

## Past Simple vs Past Continuous

### Past Simple

#### 1. used to talk about a completed past event

*Example: She dedicated her book to her late father.*

#### 2. used to talk about a permanent or long-term situation that existed in the past

*Example: When Mary was a child she played the piano.  
 They lived in the south of the country before the war.*

#### 3. used usually with exact past time phrases

ago, last night/week/month/year, in 1995, in the 1990s, on Monday, once upon a time, yesterday, the day before yesterday, at 9 o'clock;  
 every day/week/month/year;  
 in the 20<sup>th</sup> century;  
 in the past;  
 always, never, seldom, sometimes, usually;

*Example: They always had breakfast at 7.  
 They gave a concert in the hall every week.*

#### 4. used to talk about repeated actions or events in the past

*Example: I visited France four times in 2000.  
 She slept very badly whenever she stayed with her uncle.*

#### 5. used with verbs describing states

agree, belong to, cost, disagree, hate, love, like, own, realize, regret, prefer, depend, know, remember, hear, consist, hope, believe, refuse, suggest, suppose, inform, warn, advise, accept, etc.

*Example: She hated walking in the rain.  
 Their family consisted of 5 people.  
 The palace belonged to the Royal family.*

### Past Continuous

#### 1. used for actions in progress at a time in the past

**with time phrases:** at that time, then, in those days;  
 yesterday, the day before yesterday, at 9 o'clock)

*Example: The Gordons were living in Boston then.  
 They were all watching TV at 8 o'clock.*

#### 2. used for describing the situation or the background to a story

*Example: He was working in the garden in the afternoon. Suddenly his neighbour screamed loudly.  
 The sun was shining and the birds were singing. Un expectedly there was an explosion.*

#### 3. used for actions which are suddenly interrupted

(*'when' is used in this case*)

*Example: When he was crossing the street his phone rang.  
 When we were flying on the plane she felt sick.*

(*Sometimes 'when' sentence is presented in Past Simple*)

*Compare:*

*Example: When he came in, everybody was watching a film.  
 When Simon came home his children had dinner. (His children started to have dinner when Simon came home – so both actions happened at the same time.)*

*When Simon came home his children were having dinner. (His children started to have dinner before Simon came home and when he came his children were in the middle of the meal.)*

#### 4. used for actions which we see as incomplete

*Compare:*

*Example: I watched a film about the life of people in hot countries. (I watched it all.)  
 I was watching a film about the life of people in hot countries in the hotel. (I probably didn't watch it all.)*