Past Simple vs Past Continuous — Worksheet

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30 exercises · Level A1–A2 · Answer key on the last page Free for classroom use

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

Choose the correct option (a–d) for each gap or question. Check yourself with the answer key on the last page.

1. Last night the baby _____ upstairs, so we talked very quietly in the kitchen.
   a) were sleeping b) was sleeping c) was sleep d) is sleeping

2. When I looked out of the window, my neighbours _____ their car.
   a) was washing b) were wash c) are washing d) were washing

3. We _____ in the lake when it suddenly started to rain.
   a) were swiming b) were swimming c) was swimming d) were swim

4. Sam _____ a cake for his sister's birthday when the oven stopped working.
   a) was making b) was makeing c) were making d) is making

5. He _____ his coat, locked the door and ran to the bus stop.
   a) taked b) was taking c) took d) takes

6. Ben _____ a helmet when he fell off his bike, so he hurt his head.
   a) wasn't wearing b) weren't wearing c) wasn't wear d) isn't wearing

7. I _____ lunch yesterday because I was too busy at work.
   a) didn't had b) not had c) didn't have d) don't have

8. _____ you _____ the end of the film, or were you asleep by then?
   a) Were … see b) Did … see c) Did … saw d) Do … see

9. Where _____ you going when I saw you at the station yesterday?
   a) was b) did c) are d) were

10. I _____ my phone while I was running for the bus, and the screen broke.
    a) droped b) was dropping c) dropped d) drop

11. I _____ my hair when the doorbell rang, so I didn't hear it at first.
    a) was drying b) dried c) were drying d) was dry

12. When I got home at midnight last Saturday, my parents _____ for me in the kitchen.
    a) waited b) was waiting c) were waiting d) are waiting

13. I was cleaning the car when I _____ a ring under the seat.
    a) found b) was finding c) find d) have found

14. She _____ her arm while she was skiing in the mountains last winter.
a) was breaking b) breaks c) broke d) has broken

15. I found a bag on the train. It _____ to the woman next to me.
a) belonged b) was belonging c) were belonging d) belong

16. My alarm rang at six. I got up, _____ my teeth and made some coffee.
a) was brushing b) brush c) have brushed d) brushed

17. We watched the whole film, and when it ended, we _____ home.
a) were walking b) walked c) walk d) had walked

18. While Leo _____ the car, his sister was cutting the grass.
a) were washing b) washing c) was wash d) was washing

19. The phone _____ three times while I was in the shower last night.
a) was ringing b) rang c) rings d) has rung

20. I _____ anyone at the party, so I left early.
a) wasn't knowing b) didn't knew c) didn't know d) weren't knowing

21. I _____ down the street when I _____ someone call my name, so I stopped.
a) was walking … heard b) walked … heard c) was walking … was hearing d) walked … was hearing

22. While I _____ for the bus, I _____ that my bag was open.
a) was waiting … was noticing b) were waiting … noticed c) was waiting … noticed d) am waiting … noticed

23. At half-time we _____ 2–0, but in the end we _____ 3–2.
a) lost … won b) were losing … were winning c) lost … were winning d) were losing … won

24. She _____ off the bus, _____ her umbrella and walked home in the rain.
a) was getting … opened b) got … opened c) got … was opening d) was getting … was opening

25. I _____ dinner when I _____ that we had no salt.
a) were cooking … realised b) was cooking … was realising c) cooked … was realising d) was cooking … realised

26. Which sentence is correct?
a) He was knowing the way, so I let him drive.
b) He knowed the way, so I let him drive.
c) He knew the way, so I let him drive.
d) He was knew the way, so I let him drive.

27. Which sentence is correct?
a) I was reading when I heard a strange noise.
b) I read when I was hearing a strange noise.
c) I was reading when I heared a strange noise.
d) I was read when I heard a strange noise.

28. Which sentence is correct?
a) While I working, the children were watching a film.
b) While I was working, the children was watching a film.
c) During I was working, the children were watching a film.
d) While I was working, the children were watching a film.

29. Which sentence is correct?
a) He was paying the bill, put on his coat and left.
b) He paid the bill, put on his coat and left.
c) He paid the bill, was putting on his coat and left.
d) He payed the bill, put on his coat and left.

30. The bell rang, and after that the students left. Which sentence is correct in form and meaning?
a) When the bell rang, the students left the room.
b) When the bell rang, the students were leaving the room.
c) When the bell rang, the students leave the room.
d) When the bell ringed, the students left the room.

Answer Key

Past Simple vs Past Continuous · Explanations are shortened — the full interactive version is at gramvoy.com/exercises/past-simple-vs-past-continuous/

1. b) was sleeping
The sleeping was going on while we talked, so the past continuous: was…

2. d) were washing
The washing was already in progress when I looked out, so the past…

3. b) were swimming
The swim was in progress when the rain started: were swimming.

4. a) was making
Sam had started the cake when the oven stopped, so the past continuous:…

5. c) took
Three actions happen one after another, so they all take the past…

6. a) wasn't wearing
The sentence describes the situation at the moment he fell, so the past…

7. c) didn't have
Yesterday is a finished time, so the past simple negative: didn't have…

8. b) Did … see
Seeing the end is one finished event, so the past simple question: Did…

9. d) were
You were on your way somewhere when I saw you, so the past continuous…

10. c) dropped
Dropping the phone is the short event inside the longer action (while I…

11. a) was drying
The drying was already in progress when the bell rang — that's why I…

12. c) were waiting
The waiting started before I got home and was still going on at…

13. a) found
Finding the ring is the short event that interrupted the cleaning, so…

14. c) broke
While introduces the longer action (was skiing); breaking the arm is…

15. a) belonged
Belong is a state verb — it describes who owns something, not an action…

16. d) brushed
Getting up, brushing my teeth and making coffee happen one after…

17. b) walked
We stayed to the end, so here when means 'and then': first the film…

18. d) was washing
Two actions were in progress at the same time, so both take the past…

19. b) rang
Three times counts finished events, so the past simple rang.

20. c) didn't know
Know is a state verb, so it stays in the past simple, even for a…

21. a) was walking … heard
The walk was in progress — I stopped it — so was walking; hearing my…

22. c) was waiting … noticed
While introduces the longer action, so was waiting (I takes was).

23. d) were losing … won
At half-time the match was still going on, so the past continuous…

24. b) got … opened
The actions happen one after another — she got off, opened her…

25. d) was cooking … realised
Cooking was the longer action in progress, so was cooking — I takes…

26. c) He knew the way, so I let him drive.
Know is a state verb, so it stays in the past simple: He knew the way.

27. a) I was reading when I heard a strange noise.
The reading was in progress, so the past continuous was reading;…

28. d) While I was working, the children were watching a film.
Two actions were in progress at the same time, so both take was / were…

29. b) He paid the bill, put on his coat and left.
Three actions one after another all take the past simple: paid, put on,…

30. a) When the bell rang, the students left the room.
Here when means 'and then': the bell rang first, so the past simple…