

## **Lesson Plan: Past simple vs. past continuous**

**Level:** Intermediate (B1)

**Time:** 60–75 minutes

### **Objectives**

By the end of the lesson, students will be able to:

- Distinguish between background actions and main events
- Use past simple and past continuous naturally in storytelling
- Correctly use when, while, as in past narratives

### **1. Warm-up & Lead-in (8 minutes)**

Aim: Set narrative context

Activity: Picture Story

Show a picture of:

- A street scene
- An accident
- A busy café

Ask:

*"What is happening in the picture?"*

*"What do you think happened before and after?"*

Elicit:

*"People were walking..."*

*"A car crashed..."*

## 2. Guided Discovery: Meaning & Use (12 minutes)

Text (on board or handout)

Yesterday evening, I was walking home when I saw an accident. A woman was talking on her phone while a man was crossing the street. Suddenly, a car stopped.

Task

Students underline:

- Past simple
- Past continuous

Elicitation Questions

- Which actions describe the situation/background?
- Which actions move the story forward?
- Which action interrupts another?

Concept Check Questions (CCQs)

- Are background actions usually longer or shorter? (Longer)
- Are main events finished actions? (Yes)

## 3. Language Focus: Nuance & Contrast (10 minutes)

Board Summary

### Past Simple

Main events  
Completed actions  
Sequence of events  
Often with **when**

### Past Continuous

Background actions  
Temporary actions  
Actions happening at the same time  
Often with **while / as**

## Contrast Examples

- I read a book when he called. (sequence)
- I was reading a book when he called. (interruption)
- She cooked while he was studying. (parallel actions)

Discuss meaning differences, not just correctness.

## 4. Controlled Practice (10 minutes)

### Activity 1: Meaning Choice

Students choose the sentence with the intended meaning.

1. a) When I arrived, she cooked dinner.  
b) When I arrived, she was cooking dinner.
2. a) They talked while the teacher explained.  
b) They were talking while the teacher was explaining.

Discuss why one works better.

## 5. Semi-Controlled Practice: Sentence Expansion (10 minutes)

### Activity 2

Give students simple sentences:

- I saw him.
- It started to rain.

Students expand them:

*"I saw him while I was waiting for the bus."*

*"It started to rain while we were playing football."*

Encourage variety and creativity.

## **6. Communicative Practice: Storytelling (15 minutes)**

### **Activity 3: Interrupted Story**

Students work in pairs or small groups.

Instructions:

- Student A starts a story using past continuous.
- Student B interrupts using past simple.
- Continue the story together.

Example:

- A: "I was walking through the park..."
- B: "when I heard a strange noise."

Focus on fluency over accuracy, then brief feedback.

## **7. Error Analysis & Feedback (8 minutes)**

Write typical intermediate errors:

- When I was arrived...
- While I watched TV, he came.

Students correct them:

- When I arrived...
- While I was watching TV...

Discuss why they are incorrect.

## **8. Review & Reflection (5 minutes)**

Ask students:

- When do we use past continuous instead of past simple?
- How does tense choice change the meaning of a story?

## **Homework (Optional)**

- Write a short narrative (120–150 words) about:
  - An unexpected event
  - A memory from childhood
  - A problem that happened while you were doing something else

Must include:

- At least 5 past continuous
- At least 5 past simple