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Present simple and present continuous

Why is the girl in the photo smiling?



A bowler **smiles** at her friends after a good shot.

Why **is** the girl in the photo **smiling**? It **sounds** like an easy question: she's **having** a good time with friends and she's **feeling** good after a good shot. But psychologists **are** forever **arguing** about this question.

Some **believe** that smiling **is** an individual act: we **smile** because we **feel** happy ... unless we're **trying** to hide our emotions. Others **claim** that we **smile** to build social relationships. Some animals **use** a **grin** to show that they **don't want** to fight, for example, so perhaps our smile **serves** the same function.

So who's right? In one study, researchers filmed people bowling. If you **watch** people doing a very social activity like this, it **looks** as if they're **always smiling**. They **stop** smiling only when they **are concentrating** on their next shot. But when **do** they **start** smiling again? After each good shot, the researchers took photographs to identify when the smile **starts** – while the player **is still looking** down the alley or a few seconds later when they **turn** round to share their happiness with the group?

And the results? Only around 4% of bowlers **smile** with their backs to their friends. Far more – 42% – **smile** as soon as they **turn** round. The conclusion: we usually **smile** not because we're happy, but because we're friendly.



- 1 What are the two theories of smiling?
- 2 Why did the researchers choose a bowling alley?

Answers: 1 We smile because we feel happy; we smile to build social relationships. 2 Because bowling is a very social activity.

Present simple and present continuous

Present simple

- 1 Use the present simple to refer to facts and specific routines or habits, and with adverbs of frequency.
*We **smile** because we **feel** happy.*
*We usually **smile** because we're friendly.*
- 2 We usually use the present simple with state verbs such as *think, feel, believe, know, seem, appear, like, consist, have and belong.*
*Some **believe** that smiling is an individual act.*

- 3 We also often use the present simple to describe events shown in a picture, to make them seem more immediate and alive. For the same reason, we usually use the present simple in news headlines and in television or radio commentaries on sports or other ongoing events.
- A bowler **smiles** at her friends.
And Jake **heads** the ball to Gallant – who **kicks** ... and it's a goal!

Prince William visits local hospital.

- 4 Use the present simple in the expressions *Here come(s)* ... and *There go(es)*
- There **goes** Mike, looking as cheerful as usual.
NOT ~~There is going Mike,~~...

TIP

Use the present simple with verbs like *promise, agree, assure* and *demand*, which are used to perform the act they describe.

I promise I won't be late. (I am using these words to make a promise.)

Present continuous

- 5 Use the present continuous to refer to activities, situations and changes happening now / around now.
- ... while the player is still **looking** down the alley ...
- 6 We can use the present continuous with indefinite adverbs of frequency (e.g. *always, constantly, forever*) to refer to regular behaviour which is typical, habitual and predictable.
- Psychologists **are forever arguing** about this question.
- We sometimes use the present continuous in this way to criticise or express disapproval.
- Sally's **always losing** things. She should be more careful.
- 7 When we describe an action or event with the present simple, we can use the present continuous to refer to activities, situations and changes happening around the same time.
- If you **watch** a group of friends bowling, it **looks** as if they're **always smiling**.

Present simple or present continuous

TIP

The present simple is much more common than the present continuous, and it is the best form to use if you are not sure.

- 8 We usually use the present simple to refer to situations which we see as permanent, and the present continuous to refer to situations which we see as temporary. Note the difference:
- Tom **lives** in Rome. He **works** as a lawyer for a big Italian company. (Rome is his permanent base.)
Jane **is living** in Rome at the moment. She **is working** as an English teacher. (She is in Rome temporarily, e.g. for one year.)

- 9 When we tell stories or to give instructions, we use the present simple to describe the shorter actions and events and the present continuous to describe the longer situations or background activity.
- Gavin and his wife **are sitting** at home one evening when the telephone **rings** and their lives **change** for ever.
First, you **fry** the onion in a little oil. While the onion's **cooking**, you **chop** the vegetables.

- 10 Although we usually use the present simple with state verbs (see 2 above), we can use the present continuous if we are talking about an ongoing present process rather than a fact.
- She's **feeling** good after a good shot.

Some verbs (e.g. *hear, see, think, appear*) can be state verbs or action verbs, but with a different meaning.

What **do** you **think** of Jan's new hairstyle?
(= What's your opinion about it?)
I'm thinking of taking a few days off.
(= I'm considering the possibility of doing it.)

TIP

In the present simple, *see* and *hear* have different meanings.

I see him every day. (= I see)
I see what you mean. (= I understand)
I hear you loud and clear. (= I hear)
I hear you're coming to stay. (= I have been told)

- 11 We use the present simple with verbs like *hope* and *look forward to* in formal situations, and we use the present continuous if we want to sound more informal and less direct.
- We very much **hope** you will be able to attend.
We're really **hoping** you'll be able to come.
- I look forward to* hearing from you in the near future.
I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Practice

A Underline the correct option.

- 1 Ice melts / is melting above 0°C.
- 2 Have you got an umbrella? It starts / is starting to rain.
- 3 Gabriela looks lovely today – she wears / is wearing her new dress.
- 4 Paul’s daughter lives in Spain – he visits / is visiting her two or three times a year.
- 5 There goes / is going Maggie, on her way to work, I suppose.
- 6 Don’t worry, I promise / am promising I won’t tell anyone your secret.
- 7 This carpet gets / is getting very dirty – maybe we should wash it.
- 8 That’s great tennis from Thompson as he hits / is hitting another winning shot into the corner!



B Complete the sentences, using the present simple or present continuous form of the verb given.

- 1 always go
a Sue and I always go to the cinema on Thursdays.
b I saw Mary in the travel agent’s this afternoon – she ’s always going on holiday!
- 2 play
a Giovanni plays football for a local team.
b Anthony is playing in goal today because our normal goalkeeper is injured.
- 3 have
a I have lunch at the moment. Can I phone you back in half an hour?
b The hotel has 14 double rooms, all with bathrooms.
- 4 wonder
a We wonder whether we should buy a birthday present for Lucie.
b I wonder what time the next train is.
- 5 come
a Look – here comes the bus, at last!
b More and more people are coming to live here these days.
- 6 (you) think
a You look worried – what are you thinking about?
b Why is Jim so happy today? Is it his birthday or something?
- 7 stand
a St Thomas’s Tower stands at the entrance to the harbour.
b A strange woman is standing outside the house. Do you know her?
- 8 work
a It’s 8.30 on a hot July evening. Gordon Stevens is working late in his office, when suddenly ...
b These tablets work better if you take them with food.

C Underline the correct option. Sometimes both options are possible.

- 1 John regrets / is regretting the way he behaved yesterday.
- 2 Mistakes like that cost / are costing the company a lot of money.
- 3 Sue has / is having the flu, so she’s off work today.
- 4 It’s a very simple camera. You just press / are just pressing the button and that’s it!
- 5 My neighbours are really noisy – they always play / are always playing loud music late at night.
- 6 Annie’s car doesn’t sound / isn’t sounding very good. She should take it to a garage.
- 7 I don’t have / am not having much time right now. Can we talk tomorrow instead?
- 8 The company hopes / is hoping to expand into Europe in the next few years.

D Complete the sentences with the present simple or present continuous form of the verbs in brackets.

- 1 I understand a little Italian, but I can’t speak it. (understand)
- 2 My cousins go skiing nearly every winter. (usually go)
- 3 Here comes Michelle. Maybe she wants to talk to me. (come)
- 4 I invited Jill to the party – she is looking forward to it. (look forward)
- 5 Do you know what time the bank opens? (you know)
- 6 This bed measures 180 centimetres by 210 centimetres – I think it’s too big. (measure)
- 7 A: What is it?
B: My homework. Don’t interrupt me. (do)
- 8 I just heard Wendy’s news – she is expecting a baby. (expect)
- 9 The first thing to do is peel the potatoes. Then you boil them in salted water for about 20 minutes. (boil)
- 10 And at the line ... Powell won – in 9.64 seconds – a new personal best! (win)

E Complete the news story, using the present simple or continuous form of the verbs in the box.

ask be consider
follow look forward to
love play score
think want

JOHNSON¹ ASKS FOR NEW CONTRACT

City striker Simon Johnson² a new contract, and the club³ the possibility of offering him a five-year deal, according to Johnson's website. The news⁴ Johnson's winning goal in last Saturday's game against their rivals United. Johnson's agent told reporters: 'Simon⁵ the best football of his career, and the fans⁶ him. He⁷ a lot of goals at the moment, and he⁸ he can help the club to win the league. Simon⁹ one of the best players at the club, and right now he¹⁰ scoring lots more goals for them in the next twelve months.'



MY TURN!

Write three things that you are doing at this minute, three things that you are doing these days but only temporarily, and three things that you always do.

Examples: *I'm wearing black jeans. I'm reading War and Peace. I always go to bed early.*

MY TEST!

Circle the correct option.

- 1 I there are going to be a lot of people at the match tonight.

2 Hey, look. Here Robert. I wonder why he's smiling.

3 for money. It's really annoying.

4 getting a new camera. This one is getting really old now.

5 Do we have to go home now? so much fun!
- a am hearing

a goes

a She forever asks

a I'm thinking of

a I've got
- b can hear

b comes

b She asks forever

b I think of

b I have
- c hear

c is coming

c She's forever asking

c I think about

c I'm having

My Test! answers: 1c 2b 3c 4a 5c

2

Past simple and past continuous;
used to and would

Musicians sang and threw flowers.

Arjumand Banu Begam **was working** in her shop when Prince Khurram **saw** her for the first time as he **was walking** through the market. He immediately **decided** this was the woman he **wanted** to marry. Indian princes, however, **didn't use to marry** for love but for political reasons, so marriage between Khurram and Arjumand **was** impossible. It **was** six years before the prince **could** marry the woman he **loved**, but when it finally **happened** the wedding **was** magnificent. A long **procession** **travelled** to Arjumand's house, and musicians **sang** and **threw** flowers to the hundreds of people who **were watching**. At the wedding, the prince's father **gave** Arjumand the name of Mumtaz, or 'Chosen One', as a present.



When Khurram's father **died**, he **became** Emperor Shah Jahan, or 'King of the World'. He **had** many responsibilities and **was frequently leading** his army off to fight in different parts of the empire. Mumtaz **would always travel** with him and sometimes she even **used to go** with him into battle. Sadly, while her husband **was fighting** one of these battles, Mumtaz **fell** ill. As she **was dying**, Shah Jahan **promised** to build a beautiful **monument** in her memory. After Mumtaz **died**, Shah Jahan quickly **began** to turn his promise into reality, and twenty years later the Taj Mahal, perhaps the greatest symbol of love the world has ever seen, **was** finally completed.



Past simple and past continuous; *used to and would*

Past simple

- 1 We usually use the past simple to refer to events or states in the past, or to repeated past actions.
*He **had** many responsibilities.*
*I **went** to the cinema three times last week.*

Past continuous

- 2 We use the past continuous to refer to events which were unfinished or in progress at or around a definite time in the past.
*At 7 o'clock this morning I **was having** a shower.*
- 3 We often use the past continuous to refer to background activities or situations in a story.
*He looked through the window. Rain **was falling** steadily on the city's streets.*



- 1 Why was it difficult for Prince Khurram to marry Arjumand at first?
2 What did Shah Jahan decide to do in memory of his wife?

Answers: 1 Because she wasn't an important person. 2 Build a beautiful monument

TIP

Don't use the past continuous to refer to general habits and routines in the past.
*Every summer my grandparents **came** to stay with us. NOT ... were coming to stay with us.*

- 4 We sometimes use the past continuous with words like *always, constantly* and *forever* to refer to repeated past actions if we want to emphasise or criticise.
*When my dad worked in a bakery he **was always bringing** home cakes and biscuits.
My old neighbours **were forever having** parties and **playing** loud music.*
- 5 We sometimes use the past continuous instead of the present continuous with *hope, plan, think about (+ -ing),* and *wonder about (+ -ing)* to show uncertainty.
*Sally and I **were hoping** to meet up this afternoon. If we do, would you like to come too? (less definite than We're hoping to ...)*

TIP

We can use the past continuous with *wonder* to make very polite suggestions and requests.
*I **was wondering** if you could help me.*

Past simple or past continuous

- 6 We often use the past simple and the past continuous to talk about two events or situations which happened at or around the same time.

The past continuous shows that two continuing activities were in progress at the same time.
*Arjumand **was working** in her shop as the prince **was walking** through the market.*

The past simple shows that two or more events happened at or around the same time.
*A long procession **travelled** to Mumtaz's house, and musicians **sang** and **threw** flowers.*

Use the past simple to refer to events which happened during a longer activity, shown by the past continuous.
*Musicians **sang** and **threw** flowers to people who **were watching**.*
- 7 We sometimes use the past simple or the past continuous with verbs like *hope, mean, plan, think about (+ -ing)* and *want* to refer to things we intended to do but didn't or can't.
*I **hoped** / **was hoping** to get there on time but the traffic is really heavy, so I'm going to be late.*

TIP

The past simple is much more common than the past continuous when we refer to the past, and it is the best form to use if you are not sure.

Used to and would

- 8 We often use *used to (+ infinitive)* instead of the past simple to refer to past habits, routines and states, especially when the habit or routine does not happen any more or when the state is no longer true.
*She even **used to go** with him into battle.
Jackie **used to have** three rabbits, but one died.*
- 9 The negative and question forms are usually *didn't use to* and *Did ... use to ...?*
*Indian princes, however, **didn't use to marry** for love but for political reasons.*

Nowadays we often form the negative and question forms with *used* instead of *use*.
*Amanda **didn't used to like** school, but now she loves it. OR Amanda **didn't use to like** ...*
- 10 We sometimes use *would (+ infinitive)* instead of *used to* to refer to past habits or routines if the time reference is clear.
*Mumtaz **would always travel** with him.
OR Mumtaz always **used to travel** with him.*

We don't use *would* to refer to past states or if the time reference is not clear.
*I **used to love** dance music. NOT ~~I would love dance music.~~
I **used to go** to the cinema a lot. NOT ~~I would go to the cinema a lot.~~*

TIP

Be / Get used to (+ noun or -ing) is not connected with *used to (+ infinitive)*. *Used to (+ noun or -ing)* means *accustomed to*.
*I don't really like the food here. I'm **not used to eating** so much meat.*

The past simple, used to and would

- 11 Use the past simple, not *used to* or *would (+ infinitive)*, to say exactly how many times something happened in total. Note the difference:
*I **read** six books last month!
I **read** / **used to read** / **would read** a lot when I was a child.*

Practice

A Underline the correct option. Sometimes both options are possible.

- 1 The police arrested three men who robbed / were robbing a bank in the High Street.
- 2 They planned / were planning to get up early, but they overslept.
- 3 I saw Jon in the park today – he read / was reading a book.
- 4 When she ate / was eating her sandwich, the sun came out.
- 5 After the film finished / was finishing, I turned the TV off and went to bed.
- 6 Vanessa’s really shy because everyone constantly criticised / was constantly criticising her when she was a child.
- 7 Do you like my watch? My wife gave / was giving it to me for my birthday.
- 8 My sister’s really happy – she passed / was passing all her exams.

B Complete the sentences with the past simple or past continuous form of the verbs in brackets.

- 1 Did you see that film on TV last night? (you / see)
- 2 A: What was that terrible noise last night?
B: Sorry, it was me. I
my singing. (practise)
- 3 I in the bath last night when suddenly there was a loud bang in the kitchen. (lie)
- 4 James to visit me every single day when I was in hospital. (came)
- 5 A: How was the game? B: Terrible! We 6–0. (lose)
- 6 After he , my dad took up golf as a hobby. (retire)
- 7 I , why don’t you come round for dinner at the weekend? (think)
- 8 The kids when I left for work this morning. (still / sleep)
- 9 A: What happened to you? Did you cut yourself?
B: Yes, when I in the garden this morning. (work)
- 10 Simon got a job in a factory when he school last year. (leave)

C Circle the TWO correct options. All the sentences are about the past.

- 1 In the past, people ... married at a younger age than they do now.
a are used to getting b would get
c used to get d were getting
- 2 I ... playing computer games when I was younger, but now I love them.
a wasn’t liking b didn’t use to like c wouldn’t like d didn’t like
- 3 In the past, my friends and I ... each other much more regularly than we do now.
a saw b used to seeing c used to see d were seeing
- 4 I think I know you. ... in Forest Lane?
a Didn’t you use to live b Wouldn’t you live
c Weren’t you living d Didn’t you live
- 5 When I first moved to London, I ... in a big city.
a didn’t use to live b wasn’t used to living
c didn’t live d quickly got used to living
- 6 Dave ... to work every day until he had an accident.
a use to cycle b was cycling c used to cycle d cycled
- 7 I ... a lot more when I was younger.
a read b was used to read c was reading d used to read
- 8 My next-door neighbours ... in South Africa.
a were living b lived c used to live d would live

D Complete the sentences by putting the words and phrases in the correct order.

- 1 as / flowers and rice / they / came out of / threw / at the bride and groom
People threw flowers and rice at the bride and groom as they came out of the church.
- 2 to invite us / were / they / meaning / but
They kept forgetting.
- 3 when he / about / stories / was always / was / telling us
Our grandfather a boy.
- 4 was / eat / when I / anything / would
I a child.
- 5 side of the road / to / isn’t / to drive on the other / getting / but / strange / I’m / used
It’s it.
- 6 thinking about / having a barbecue / were / at the weekend / the weather’s / if
We nice.
- 7 from the south of / was constantly / by armies / invaded / being
The city the country.
- 8 was / your plates / while / one of / she / doing / dropped
Suzie the washing up.
- 9 heard / as soon as / phoned / I / her
I the news.
- 10 what I said / listening / hear / know you / didn’t / because / you weren’t
I to me.

A black and white photograph of a bride and groom in formal wedding attire. The bride is on the left, wearing a lace gown and veil, holding a bouquet. The groom is on the right, in a military-style uniform with medals. They are standing in front of a dark background with a small table and a plant.

Example: I was about six when I went to my first party. I was staying with my cousin and . . .

My Test! answers: 1a 2c 3a 4b 5b



Present perfect simple and present perfect continuous

The higher temperatures have had dramatic effects.

A new report on **climate change** **has shown** that other reports were wrong about the effect of human activity on the Earth's temperature. The planet's temperature **has been rising since** the beginning of the 20th century, and **has increased** by nearly 0.8°C in that time. Earlier reports said this increase was the result of natural changes, but the new report says the main cause **has been** a rise in the levels of **greenhouse gases** because of increased industrial activity.

The higher temperatures **have already had** dramatic effects. In the Arctic, the area covered by ice **has been getting** smaller **for** more than 30 years, and average sea levels **have risen** by 3 mm each year **since** the beginning of this century, increasing the danger of flooding in many areas. So far this century many parts of the world, including South-East Asia, Africa, Central Europe and the Caribbean, **have already had** the worst floods anyone can remember. If the new report is correct, it seems that we are now seeing the cost to the environment of the growth that the developed world **has been enjoying** over the last two hundred years.



- ?
- 1 How is the new report different from older reports?
 - 2 What does the new report suggest about the recent floods in many parts of the world?

Answers: 1 It says that the increased temperature of the Earth is mainly caused by industrial activity. 2 That they are the result of growth in the developed world.

Present perfect simple and present perfect continuous

Present perfect simple

- 1 We use the present perfect simple to refer to events at an unspecified time in the past which are relevant and important now.
*The higher temperatures **have already had** dramatic effects on the planet.*

We often use this form to talk about experiences in life up to now or to talk about recent events (including events which are in the news).
*She **has won** two Oscars.*
*A new report on climate change **has shown** ...*

We often use the adverbs *just*, *already*, *yet*, *not yet*, *ever* and *never* with the present perfect.
*Sorry, Sarah isn't here. She **has just left**.*

TIP

Use the present perfect after *It's* / *This is the first / second / third / etc. time*.
*This is the third time someone **has told** me this.*
NOT *This is the third time someone is telling...*

- 2 We use the present perfect simple (often with *since* and *for*) to refer to **facts**: states or developments that began in the past and are still going on or ended a short time ago.
*... average global sea levels **have risen** by 3 mm each year **since** the beginning of this century.*

Present perfect simple or past simple

- 3 We use the present perfect simple to refer to past events which we feel are relevant / important now. We use the past simple to refer to past events with no particular relevance to the present.
*So far this century many parts of the world ... **have** already **had** the worst floods anyone can remember. I **saw** Janet **yesterday**.*

TIP

In American English, the past simple is sometimes used instead of the present perfect, especially with time expressions like *already*, *yet*, *not yet*, *ever*, *never* and *just*.
*They **already finished** their assignments.* OR *They **have already finished** their assignments.*

Present perfect continuous

- 4 We use the present perfect continuous to refer to **activities**: active processes that began in the past and are still going on or ended a short time ago, particularly when we say how long they have been going on.
*The planet's temperature **has been rising since** the beginning of the 20th century.*

We often use the present perfect continuous in this way to express a complaint or criticism.
*I've **been waiting** here for you **since** three o'clock!*

- 5 We can use the present perfect continuous to focus on the activity itself, without saying how long it has been going on.
*A: What **have you been doing**?
B: I've **been working** in the garden.*

We sometimes use the present perfect continuous to explain present evidence, give an excuse, or with verbs like *mean*, *want*, *think* and *wonder* to express a vague intention / idea.
*Your face is red. **Have you been sunbathing**?
Sorry I'm late. I've **been writing** an urgent email.
I've **been meaning** to email Julie.*

Present perfect simple or present perfect continuous

- 6 We can often use either the present perfect simple or continuous to refer to past events or situations which we feel are relevant or important now, with little or no difference in meaning.
*... the economic growth that the developed world **has been enjoying** / **has enjoyed** since the start of ...*
- 7 We usually use the present perfect continuous, not simple, if we want to express the feeling that a situation is temporary and incomplete.
*I've **been staying** with a friend while my house is being redecorated.* NOT *I've ~~stayed~~ with a friend ...*
- 8 We use the present perfect simple, not continuous, when we want to imply that the activity was completed at some time in the past. Note the difference:
*He **has written** his report.* (It is complete.)
*He **has been writing** his report.* (It may or may not be complete.)
- 9 We normally use the present perfect simple, not continuous, with *for* or *since* with verbs that describe unchanging states (e.g. *like*, *hate*, *know*).
*Jill and I **have known** each other since we were children.*
NOT *Jill and I ~~have been knowing~~ ...*
- But we can use the present perfect continuous with *want*.
*We've **been wanting** to meet you for years.*
OR *We've **wanted** ...*

TIP

Don't use the present simple or continuous with *for* or *since* to refer to states or activities which began in the past and continue up to the present.
*They **have been married** for 20 years.*
NOT *They ~~are married~~ for 20 years.*

- 10 We use the present perfect simple, not continuous, to refer to a single completed activity.
*Have you heard? Jim's **passed** his driving test.*
NOT *Jim's ~~been passing~~ ...*
- 11 We use the present perfect simple to refer to a series of actions when we mention or ask about the number of these actions. We use the present perfect continuous if the number of actions is not important.
*I've **walked** to work three times this week.*
*My bike's broken so I've **been walking** to work this week.*