

## Language at work | Narrative tenses – past continuous, past simple and past perfect

### Past continuous

- 1 The past continuous (*was doing, were doing*) is often used to set the scene and give background information at the beginning of a narrative.

*When I got to the trade fair, it was still early. Some of the exhibitors **were setting up** their stands and others **were unpacking** their publicity materials.*

BUT the past continuous is not used with stative verbs (see page 103) or when describing permanent features.

*Our stand **looked** very professional and it **was** ideally placed because it **was** on the aisle that led to the main restaurant.*

- 2 The past continuous is also used for an action in progress that is interrupted by another shorter action. (Use the past simple for the action that interrupts.)

*I **was unpacking** one of the boxes for our stand when my mobile **rang**.*



### Past simple

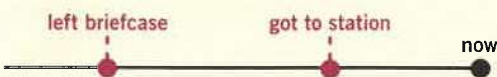
The past simple (*did*) is used for the main actions and events in a story that happen one after the other.

*He **said** I **wanted** back at the office immediately and **ended** the call. I **tried** to call back, but there **was** no reply. In the end, I **packed** everything up, **locked** it away and **left** the hall.*

### Past perfect

The past perfect (*had done*) is used when we are already talking about the past and want to refer to an earlier action, event or state.

*When I **got** to the station, I realized I **'d left** my briefcase at the exhibition.*



- 1 Complete these sentences with the past continuous, past simple or past perfect form of the verbs in brackets.

- I \_\_\_\_\_ (not recognize) him because he \_\_\_\_\_ (change) so much.
- While I \_\_\_\_\_ (wait) for the train, I quickly \_\_\_\_\_ (call) the office to leave a message for Joe.
- On my way to work this morning, the sky \_\_\_\_\_ (be) grey and it \_\_\_\_\_ (rain) lightly.
- I first \_\_\_\_\_ (meet) Harry while I \_\_\_\_\_ (work) for Morgan Stanley in New York.
- When I \_\_\_\_\_ (get) to the checkout, I realized that I \_\_\_\_\_ (leave) my credit card at the office.
- When they \_\_\_\_\_ (arrive) back from their holiday, they were shocked to find out that someone \_\_\_\_\_ (break) into their apartment.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ (jump) up, \_\_\_\_\_ (run) across the room and quickly \_\_\_\_\_ (smash) the glass to set off the fire alarm.
- I \_\_\_\_\_ (notice) a couple of small mistakes while I \_\_\_\_\_ (read) your report.

- 2 Complete this story about a boat trip with the past continuous, past simple or past perfect form of the verb in brackets.

A few years ago, while I <sup>1</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (do) a training course in Borneo, I <sup>2</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (go) with some colleagues to an island animal sanctuary – with lots of wild monkeys. We <sup>3</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (arrive) at lunchtime, and I <sup>4</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (decide) to explore the jungle. I <sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (walk) along a path when I <sup>6</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (see) a large monkey sitting on a branch in front of me. I <sup>7</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (stop) because I <sup>8</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (never / come) across wild monkeys before, and I <sup>9</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (not / know) what to do. Suddenly, the monkey <sup>10</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (jump) down and <sup>11</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (come) towards me very aggressively. I <sup>12</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (turn) and <sup>13</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (run) as fast as I could, shouting loudly as I got to the beach. When my colleagues <sup>14</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (look) up, I <sup>15</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (race) towards the water and the monkey <sup>16</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (chase) after me. I finally <sup>17</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (reach) the safety of the sea and <sup>18</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (dive) in. When I <sup>19</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (look) round, I <sup>20</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (be) pleased to see that the animal <sup>21</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (disappear) but my colleagues <sup>22</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ (laugh) uncontrollably.