

English grammar lessons for third year undergraduate students

Second edition

Oxford Practice Grammar

with answers John Eastwood

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8 The past simple

A Introduction

B

Positive forms

A regular past form ends in **ed**.

*It **happened** very quickly. The van **crashed** into the car I **posted** the letter yesterday. We once **owned** a caravan*

For spelling rules, see page 370.

Some verbs have an irregular past form.

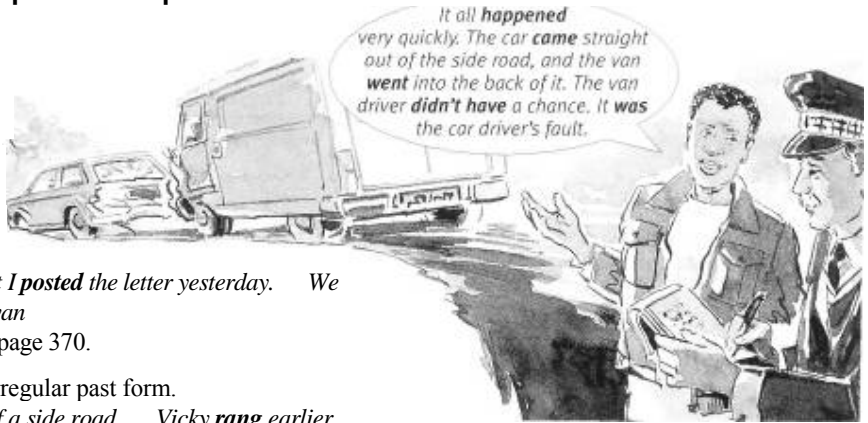
*The car **came** out of a side road. Vicky **rang** earlier. I **won** the game.*

*I **had** breakfast at six. The train **left** on time. We **took** some photos.*

For a list of irregular verbs, see page 383.

The past simple is the same in all persons except in the past tense of be.

*I/he/she/it **was** I **was** ill last week,
you/we/they **were** Those cakes **were** nice.*



C Negatives and questions

We use **did** in negatives and questions (but see Unit 37).

NEGATIVE

*I/you/he/she/it/we/they **did not stop**
OR **didn't stop***

QUESTION

did** I/you/he/she/it/we/they **stop?

*The car **did not stop**. The driver **didn't look** to his right.
What **did** you **tell** the police? ~ Nothing. **Did** you **ring** home? ~ Yes, I did.*

We do not use a past form such as **stopped** or **rang** in negatives and questions.

NOT *The car ~~didn't stopped~~* and NOT *Did you ~~rang?~~*

We also use **was** and **were** in negatives and questions.

NEGATIVE

*I/he/she/it **was not** OR **wasn't**
you/we/they **were** OR **weren't***

QUESTION

***was** I/he/she/it?
were you/we/they?*

*I **wasn't** very well last week. The gates **weren't** open.
Where **was** your friend last night? **Was** your steak nice?*

D Use

We use the past simple for something in the past which is finished.

*Emma **passed** her exam **last year**. We **went** to the theatre **on Friday**. Elvis Presley **died** in 1977.
I **knew** what the problem **was**. **When did** you **buy** this car? ~ About **three years ago**.*

10 Past continuous or simple? 14-15 Present perfect or past simple?

8 Exercises

1 Positive forms (B)

What did Claire do on holiday last month? Look at her photos and use these words:
go out dancing, have a picnic, lie on the beach, play volleyball, swim in the sea



► *She lay on the beach*

- 1 3.....
 2..... 4.....

2 Positive forms (B)

Complete the newspaper story about a fire. Put in the past simple forms of the verbs.

Two people (►) *died* (die) in a fire in Ellis Street, Oldport yesterday morning. They
 (1).....(be) Herbert and Molly Paynter, a couple in their seventies. The fire
 (2).....(start) at 3.20 am. A neighbour, Mr Aziz, (3).....(see)
 the flames and (4).....(call) the fire brigade. He also
 (5).....(try) to get into the house and rescue his neighbours, but the heat
 (6).....(be) too great. The fire brigade (7).....(arrive) in five
 minutes. Twenty fire-fighters (8).....(fight) the fire and finally
 (9).....(bring) it under control. Two fire-fighters (10).....
 (enter) the burning building but (11).....(find) the couple dead.

3 Negatives and questions (C)

Complete the conversation. Put in the past simple negatives and questions.

Claire: (►) *Did you have* (you / have) a nice weekend in Paris?

Mark: Yes, thanks. It was good. We looked around and then we saw a show.

(1) (we / not / try) to do too much.

Claire: What sights (2) (you / see)?

Mark: We had a look round the Louvre. (3) (I / not / know) there was so much
 in there.

Claire: And what show (4) (you / go) to?

Mark: Oh, a musical. I forget the name. (5) (I / not / like) it.

Claire: Oh, dear. And (6) (Sarah / enjoy) it?

Mark: No, not really. But we enjoyed the weekend. Sarah did some shopping, too, but

(7) (I / not / want) to go shopping.

9 The past continuous



A Introduction

The past continuous means that at a time in the past we were in the middle of an action.

B Form

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

I/he/she/it was playing
you/we/they were playing

NEGATIVE

I/he/she/it wasn't playing
you/we/they weren't playing

QUESTION

was I/he/she/it playing?
were you/we/they playing?

Soft music was playing. People were walking in the park. I wasn't dreaming. I really was in New York City. Why did you give our secret away? What were you thinking of? Was Matthew already waiting for you when you got there?

C Use

Read this conversation.

Melanie: *I rang at about three yesterday afternoon, but you weren't in. I didn't know where you were.*

David: *Oh, I was helping Mike. We were repairing his car. It took ages. We were working on it all afternoon.*

Melanie: *It was raining. I hope you weren't doing it outside.*

David: *No, we were in the garage. So I didn't get wet. But I'm afraid I got oil all over my new trousers.*

Melanie: *Why were you wearing your new trousers to repair a car?* David: *I don't know. I forgot I had them on.*

It was raining at three o'clock means that at three o'clock we were in the middle of a period of rain. The rain began before three and stopped some time after three. *We were working all afternoon* means that the action went on for the whole period. David is stressing the length of time that the work went on.

We use the continuous with actions. We do not normally use it with state verbs (see Unit 7). For states we use the past simple.

I didn't know where you were, NOT ~~*I wasn't knowing...*~~

9 Exercises

1 Form (B)

Today is the first of January, the start of a new year. Most people are feeling a bit tired. What were they doing at midnight last night?

Use these verbs: *dance, drive, listen, watch, write*

Use these phrases after the verb: *an essay, his taxi, in the street, television, to a band*



► Claire was listening to a band.

- 1 Trevor and Laura
- 2 Vicky and Rachel
- 3 Tom
- 4 Andrew

2 Form (B)

Complete the conversation. Put in the past continuous forms.

Jessica: (►) *I was looking* (I / look) for you, Vicky. I'm afraid I've broken this dish.

Vicky: Oh no! What (1).....(you / do)?

Jessica: (2)..... (I / take) it into the kitchen.

I bumped into Emma. (3)..... (she / come) out just as

(4)..... (I / go) in.

Vicky: I expect it was your fault. (5)..... (you / not / look) where

(6)..... (you / go).

Jessica: Sorry. I'll buy you another one as soon as I have some money.

3 Use(C)

What can you say in these situations? Add a sentence with the past continuous to say that an action lasted a long time.

► You had to work yesterday. The work went on all day.
/ was working all day.

- 1 You had to make phone calls. The calls went on all evening.
- 2 You had to wait in the rain. The wait lasted for half an hour.
- 3 You had to make sandwiches. This went on all afternoon.
- 4 You had to sit in a traffic jam. You were there for two hours.
- 5 Your neighbour played loud music. This went on all night.

10 Past continuous or simple?

A Introduction

A reporter is interviewing Mike and Harriet.

Reporter: *Mike and Harriet, tell me what you **saw**.*

Harriet: *Well, when we **were driving** home last night, we **saw** a strange object in the sky.*

Mike: *As we **were coming** down the hill into town, it just suddenly **appeared** in front of us. We **stopped** the car and **got** out.*

Harriet: *It **was** a very clear night. The stars **were twinkling**.* Mike: *It **was** a spaceship. It **seemed** quite big. It **had** some strange writing on the side.*

*And a light **was flashing** on the top.* Harriet: *As we **were watching** it, it suddenly **flew** away and **disappeared**.*

PAST CONTINUOUS

We use the past continuous for an action that we were in the middle of.

*We **were driving** home.*

(We were in the middle of our journey.)

*A light **was flashing**.*

We do not normally use the past continuous for states. See Unit 7.

NOT ~~*The spaceship **was seeming** ...*~~

NOT ~~*It **was having** writing ...*~~

NOT ~~*I **wasn't knowing** ...*~~

PAST SIMPLE

We use the past simple for a complete action in the past.

*We **drove** home.*

(We finished our journey.)

*The spaceship **flew** away.*

We also use the past simple (not normally the continuous) for states. See Unit 7.

*The spaceship **seemed** quite big.*

*It **had** writing on the side.*

*I **didn't know** what it was.*

B It happened as I was driving

We often use the past continuous and simple together when one (shorter) action comes in the middle of another (longer) one.

*As we **were driving** down the hill, a strange object **appeared** in the sky.*

*While Laura **was sitting** in the garden, it suddenly **began** to rain.*

*You **drove** right past me when I **was waiting** for the bus.*

The appearance of the strange object comes in the middle of the longer action, the drive down the hill.

Shorter action: *An object **appeared**.*

In the three sentences above, the past continuous comes after **as**, **while** or **when** (*As we **were driving** ...*). We can also use **when** before the past simple.

*We **were driving** down the hill **when** a strange object **appeared** in the sky.*

*David **was making** lunch **when** the phone **rang**.*

But we use two past simple verbs for one action after another.

*When we **saw** the spaceship, we **stopped** the car. (= We saw it and then we stopped.)*

C The sun was shining

PAST CONTINUOUS

We often use the past continuous to describe the background.

*The sun **was shining**.*

*The stars **were twinkling**.*

PAST SIMPLE

We use the past simple for actions in a story,

*We **arrived** at the beach.*

*The aliens **landed** quietly.*

10 Exercises

1 Past continuous or simple? (A-B)

David is always having accidents. His girlfriend Melanie is talking about some of the accidents. Write her sentences from these notes. Each sentence has one verb in the past continuous and one in the past simple.

? when / he / carry / a suitcase / he / drop / it / on his foot

When he was carrying a suitcase, he dropped it on his foot.

? he / break / his leg / when / he / ski

He broke his leg when he was skiing.

1 he / sit down / on a chair / while / I / paint / it

2 as / he / run / for a bus / he / collide / with a lamppost

3 his hair / catch / fire / when / he / cook / chips

4 when / he / hold / a beautiful vase / he / suddenly / drop / it

5 he / sit / in the garden / when / a wasp / sting / him / on the nose

2 Past continuous or simple? (A-B)

Put in the correct form of the verb.

Rita: I hear the lights (▶) *went* (go) out in your flats last night.

Emma: Yes, (▶) / *was watching* (I / watch) a documentary on TV when suddenly

(1)..... (we / lose) all the power. But

(2).....(it / come) on again after about ten minutes.

Vicky: Rachel (3)..... (come) down the stairs when the lights

(4)..... (go) out. She almost (5)..... (fall) over.

Daniel: Matthew and I (6)..... (play) table tennis at the time.

Andrew: (7)..... (I / work) on the computer.

(8)..... (I / lose) a whole hour's work. But this morning

(9)..... (I/get) up early and (10)..... (do) it again.

3 Past continuous or simple? (A-C)

Find the second part of each sentence. Put each verb into the correct form.

? Vicky (have) a beautiful dream when she (touch) the wire.

? When Andrew (see) the question, when I (find) a £10 note in it.

1 The train (wait) when the alarm clock (ring).

2 I (read) a library book the crowd (rush) in.

3 Sarah (have) an electric shock he (know) the answer immediately.

4 When the doors (open), they (see) that the sun (shine).

5 When the campers (wake), when we (arrive) at the station.

? *Vicky was having a beautiful dream when the alarm clock rang.*

? *When Andrew saw the question, he knew the answer immediately.*

1

2

3

4

Test 2 Past simple and past continuous (Units 8-10)

Test 2A

Put in the past simple of the verbs in brackets.

► The car *stopped* (stop) at the lights.

1 We..... (leave) the cinema before the end of the film.

2 The streets.....(be) crowded with people.

3 My grandmother..... (die) last year.

4 Everyone..... (have) a marvellous time.

5 We..... (not / like) the food they gave us.

6 Claire..... (go) to Egypt last month.

7 The accident..... (happen) last weekend.

8 It..... (not / be) a very comfortable journey.

9 I..... (know) that ages ago.

Test 2B

Write a second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first. Use the word in brackets.

► There were lights on the spacecraft, (had)

The spacecraft had lights on it.

1 I had my old coat on. (wearing)

2 I was on holiday, and you were on holiday, too. (we)

3 It isn't true that I made a mistake, (didn't)

4 The boys were in the middle of a game of cards, (playing)

5 No one told me about the change of plan, (know)

6 My friend was the winner of the competition, (won)

7 Is it a fact that the Romans built this wall? (did)

Test 2C

Lorna Bright is a long-distance walker. Look at this part of her diary describing a morning's walk along the coast. Write the missing words. Use one word only in each space.

It was a fine day (►) *when* I started out on the last part of my walk around the coast of Britain. The sun was(1)....., and a light wind (2)..... blowing from the south-west. I was pleased that it (3)..... raining. I knew by now that I (4)..... like rain. In fact I (5)..... it. I (6)..... along the cliff top and then down into the lovely little fishing village of Wellburn, past a cafe where people (7)..... having morning coffee. Three miles past Wellburn I (8)..... down for five minutes and (9)..... a drink. Now it (10)..... getting warmer, so I (11)..... off one of my sweaters. I (12)..... stop for long because I (13)..... to reach Seabury by lunch-time. (14)..... I finally got there, it (15)..... just after half past twelve.

Test 2D

Each of these sentences has a mistake in it. Write the correct sentence,

The hotel were very quite.

The hotel was very quiet.

1 ~~It was peaceful, and the birds were sing.~~

2 ~~I washed my hair when the phone rang.~~

3 ~~You came to the club last night.~~

4 ~~It taked ages to go home.~~

5 ~~We tried to keep quiet because the baby sleeping~~

6 ~~As I was watching him, the man was suddenly running away.~~

7 ~~We pass a petrol station two minutes ago.~~

8 ~~Everything was seeming OK.~~

9 ~~Where bought you that bag?~~

10 ~~When I heard the alarm I was having the room immediately.~~

Test 2E

Complete the sentences. Put in the correct form of each verb. Use the past continuous or past simple. ►

When Martin *arrived* (arrive) home, Anna *was talking* (talk) to someone on the phone. Martin *started* (start) to get the tea.

1 I..... (lie) in the bath when the phone..... (ring).

It.....(stop) after a few rings.

2 It.....(be) cold when we..... (leave) the house that day, and
alight snow.....(fall).

3 Your friend who.....(come) here the other day..... (seem)
very nice. I..... (enjoy) meeting her.

4 When I..... (see) the man, he..... (stand) outside the bank.
He..... (have) a black baseball cap on.

5 When I..... (open) the cupboard door, a pile of books
(fall) out.

6 I..... (walk) along the street when I suddenly..... (feel)
something hit me in the back. I..... (not / know) what it was.

We..... (go) to London yesterday, but on the way

We..... (hear) about a bomb scare in Oxford Street. So

We..... (drive) back home straightaway.

8 Something very strange..... (happen) to me on my way home from work
yesterday afternoon. I..... (drive) along the bypass at the time. Suddenly

I..... (see) my mother in the seat beside me. But she died three years ago.