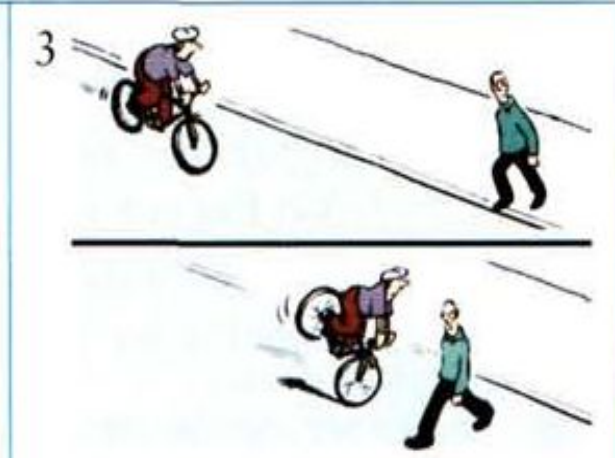
Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.



I saw (see) Sue in town yesterday, but she (not / see) me. She (look) the other way.



I (meet) Tom and Jane at the airport a few weeks ago. They (go) to Paris and I (go) to Rome. We (have) a chat while we (wait) for our flights.



I (cycle) home yesterday when a man (step) out into the road in front of me. I (go) quite fast, but luckily I (manage) to stop in time and (not / hit) him.

Put the verb into the correct form, past continuous or past simple.

- 1 Jenny *was waiting* (wait) for me when I *arrived* (arrive).
- 2 'What (you / do) at this time yesterday?' 'I was asleep.'
- 3 '..... (you / go) out last night?' 'No, I was too tired.'
- 4 How fast (you / drive) when the accident (happen)?
- 5 Sam (take) a photograph of me while I (not / look).
- 6 We were in a very difficult position. We (not / know) what to do.
- 7 I haven't seen Alan for ages. When I last (see) him, he (try) to find a job.
- 8 I (walk) along the street when suddenly I (hear) footsteps behind me. Somebody (follow) me. I was scared and I (start) to run.
- 9 When I was young, I (want) to be a pilot.
- 10 Last night I (drop) a plate when I (do) the washing up. Fortunately it (not / break).