Present continuous and present simple 1

State verbs

We can use the present continuous with some state verbs (e.g. attract, like, look, love, sound) to emphasise that a situation is temporary or for a period of time around the present. Compare:

- Ella stays with us quite often. The children love having her here. and
- Ella’s with us at the moment. The children are loving having her here.

State verbs which we rarely use with the present continuous include believe, consist of, doubt, own.

Some verbs have different meanings when they are used to talk about states and when they describe actions. With their ‘state’ meanings, they usually take simple rather than continuous forms. With their ‘action’ meanings, they may take simple or continuous forms, depending on context. Compare:

- The app doesn’t appear to work on my phone. (appear: state = seem) and
- Carley Robb is currently appearing in a musical on Broadway. / She often appears in musicals. (appear: action = take part)

Mental state verbs

With some verbs describing mental states (e.g. find, realise, regret, think, understand) we can use the present continuous to emphasise that we have recently started to think about something or that we are not sure about something. Compare:

- I regret that the company will have to be sold. (= I’ve made the decision and I’m sorry about it) and
- I’m regretting my decision to give her the job. (= I’m increasingly aware that it was the wrong decision)

When it means ‘think carefully about’, consider is only used with the present continuous:

- He’s considering taking early retirement. (not He considers taking early retirement.)

Some other verbs describing preferences and mental states (e.g. agree, believe, conclude, know, prefer) are rarely used with the present continuous:

- I believe you now. (not I’m believing you now.)

Performatives

We use the present simple with verbs which perform the action they describe (= performatives):

- I suggest you park outside the city and get the bus to the centre.
- We request that you read the terms and conditions carefully before signing.

Some verbs used as performatives with the present simple in affirmative (= positive) sentences (apologise, deny, guarantee, promise, suggest) have a similar meaning with either the present simple or the present continuous in negative sentences:

- I don’t deny / I’m not denying taking the books, but Miguel said it would be okay.

Modals are often used with performatives to make what we say more tentative or polite:

- We would advise you to arrive two hours before the flight leaves.
- I must beg you to keep this a secret.
Exercises

1.1 Complete each pair of sentences using the same verb (in a question form or negative if necessary) from the box. Use the present continuous; if this is not possible, use the present simple. Use / to add any words outside the gap and use contracted forms where appropriate.

A & B

attract consist of doubt feel fit have like look measure sound

1 a I hear you’re having your house repainted. How (does) it looking? (or How (does) it look?)
   b I bought this new dress today. How (does) it look?

2 a A: What are you doing with that ruler?  b: I (measure) the area of the kitchen.
   b The garden (is) 12 by 20 metres.

3 a I (doubt) whether I’ll get another chance to retake the exam.
   b I suppose she might be at home tonight, but I (doubt) it.

4 a The new science museum currently (has) 10,000 visitors a month.
   b Flowers (attract) bees with their brightly-coloured petals.

5 a Carlos won’t work at the top of the 20-storey building because he (fear) heights.
   b / A: How’s the new job?  B: Well, at the moment, I (feel) fit.

6 a My car’s in the garage today. They (have) new brakes.
   b I bought this jumper for Anna, but it (b) her so I’ll have to take it back.

7 a What’s your shirt made from? It (feel) like silk.
   b I won’t be coming to work today. I (feel) very well.

8 a The roof of the house (consist) only plastic sheets nailed down in a few places.
   b Their school uniform (fit) black trousers and a dark green jumper.

9 a Simon’s new song (sound) quite good, but he doesn’t think he’s ready yet to perform it in public.
   b / A: What’s that noise?  B: It (sound) like a bird stuck in the chimney.

10 a Poulsin (fit) treatment for a knee injury, but should be fit to play on Saturday.
   b My sister (has) long blonde hair. You’re bound to recognise her.

1.2 Cross out any improbable answers. C & D

Dear Aunt Mara,

Thanks for your message. I (admit) / I’m admitting for not getting back to you sooner, but I’ve been incredibly busy. When I went into nursing, you warned me that it would be really hard work, but I (don’t admit) / I’m not admitting that I didn’t really believe you. Don’t get me wrong – I (don’t admit) / I’m not admitting that I’m not enjoying it. It’s incredibly rewarding, but I (now realise) / I’m now realising how hard the job is. When I get home I just eat (not very well, I (confess) / I’m confessing) and go straight to bed. It doesn’t help that the bus journey to the hospital is so slow. I (consider) / I’m considering buying a car, which will make things easier, I hope.

And what about you? How (are) do you find / are you finding living in a village after so many years in the city? I (know) / I’m knowing how difficult it is for you to travel such a long way, but it would be lovely if you could come and stay with me for a weekend. I’ve got plenty of room in my flat. I (don’t guarantee) / I’m not guaranteeing to cook as well as you do, but I (promise) / I’m promising to find time to show you around this lovely old town.

Hope to see you soon. Keep in touch.

Love,

Martina

Additional exercise 1 (page 240)
We often use the present simple and present continuous in stories and jokes in informal spoken English to create the impression that events are happening now. This can make them more direct and exciting and hold people’s attention:

- She goes up to this man and looks straight into his eyes. He’s not wearing his glasses, and he doesn’t recognise her …
- This man’s playing golf when a kangaroo bounds up to him, grabs his club and hits his ball about half a mile …

The main events are usually described in sequence using the present simple and longer background events are described using the present continuous.

In narratives and anecdotes the present simple can be used to highlight an event. Often it is used after past tenses and with a phrase such as suddenly or all of a sudden:

- I was sitting in the park, reading a newspaper, when all of a sudden this dog jumps at me.

We also use the present simple and present continuous in live commentaries (for example, on sports events) when the report takes place at the same time as the action:

- King serves to the left-hand court and Adams makes a wonderful return. She’s playing magnificent tennis in this match …

We can use the present simple in phrases such as It says here, I hear, I gather, I see, I understand and They say, (Someone) says, (Someone) tells me to introduce news that we have heard, read, seen (e.g. on television), or been told. We can also use past tenses (e.g. It said here, I heard):

- I gather you’re worried about Pedro.
- Sophia tells me you’re thinking of emigrating.
- Professor Hendriks is at the conference and I hear she’s an excellent speaker.

The present simple is often used in news headlines to talk about events that have recently happened:

- SECOND QUAKE HITS JAPAN
- FIRE BREAKS OUT IN HOTEL ROOM
- SCIENTISTS FIND ICE ON THE MOON
- FOREIGN MINISTER RESIGNS

We can use the present simple to refer to the contents of books, films, newspapers, etc:

- Thompson gives a list of the largest European companies in Chapter 6.
- At the beginning of the book, three men find $4 million in a crashed plane.
- In the film, Loni Baranski takes the role of a private detective.

We can use the present continuous with adverbs such as always, constantly, continually or forever to emphasise that something is done so often that it is characteristic of a person, group or thing:

A: I think I’ll stay here after all.  B: You’re constantly changing your mind.

- Jacob is a really kind person. He’s always offering to help me with my work.

We often use this pattern to indicate disapproval. The past continuous is used in a similar way with these adverbs (e.g. Was Olivia always asking you for money, too?).

We can use the present continuous to describe something we regularly do at a certain time:

- At eight o’clock I’m usually driving to work, so phone me on my mobile.
- Seven o’clock is a bit early. We’re generally eating then.
Exercises

2.1 Complete these sentences using the verbs in brackets. Use the present simple or present continuous. (A & B)

1 Rodriguez passes to Messi who just over the bar. Barcelona much more in this half … (pass – shoot – attack)
2 A man home late one night after the office Christmas party. His wife for him, and she to him … (arrive – wait – say)
3 I went to a concert yesterday in the Town Hall. In the middle of it, while the orchestra this man suddenly on his seat and to conduct them. (play – stand – start)

2.2 Complete what each person says about the news they have read or heard using the present tense phrases in C. C

1 I see the government’s giving the health service a lot more money.
2 Vegecorp are going to.
3 we’re going to have.
4 Bruno’s.
5 they’ve identified.
6 A team of researchers claims to have identified a gene which causes some people to overeat.

2.3 Expand one of the sets of notes below to complete each dialogue. E

continually / change / mind forever / moan / work forever / ask me / money constantly / criticise / driving always / complain / handwriting.  

1 A: I can’t read this.  B: You’re always complaining about my handwriting......
3 A: That was a dangerous thing to do.  B: You’re.
4 A: I think I’ll stay here after all.  B: You’re.
5 A: I had a bad day at the office again.  B: You’re.

2.4 Complete each pair of sentences using the same verb (in negative form if necessary). Use to any words outside the gap. (D & E)

1 a A: Shall I phone at six?  B: No, we usually dinner at that time.
b I lamb, thanks. I’m a vegetarian.
2 a Gielman Henry V in the latest production at the Royal Theatre.
b They constantly loud music until the early hours of the morning.
3 a I normally the children to school at 8:30. Perhaps we could meet at 9:00.
b In his 2007 book, Wall a controversial view of Britain’s role in the war.
Past simple and present perfect

Unit A

Time expressions that refer to the present, such as this morning / week / month and today, can be used with either past simple or present perfect verbs. If we think of this morning (etc.) as a past, completed time period, then we use the past simple; if we think of this morning (etc.) as a time period which includes the present moment, then we use the present perfect. Compare:

- I didn’t shave this morning. (= the morning is over and I didn’t shave) and
- I haven’t shaved this morning. (= it is still the morning and I might shave later)

Unit B

In a sentence which includes a time clause with since, we generally prefer a past simple verb in the time clause and a present perfect verb in the main clause. The time clause refers to a particular point in the past:

- Since Mr Dodson became president unemployment has increased. (rather than … has become …)
- She hasn’t been able to play tennis since she broke her arm. (rather than … has broken …)

Note, however, that we use the present perfect in the time clause if the two situations described in the main clause and time clause extend until the present:

- Have you met any of your neighbours since you’ve lived here? (not … you lived …)

Unit C

With time clauses introduced by after, when, until, as soon as, once, by the time and the time expressions the minute / second / moment the past simple refers to past, completed events and the present perfect refers to future events. Compare these examples:

- After she left hospital (past), she had a long holiday. and
- After Lucas has left school (future), he will be spending six months in India.
- The minute I got the news about Anna (past) I telephoned my parents. and
- I’ll contact you the minute I’ve got my exam results. (future)

In the time clause in sentences like this it is possible to use the past perfect instead of the past simple (e.g. After she had left …) and the present simple instead of the present perfect (e.g. After Lucas leaves …) with the same meaning (see also Unit 5).

Unit D

In news reports, you will often read about or hear recent events introduced with the present perfect, and then the past simple or other past tenses are used to give details:

- A Russian spacecraft has returned safely to Earth with its two passengers. US astronaut Scott Keane and Russian cosmonaut Olga Kaleri landed in the early hours of Wednesday.
- An American woman has become the first person to make 2 million contributions to Wikipedia. Esther Miller began editing the site eight years ago.

Unit E

After the pattern It / This / That is / will be the first time … we generally use the present perfect in the next clause:

- That’s the first time I’ve seen Jan look embarrassed. (reporting a past event)
- It won’t be the first time she has voted against the government. (talking about a future event)

Note that after It / This / That was the first time … we generally use the past perfect (see Unit 5):

- It was the first time I’d talked to Dimitra outside the office.
Exercises

3.1 Complete each sentence with a verb from the box. Use the present perfect or past simple, with a negative form where necessary.

A

have  go  oversleep  read  spend  wear

1 A: Shall I make us some dinner? It’s already eight o’clock.
   B: No, thanks. I ___________ to the dentist this afternoon and my mouth hurts too much to eat anything.

2 I ___________ three lectures today and I still have two more later this afternoon.

3 It was so hot today that I ___________ shorts and a T-shirt at work.

4 We ___________ €200 on food this month and there’s another week to go before I get paid.

5 A: Do you want a lift home?
   B: No, I ___________ this morning because my alarm clock didn’t go off, so I need to work late.

6 I ___________ much of the report yet, but I have to finish it by the weekend.

3.2 Complete the sentences with the pairs of verbs from the box. Choose the most appropriate tense — present perfect or past simple.

B

be able – feel  happen – speak  improve – be
not want – fall  rescue – be  work – not have

1 Maria ___________ to go swimming since she ___________ in the river.

2 Since she ___________ at the company she ___________ a day off through illness.

3 Since he ___________ the girl from a house fire, he ___________ on TV almost every day.

4 A lot ___________ since I last ___________ to you.

5 Since I ___________ to drive I ___________ much more independent

6 Stefan’s reading ___________ enormously since he ___________ at school.

3.3 One sentence in each pair is wrong. Correct it by replacing the past simple with the present perfect of the italicised verb.

C

1 a Remember that after you ___________ the contract you won’t be able to change your mind.
   b Carlo’s injury only became apparent after he ___________ to play for Real Madrid.

2 a As soon as I ___________ college I want to travel around Australia.
   b I didn’t have time to check the essay. I handed it in as soon as I ___________ it.

3 a By the time Sarah ___________ to work the meeting had ___________.
   b I’ll probably have finished breakfast by the time the children ___________

4 a I recognised her the moment I ___________ her laugh.
   b I’ll tell you what time we’re coming the moment I ___________ from Emil.

3.4 Here are some extracts from a television news report. Choose the more appropriate tense — present perfect or past simple — for the verbs in brackets.

D & E

1 When President Nelson ___________ (arrive) in Paris this evening, it will be the first time she ___________ (visit) Europe since her election victory in May.

2 The Victoria Hospital in Milltown ___________ (close) to new patients after more cases of food poisoning. Three elderly patients ___________ (die) last week in the outbreak.

3 The rate of inflation ___________ (drop) to 4.8%. It’s the first time in nearly two years that the rate ___________ (fall) below 5%.

4 Nearly 600 laptops ___________ (steal) from Ministry of Defence staff over the past five years. However, a spokesperson ___________ (insist) that there had been no security problems as none of the computers ___________ (hold) secret information.

⇒ Additional exercise 2 (page 241)
Past continuous and past simple

When we talk about two events or activities that went on over the same period of past time, we can often use the past continuous or the past simple for both:

- Mia was reading to the children while Ben was washing up. (or … read … washed up.)

Using the past continuous emphasises that the event or activity (‘was reading’) was in progress during the past period of time (‘while Ben was washing up’). Compare:
- When I was learning / learned to drive I was living with my parents.

Was learning emphasises that the activity was in progress (‘I had lessons during this time’) and learned emphasises completion (‘I passed my test during this time’).

When we talk about two or more past completed events that followed one another, we use the past simple, not the past continuous, for both (see also Unit 5C):
- She got up when the alarm clock went off.

We usually use the past simple rather than the past continuous to talk about repeated past actions:
- We went to Spain three times last year.
- Did you drive past her house every day?

However, we can use the past continuous, particularly in spoken English, when we want to emphasise that repeated actions went on for a limited and temporary period of past time:
- When Kata was in hospital, we were visiting her twice a day. (or … visited …)
- To lose weight before the race, I wasn’t eating any biscuits for weeks. (or … didn’t eat …)

or to talk about something that happened surprisingly often:
- Last week I was having to bring work home every night to get it all done. (or … had …)
- When the builders were here I was making them cups of tea all the time. (or … made …)

When we talk about two or more past completed events that followed one another, we use the past simple, not the past continuous, for both (see also Unit 5C):
- She was shaking with anger as she left the hotel.

We can use either the past continuous or past simple (or past perfect; see Unit 5E) with some verbs to talk about things we intended to do but didn’t:
- We were meaning to call in and see you, but Marc wasn’t feeling well. (or We meant …)

Also: consider + -ing, expect to, hope to, intend to, plan to / on + -ing, think about / of + -ing, want to

These verbs (with the exception of mean and expect) and wonder about can also be used with the present and past continuous to report what we might do in the future. The past continuous is less definite than the present continuous:
- I was thinking of going to China next year, but it depends how much money I’ve got. (less definite than I’m thinking of going …)
- We were wondering about inviting Eva over tomorrow. (less definite than We’re wondering about …)
Exercises

4.1 Complete the sentences using these pairs of verbs. Use the past simple in one gap and the past continuous in the other. A–D

come – show         get – go         hope – give         live – spend
look – see         play – break         start – check in

1 Just as I was getting into the bath all the lights went off.
2 I had to go away this weekend, but my boss gave me some work that I have to finish by Monday.
3 When I was in Paris, I spent three hours a day travelling to and from work.
4 A friendly American couple was chatting to him as he was checking in at the hotel reception.
5 I bumped into Lena last week. She was a lot better than when I last saw her.
6 My boss was into the office just as I was showing everyone my holiday photos.
7 I was badminton four times a week before I hurt my ankle.

This time, use the same tense, either past simple or past continuous, in both spaces.

come – show         get – go         hope – give         live – spend
look – see         play – break         start – check in

8 The smoke alarm went off when he put a candle underneath it.
9 I can’t remember how to answer this question. I must confess that I was thinking while the teacher explained it to us.
10 She added more salt to the soup, and then it tasted much better.
11 Although the television was on, I didn’t listen. Instead I was about my holidays.
12 She was opening the door and running into the room.

4.2 Look again at numbers 1, 4, 7 and 11 in 4.1. Which of these sentences could have both verbs in the past simple? What difference in meaning, if any, would there be?

4.3 Complete this email with either the past simple or the past continuous form of the verbs in brackets. Where alternatives are possible, think about any difference in meaning.

A–C

I (1) (buy) a new alarm clock the other day in Taylor’s the jewellers, when I actually (2) (see) somebody shoplifting. I’d just finished paying for my clock and as I (3) (turn) round, an elderly woman (4) (slowly put) a silver plate into a bag that she (5) (carry). Then she (6) (walk) over to another part of the shop and (7) (pick up) an expensive-looking watch a number of times. When she (8) (think) that nobody (9) (look), she (10) (drop) it into the bag. Before I (11) (have) a chance to tell the staff in the shop, she (12) (notice) that I (13) (watch) her and (14) (hurry) out. Unfortunately for her, two police officers (15) (walk) past just at that moment and she (16) (run) straight into them.
Past perfect and past simple

When we give an account of a sequence of past events we usually put these events in chronological order using the past simple. If we want to refer to an event out of order—that is, an event which happened before the last event in the sequence we have written or spoken about—we can use the past perfect. Study the use of the past perfect and past simple in the text on the right:

### Order of events: 1 gave present 2 wrote email 3 made mistake 4 realised mistake

### Order events are mentioned: 1 wrote email 2 had given present (out of order) 3 realised mistake 4 had made mistake (out of order)

- **I wrote** Clara an email to thank her for the present she **had given** me for my birthday last week. But as soon as I pressed the ‘send’ button, I **realised** that I **had made** a mistake and sent it to her sister instead.

When we understand that we are talking about events before another past event, we don’t have to continue using the past perfect:

- **We bought** a new car last month. **We’d driven** my parents’ old car for ages, but it **started** (or **had started**) to fall apart. **We put** (or **had put**) a new engine in it, but that **didn’t solve** (or **hadn’t solved**) the problems we were having.

If the order of past events is clear from the context (for example, if time expressions make the order clear) we can often use either the past perfect or the past simple:

- **After Ivan had finished** reading, he put out the light. (or ... Ivan finished ...)
- **The two leaders agreed to meet,** even though **earlier talks had failed** to reach an agreement. (or ... talks failed ...)

The past perfect is often used in reporting what was originally said or thought in the present perfect or past simple (see also Unit 35):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Talking about a past event</th>
<th>Reporting this past event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>'I have met him before.'</td>
<td>I was sure that I <strong>had met</strong> him before. (not ... I met him ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'The village hasn’t changed much.'</td>
<td>I found that the village <strong>hadn’t changed</strong> much. (not ... the village didn’t change ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘225 people drowned in the recent floods.’</td>
<td>Police said that 225 people <strong>had drowned</strong> in the recent floods. (or ... drowned ...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘I stole the watch.’</td>
<td>She admitted that she <strong>had stolen</strong> the watch. (or ... stole ...)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We can use either the past perfect or past simple (and often past continuous and past perfect continuous; see Units 4 and 7) when we talk about things that we intended to do, but didn’t or won’t now do in the future:

- **I had hoped** to visit the gallery before I left Florence, but it’s closed on Mondays. (or I **hoped ..., I was hoping ..., I had been hoping ...)
- **Aron planned** to retire at 60, but we have persuaded him to stay for a few more years. (or Aron **had planned ..., Aron was planning ..., Aron had been planning ...)

© in this web service Cambridge University Press  www.cambridge.org
Exercises

5.1 The events mentioned in the magazine article are listed below. Write the order in which the events are mentioned and then the order in which they occurred (or were thought to occur). Compare the two lists and consider why the past perfect (in italics) was used. A & B

How I bought my dream house
When I first saw the old house I had just moved to the area. It had been empty for about a year and was beginning to need some repairs, but the house was exactly what I wanted. But by the time I had put together enough money I learnt that a property developer had bought it and planned to turn it into a hotel. Six months later I had nearly given up hope of finding anywhere to live in the village when I heard that the house was for sale again. The property developer had decided to invest his money in a new housing development on the edge of the village. I bought the house immediately and I’ve lived there happily ever since.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>events</th>
<th>order events are mentioned in text</th>
<th>order of events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I moved ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I learnt ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The property developer decided ...</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I heard ...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I first saw the old house</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A property developer bought it</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I nearly gave up...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I put together enough money...</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It was empty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.2 Underline the correct options. In some cases only one is correct, and in others both are correct. C & D

1 As Jonas was introduced to Mrs Lopez, he realised that he had met / met her before.
2 During the previous week, I had been / went to the gym every evening.
3 He denied that he had taken / took the money from the office.
4 I thought it was the best film I had seen / saw in my life.
5 The boy told me that he had lost / lost his train ticket and didn’t know how he would get home.
6 At the conference, scientists reported that they had found / found a cure for malaria.
7 The teacher guessed that some of the children had cheated / cheated in the exam.
8 She said that she had made up / made up her mind who to vote for, and that I couldn’t persuade her to change.
9 Thomas explained that he had gone / went home early because he felt ill.
10 When I asked Maria about Jakub, she admitted that she hadn’t heard / didn’t hear from him for ages.
11 The waiter took my plate away before I had finished / finished eating.
12 Julia said she didn’t want any dinner. Apparently, she had eaten / ate already.

5.3 Expand these sets of notes using the past perfect to begin each sentence. E

1 I expect / operation / painful I hope / leave / by nine.
2 He / not mean / insult / her Lara / not intend / become / dentist
3 I / not think of / cook rabbit

1 I had hoped to leave by nine, but I overslept and missed the train.
2 ........................................................................................................................................, she always wanted to be a vet.
3 ........................................................................................................................................, but I didn’t feel a thing.
4 ........................................................................................................................................, until Andrei told me how tasty it was.
5 ........................................................................................................................................, but Daria was very offended.