

FUTURE CONTINUOUS

OVERLAPPING ACTION

I'll be waiting when you arrive.

Use with: when + present simple, at 8pm.

FUTURE AS A MATTER OF COURSE

The government will be making a statement later.

Use with: later, tonight, next week on the 2nd of September.

When should I use the Future Continuous?

1: We use the future continuous to talk about an action in the future that overlaps another, shorter action or a time. The action in the future continuous usually starts before and might continue after the second action or time. This is very similar to how we use the past continuous in the past. The verb after 'when' is usually in the present simple.

- I'll be waiting when you arrive.
- At eight o'clock, I'll be eating dinner.

2: We can use the future continuous to talk about something that will happen if everything happens as we expect. This is sometimes called 'future as a matter of course'. It's usually possible to choose the future simple as well, but we often choose the future continuous because then it's clear that we are not making a request or offer.

- The Government will be making a statement later.
- When will you be leaving? (This is more polite than 'when will you leave?' because it's definitely not a request for you to leave.)

Remember, we can't use the future continuous with stative verbs, so if we want to use a stative verb in one of the situations where we need to the future continuous, then we use the future simple with 'will'.

UNFINISHED ACTIONS NOW

I'm working at the moment.

Use with: now, at the moment.

TEMPORARY SITUATIONS

I'm living in London.

Use with: at the moment, for a few weeks, for a couple of months.

TEMPORARY HABITS

He's eating a lot these days.

Use with: at the moment, these days.

ANNOYING HABITS

You're forever losing your keys!

Use with: always, forever, constantly.

DEFINITE FUTURE PLANS

I'm meeting my father tomorrow.

Use with: tomorrow, later, at 7pm tonight, on Tuesday.

PRESENT

PRESENT
CONTINUOUS

FUTURE

When should I use the Present Continuous?

Present Uses

1: First, we use the present continuous for things that are happening at the moment of speaking. These things usually last for quite a short time and they are not finished when we are talking about them.

- I'm working at the moment.
- Please call back as we are eating dinner now.
- Julie is sleeping.

2: We can also use this tense for other kinds of temporary situations, even if the action isn't happening at this moment.

- John's working in a bar until he finds a job in his field. (He might not be working now.)
- I'm reading a really great book.
- She's staying with her friend for a week.

Compare this with the present simple, which is used for permanent situations that we feel will continue for a long time.

- I work in a school. (I think this is a permanent situation.)
- I'm working in a school. (I think this is a temporary situation.)

3: We can use the present continuous for temporary or new habits (for normal habits that continue for a long time, we use the present simple). We often use this with expressions like 'these days' or 'at the moment'.

- He's eating a lot these days.
- She's swimming every morning (she didn't use to do this).
- You're smoking too much.

4: Another present continuous use is for habits that are not regular, but that happen very often. In this case we usually use an adverb like 'always', 'forever' or 'constantly'. Often, we use the present continuous in this way to talk about an annoying habit.

- You're forever losing your keys!
- She's constantly missing the train.
- Lucy's always smiling!

Future Uses

5: The next use is for definite future arrangements (with a future time word). In this case we have already made a plan and we are pretty sure that the event will happen in the future.

- I'm meeting my father tomorrow.
- We're going to the beach at the weekend.
- I'm leaving at three.

We can't use this tense (or any other continuous tense) with stative verbs.

OVERLAPPING ACTION

I was walking to the station when I met John.

Use with: when + past simple, two o'clock, 7pm.

STORY BACKGROUND

The birds were singing and the sun was shining. Amy sat down.

Use with: the past simple.

SOME PAST HABITS

She was constantly singing.

Use with: always, forever, constantly, at that time, in those days.

PAST CONTINUOUS

EMPHASIS OF LENGTH OF ACTION

I was working in the garden all day.

Use with: all day, all evening, for hours.

When should we use the Past Continuous (also called the Past Progressive)?

1: An action in the past which overlaps another action or a time. The action in the past continuous starts before and often continues after the other shorter action or time.

- I was walking to the station when I met John. (I started walking before I met John, and maybe I continued afterwards.)
- At three o'clock, I was working. (I started before three o'clock and finished after three o'clock.)

2: In the same way, we can use the past continuous for the background of a story. (We often use the past simple for the actions.) This is really a specific example of Use 1.

- The birds were singing, the sun was shining and in the cafés people were laughing and chatting. Amy sat down and took out her phone.

3: Temporary habits or habits that happen more often than we expect in the past. We often use 'always, constantly' or 'forever' here. This is the same as the way we use the present continuous for habits, but the habit started and finished in the past. This thing doesn't happen now.

- He was always leaving the tap running.
- She was constantly singing.

4: To emphasise that something lasted for a while. This use is often optional and we usually use it with time expressions like 'all day' or 'all evening' or 'for hours'.

- I was working in the garden all day.
- He was reading all evening.

Remember you can't use this tense or any continuous tense with stative verbs.