

Past continuous use: events at a point in time

We often use the past continuous to talk about something that was in progress at a time in the past.

- At 6 o'clock, I was watching TV.

This means that I started watching TV before six o'clock and I finished watching TV after six o'clock. The action of watching TV was in progress at six o'clock. Maybe I turned on the TV at 5:30 and I turned it off at 7:30.

- At three o'clock, I was working. (I started before three o'clock and finished after three o'clock.)
- She was sleeping at 5 am. (She started sleeping before 5 am and woke up after 5 am.)
- They were eating lunch at one o'clock. (They started eating at 12:30, for example, and finished at 1:30.)

Past continuous use: interrupted actions with the past simple

We often use the past continuous to show that one action started before and probably continued after another action.

The long action is in the past continuous. It started before and probably finished after the short action.

The short action is in the past simple, often after 'when'.

- I was walking to the station when I met John.

'I was walking' is in the past continuous. It's a longer action. It started before I met John. 'I met John' is a shorter action. It happened during the longer action.

Here are some more examples.

- I was cooking when the telephone rang (I was in the middle of cooking when the telephone rang and interrupted me).
- She was sleeping when we came home.
- When I saw Julie, she was working.