

The image features two large, thick black L-shaped brackets. One is positioned in the top-left corner, and the other is in the bottom-right corner. They are oriented towards each other, framing the central text.

PAST TENSES

Simple. Continuous. Formation. Functions.

Past Tenses. General

We often use the **Past Simple** tense for *single completed events* and *past states* and we use the **Past Continuous** for *temporary or interrupted actions*. We use the **Past Perfect** tense for *actions* which happened *before* a time in the past. This topic looks at the differences between the past and the past perfect tenses and ***used to/would + infinitive***.

Past Simple (Indefinite)

FORMATION

Affirmative (+)

- Synthetic form
I worked. He worked.

Negative (-)

- Analytical form
I did not work. He didn't work.

Interrogative (?)

- Analytical form
Did you work? Did he work?

! EMPHATIC FORM

- Analytical form
I 'did insist on it.
He 'did insist on it.

SPELLING RULES

- Base forms ending in a single stressed vowel and a consonant (except **w**, **x** or **y**), *double the consonant, (hug – hugged);*
- In British English, but not US English, we often *double final consonant l* (label – labelled);
- Base forms ending in a **consonant + y**, *change y to l* (copy – copied);
- Irregular verbs *do not form* the past tense with **-ed** (go – went).

Functions (Usage)

1. **Single completed action** which took place in the past . He time is often indicated (*this morning, today, tonight, last night, ago, etc.*).

e.g. *Things **came** to a crisis in July. My mother first **heard** of him when I was a mere child.*

■ If the context is clear, it is not necessary to give a past time reference.

e.g. *Caesar's troops **failed** to defeat the indigenous tribes (in 55 BC). "Sorry! I **didn't mean** to hurt you.*

2. **Action** which occupied a whole **period of time** now over. The period of time is usually indicated (*for, during, etc.*).

e.g. *"I admit I was wrong. Remember how we quarrelled about it? We **quarrelled** for three days". Last May I **spent** two weeks in London.*

3. In narration to express a **succession** (последовательность) **of** single accomplished or durative **actions** (*for, during, from.. to, all day, etc.*).

e.g. *I **found** some matches, **climbed** on the table, **lit** the gas lamp, then **settled down** to read. She **looked** at him for a long time and then **shrugged**.*

4. **Recurrent** (повторяющееся) **action** (*often, never, now and again, sometimes, for days, etc.*).

e.g. You often **mentioned** her in your letters. But sometimes he **found** his work difficult.

5. **Permanent actions** which indicate continuous process in the past, giving a **general characteristic of the person or thing** denoted by the subject.

e.g. She **had** a large, blunt, knobby nose, and her eyes **protruded**: they were light blue, staring and slightly puzzled. She **wore** her hair in a knob above the back of her head. Dan **worked** in a factory twelve hours a day for nine shillings a week.

6. **Actions** going at a **given past moment** (usually Past Continuous):

- with **stative** verbs

e.g. She sipped her coffee and pulled a face. She thought it **tasted** horrible.

- with certain durative verbs, only **circumstances are important** (to sit, to stand, to lie, to hang, to shine, to gleam, to talk, to speak, to wear, to carry, to walk, etc.)

- e.g. The lights in the house were out, but a rising moon **gleamed** against one window in the room where little Mary **slept**.

7. **Future action** viewed from the past (**sequence of tenses** (согласование времен) in **reported speech** (косвенная речь), clauses of time, condition, concession);

e.g. *Probably she knew that, whatever **happened**, he would not give her away. He knew that she was determined to marry him, and would, if she **thought** it useful, lie and cheat and steal until she **brought** it off.*

8. **Unreal actions** (Conjunctive Mood – сослагательное наклонение)

e.g. *If I **were** you I should not accept his offer. I wish I **knew** it.*

9. **Present-time context** to refer a **succession of past actions** or **single action** (to spend + time + ing-form)

e.g. *I **spent** all the morning **reading**. He **spent** the summer **helping** his uncle on the farm.*

Exercises

Explain the use of the Past Indefinite in the following sentences:

1. Then a bomb *hit* close by. He *felt* himself being lifted. Then he *was* out. Later, he *opened* his eyes. He *began* to hurt and he *didn't think* about anything for a long time.
2. At home we *heated* soup.
3. A netting wire fence *ran* all around the house to keep out rabbits and deer.
4. My aunt *looked* after my father and they *lived* in our old house.
5. "Wow!" he *said* to the wide straw hat I *wore*.
6. He always *smiled* at children and *gave* them sweets.
7. She had *changed* into a white summer dress and *carried* a big sun hat which she *swung* idly in one hand from a blue ribbon.
8. He *moved* across the lawn to the house and I *followed* him. The moonlight *fell* in streaks through the leaves.
9. "*Did you hear* about the party?" "*It was a complete failure?*"
10. You *heard* what he said.
11. She *knew* her brother at the University where he *lectured* on physics.
12. That evening she *had* a date with a man who *sold* cosmetics.

Past Continuous

FORMATION

Affirmative (+)

- Analytical form
I was working. We were working.

Negative (-)

- Analytical form
I was not working. We weren't working.

Interrogative (?)

- Analytical form
Were you working? Was he working?

SPELLING RULES

- A mute -e at the end of the verb is dropped before the suffix -ing (e.g. *close* – *closing*, *make* – *making*).
- A final consonant is doubled if it is preceded by a short stressed vowel or if a verb ends in a stressed -er (-ur) (e.g. *cut* – *cutting*, *begin* – *beginning*, *prefer* – *preferring*, *occur* – *occurring*),
- A final -l is always doubled in British English (e.g. *travel* – *travelling*, *quarrel* – *quarrelling*).
- A final -y is preserved no matter what sound it is preceded by (e.g. *study* – *studying*, *stay* – *staying*).
- A final -ie changes into -y (e.g. *tie* – *tying*, *lie* – *lying*).

Functions (Usage)

1. **Action** going on at a **given moment** in the past (the precise time limit usually is not known);

e.g. *Little Mary came in. She **was eating** an ice-cream cone. Jolly's face crimsoned, then clouded. Some struggle **was** evidently **taking place** in him.*

2. With certain durative verbs when the **process** of the action is in the **focus of communication** (not circumstances);

e.g. *On one occasion I **sat** with them in the studio. Dirk and I **were talking**. Mrs Stroeve **sewed**, and I thought I recognized the shirt she **was mending** as Strickland's. He **lay** on his back. He **did not speak**.*

3. Action going on at a given **period of time** in the past (time limits are usually understood by the context);

e.g. *Andrew had no idea whether he **was doing** well or badly in his exam. In the slight pause young Nicholas was heard saying gently that Violet **was taking** lessons in pastel.*

4. In **present-time context** to refer to a **single past action** whose duration is marked by *all day, all that year, yesterday, the whole morning, etc.*

e.g. *All through that winter and spring, I **was attending** committees, **preparing** notes for the minister, **reading** memoranda, **talking** to my scientific friends.*

5. **Emotional Continuous**: actions characterizing a person's **typical traits** (*always, constantly*);

e.g. *She **was** noisy and constantly **trying** to attract attention by all means.*

6. Action in **the near future** viewed from the past (due to one's **previous decision**)

e.g. *Why didn't you tell me you **were starting**? At the end of the week she wired that she **was returning**.*

7. **Interrupted action**: to contrast an ongoing action (Past Continuous) with a single event (Past Simple) which interrupts it;

e.g. *Elizabeth **was hunting** when messengers **arrived** with the news of Mary's plot. Seventy cars **were crossing** the bridge when the pier **collapsed** into the river.*

8. **Polite requests**, questions & suggestions (usually with *think, wonder*).

e.g. *We **were wondering** if you would like to join us. (= Would you like to join us ...?)
Were you **planning** on going somewhere else later? (= Are you planning on ...?)*

Stative & durative verbs

- **Present Continuous** sometimes may be found with *stative* verbs (**change in meaning**)

e.g. *I had a horrid feeling that she **was seeing** right through me and **knowing** all about me. I **was seeing** George regularly now. He took me as an equal.*

- Some *durative* verbs, for example, verbs of bodily sensation (*to feel, to hurt, to ache, to itch, etc.*) and such verbs as *to wear, to look (= to seem), to shine* and others may be used either in the *Past Indefinite* or in the *Past Continuous* with little **difference in meaning**.

e.g. *He was happy now that his wife **was feeling** better.*

*I saw that he **felt** upset.*

*Ted Newton stopped at my table for a quick drink. He **was wearing** a fur coat.*

*A few minutes later Fred came from the direction of the stables. He **wore** riding breeches.*

*His wife **was looking** happy.*

*She **looked** like a very wise mermaid rising out of the sea.*

Exercises

Explain the use of the Past Continuous in the following sentences:

1. The front door of the house stood open. The maid *was polishing* the windows.
2. After a while he informed me that John *was doing* a translation of some poems from Spanish.
3. I knew Harry *was coming* sometime on Monday.
4. You remember how he *was always writing* verses.
5. He glanced my way to see if *I was listening*.
6. By the time the month was up, Eric realized he *was fighting* a losing battle.
7. Roma said: "Hallo, everybody. *We were passing* and saw the light in the studio. We guessed you *were having* a party."
8. She stopped beside Tommy who was in a particularly scornful mood. He *was leaving* in the morning.
9. Well, I was taught not to interrupt when older people *were talking*.
10. She said it very calmly but her face had gone the curious colour which meant that she *wasn't liking* it very much.
11. He looked across the street to see if they *were waiting*.
12. "What *were you doing* in New York, Mr Brown?" "I *was trying* to find someone to buy my hotel," he replied truthfully.

Use the Past Continuous or the Past Indefinite in the following sentences:

1. I (to have) an uncomfortable feeling that he (to laugh) at me.
2. They (to move) into the shelter. The rain (to come) down swiftly.
3. The general (to wait) on the platform when I (to arrive) at Camberley.
4. She (to be) on her guard because he always (to tease) her.
5. I only (to want) to know if you (to come) on Saturday.
6. He (to see) to it that their publishing house (to become) a flourishing firm again.
7. He (to have) a bath when the sirens (to start).
8. He (to walk) in the frosty fields when he (not to work).
9. Jack (to look) at her trying to guess what (to come).
10. The road under the limes (to lead) straight to the village.
11. He (to find) that he (to speak) in a low voice.
12. He (to be) surprised to find how much her hands (to shake).