English grammar help for learners of English.

The present continuous tense (guided discovery exercise 1).

Use the following words to fill the spaces below. Write one answer for each space.

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<th>how much time</th>
<th>Is everybody</th>
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Usually, we only use one tense to talk about actions happening now. This tense is called 1.__________. Example sentences:

I'm reading at the moment.
What's she doing there?
She isn't doing anything.
Look, it's raining.
Is it raining or isn't it?
Hey, I'm talking to you!
Where are you going?
I'm coming to see you.

The present continuous must use the auxiliary 2.__________ followed by the 3.__________ form of the verb. Examples:

John 4.__________ waiting for the bus.
We are 5.__________ the football on television.

In 6.__________, the auxiliary and the subject are inverted. Examples:

Everybody is doing their Christmas shopping today. (affirmative)
7.__________ doing their Christmas shopping today? (question)

8.__________ in present continuous use 'not' with the auxiliary. Examples:

I am not doing anything interesting at the moment.

and the contracted form in 9.__________ English is:

I'm not doing anything interesting at the moment.

Present continuous is also used to talk about 10.__________ in our lives. These are actions that may continue for a few days, months or perhaps years. Examples:

I'm working in Birmingham 11.__________.
I'm studying English at the university this term.
I'm studying Economics at the polytechnic. (but not permanently)

Present continuous is not used to talk about a continuing action in the present when we say 12.__________ has passed. We use present perfect continuous instead. Examples:

I've been working in Birmingham for 2 months. (2 months have passed)
I've been studying English since last summer. (All the time since last summer has passed.)
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**The present continuous (structure of verbs and auxiliaries in affirmative sentences, questions and negatives – exercise 2).**

Re-write these sentences in the present continuous tense. Replace the underlined words by the words in brackets:

a) They catch the train **every day at 6.00pm.** (now)

b) The letters arrive **every morning.** (at the moment)

c) I work in the Health Ministry **every day.** (for two months)

d) A plane flies **weekly** between Madrid and Moscow. (at this very moment [put at the end of the sentence])

Re-write these sentences in the question form of present continuous tense. Replace the underlined words by the words in brackets:

e) Nick and Emma watch television **at the weekend.** (this weekend)

f) Steve shops with his wife **on Saturday mornings.** (this morning)

g) The computer **usually** works well. (right now [put at the end of the sentence])

h) Mary **always** fries her food in margarine. (just now [put at the end of the sentence])

Re-write these sentences in the negative form of present continuous tense. Replace the underlined words by the words in brackets:

i) Mary’s baby cries **all day.** (today)

j) Pedro **sometimes** goes to a football match. (at the moment [put at the end of the sentence])

k) Sally washes her motorbike **during her lunch hour.** (now)

l) My parents eat out **on Friday evenings.** (this Friday evening)
**Teacher’s notes.**

The present continuous tense (answers to exercises 1 and 2).

Exercise 1 (answers)
1. present continuous
2. to be
3. ing
4. is
5. watching
6. questions
7. Is everybody
8. Negative sentences
9. spoken
10. temporary periods
11. for a few months
12. how much time

It’s probably not a good idea to expand on the subject of present perfect continuous if your students haven’t seen this tense before. The reason this point is mentioned is because learners of English frequently make the mistake of using present continuous for talking about periods of time that have already elapsed eg. “I am living here for 2 months” when they mean “I have lived” or “I have been living”.

Exercise 2 (answers)

a) They are catching the train now.
b) The letters are arriving at the moment.
c) I’m working in the Health Ministry for two months.
d) A plane is flying between Madrid and Moscow at this very moment.
e) Are Nick and Emma watching television this weekend?
f) Is Steve shopping with his wife this morning?
g) Is the computer working well right now?
h) Is Mary frying her food in margarine just now?
i) Mary’s baby isn’t crying today.
j) Pedro isn’t going to a football match at the moment.
k) Sally isn’t washing her motorbike now.
l) My parents aren’t eating out this Friday evening.

Exercise 2 purposely uses sentences in present simple aspect and context so that learners can clearly distinguish between the differences in use between simple and continuous. There are structure points here not covered, therefore, that should have been discussed when the learners studied present simple such as the verb forms. Adaptations are needed for verbs in present simple to change to the “ing” form eg. cries – crying, goes – going, washes – washing. You may want to revise this with other verbs they know too. Also point out that the time adverbs here don’t usually take a mid-position in the sentence. Compare “always” and “just now”.

The time adverbs mentioned here are not usually included in exercises at this level but nevertheless they are very common in spoken English: right now, just now, at the moment; variants of “now”. You may want to ensure students understand these terms before they start. You may like to add some more eg. “at the present moment” is more formal and useful for email writing.

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