Past Continuous (Guided Discovery Grammar Exercise). (page 1)

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

while simple rang at the same time story while specific time to be in front of negative We don't know unfinished watched past continuous past simple interrupted weren't Was auxiliary verb + ing

The English past continuous has a compound form (more than one part to the verb form). Past continuous uses an auxiliary verb (the verb "1,_________" in the past) and a present participle (2,_________).

Examples:

I was watching television.
He was coming home.
We were going to the cinema.

To make a question in past continuous, we invert the subject and the 3,_________. Examples:

Was I watching television?
4,_________ he coming home?
Were we going to the cinema?

The 5,_________ form uses "not" after the auxiliary: "was not", "were not". These are usually contracted in spoken or informal written English. Examples:

I wasn't watching television.
He wasn't coming home.
We 6,_________ going to the cinema.

Past continuous is usually used with:

a) the past 7,_________ or
b) another past continuous sentence.

a) Past continuous often expresses an action which was 8,_________ by another action. This second action is in the past simple form. Examples:

I was having a bath when the phone 9,_________.
The student was doing her homework when her mother came in.
John and Mary were playing tennis when it started to rain.

(continued on page 2...)
We can see that the past continuous talks about actions in the past. Look at this next sentence:

**John and Mary were sleeping in bed when suddenly there was a loud knock at the door.**

Did John and Mary hear the knock? Did they get up? 11,__________.

The conjunction "when" that divides the two parts of a past continuous / past simple sentence can be put 12,__________ the past continuous part. In this case, we often change "when" to "13,__________". Examples:

**While (When) Mary was swimming in the sea, she saw a shark. Mary saw a shark 14,__________ (when) she was swimming in the sea.**

An unfinished action can also be expressed when we talk about a 15,__________ in the past. We understand that the action continued after the time mentioned. Examples:

**What were you doing at 6.00pm yesterday evening? At that moment John was driving back home.**

b) Past continuous can also be used with another 16,__________ sentence. In this case, one action doesn't interrupt another. The two actions happen 17,__________ and for the same length of time. Examples:

**While John was washing the car, Mary was repairing the engine. The children were playing in the park while their mother was reading a book.**

In a similar way, the past continuous is used in narrative to describe more than one scene happening at the same time. The action or 18,__________ (past simple) then interrupts the scene. Example:

**On Sunday morning the sun was shining and the birds were singing in the trees. John got out of bed and...**

Try to avoid making a mistake like this one:

**What did you do yesterday? I was watching a film at the cinema.**

Remember that single actions or a sequence of actions in the past are usually in the 19,__________:

**What did you do yesterday? I 20,__________ a film at the cinema.**

(Read the activity again. Do you understand everything? If not, ask your teacher.)
**Teacher’s notes.**

**The past continuous (answers). Time for activities: 40 mins. approx.**

*Level: lower-intermediate.*

**Answers**

1. to be
2. verb + ing
3. Auxiliary
4. Was
5. Negative
6. weren't
7. Simple
8. Interrupted
9. Rang
10. Unfinished
11. We don't know
12. in front of
13. While
14. While
15. specific time
16. past continuous
17. at the same time
18. Story
19. past simple
20. watched

After completion and correction of this exercise, it would be a good idea to go through the main points with the students. Explaining the concepts of past continuous is made easier by drawing time lines. This could be another guided discovery activity on the board, eg.

Past < ___X_______________________> (now) > Future

I was having a bath / the phone rang

Past < ------X--------------------------> (now) > Future

at that moment / John was driving

Past < ____________________________> (now) > Future

the children were playing

their mother was reading

The solid lines represent time from past to present going into the future. | = now. The dotted lines represent the relatively more prolonged action of the past continuous and the X is the past simple action that interrupts the past continuous action.

You can just draw up the lines and symbols, explain their meaning then ask students to find sentences from the exercise which would fit. Which is the ------ action and which is the X action? Students copy these time lines for future revision.

**Oral activity:** write a list inside a cloud shape on the board of about twenty common infinitives. Divide the class into two groups. The first person of a group utters just one clause from a past continuous / simple sentence using a verb from the list eg. “I was walking along the road...” (erase “walk” from list). A student from the other group chooses another verb and completes the sentence: “I was walking along the road when a car hit me.” (Erase “hit” from list.) Sentences may start with the past simple clause too: “A car hit me while...” Accept only sentences that are in correct context and award points.

Enjoy the lesson!