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English grammar

PDF rules with examples

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Present simple and continuous

1 Present simple tense

Form

Positive statement: *I play, He plays*

Negative statement: *I do not play (I don't play), He does not play (He doesn't play)*

Question form: *Do you play? Does he play?*

Negative question: *Do you not play? (Don't you play?) Does he not play? (Doesn't he play?)*

The passive voice: *The game is played. The letters are written.* (See more at Active and passive voice.)

Spelling

We only use -s ending (plays) in the third person singular.

We add -es to the verbs that end in ss, sh, ch, x and o: misses, finishes, watches, mixes, goes.

If the verb ends in a consonant and -y, we change -y into -i and use the -es ending: carry - carries, try - tries.

But: play - plays, because this verb ends with a vowel and -y.

The auxiliary verb *do* is not used to make questions and negative statements with modal verbs and the verb *to be*.

Are you a student? Is he in London? I am not at home. He is not happy. Can you sing? Must I come? I cannot swim. He mustn't stay.

If the *wh-* pronoun introducing the question (who, which) is the subject of the question, we do not use the auxiliary verb *do*. Compare the following sentences.

Who knows you? (who is the subject)

Which cars belong to you? (which cars is the subject)

But: *Who do you know?* (who is the object)

The negative question normally expresses a surprise.

Doesn't he work?

Use

- We use the **present simple tense** for activities that happen again and again (everyday, sometimes, ever, never).

I sometimes go to school by bike. You don't speak Greek. Do they get up early?

He often travels. She doesn't work. Does she ever help you?

- We use it for facts that are always true.

Our planet moves round the sun.

Lions eat meat.

- With a future time expression (tomorrow, next week) the present simple is used for planned future actions (timetables).

The train leaves at 8.15.

They return tonight.

2 Present continuous tense

Form

Positive statement: *I am doing, You are doing, He is doing (I'm doing, You're doing, He's doing)*

Negative statement: *I am not playing (I'm not playing), You are not playing (You aren't playing, You're not playing), He is not playing (He isn't playing, He's not playing)*

Question: *Are you playing? Is he playing?*

Negative question: *Are you not playing? (Aren't you playing?) Is he not playing? (Isn't he playing?)*

The present continuous tense is formed with the verb *to be* and the present participle (-ing ending).

The negative question normally expresses a surprise: *Isn't he working?*

Use

The **present continuous tense** is used:

- If we want to say that something is happening at the time of speaking. We often use it with time expressions such as *now* or *at the moment*.

I am doing housework at the moment.

You aren't listening to me now!

Look at him! What is he doing?

- For temporary activities that are true now, but maybe not happening at the time of speaking. Time expressions such as *today*, *this week* or *these days* are typical of this use.

I am in London. I am learning English here.

She can't go out today. She is preparing for an exam.

You can't meet him this week. He is working in Bath.

- For planned future arrangements. The time of the action must be given in the sentence (*soon*, *tomorrow*, *on Monday*, *next week*), otherwise it is not clear that we talk about future.

I am coming soon.

We are leaving on Monday.

She is starting next week.

- With *always* to express the idea that something happens too often and it annoys the speaker.

I am always forgetting my keys.

He is always smoking in the living room!

We do not normally use in the continuous the following groups of verbs (so called state verbs):

1. Of senses: *feel*, *hear*, *see*, *smell*, *taste*. On the other hand, *look*, *watch* or *listen* are action verbs and can be used in the continuous:

I can hear you. - I am listening to you.

Can you see the bird? - Are you looking at the bird?

2. Of liking and disliking: *like*, *love*, *hate*, *fear*, *detest*, *want*, *wish*...

I like animals.

I hate snakes.

3. Of mental states: *agree*, *believe*, *forget*, *know*, *remember*, *suppose*, *think*...

I agree with you.

I suppose you are right.

4. Of permanent states: *be*, *have*, *belong*, *contain*, *owe*, *own*, *possess*...

This pen belongs to me.

I have a new pet.

5. Of appearance: *seem*, *appear*, *look*, *sound*...

It seems that it will rain.

Your new haircut looks really good.

If some of these verbs are used in the present continuous, they have a different meaning. In such a case they become action verbs.

I think he is my best friend. (mental state) - *I'm thinking of giving him a present.* (mental activity)

He has a new bathroom. (possess) - *He is having a bath.* (take a bath)

I see what you mean. (know) - *I am seeing a doctor.* (visit)

The flower smells beautiful. (scent) - *The dog is smelling the sausage.* (sniff)

This wine tastes sour. (It has a sour taste.) - *She is tasting the soup if it is warm enough.*

Past simple and continuous

1 Past simple tense

Form - regular verbs

Positive statement: *I watched, He watched*

Negative statement: *I did not watch (I didn't watch), He did not watch (He didn't watch)*

Question: *Did you watch?*

Negative question: *Did you not watch? (Didn't you watch?)*

It is formed by -ed ending. It is the same for all persons, singular and plural.

Spelling

We add -d (not -ed) to the verbs that end with -e: *like - liked*

If the verb ends with a consonant and -y, we change -y into -i: *carry - carried, try - tried*.

But: *play - played*, because this verb ends with a vowel and -y.

If the verb has only one syllable and ends with a vowel and a consonant, we double the consonant to keep the same pronunciation: *stop - stopped*. The same rule applies to the verbs that end with -l: *travel - travelled*.

Form - irregular verbs

All the irregular verbs have different forms: *go - went, buy - bought, cut - cut* etc.

The question and negative are made in the same way: *I went - Did you go? No, I did not go*.

Notes

We do not use the auxiliary verb *did* with the verb *to be* and modal verbs.

Were you a student? Was he in London? I was not at home. He was not happy.

Could you sing? Could he come? I could not swim. He could not stay.

The auxiliary verb *did* is not used in questions beginning with *wh-* pronouns (*who, which, what*) in case that the pronoun is the subject of the question.

Who met you? (who is the subject)

Which train arrived on time? (which train is the subject)

But: *Who did you meet? Which train did you miss? (who and which train are the objects)*

The negative question normally shows a surprise.

Didn't you know it?

Use

- We use the **past simple tense** for activities or situations that were completed in the past at a definite time.

a) The time can be given in the sentence:

I came home at 6 o'clock.

When he was a child, he didn't live in a house.

b) The time is asked about:

When did they get married?

c) The time is not given in the sentence, but it is clear from a context that the action or situation finished in the past.

He is 20 years old. He was born in Canada.

I've been to Iceland. (present perfect) - Did you enjoy it? (past simple)

- We use it for repeated actions in the past.
We walked to school every day. - And did you ever go by bus?

- It is used in stories to describe events that follow each other.
Charles entered the hall and looked around. He took off his coat and put it on a chair. He was at home.

2 Past continuous tense

Form

Positive statement: *I was watching, You were watching*

Negative statement: *I was not watching (I wasn't watching), You were not watching (You weren't watching)*

Question: *Were you watching? Was he watching?*

Negative question: *Were you not watching? (Weren't you watching?) Was he not watching? (Wasn't he watching?)*

The past continuous tense is formed with the past tense of the verb *to be* and the present participle (-ing form).

Use

- We use the **past continuous tense** for actions or situations in the past that were not completed.
From 10 to 12 I was washing my car. I was in the garage.
(I did not finish my work. It was in progress. I started before 10 and finished after 12.)
The sun was setting. The beach was changing its colours.
(The sun was still in the sky when I was watching it.)

Compare this sentence with the past simple, which is used for completed activities:

From 10 to 12 I washed my car.

(I finished my work. I started at 10 and finished at 12.)

Finally, the sun set. It was dark and we did not see the beach anymore.

(The sun completely disappeared.)

- We use it for continuous, uninterrupted activities. If the action is interrupted (something is done in more intervals or we did more things one after another), we must use the past simple.
Tom was watching TV on Sunday.
Tom watched TV in the morning and in the evening.
Yesterday I was working in the garden.
Yesterday I worked in the garden and on my house.

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