

Explanations

Present simple

- Facts which are always true

The present simple is used to describe permanent facts, for example in science and geographical descriptions.

*The light from the Sun **takes** 8 mins 20 secs to reach the Earth.*

*The River Po **flows** into the Adriatic Sea.*

The present simple is also used for situations that are generally true.

*I **work** in an office and **live** in a flat in the suburbs.*

- Habitual actions

The present simple is used to describe habits and routines. A frequency adverb is often used.

*I usually **take** the bus to work.*

- Summary of events

The present simple can be used to make a summary of the events in a narrative, for example in a film or book. It can also be used for a table of historical events.

*In Chapter 1, Susan **meets** David, and **agrees** to go to the school dance with him.*

*In 1789 the French Revolution **begins**.*

Present continuous

- Actions which are in progress now

The present continuous is used to describe actions which are temporary and not yet finished.

*I'm **doing** the washing-up.*

The action may be happening right now, or around now.

*I'm **reading** one of the Harry Potter books at the moment.*

- Habits during a temporary situation

The present continuous can describe a habit that happens over a short period of time. A time expression is necessary.

*At the moment we're **sending** all the mail by courier, because the Post Office is on strike.*

- A repeated temporary action

The present continuous can describe a single action that is repeated. A time expression is necessary.

*Whenever I see Tom he's **smoking**.*

*You're **making** the same mistake again!*

In examples like this we are often exaggerating or complaining. This is particularly true when we use *always*.

*You're **always borrowing** money from me!*

**Problems with
simple and
continuous**

- Some verbs are not normally used in the continuous form, because they describe activities which already extend in time. These are called 'state' verbs.

be, believe, cost, depend, have, hear, know, matter, smell, suppose, taste, think, understand

(verbs of perception)

- Some of these verbs can be used in continuous forms with a change of meaning.

Tim is being rather difficult at the moment. (behave)

I'm having breakfast. (eat)

I'm tasting the soup, to check if it needs more salt. (sample)

I'm thinking of buying a new car. (consider)

- In many situations we can use either a simple or continuous form. The simple form is for a permanent situation or general habit, the continuous form is for a temporary situation.

I live in London. (it's my permanent home)

I'm living in London. (just for a year – my home is in Athens)

Do you sleep a lot? (Is it your habit?)

Are you sleeping enough? (What is happening at the moment?)

Practice

1

Underline the most suitable verb form in each sentence.

- What sort of work do you do/are you doing?
- I can't talk now. *I cook/I'm cooking* the dinner.
- What shall we have? *Do you like/Are you liking* fish?
- Can I borrow this typewriter? Or *do you use/are you using* it?
- What *do the people here do/are the people here doing* in the evenings?
- Follow that bus. Then you *turn/are turning* left.
- A lot of people think that the Sun *goes/is going* around the Earth.
- Excuse me, *do you read/are you reading* your newspaper? Could I borrow it?
- Do you wait/Are you waiting* for the bus to Newcastle?
- Andy *builds/is building* his own house in the country.

2

Put each verb in brackets into either the present simple or the present continuous.

- There's nobody here, and the door's locked. What (we do) do we do now?
- What (you look) at? (I wear) the wrong clothes?
- I (look after) Jack's dog this weekend. (you want) to take it for a walk?
- Who (drive) the Mercedes that's parked outside?
- I (still have) a pain in my leg but it (get) better.
- Who (Sue dance) with? That's not her brother, is it?
- Harry always (look) untidy! He (wear) dirty jeans.
- I (write) in reply to your advertisement in the *Daily News*.
- That plant I bought (not grow) very much. And I (water) it every day.
- Which hotel (you stay) in when you (come) here?

3

Decide whether the verb form in *italics* refers to present or future time.

- Where *are you staying* on Saturday night? future
- George *retires* at the end of next year.
- What are we doing when the guests *arrive*?
- I'm trying* really hard to understand this book.
- Wait for me here until I *get* back.
- Sue *is leaving* in the morning.
- I'm waiting* for the bus.
- I'm off* now and *I'm taking* the car.
- They're *showing* a Woody Allen film on Channel 4 tonight.
- I'm going* for a walk this evening.

6 Put each verb in brackets into either the present simple or the present continuous.

Dear Aunt Jean,

I (1) *am just writing* (just write) to tell you how much I
 (2) (appreciate) the money you sent me, and to tell you
 how I (3) (get on) in my first term at university. Actually, I
 (4) (really enjoy) myself! I (5) (study)
 quite hard as well, but at the moment I (6) (spend) a lot of
 time just making friends. I (7) (still stay) with my friend
 Sue, and I (8) (look for) somewhere of my own to live. Only
 a few of the first-year students (9) (live) in college here,
 and I (10) (seem) to be spending a lot of time travelling
 backwards and forwards. I (11) (go) to lectures every
 morning, and most afternoons I (12) (study) in the library.
 In fact I (13) (write) this letter instead of an essay on
Hamlet! I (14) (think) I'll buy some new clothes with the
 money you sent. Everything (15) (cost) a lot here, and I
 (16) (save) to buy a winter coat. It
 (17) (get) really cold here in the evenings. I now
 (18) (know) some other students and generally speaking
 we (19) (have) quite a good time socially! I
 (20) (also learn) to drive. See you soon.

Katherine

Key points

- 1 The present simple describes facts and habitual actions. The present continuous describes actions which are still in progress at the time of speaking.
- 2 Many verbs which describe states rather than momentary events can only be used in the simple form. Many verbs describing mental activities (*understand, know*) are of this kind.
- 3 Some verbs have both state and event meanings, but the meanings are not the same.
- 4 When describing a photograph, we usually describe the scene as if it is happening now, and use the present continuous.
- 5 Present tense forms are also used to refer to future time. See Grammar 3.
- 6 Where some languages use present tenses, English uses the present perfect. See Grammar 2.

I've lived in Milan all my life.

→ SEE ALSO
Grammar 3: Future time
Grammar 5: Consolidation 1

People



Chart

Name _____ Age _____

Present address (town/city) _____

Occupation _____

Interests _____

Currently reading _____

Usual holiday destination _____

Dress _____

Personality _____

Dislikes _____
