

## A2 TEENS · GRAMMAR · LESSON 07

# What *were you doing* when the lights went out?

Every great story has **two actions**: something *long* happening in the background, and something *sudden* that interrupts it. This is the **Past Continuous**. Cue the dramatic music.

🕒 45 min · ✓ CEFR A2 · ♦ Past Continuous · ♦ Interrupted Moments

## WARM-UP

I

## Set the scene

### Your moment...

Think back. What were you doing exactly...

- 01 at 7 p.m. yesterday evening?
- 02 at 3 p.m. last Saturday?
- 03 when your alarm rang this morning?
- 04 the last time the power went out at home?

## GRAMMAR FOCUS

II

## The past continuous — long actions in the past

### Form — the formula

We use the **past continuous** for a *long action* in the past — an action that was **happening** at a specific moment.

## POSITIVE FORM

subject + **was / were** + verb-**ing**

**was**

I · he · she · it

I **was reading** a book at 9 p.m.She **was cooking** dinner.It **was raining** all morning.**were**

you · we · they

You **were sleeping** at 10 p.m.We **were watching** a film.They **were laughing** all night.

## Use 1 – the interrupted action (WHEN)

### ► The interrupted action pattern – use WHEN to connect

Use the **past continuous** for the **long action** (background), and the **past simple** for the **sudden action** (interrupting it).

I **was watching TV** **WHEN** the doorbell **rang**.

We **were eating** dinner **WHEN** the lights **went** out.

She **was walking** home **WHEN** she **saw** her old teacher.

## Use 2 – two things at the same time (WHILE)

### ► WHILE – two long actions at the same time

When two things happen at the same time in the past, use **past continuous + past continuous**.

I **was cooking** **WHILE** my brother **was studying**.

Dad **was watching** the news **WHILE** I **was scrolling** on my phone.

The dog **was barking** **WHILE** the cat **was sleeping** peacefully.

## Negatives & questions

### Negative

**WAS / WERE + NOT + -ING**

I **wasn't listening**, sorry.

They **weren't studying**.

It **wasn't raining** when we left.

### Question

**WAS / WERE + SUBJECT + -ING?**

**Were you sleeping** at midnight?

**What was she doing** at 8 p.m.?

**Why were they laughing?**



## KEY VOCABULARY

**Words for dramatic moments**

WORD	MEANING	EXAMPLE
<b>suddenly</b> adverb	happening quickly and without warning	<i>Suddenly, the door opened.</i>
<b>scream</b> verb/noun	to shout very loudly	<i>She screamed when she saw the spider.</i>
<b>notice</b> verb	to see or become aware of something	<i>I didn't notice the time.</i>
<b>moment</b> noun	a very short period of time	<i>At that moment, the phone rang.</i>
<b>whisper</b> verb	to speak very quietly	<i>"Be careful," he whispered.</i>
<b>meanwhile</b> adverb	at the same time	<i>I was revising. Meanwhile, my sister was gaming.</i>
<b>power cut</b> noun	when the electricity stops working	<i>There was a power cut last night.</i>
<b>freeze</b> verb	to suddenly stop moving because of shock	<i>I froze when I heard the noise.</i>
<b>bump into</b> phrasal verb	to meet someone by accident	<i>I bumped into my old friend at the cafe.</i>
<b>background</b> noun	the part of a scene behind the main action	<i>Music was playing in the background.</i>



## READING

**Four moments that changed the night**

CINEMA OF MEMORY · ISSUE 07

**The night something happened***Four teenagers, four interrupted moments*

*We asked four teens a simple question: "Tell us about a night when you were doing something normal — and something unexpected happened." These are their stories.*

The past continuous is the tense of memory. We use it when we want to put you *in* the scene — to show you what was happening **just before** everything changed.

**SOFIA, 15, ARGENTINA** *Buenos Aires · 9 p.m.*

**POWER CUT**

It was a normal Tuesday. My family **was having** dinner, my mum **was telling** us about her day, and I **was pretending** to listen while I **was scrolling** on my phone under the table. Then — suddenly — the whole house **went** dark. A power cut. My little brother **screamed**. My dad **laughed**. We **spent** two hours playing cards by candlelight. It was one of the best nights of that month.

**KAI, 14, NEW ZEALAND** *Wellington · Midnight*

**THE NOISE**

Everyone **was sleeping**. I **was reading** a book with my torch because I couldn't sleep. The rain **was falling** on the roof, and the wind **was making** this soft whistling sound. Then I **heard** it — a loud BANG from the kitchen. I froze. For about ten seconds I **didn't move**. Then my dad **shouted**, 'It's just the cat!' I **felt** very brave for the rest of the week.

**LEILA, 16, MOROCCO** *Fes · Saturday evening*

**THE MESSAGE**

I **was walking** home from the library while my friend Yasmine **was texting** me about our biology test. I **wasn't paying** attention to the street. Then my phone **buzzed** — and it **was** a message from a boy I **liked**. I **stopped** walking immediately, in the middle of the pavement. People **were walking** around me. I **didn't care**. I **read** the message six times before I **answered**.

**MARCO, 17, ITALY** *Milan · Afternoon*

**BUMP INTO**

I **was running** late for the train. I **wasn't looking** where I **was going** — I **was checking** the time on my phone. Then I bumped into someone. I **looked** up to say sorry... and it **was** my English teacher from three years ago, Mr. Russo. 'Marco!' he **said**. 'Still running everywhere?' We **talked** for ten minutes. I **messed** the train. It **was** worth it.

**Editor's note:** Every one of these stories starts with something **was happening**. Then — SUDDENLY — something changed. That's the past continuous. It sets the *background*, so the foreground feels dramatic.

## V

## PRACTICE

**Complete the sentences**

★ Choose the correct form. Hints: PC = past continuous, PS = past simple, WHEN = interrupted, WHILE = two actions, NEG/Q = negative or question.

- 1 At 8 p.m. last night, I \_\_\_\_\_ a really boring film. [PC]  
 watched                       was watching                       were watching
- 
- 2 We \_\_\_\_\_ dinner when the lights went out. [WHEN]  
 ate                       were eating                       was eating
- 
- 3 While I was walking home, it \_\_\_\_\_ to rain. [WHILE]  
 started                       was starting                       were starting
- 
- 4 The dog \_\_\_\_\_ while the cat \_\_\_\_\_ peacefully. [WHILE]  
 barked / slept                       was barking / slept                       was barking / was sleeping
- 
- 5 I \_\_\_\_\_ to the music, so I didn't hear you. [NEG]  
 didn't listen                       wasn't listening                       weren't listening
- 
- 6 "\_\_\_\_\_ you sleeping when I called?" "Yes, I was." [Q]  
 Did                       Was                       Were
- 
- 7 Sofia \_\_\_\_\_ on her phone under the table when the power \_\_\_\_\_ off. [WHEN]  
 scrolled / was going                       was scrolling / went                       was scrolling / was going
- 
- 8 Marco \_\_\_\_\_ late, so he \_\_\_\_\_ his train. [PS]  
 ran / missed                       was running / missed                       was running / was missing

**VI** **SPEAKING**  
**Set the scene**

**Partner interview**

Ask your partner what they were doing at specific moments. Their answer must use **past continuous**. Then ask "What happened next?"

- ▶ What were you doing at 7 p.m. yesterday?
- ▶ What were you doing when your alarm rang this morning?
- ▶ What were you and your family doing last Sunday afternoon?
- ▶ Tell me about a time you bumped into someone unexpectedly.
- ▶ Describe the last time there was a power cut. What were you doing?

**EXAMPLE CONVERSATION**

**A:** What were you doing at 7 p.m. yesterday?

**B:** I was helping my mum in the kitchen. We were making pasta.

**A:** Nice. What were you doing when your alarm rang this morning?

**B:** Honestly, I was dreaming about pizza. Then suddenly — BEEP BEEP BEEP.

**A:** What happened next?

**B:** I pressed snooze three times. Then my dad shouted, so I got up.

**VII** **WRITING**  
**Your 'suddenly' moment**

**Write about a moment something unexpected happened (80-100 words)**

Describe **where you were, what you were doing**, and then **what suddenly happened**. Use past continuous for the background, past simple for the sudden moment.

- at least 3 past continuous verbs (was/were + -ing)
- at least 2 past simple verbs for sudden actions
- use "when" OR "while" at least once
- use "suddenly" or "meanwhile" somewhere

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QUIZ

## Check your understanding

Circle the correct answer. Check your answers at the end.

**1. At 9 p.m. yesterday, I \_\_\_\_\_ a book.**

- A. read
- B. was reading
- C. were reading
- D. am reading

**2. Which sentence is CORRECT?**

- A. We was watching TV when he called.
- B. We were watching TV when he called.
- C. We were watched TV when he called.
- D. We watching TV when he called.

**3. I \_\_\_\_\_ home when it \_\_\_\_\_ to rain.**

- A. walked / started
- B. was walking / was starting
- C. was walking / started
- D. walked / was starting

**4. Choose the CORRECT sentence with 'while':**

- A. I was cooking while my brother studied.
- B. I cooked while my brother was studying.
- C. I was cooking while my brother was studying.
- D. I cooked while my brother studied.

**5. Negative form: She \_\_\_\_\_ listening to me.**

- A. didn't
- B. wasn't
- C. weren't
- D. isn't

**6. From the reading: What WAS Sofia doing when the power went out?**

- A. She was eating dinner.
- B. She was scrolling on her phone under the table.
- C. She was listening to her mum.

D. She was playing cards.

**7. Question form: ' \_\_\_\_\_ you sleeping at midnight?'**

A. Did

B. Was

C. Were

D. Are

**8. Which sentence uses the tenses correctly?**

A. I was meeting my teacher while I was running late.

B. I met my teacher while I was running late.

C. I was meeting my teacher while I ran late.

D. I met my teacher while I ran late.

### ANSWER KEY

#### Fill in the blanks:

1. was watching · 2. were eating · 3. started · 4. was barking / was sleeping  
5. wasn't listening · 6. Were · 7. was scrolling / went · 8. was running / missed

#### Quiz:

1. B · 2. B · 3. C · 4. C · 5. B · 6. B · 7. C · 8. B

*Scene complete! Next lesson: Past Perfect — "By the time I arrived..."*