

## RULES

## PAST SIMPLE

- states or actions (single or repeated) that finished in the past (often given with a specific time in the past)
- narration of single past actions in the order they occurred

The committee **debated** the proposals for months.

The dog **ran** into the garden and **chased** the cat, who **climbed** up a tree.

**Time expressions:** ago, last week / year, the day before yesterday, the other day, when, then, not until, whenever, later, after / afterwards, before / beforehand

## Past Simple or Present Perfect?

- We use Present Perfect Simple to refer to past events (see Unit 1), but we don't normally use it when mentioning a specific past time.

**Compare:** I've **submitted** my application. I **submitted** my application **last week**.

- With time expressions like *today* and *this week / year*, we can use Past Simple if this time period is finished.  
We only won three matches this season. (*The season is now over.*)  
We have only won three matches this season. (*The season is not over – we may win more matches.*)
- With *since*, it is common to use Past Simple in the clause beginning with *since* and Present Perfect in the main clause.  
Margaret **has developed** new interests **since** she **left** college. (**not:** *since she has left college X*)
- In American English it is possible to use the Past Simple with the adverbs such as *just, already, yet, ever, never, before*.  
**AmE** Did you already see the movie? (British English: *Have you already seen that film?*)

## PAST CONTINUOUS

- action in progress at a particular moment in the past or at the time something else happens
- action or situation described as background to a more important event
- temporary action in the past or action that was changing or developing
- annoying or amusing past habit (with *always, constantly, forever*)
- plans that did not happen or expectations that were not fulfilled
- to describe past arrangements that may or may not have taken place

I **was downloading** some files when the computer crashed.

I **was talking** to John yesterday and he told me about his new job.

In the summer of 1987, I **was working** for a law firm.

When we were at school, Andrew **was always forgetting** his lunch.

I **was expecting** to hear from you by Sunday.

I **was meeting** Sally in town so I didn't go to the lecture.

**Time expressions:** while, as, all day, at the time, back then, in those days, during

## Notes

1. Remember that stative verbs are not usually used in the continuous form. (See Grammar Appendix, page 216.)  
I **didn't understand** what she was telling me. (**not:** *I wasn't understanding X*)
2. We use the phrase *I was wondering if* to be polite when asking someone to do something or when we ask for information.  
I **was wondering if** you could suggest a topic for my essay?
3. The phrase *was thinking of* can be used to refer to something currently being considered for the future, but which is not yet definite.  
I **was thinking of** signing up for a computer course.