Past Tenses

CEFR B1 · Past simple vs past continuous, and used to
WS1 Past Continuous · WS2 Simple vs Continuous · WS3 used to & would · WS4 Editing & Writing · Answer Key

Worksheet 1: Past Continuous

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: B1 (CEFR)

Reference: was/were + -ing

The **past continuous** describes an action **in progress** at a past moment. Form it with **was/were + verb-ing**. We often use it to set the scene, or to describe a longer action interrupted by a shorter one (*when* + past simple).

Use	Example	Note
Action in progress	At 8 p.m. I **was studying**.	a moment in the past
Scene-setting	The sun **was shining**; birds **were singing**.	background
Interrupted action	I **was cooking** when he called.	long + short (when)
Two actions together	She **read** while I **was cooking**.	while + continuous

Part A – Complete with the Past Continuous

1. At nine o'clock last night, I _____ (watch) TV.
2. They _____ (not / work) when I arrived.
3. What _____ you _____ (do) at noon?
4. The children _____ (play) in the garden.
5. It _____ (rain) when we left.

Part B – when or while?

1. I was reading _____ the phone rang.
2. _____ she was cooking, he set the table.
3. They arrived _____ we were having dinner.

Score: ____ / 20

Worksheet 2: Past Simple vs Past Continuous

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: B1 (CEFR)

Reference: Completed vs In Progress

Use the **past simple** for completed actions and the main events of a story. Use the **past continuous** for the background or an action in progress. A common pattern: a past continuous action (long) is interrupted by a past simple action (short).

Past simple	Past continuous
completed action	action in progress
I **broke** my leg.	I **was skiing**.
the sequence of events	the background / scene
short interrupting action	long interrupted action

Part A – Choose the Correct Tense

1. While I _____ (walk) home, I _____ (meet) an old friend.
2. When the film _____ (start), we _____ (sit) in the front row.
3. She _____ (cook) when the smoke alarm _____ (go off).
4. They _____ (drive) to the coast when the car _____ (break) down.

Part B – Explain the Choice

For each verb in bold, say whether it is the interrupted (long) or interrupting (short) action.

#	Sentence	Long / short + reason
1	I **was sleeping** when the alarm **rang**.	
2	As she **was leaving**, it **started** to snow.	
3	We **were watching** a film when the power **went** out.	

Score: _____ / 25

Worksheet 3: used to & would

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: B1 (CEFR)

Reference: Past Habits and States

used to + base form describes past habits and states that are no longer true (*I used to smoke*). **would + base form** also describes repeated past actions, but NOT past states — we don't say *would* for states like *be, have, like, know*. The past simple can replace both.

Form	Use	Example
used to	past habit OR state	We **used to live** in Rome.
would	repeated past action only	Every summer we **would swim** in the lake.
not for states	✗ would with be/have/like	✗ I would have a bike → ✓ I **used to have** a bike.
negative / question	didn't use to / Did … use to	**Did** you **use to** play?

Part A – Complete with used to

1. I _____ (play) the violin when I was young.
2. She _____ (not / like) coffee, but now she loves it.
3. _____ you _____ (live) near here?
4. There _____ (be) a cinema on this street.

Part B – would or used to?

If only **used to** is possible (a state), write "used to only".

1. Every winter we _____ go skiing.
2. My grandmother _____ have a big garden. _____
3. He _____ tell us stories every night.
4. I _____ know all their names. _____

Part C – Rewrite with used to

1. I don't eat meat now, but I did before. → _____
2. She isn't shy now, but she was as a child. → _____

Score: _____ / 30

Worksheet 4: Editing & Writing

Name: _____ Date: _____ Level: B1 (CEFR)

Part A – Intensive Edit

This text has **eight** errors (simple vs continuous, when/while, or used to/would). Find and correct them.

> When I was a child, we would live in a small village by the sea. Every morning my father would go fishing, and my mother was making bread. One day, while I played on the beach, I was finding an old bottle. There was a message inside! I was so excited that I run home. My grandmother, who used to be a teacher, would know exactly what the old words meant. I will never forget that day — I used to tell the story again and again.

#	Error	Correction
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		
8		

Part B – Guided Writing

Write 120–150 words telling a short story about a past event. You must include: (1) at least two **past continuous** verbs for background; (2) an **interrupted action** (when/while); (3) at least one use of **used to** or **would** for a past habit.

#	Line
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	

8	
9	

Continuous: _____ / 2 Interrupted: _____ / 1 used to/would: _____ / 1 Score: _____ / 35

Answer Key & Teacher Notes

For teacher use only — B1 Level, Past Tenses

Worksheet 1 – Part A

1 was watching · 2 weren't working · 3 were … doing · 4 were playing · 5 was raining

Worksheet 1 – Part B

1 when · 2 While · 3 while

Rule of thumb: *while* + long action (continuous); *when* + short action (past simple). Both can join the two, but the tenses differ.

Worksheet 2 – Part A

1 was walking / met · 2 started / were sitting · 3 was cooking / went off · 4 were driving / broke

Worksheet 2 – Part B

1 was sleeping = long (interrupted); rang = short (interrupting). · 2 was leaving = long; started = short. · 3 were watching = long; went out = short.

Worksheet 3 – Part A

1 used to play · 2 didn't use to like · 3 Did … use to live · 4 used to be

Worksheet 3 – Part B

1 would / used to · 2 used to (state — used to only) · 3 would / used to · 4 used to (state — used to only)

Items 2 and 4 are states (have, know), so *would* is not possible.

Worksheet 3 – Part C

1 I used to eat meat. · 2 She used to be shy.

Worksheet 4 – Part A

1 we used to live (state — not *would*) · 2 my mother was making bread (background, but "would go/was making" mix — accept "my mother would make" for a habit) · 3 while I was playing on the beach · 4 I found an old bottle · 5 I ran home · 6 would have known / knew (state — not the habitual scene) · 7 I used to tell the story · 8 (accept the was-making/was-finding correction as the eighth)

Worksheet 4 – Part B: Marking Guide

Criterion	Descriptor	Marks
Past continuous	Two+ for background, correct form	0–4
Simple vs continuous	Interruption pattern handled correctly	0–4
used to / would	Past habit/state expressed correctly	0–3
Task & length	120–150 words; coherent story	0–3