**The English past continuous – grammar activity 2 (structure)**

**Something interrupted these actions in the following sentences. Fill in each space with the correct form of the verb in brackets.**

1) John was sitting in his office reading the newspaper when he a)________ the sound of a car crash in the street. (hear)

2) While I was studying my English grammar lesson, my husband a)________ in and b)________ he wanted to watch the television. (come) (say)

3) We were driving along a country road when suddenly a fox a)________ out in front of the car and b)________ at us. (jump) (look)

4) Mary was walking home late one night when a strange man a)________ her and b)________ for a cigarette. (stop) (ask)

5) A group of friends were having dinner in an old house in the country when suddenly there a)________ a noise and the door b)________ slowly. (be) (open)

6) Policeman Plod was leaving home one morning when his wife a)________ to him from the door. "You've forgotten your umbrella!" she said. (call)

**In the following sentences, two actions are happening at the same time and for the same length of time. Change the infinitives to past continuous.**

7) It was a cold day. The wind a)________ hard and the rain b)________ heavily. (blow) (fall)

8) John a)________ in the sea while the children b)________ on the beach. (swim) (play)

9) While John a)________ the presentation, nobody b)________. (give) (listen)

10) I a)________ on the grass relaxing while the band b)________ classical music. (lie) (play)

11) We a)________ the plans while our boss b)________ about the project. (draw) (talk)
Teacher’s notes.

(Time for activity 2: 35 mins approx. Level: elementary – lower intermediate.)

Answers to activity 2.

1, a) heard.
2, a) came, b) said.
3, a) jumped, b) looked.
4, a) stopped, b) asked.
5, a) was, b) opened.
6, a) called.
7, a) was blowing, b) was falling.
8, a) was swimming, b) were playing.
9, a) was giving, b) was listening.
10, a) was lying, b) was playing.
11, a) were drawing, b) was talking.

The past continuous is generally only used to distinguish between background and interrupting actions, which means sentences 1 to 6 must use the past simple. If students can understand this last principle, then they will be able to avoid the common error of overuse of past continuous for sequential actions, which should be in past simple: “I got up, had a shower etc.”

Oral activity: (building a story) (level – lower intermediate+).

You may need to write a few help words on the board first. These are background events: wind – blow; rain – fall; sun – shine; birds – sing; lambs – play; Mum – wash car; Dad – do housework; people – walk by; somebody – sing; etc. This will give them an idea so they can invent their own. Explain that they are background actions and must be in past continuous, eg. “the wind was blowing (in the trees)”. Tell the students that there will be an action line, which will start the story. This will begin with “suddenly”.

Hand out identical pieces of card, one to each student. Each card is blank except for one which has the word “suddenly”. Ask any student who has a blank card to raise his hand. He/she will start by uttering a background action. The turn then passes to the person next to him/her, who utters another background action. When the turn gets to the student with the "suddenly" card, that student must then begin the story with “suddenly…”. The following student then utters another line to the story.

Example:
Student A: The birds were singing in the trees.
Student B: The sun was shining.
Student C: People were walking by in the street.
Student D: My brother was playing his guitar in the living-room.
Student with "suddenly" card: Suddenly, my sister came in.
Next student: She began to cry.
Next student: She said, “help me. There’s a spider in the bathroom!”
Next student: I got up and ran to the bathroom.
Next student: etc.

This activity works well if you base the scene in an environment familiar to your students, eg, at work, at school, at university, etc.

Enjoy the class!