

SIMPLE PAST VS PAST CONTINUOUS

Remember that if the actions are consecutive they appear in PAST SIMPLE tense.
This is the same with habitual actions in the past.

I (always) wear a hat when it snows.

I (always) wore a hat when it snowed.

The PAST CONTINUOUS is used when we are not interested in the completion of one or more actions, but simply in the fact that they are in progress at the time something else happens.

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Supply suitable past tenses of verbs in brackets:

1 He (sit) in a cafe when I (see) him.

2 When I (go out) the sun (shine).

3 The boy (fall down) while he (run).

4 When the (begin) we (live) in London.

5 The light (go out) while I (have) tea.

6 I (have) tea when the light (went) out.

7 My friends (sing) when I (come) into the room.

8 While you (play) piano I (write) a letter.

9 When I (be) at school I (learn) Latin. (to be has no continuous form.)

10 He (eat) his dinner when I (go) to see him.

11 When my grandmother (go) for a walk she always (wear) gloves.

12 When it (rain) she (carry) an umbrella.

13 She (die) while she (run) after a bus.

14 We (drink) coffee every day when we (be) in France.

15 You (wear) your new hat when I (meet) you yesterday.

16 When I (have) a dog I always (take) him out for a walk in the evening.

17 When the phone (ring), I (have) a bath.

18 I was (lay) the table for dinner while you (wash) your hands.

19 When we (live) in the house we (have) three servants.

20 Large crowds (wait) at the station when the Prime Minister (arrive).

Seeing that in general the continuous tenses are used to express our interest in the action in progress (i.e. Not in its completion, but only in the fact of its taking place), a sentence like:

He was reading a book while I was mending his socks.

Tells us of two past actions in progress at the same time, but tells us nothing of their beginning or end.

Certain verbs (Exercises 21,9,10) are rare in the continuous forms.

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Put the verbs in the following sentences into a suitable past tense; notice where sensible alternatives are possible:

1 I (speak) to her several times, but she always (read) and (hear) me.

2 He (lose) his watch while he (see) the sights of the city.

3 He (teach) English for two months when he (live) in Germany and (work) as journalist.

4 I (open) the door just as Cyril (ring) the bell.

5 The house was (burn) fast, so we (break) a window to get out.

6 Maisie (cook) fish when I first (ask) her to marry me.

7 We (walk) to the station when it (begin) to rain.

8 We (run) under a bridge when the storm (break).

9 My sister (drop) two cups while she (wash up) last night; neither of them (break).

10 She (put) on her raincoat when it (start) to rain.

11 When the teacher (come) in, the boys (play).

12 The ship (sink), so all the passengers (jump) into the boats.

13 He (think) of something else all the time you (talk) to him.

14 He (eat) three sandwiches while you (talk) to him.

15 When I (see) him, he (sing) and (smoke) a cigar at the same time.

16 Maisie (peel) potatoes when Cyril (ask) her to marry him.

17 The dog (bite) her on the ankle while she (catch) it.

18 While he (get) off the tram, he (fall) and (cut) his face.

19 He (lean) against the door and (listen) to the radio when I first (try) to speak to him.

20 While he (write) a letter the telephone (ring); as he (go) to answer it, he (hear) a knock at the door; the telephone still (ring) while he (walk) to the door; but just as he (open) it, it (stop).