



Module: English
Branch: International Trade
Level: Third year Bachelor

Lecture 10: The Past continuous or simple?

1- Introduction

A reporter is interviewing Mike and Harriet.

Reporter: *Mike and Harriet, tell me what you **saw**.*

Harriet: *Well, when we **were driving** home last night, we **saw** a strange object in the sky.*

Mike : *As we **were coming** down the hill into town, it just suddenly **appeared in front of us**. We **stopped** the car and **got out***

Harriet : *It **was** a very clear night. The stars **were twinkling**.* Mike: *It **was** a spaceship. IT **seemed** quite big .*

*It **had** some strange writing on the side.*

*And a light **was flashing** on the top.* Harriet: *As we **were watching** it, it suddenly **flew** away and **disappeared**.*

PAST CONTINUOUS/

PAST SIMPLE

<p>We use the past continuous for an action that we were in the middle of. <i>We were driving home.</i> (We were in the middle of our journey.) <i>A light was flashing.</i> We do not normally use the past continuous for states. NOT <i>The spaceship was seeming</i> ... NOT <i>It was having writing ...</i> NOT <i>I wasn't knowing ...</i></p>	<p>We use the past simple for a complete action in the past. <i>We drove home.</i> (We finished our journey.) <i>The spaceship flew away.</i> We also use the past simple (not normally the continuous) for states. <i>The spaceship seemed quite big.</i> <i>It had writing on the side.</i> <i>I didn't know what it was.</i></p>
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2- It happened as I was driving

We often use the past continuous and simple together when one (shorter) action comes in the middle of another (longer) one.

*As we **were driving** down the hill, a strange object **appeared** in the sky.*

*While Laura **was sitting** in the garden, it suddenly **began** to rain.*

*You **drove** right past me when I **was waiting** for the bus.*

The appearance of the strange object comes in the middle of the longer action, the drive down the hill.

Shorter action: *An object appeared.*

In the three sentences above, the past continuous comes after **as**, **while** or **when** (*As we were driving ...*). We can also use **when** before the past simple.

*We **were driving** down the hill **when** a strange object **appeared** in the sky.*

*David **was making** lunch **when** the phone **rang**.*

But we use two past simple verbs for one action after another.

*When we **saw** the spaceship, we **stopped** the car. (= We saw it and then we stopped.)*

3- The sun was shining

- PAST CONTINUOUS

We often use the past continuous to describe the background.

*The sun **was shining**.*

*The stars **were twinkling**.*

-PAST SIMPLE

We use the past simple for actions in a story,

***We arrived** at the beach.*

*The aliens **landed** quietly.*