

English grammar lessons for second year undergraduate students

Second edition

Oxford Practice Grammar

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4 The present continuous

A Introduction

The present continuous means that we are in the middle of an action.



B Form

The present continuous is the present tense of be + an ing-form.

I am looking OR I'm looking

you/we/they are looking OR you/we/they're looking

he/she/it is looking OR he/she/it's looking

NEGATIVE

I'm not looking

you/we/they aren't looking

he/she/it isn't looking

QUESTION

am I looking?

are you/we/they looking?

is he/she/it looking?

I'm getting the lunch ready. The train is coming, look.

We're looking for a post office. Rachel isn't wearing her new dress.

What are you doing? Who is Vicky dancing with?

For rules about the spelling of the ing-form see page 370.

C Use

We use the present continuous to say that we are in the middle of an action.

I'm waiting for the train. (I'm at the station now.)

I'm getting the lunch ready. (I'm in the kitchen now.) *I'm waiting* means that I am in the middle of a period of waiting. The wait is not yet over.

We can also use the present continuous when we are in the middle of something but not actually doing it at the moment of speaking.

*I must get back to the office. We're **working** on a new project.*

*I'm quite busy these days. I'm **doing** a course at college.*

We can use the present continuous when things are changing over a long period. *The number of cars on the road is **increasing**. The earth is slowly **getting** warmer.*

For the future meaning of the present continuous see Unit 26A. *I'm **playing** badminton with Matthew **tomorrow**.*

6 Present continuous or simple? 7 State verbs and action verbs

3 Exercises

1 Form (B)

Look at the pictures and say what people are doing.

Use these verbs: *carry, paint, play, ride, take*

Use these objects: *a bicycle, a parcel, a photo, a picture, basketball*



► *He's riding a bicycle.*

1 3
2 4

2 Form (B)

Rachel is in the computer room at college. Complete her conversation with Andrew. Put in a present continuous form of the verb.

Andrew: What (►) *are you doing?* (you / do)

Rachel: (►) *I'm writing* (I / write) a letter to a friend. He's a disc jockey. Vicky and I

(1) (try) to organize a disco.

Andrew: That sounds a lot of work. How (2).... (you / find) time for your studies?

Rachel: Well, as I said, Vicky (3) (help) me.

(4) (we / get) on all right. (5) (we / not / spend)

too much time on it. (6) (it / not / take) me away from my studies,

don't worry about that. Oh, sorry, (7) (you / wait) for this computer?

Andrew: Yes, but there's no hurry.

Rachel: (8) (I / correct) the last bit of the letter. I've nearly finished.

3 Use(C)

What can you say in these situations? Add a sentence with the present continuous.

► A friend rings you up in the middle of 'Neighbours', your favourite soap opera. Is it important? *I'm watching 'Neighbours'.*

1 A friend is at your flat and suggests going out, but you can see rain outside.

I don't want to go out now. Look,.....

2 A friend rings you up at work.

Sorry, I can't talk now.

3 You want to get off the bus, but the man next to you is sitting on your coat.

Excuse me,

4 A friend wants to talk to you, but you have just started to write an important letter.

Can I talk to you later?

5 You have been ill, but you're better now than you were.

I'm OK now

4 The present simple



A Use

We use the present simple for

- thoughts and feelings: / **think so, I like it.**
- states, things staying the same, facts and things that are true for a long time:
*We **live** quite near* (see Unit 7).
- repeated actions: *We **come** here every week.*

and also

- in phrases like **I promise, I agree**, etc:
*I **promise** I'll pay you back.*
- in a negative question with why to make a suggestion: *Why **don't** we go out?*

For the future meaning of the present simple see Units 26 and 27.

*The new term **starts** next week.*

B Positive forms

*I/you/we/they **get**
he/she/it **gets***

In the present simple we use the verb without an ending.

*I **get** the lunch ready at one o'clock, usually. We always **do** our shopping at Greenway.
Most children **like** ice-cream. You **know** the answer.*

But in the third person singular (after **he, she, it, your friend**, etc), the verb ends in **s** or **es**. For spelling rules see page 370.

*It **gets** busy at weekends. My husband **thinks** so, too.
Sarah **catches** the early train. She **faxes** messages all over the world.*

C Negatives and questions

NEGATIVE

*I/you/we/they **do not get** OR **don't get**
he/she/it **does not get** OR **doesn't get***

QUESTION

***do** I/we/you/they **get**?
does he/she/it **get**?*

We use a form of **do** in negatives and questions (but see Unit 37). We use **do** and **don't** except in the third person singular, where we use **does** and **doesn't**.

*We **don't live** far away. He **doesn't want** to go shopping.
Do you **live** here? ~ Yes, I do. What **does** he **want**? ~ Money.*

We do not add **s** to the verb in negatives and questions.

NOT *He-~~doesn't~~ gets* and NOT *Does he gets?*

4 Exercises

1 Use (A)

Look at each underlined verb and say what kind of meaning it expresses. Is it a thought, a feeling, a fact or a repeated action?

- ? Matthew loves sport. *a feeling*
- ? Sarah often works late at the office. *a repeated action*
- 1 I hate quiz programmes.
- 2 We play table tennis every Thursday.
- 3 The computer belongs to Emma.
- 4 These plates cost £20 each.
- 5 I believe it's the right thing to do.
- 6 I'm hungry. I want something to eat.
- 7 I usually go to work by bus.
- 8 It's OK. I understand your problem.

2 Forms (B-C)

Complete the sentences by putting in the verbs. Use the present simple. You have to decide if the verb is positive or negative.

- ? Claire is very sociable. She *knows* (know) lots of people.
- ? We've got plenty of chairs, thanks. We *don't want* (want) any more.
- 1 My friend is finding life in Paris a bit difficult. He..... (speak) French.
- 2 Most students live quite close to the college, so they (walk) there.
- 3 My sports kit is really muddy. This shirt (need) a good wash.
- 4 I've got four cats and two dogs. I (love) animals.
- 5 No breakfast for Mark, thanks. He (eat) breakfast.
- 6 What's the matter? You (look) very happy.
- 7 Don't try to ring the bell. It (work).
- 8 I hate telephone answering machines. I just..... (like) talking to them.
- 9 Matthew is good at badminton. He (win) every game.
- 10 We always travel by bus. We (own) a car.

3 Forms (B-C)

Complete the conversation. Put in the present simple forms.

- Rita: (►) *Do you like* (you / like) football, Tom?
Tom: (►) / *love* (I / love) it. I'm a United fan. (1) (I / go) to all their games.
Nick usually (2) (come) with me.
And (3) (we / travel) to away games, too.
Why (4) (you / not / come) to a match some time?
Rita: I'm afraid football (5) (not / make) sense to me — men running after a ball. Why (6) (you / take) it so seriously?
Tom: It's a wonderful game. (7) (I / love) it. United are my whole life.
Rita: How much (8) (it / cost) to buy the tickets and pay for the travel?
Tom: A lot. (9) (I / not / know) exactly how much.
But (10) (that / not / matter) to me.
(11) (I / not / want) to do anything else.
(12) (that / annoy) you?
Rita: No, (13) (it / not / annoy) me.
I just (14) (find) it a bit sad.

5 Present continuous or simple?

A Now or sometimes?



PRESENT CONTINUOUS

We use the present continuous for something happening now. / *am speaking to you live* means that Kitty is in the middle of a live broadcast.

Here are some more examples.

*It's **raining** at the moment.*

*I'm **watching** this programme.*

*Look. That man **is taking** a photo of you.*



PRESENT SIMPLE

We use the present simple for repeated actions. / *often speak live to the camera* means that she does it again and again.

*It **always rains** at the weekend.*

*I **watch** television most weekends.*

*He's a photographer. He **takes** lots of photos.*

B Thoughts, feelings and states

We normally use the present simple to talk about thoughts and feelings.

/ *think it's a good programme.* / *Kitty **likes** her job.* We also use it to talk about states (see Unit 7) and permanent facts.

*Reporting **means** a lot to her.* / *Paper **burns** easily.* We also use the present simple in **I promise, I agree, I refuse**, etc.

*I **promise** I'll write to you.* / *It's all right. I **forgive** you.*

C Temporary or permanent?

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

We use the present continuous for a routine or situation that we see as temporary (for a short period).

*I'm **working** at a sports shop for six weeks.*

*At the moment they're **living** in a very small flat.*

PRESENT SIMPLE

We use the present simple for a routine or situation that we see as permanent.

*I **work** at a sports shop. It's a permanent job.*

*They **live** in a very nice flat.*

D Always

PRESENT CONTINUOUS

We can use **always** with the present continuous to mean 'very often', usually with the added meaning of 'too often'.

*Tom **is always inviting** friends here.*

(= He invites them very often.)

*I'm **always making** silly mistakes.*

(= I make silly mistakes too often.)

PRESENT SIMPLE

Always with the present simple means 'every time'.

*Tom **always invites** us to stay at Christmas.*

(= He invites us every Christmas.) / ***always***

***make** silly mistakes in exams.* (= I make mistakes in every exam.)

5 Exercises

1 Present continuous or simple? (A-B)

At work Mark is talking to Alan in the corridor. Complete their conversation.

Put in the present continuous or simple of the verbs.

Mark: (►) *Are you looking* (you / look) for someone?

Alan: Yes, (►) / *need* (I / need) to speak to Neil. He isn't in his office.

Mark: (1)..... (he / talk) to the boss at the moment.

(2)..... (I / think) (3)..... (they / discuss) money.

Alan: Oh, right. And what about you? (4)..... (you / look) for someone too?

Mark: Yes, Linda. (5)..... (you / know) where she is?

Alan: Oh, she isn't here today. She only (6)..... (work) four days a week.

(7)..... (she / not / work) on Fridays. She'll be here on Monday.

Mark: Thank you. (8)..... (you / know) a lot about Linda.

Alan: Well, most days (9)..... (I / give) her a lift,

or(10)..... (she / give) me one. (11)..... (she / live)

quite close to me. (12)..... (it / save) petrol.

Mark: Yes, of course. Good idea. Yes, (13)..... (I / agree).

Well, (14)..... (I / waste) my time here then. I'll get back to my computer.

2 Present continuous or simple? (A-C)

Complete the sentences. Put in the present continuous or simple of the verbs.

► *I'm writing* (I / write) to my parents. / *write* (I / write) to them every weekend.

1 (it / snow) outside. (it / come) down quite hard, look.

2 Normally (I / start) work at eight o'clock, but (I / start) at seven this week. We're very busy at the moment.

3 I haven't got a car at the moment, so.....(I / go) to work on the bus this week. Usually (I / drive) to work.

4 The sun (rise) in the east, remember. It's behind us so (we / travel) west.

5 I'm afraid I have no time to help just now (I / write) a report. But (I / promise) I'll give you some help later.

6 (I / want) a new car (I / save) up to buy one.

3 Always (D)

Complete the sentences. Use *always* and the present continuous or simple.

► Melanie: Tom talks too much, doesn't he?

Rita: Yes, and *he's always talking* about football.

► Laura: You forget your keys every time.

Trevor: I try to remember them, but / *always forget*.

1 Claire: Sarah takes the train every day, doesn't she?

Mark: Yes, the train.

2 Vicky: Rachel misses lectures much too often in my opinion.

Emma: I agree. lectures.

3 Mike: Every time I drive along here, I go the wrong way.

Harriet: But it's very simple, isn't it? Why..... the wrong way?

4 David: Trevor and Laura argue much too often, I think.

Melanie: I know