

# UNIT

# 14

## The Past Continuous

See also

Units 1, 2

Be

Unit 20

The present tenses and the past tenses

### A Sample sentences

**Alison:** What were you doing last year?

**Silvie:** We were developing a new product.

**Alison:** Who was working on this project?

**Silvie:** Mainly Rachida and Voitek. But they were not working on it full time.

### B Form

The past continuous positive and question have two main parts:

the past tense of **to be** + infinitive *...ing*

Positive form		
Subject	to be	Infinitive <i>...ing</i>
I/he/she/it	<b>was</b>	making
you/we/they	<b>were</b>	presenting
the company (= it)	<b>was</b>	preparing
the manager (= he/she)	<b>was</b>	reading
the departments (= they)	<b>were</b>	doing
the workers (= they)	<b>were</b>	discussing

Question form		
to be	Subject	Infinitive <i>...ing</i>
<b>was</b>	I/he/she/it	making?
<b>were</b>	you/we/they	presenting?
<b>was</b>	the company (= it)	preparing?
<b>was</b>	the manager (= he/she)	reading?
<b>were</b>	the departments (= they)	doing?
<b>were</b>	the workers (= they)	discussing?

The past continuous has three parts in the negative:

the past tense of **to be** + not + infinitive *...ing*

Negative form			
Subject	to be	not	Infinitive <i>...ing</i>
I/he/she/it	<b>was</b>	<b>not</b>	making
you/we/they	<b>were</b>	<b>not</b>	presenting
the company (= it)	<b>was</b>	<b>not</b>	preparing
the manager (= he/she)	<b>was</b>	<b>not</b>	reading
the departments (= they)	<b>were</b>	<b>not</b>	doing
the workers (= they)	<b>were</b>	<b>not</b>	discussing

In spoken language we often use the short forms:

*I/he/she/it/the company* **wasn't** ...  
*you/we/they/the departments/the workers* **weren't** ...

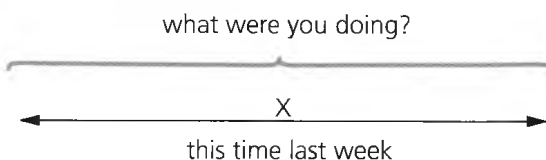
We sometimes also use them in informal written language.

### C Uses

We use the past continuous as a time frame for another activity:

**What were you doing at this time last week?**

**At this time last week I was visiting our factory in Switzerland.**



## TASKS

### Exercise 1

Read the extract from a Director's speech at the Annual General Meeting of Pace PLC. Underline all forms of the past continuous. Label them positive (P), negative (N), or question (Q).

'What was happening a few years ago? Well, the company wasn't doing very well. During the 1990s we were competing with many suppliers. We had a small turnover. Then everyone was thinking about mergers and takeovers. In the early 2000s we were operating in a very different market. There were only four large companies. All four were making big profits. We were all doing well...'

### Exercise 2

A Safety Officer is talking to a technician about a fire at a factory. Complete the dialogue. Use the words in brackets.

**SO:** What **were you doing** (you/do) yesterday morning?

**T:** From 8 o'clock until 9 o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ (I/check) the production system.

From 9 o'clock until 10 o'clock \_\_\_\_\_ (I/repair) a computer.

Then when the fire started \_\_\_\_\_ (I/not/work).

\_\_\_\_\_ (I have/coffee).

**SO:** \_\_\_\_\_ (your colleagues/drink/coffee) too?

**T:** No, \_\_\_\_\_ (they/install) a new printer.

**SO:** \_\_\_\_\_ (factory/work/normally)?

**T:** Yes, \_\_\_\_\_ (everything/run/perfectly).

**SO:** Okay. Thanks for your help.

### Exercise 3

Look at the table below which describes Sally Kline's day. Write **where she was** and **what she was doing**.

	time	place	action
1.	10.30	airport	check in
2.	11.00	duty free shop	buy clothes
3.	11.30	departure gate	wait
4.	12.00	plane	read
5.	2.00	plane	have lunch
6.	5.00	meeting	give a presentation

**At 10.30 Sally was at the airport. She was checking in.**

### Transfer

Make sentences about yourself or a company or institution you know. Begin with phrases like **This time last year...** and **In the summer...** Use the past continuous where possible.

# ANSWERS

## TASKS 14

### The Past Continuous

#### Exercise 1

'What was happening (Q) a few years ago? Well, the company wasn't doing (N) very well. During the 1990s we were competing (P) with many suppliers. We had (P) a small turnover. Then everyone was thinking about (P) mergers and takeovers. In the early 2000s we were operating (P) in a very different market. There were only four large companies. All four were making (P) big profits. We were all doing well (P) ...'

#### Exercise 2

- T:** From 8 o'clock until 9 o'clock **I was checking** the production system. From 9 o'clock until 10 o'clock **I was repairing** a computer. Then when the fire started **I wasn't working. I was having coffee.**
- S.F:** **Were your colleagues drinking coffee** too?
- T:** No, **they were installing** a new printer.
- S.F:** **Was the factory working normally?**
- T:** Yes, **everything was running perfectly.**
- S.F:** Okay. Thanks for your help.

#### Exercise 3

- At 11.00 Sally was in the duty free shop. She was buying clothes.
- At 11.30 Sally was at the Gate. She was waiting to get on the plane.
- At 12.00 she was on the plane. She was reading.
- At 2.00 she was (still) on the plane. She was having lunch.
- At 5.00 she was at a meeting. She was giving a presentation.