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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Continuous tenses

### PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE

# EXPLANATION

- The **PRESENT CONTINUOUS** tense is very useful for the IELTS Speaking and Listening Tests in particular.
- The **PRESENT CONTINUOUS** tense can be used to describe things happening now or things which are not permanent.
- It can also be used to describe the future.
- It has several other functions.

# HOW TO FORM PRESENT CONTINUOUS

## THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE

I am currently living in a two-bedroom apartment.

He/She isn't expecting to graduate until the end of next year.

It is beginning to rain.

You are playing with fire!

We are not working incredibly hard at the moment.

They are thinking about emigrating.

You are going on holiday soon.

THERE IS: We do not use this structure with continuous tenses

PASSIVE: The problem is being solved; The bridge is being built right now

# HOW TO FORM PRESENT CONTINUOUS

## THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE

I am currently living in a two-bedroom apartment.

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THERE IS: We do not use this structure with continuous tenses

PASSIVE: The problem is being solved; The bridge is being built right now

# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

It can be used to describe something happening right now:

- It's **raining** and **snowing** at the same time.
- I'm **feeling** a bit sleepy. I might have a lie down.
- The pizza **is coming**. It'll be here soon.
- I've no idea why that dog **is barking**.
- He's **cooking** so he can't come to the phone right now.
- I'm **listening** to every word you say.
- He's **putting** the children to bed at the moment.
- She **isn't smoking** at the moment.

# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE

## USES

It can be used to describe things which are temporary and which are happening around now:

- **I'm preparing** for my IELTS exam. I've been doing two hours' work each day, which probably isn't enough because the actual test is next Friday.
- **I'm watching** this brilliant series at the moment. I started yesterday and I've got about six more episodes left.
- **I'm looking for** a job in advertising.
- **She's training** to become an engineer. Her course started last year and runs until June 2023.
- **He's thinking** of emigrating.

# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

It can be used to describe future arrangements and plans:

- I'm **landing** at tea-time on Saturday so I should get to your house by around seven in the evening.
- She's **starting** her new course in the autumn.
- We're all **meeting** at the train station after work and **going** for a drink.
- The concert **is starting** at eight o'clock so we should try to meet around half an hour earlier.
- They **are opening** the new shopping centre next week.
- We **are not arriving** until quite late tomorrow evening.



# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

It can be used with **always** for something which annoys the speaker because it happens too often:

- My sister **is always telling** me what to do.
- You're **always apologising**!
- He **is always losing** something.
- Those cats **are always fighting**.
- I'm **always having** to tell you what to do.
- She's **always complaining** about having too much work.

# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

It can be used to describe a continuing change which started before now and will probably continue after this point (into the future):

- It **is getting** harder to find a well-paid job.
- The number of unemployed people **is increasing**.
- English **is becoming** increasingly important as a world language.
- The proportion of young adults who are unmarried **is decreasing**.
- Global temperatures **are rising** year on year.
- Unfortunately, the standard of living **is not going up** for most people.

# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

It can be used with some modal verbs to describe something happening now or something temporary:

- You **must be joking!**
- You **cannot be being serious!**
- He **might be feeling** quite annoyed after what you said.
- They **may be getting up** about now.
- They **could be working**. If they are, it would be better if you didn't go round and disturb them.
- You **ought to be taking** this exam more seriously.
- You **shouldn't be carrying** all of those bags so soon after your operation.

# THE PRESENT CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

In letters when you want to be quite formal, but not very formal:

- I **am writing** with regard to the advertisement I saw on your website for a full-time mechanic.
- I **am writing** to confirm that I will attend the meeting next Friday.
- I **am writing** to apply for the part-time position advertised.
- I **am attaching/enclosing** my CV.
- I **am looking forward to** hearing from you soon.
- (In a very formal letter, we would write: **I write with regard to...; I write to...; I attach/enclose my CV; I look forward to hearing from you**)



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## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following sentences. Each sentence contains a present continuous tense. Decide if the tense is used correctly in each sentence:

1. It is raining and snowing at the moment so I don't want to go outside.
2. I have no idea why the children are behaving so badly.
3. I don't know why you are never enjoying your work.
4. I'm preparing for my IELTS exam next week.
5. He's looking for a job in advertising, but I think he would be willing to consider anything.
6. I'm starting my new job next Monday.
7. You're always telling me what to do and how to behave. It's really annoying!
8. You must be feeling really tired after your journey.
9. Arabic is becoming an increasingly important world language.
10. I am writing with regard to my university accommodation.

### ANSWERS:

1. **CORRECT:** It describes something happening right now
2. **CORRECT:** It describes something happening right now
3. **INCORRECT:** We cannot usually use this tense to describe feelings
4. **CORRECT:** It describes something which is temporary, and which is happening at this time
5. **CORRECT:** It describes something which is temporary, and which is happening at this time
6. **CORRECT:** It describes future arrangements and plans
7. **CORRECT:** It is used with **always** to describe something which annoys the speaker because it happens often
8. **CORRECT:** It can be used with some modal verbs to describe a temporary or current situation
9. **CORRECT:** It can describe a continuing change which started before now and will probably continue into the future
10. **CORRECT:** It can be used in letters when you would like to be quite formal but not very formal

## PREPARE for IELTS: Grammar Exercises

Look at the following pairs of sentences. Decide if SENTENCE 1 is correct, if SENTENCE 2 is correct or if BOTH SENTENCES are correct:

EXAMPLE:

**SENTENCE 1:** I was eating pizza when you called.

**SENTENCE 2:** I ate pizza when you called.

ANSWER: **SENTENCE 1** is correct.

QUESTION 1

**SENTENCE 1:** It was getting colder and darker so we decided to come home

**SENTENCE 2:** It got colder and darker so we decided to come home.

QUESTION 2

**SENTENCE 1:** I didn't go out last night because I was writing an essay.

**SENTENCE 2:** I didn't go out last night because I wrote an essay.

QUESTION 3

**SENTENCE 1:** When you called, I was cooking.

**SENTENCE 2:** When you called, I cooked.

QUESTION 4

**SENTENCE 1:** We went for a walk. The sun was shining and the birds were singing.

**SENTENCE 2:** We went for a walk. The sun shone and the birds sang.

QUESTION 5

**SENTENCE 1:** I was wondering if you could help me.

**SENTENCE 2:** I wonder if you could help me.

QUESTION 6

**SENTENCE 1:** I was meaning to email you

**SENTENCE 2:** I meant to email you.

QUESTION 7

**SENTENCE 1:** You should have been paying attention

**SENTENCE 2:** You should have paid attention.

QUESTION 8

**SENTENCE 1:** This time tomorrow I'll be sitting on the beach.

**SENTENCE 2:** This time tomorrow I'll sit on a beach.

## ANSWERS

1. **BOTH SENTENCES** are correct: The continuous tense can be used to describe past actions which continue for a period of time. The simple tense can be used to describe actions which finished in the past.
2. **BOTH SENTENCES** are correct (but **SENTENCE 2** is quite unusual): The continuous tense can be used to describe something which started before a moment in the past. The simple tense can be used to describe something which finished in the past.
3. **SENTENCE 1** is correct: We can use the continuous tense with the simple past tense to describe an action which is interrupted or does not finish.
4. **SENTENCE 1** is correct: The continuous tense can be used when we want to describe the background in a narrative/story
5. **BOTH SENTENCES** are correct: We can use the continuous tense for politeness/vagueness when we want to indicate that we do not have strong feelings or do not mind what answer we get. We can use the simple tense to make a stronger request
6. **BOTH SENTENCES** are correct: We can use the continuous tense to describe something we planned/wanted to do in the past but did not manage to do. We can use the simple tense here to state a fact about a past plan/intention
7. **BOTH SENTENCES** are correct: We can use the continuous tense with modal verbs when we want to refer to a specific moment or short period in the past
8. **SENTENCE 1** is correct: We can use the future continuous tense to describe a future action which takes place at a particular future moment.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

**Continuous tenses**

**PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE**

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# EXPLANATION

- The **PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE** is useful for the IELTS Speaking Test and Listening Test in particular.
- The **PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE** can be used to describe things which happened in the past and which continued for a period of time.
- The **PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE** can also describe things which started and finished at a past time we do not know, things which started before a past time and continued after it, and things which gradually developed or changed.
- It has some other useful functions.

# HOW TO FORM **PAST CONTINUOUS**

## THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

I	was	picking flowers when you called.
He/She	was not	wearing a blue sweater when I saw her.
It	wasn't	raining when I arrived.
You	were	working as a waitress in a cocktail bar when I met you.
We	were	hoping to meet you for a drink.
They	were	eating ice-cream and chatting.
You	weren't	walking along the street and chatting when I saw you.

THERE IS: We do not use this structure with continuous tenses

PASSIVE: The problem was being solved; The issues were being dealt with

# HOW TO FORM **PAST CONTINUOUS**

## THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

I	was	picking flowers when you called.
He/She	<b>was not</b>	wearing a blue sweater when I saw her.
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THERE IS: We do not use this structure with continuous tenses

PASSIVE: The problem was being solved; The issues were being dealt with

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

## USES

It can be used to describe past actions which continued for a period of time. Often we use this tense when we do not know the exact starting point or the exact finishing point:

- Do you remember that amazing picnic we had in the woods? You **were trying** to explain The Theory of Relativity and we **were laughing** at you.

Without a time expression it can refer to a gradual change:

- It **was getting** colder so we decided to go inside.
- It **was becoming** more dangerous to live in the city and eventually we moved to the countryside.
- He **was starting** to get bored.

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

## USES

It can be used with a point in time to indicate that something started before that point and finished after it:

- I **was living** in Tehran in March 1999. (= I started living in Tehran before March 1999 and finished living in Tehran after March 1999)
- I didn't come to the party last night because I **was writing** my dissertation. (= I probably started writing it before last night and finished it after last night, or haven't finished it yet)
- I'm sorry I didn't have time to chat when you called. I **was putting** the children to bed. (= The process started before you called and finished after you called)

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

When it is used with a simple past verb, it indicates an interrupted action which might continue:

- When you **called**, I **was having** a shower.
- I **was sleeping** when the plane **landed** so I didn't even realise that we were on the ground.
- I **was trying** to finish my housework when you **came** round.
- I missed my bus and when I **got** here the candidates **were already being taken** into the examination room. (This is a passive form)
- Some inexperienced mountaineers **got stuck** while they **were trying** to climb a dangerous cliff-face in The Andes.



# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

It can be used in descriptions and background as part of narratives (stories and anecdotes):

- It **was raining** hard so I walked into a café and looked around. Two men **were standing** by the bar and **chatting**. As soon as they saw me, they stopped talking. I recognised one of them. He **was wearing** a distinctive yellow sweater. I walked outside as casually as I could. Luckily a police-officer **was sitting** on the wall so I briefly told her about the situation and she radioed for back-up.

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

## USES

We can use this tense for politeness and vagueness. It indicates to the reader/listener that we do not have strong feelings about something:

- I **was wondering** if you could give me a hand moving house next week.
- I **was hoping** you might be able to give me some advice.
- I **was thinking** about going out for a drink this evening. **Would you like to come?**
- I **was expecting** your report to be ready today.

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE

## USES

We can use this tense with past plans which were probably not completed:

- I **was meaning** to call you last night. Actually, I have been meaning to call you for ages.
- I **was going** to send you a text yesterday evening, but never got round to it.
- I **was planning** to come round and give you a hand with the painting last weekend. Something else came up at the last minute.
- I **was hoping** to bump into you while I was in Stockholm last week.
- I **was thinking** of inviting your sister out for a meal last week but completely forgot about it.

# THE PAST CONTINUOUS TENSE USES

We can replace **was/were** with modal verbs:

- You **must have been sleeping** when she called.
- We **might/may/could have been working** on our dissertations last Saturday morning. I actually can't remember.
- You **can't have been listening** very carefully to the instructor. If you had been listening, you would know what to do.
- You **should have been paying / ought to have been paying** more attention to what the tutor said.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Continuous tenses

### FUTURE CONTINUOUS TENSE

# EXPLANATION

- The **FUTURE CONTINUOUS** tense can be useful in the IELTS Speaking Test and occasionally in the IELTS Writing Test.
- It is occasionally found in the IELTS Listening Test and in the IELTS Reading Test (General and Academic).
- Examiners consider it to be a complex tense and will be impressed if candidates use it correctly.



# HOW TO FORM FUTURE CONTINUOUS

## THE FUTURE CONTINUOUS TENSE

I	will be	arriving just before seven in the morning.
He/She	will not be	talking for about an hour.
It	will be	raining heavily all day, according to the forecast.
You	will be	sitting on a beach enjoying yourself this time next week.
We	won't be	sorting out the arrangements all day tomorrow.
They	will be	expecting things to improve.
You	will be	working on Saturday.

THERE IS: We do not use this structure with continuous tenses

PASSIVE: (unusual) The problem will be being solved.

# HOW TO FORM FUTURE CONTINUOUS

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THERE IS: We do not use this structure with continuous tenses

PASSIVE: (unusual) The problem will be being solved.

# THE FUTURE CONTINUOUS TENSE

## USES

We can use the future continuous tense to express an action which starts before a future point in time and finishes after it:

- This time next year I'll be working as a volunteer in Botswana. I'll be living with the local community and both teaching them and learning from them. I'll be developing my ability to understand different cultures.
- Unfortunately, I won't be able to attend. On Saturday afternoon I'll probably be doing the weekly shopping.
- I'll be thinking about you next week when you are having a wonderful time on holiday and I'm stuck in this dreadful office.
- In July I'll be doing my pre-entry course. I'll be studying / I might be studying in Montreal and going to college every day.



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# GRAMMAR FOR IELTS

## Continuous tenses

**VERBS NOT USUALLY USED  
WITH CONTINUOUS TENSES**

# EXPLANATION

- Some verbs are not usually used with **CONTINUOUS TENSES**.
- This is because **CONTINUOUS TENSES** are usually used to describe deliberate actions.
- Knowing which verbs can and cannot be used with **CONTINUOUS TENSES** will help you to speak and write more accurately in the IELTS Test.

# VERBS NOT USUALLY USED IN CONTINUOUS TENSES

We do not use continuous tenses with verbs connected with the senses:

- We should **notice/observe** the changes.
- Food should **look, smell** and **taste** good.
- I'm afraid she can neither **hear** well nor **see** properly.

However, if we refer to deliberate use of the senses, we can use continuous tenses:

- She **has been staring/looking** into that screen for ages.
- I must admit that I **wasn't listening** carefully.
- I **will be watching/observing** you.



# VERBS NOT USUALLY USED IN CONTINUOUS TENSES

We do not use continuous tenses with verbs expressing feelings and emotions:

- I **adore/love/like/enjoy** long walks on the beach.
- I **hate/detest/loathe/abhor** getting up early.
- I **admire** my grandfather and **appreciate** everything he has done for me. I **value** his support.

However, when these verbs have different meanings, they can be used with continuous tenses:

- I'm **enjoying** my holiday.
- She **is caring** for her aunt.

# VERBS NOT USUALLY USED IN CONTINUOUS TENSES

We do not use continuous tenses with verbs of thinking or mental activity:

- I **assume** we will be offered a pay rise.
- I **believe** in justice.
- I entirely **agree** with you.
- I **think** it makes sense.
- I **remember/recall/recollect** meeting you at the party.
- **Don't forget** to do your homework.
- I **expect** it might rain tomorrow.

# VERBS NOT USUALLY USED IN CONTINUOUS TENSES

We do not use continuous tenses with verbs of possession and owning:

- I **don't** even **own** a bike.
- If you **possessed** as much intelligence as you claim to, we wouldn't be in this mess.
- Nature **belongs** to all of us.
- The test **consists of** three parts.
- The container **holds** up to a litre of liquid.
- She still **owes** me quite a lot of the money which she borrowed.

# VERBS NOT USUALLY USED IN CONTINUOUS TENSES

We do not use continuous tenses with verbs which refer to characteristics of a situation:

- It **seems** quite unlikely that the situation will change.
- What you told me **appears** to be true.
- It **sounds** like a good idea in theory, but I'm not sure in practice.
- This problem **matters** to everyone.
- Prices are high, which **means** that those on lower incomes suffer.
- We **keep / keep on / carry on / go on** repeating the same mistakes.

# VERBS NOT USUALLY USED IN CONTINUOUS TENSES

We do not use continuous tenses with most auxiliary verbs:

- It **might/may be** too difficult.
- We **should/ought to be** more careful.
- There was nothing we **could do**. We just **had/needed to wait**.

However, when we want to refer to a temporary period which we are currently in, it is possible to use modal verbs with the **-ing** form:

- You **should be being** more careful at the moment.
- We **need to be being** more vigilant.
- Thousands of students **must/might/could be waiting** for their results.
- You **must be wondering** what happened yesterday.



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