

Uses of the Past Continuous Tense Exercises

Instructions:

Choose which use of the past continuous tense best fits the sentence/s.

1. He was forever washing his car when he first bought it.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

2. The government was planning to increase interest rates until they realised Completed Past Event

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

3. The boss was shouting at the staff and the staff were looking concerned. Anne knew it was going to be a bad day.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

4. I was feeling very tired yesterday.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

5. I was always trying to be the best in the class when I was younger.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

6. I was waiting for a bus when I saw the man fall off his bike.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

7. He was playing football when he broke his leg.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

8. They were having dinner at home when it started to rain.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

9. Why was the Prime Minister out greeting crowds this morning?

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

10. The picnic was wonderful. The sun was shining, the children were playing together and the adults were chatting amongst themselves.

- ☐ Completed Past Event
- ☐ Repeated Events or Habits
- ☐ Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event
- ☐ Intervening Past Event
- ☐ Background to a Story

Answers:

1. Repeated Events or Habits

This is an example of something happening again and again or that could be seen as a habit. It's commonly used with words like 'always', 'forever', 'constantly' etc.)

2. Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event

The past continuous tense is used to describe events over a period of time that were not completed, or in other words unfinished, because there was an interruption. The plan was ongoing (to increase interest rates) but it was then interrupted or stopped by a change of mind (when it was realised mortgages would become unaffordable).

3. Background to a Story

We often use the past continuous to describe the background to a story written in the past tense. In reality this is the same as the Interrupted Past Events use of the past continuous because we are explaining what was happening in the background (past continuous) when the specific event/action in the story took place (past simple). So don't worry if you chose that by mistake.

4. Completed Past Event

The past continuous is used for completed actions over a fixed period of time in the past. 'Completed' means the action being referred to was started and finished. These are commonly used with phrases/words such as all day/morning etc, the whole time, every minute, and so on.

5. Repeated Events or Habits

This is an example of something happening again and again or that could be seen as a habit.

6. Intervening Past Event

The past continuous can be used for a situation where something is happening over time, but there is an intervening event. The intervening event (accident) doesn't stop the thing happening over a period of time (waiting for the bus). We can assume the person carried on waiting for the bus.

7. Interrupted and Unfinished Past Event

The past continuous tense is used to describe ongoing events that were not completed, or in other words unfinished, because there was an interruption. The event or action was stopped at a key point in the past. The person could obviously not continue playing football after he broke his leg.

8. Intervening Past Event

Again, a situation where something is happening over time, but there is an intervening event. We can assume they continued with their dinner even though it had started to rain.

9. Completed Past Event

The past continuous is used for completed actions over a fixed period of time in the past. 'Completed' means the action being referred to was started and finished. These are commonly used with phrases/words such as all day/morning etc, the whole time, every minute, and so on.

10. Background to a Story

We often use the past continuous to describe the background to a story written in the past tense, with the main event (the picnic) in the past simple.