



Tense Comparison: Past Simple vs Past Continuous

Fill in the blank with the correct option.

1. I ___ TV when the phone ____.
a) watched / rang
b) watched / was ringing
c) was watching / rang
d) was watching / was ringing
2. While she ___ dinner, the doorbell ____.
a) was cooking / rang
b) was cooking / was ringing
c) cooked / was ringing
d) cooked / rang
3. Yesterday I ___ to the supermarket and ___ some groceries.
a) was going / bought
b) went / was buying
c) went / bought
d) was going / was buying
4. What ___ you ___ at 8 o'clock last night?
a) did / do
b) were / doing
c) did / doing
d) were / do
5. When I ___ home, it ___ heavily.
a) arrived / was raining
b) was arriving / rained
c) was arriving / was raining
d) arrived / rained
6. She ___ when she ___ off the ladder.
a) painted / was falling
b) was painting / fell
c) was painting / was falling
d) painted / fell
7. They ___ tennis all afternoon yesterday.
a) are playing
b) played
c) had played
d) play
8. While the students ____, the teacher ___ their essays.
a) wrote / was marking
b) were writing / marked
c) wrote / marked
d) were writing / was marking
9. I ___ my keys while I ___ for the bus.
a) was losing / was waiting
b) was losing / waited
c) lost / waited
d) lost / was waiting
10. He ___ a noise and ___ up.
a) was hearing / was waking
b) was hearing / woke
c) heard / woke
d) heard / was waking
11. At midnight, everyone ___ except Tom who ___ a book.
a) was sleeping / was reading
b) slept / read
c) was sleeping / read
d) slept / was reading

12. The sun ___ when we ___ for our hike.
a) was shining / were leaving
b) shone / were leaving
c) was shining / left
d) shone / left
13. I ___ in the park when I ___ an old friend.
a) was jogging / was meeting
b) was jogging / met
c) jogged / met
d) jogged / was meeting
14. They ___ married in 2015.
a) were getting
b) got
c) get
d) getting
15. What ___ when the earthquake ___?
a) were you doing / happened
b) were you doing / was happening
c) did you do / was happening
d) did you do / happened
16. She ___ her ankle while she ___ down the stairs.
a) was twisting / ran
b) was twisting / was running
c) twisted / ran
d) twisted / was running
17. Last summer, we ___ to Italy for two weeks.
a) going
b) were going
c) go
d) went
18. I ___ to call you but you ___ on the phone.
a) tried / talked
b) was trying / talked
c) was trying / were talking
d) tried / were talking
19. While I ___ the report, my computer ____.
a) was typing / crashed
b) typed / crashed
c) was typing / was crashing
d) typed / was crashing
20. When I ___ young, I ___ every day.
a) was being / swam
b) was / was swimming
c) was / swam
d) was being / was swimming



Answers

1. c) was watching / rang
2. a) was cooking / rang
3. c) went / bought
4. b) were / doing
5. a) arrived / was raining
6. b) was painting / fell
7. b) played
8. d) were writing / was marking
9. d) lost / was waiting
10. c) heard / woke
11. a) was sleeping / was reading
12. c) was shining / left
13. b) was jogging / met
14. b) got
15. a) were you doing / happened
16. d) twisted / was running
17. d) went
18. d) tried / were talking
19. a) was typing / crashed
20. c) was / swam



Explanations

1. “was watching / rang” (c)

Use Past Continuous 'was watching' for the background action in progress, and Past Simple 'rang' for the interrupting action.

2. “was cooking / rang” (a)

'While' introduces the longer background action (Past Continuous), and the doorbell ringing is a short interruption (Past Simple).

3. “went / bought” (c)

Both actions are completed events in sequence, so we use Past Simple for both.

4. “were / doing” (b)

The question asks about an action in progress at a specific time (8 o'clock), so we use Past Continuous.

5. “arrived / was raining” (a)

'Arrived' is a completed action (Past Simple), while 'was raining' describes the weather in progress at that moment.

6. “was painting / fell” (b)

'Was painting' is the background action in progress; 'fell' is the sudden interruption.

7. “played” (b)

'All afternoon yesterday' is a completed past period, so Past Simple 'played' fits. 'Had played' (Past Perfect) is wrong because there is no later past event for it to precede.

8. “were writing / was marking” (d)

Both actions were happening at the same time in the past, so both use Past Continuous.

9. “lost / was waiting” (d)

'Lost' is a sudden, completed action; 'was waiting' describes what was happening when it occurred.

10. “heard / woke” (c)

Both are quick, completed actions in sequence, so both use Past Simple.

11. “was sleeping / was reading” (a)

Both actions were in progress at a specific time (midnight), so both use Past Continuous.

12. “was shining / left” (c)

'Was shining' describes the weather condition; 'left' is a completed action.

13. “was jogging / met” (b)

'Was jogging' is the background action; 'met' is the sudden event that happened during it.

14. “got” (b)

A specific completed event at a definite time in the past uses Past Simple.

15. “were you doing / happened” (a)

The question asks about an ongoing action interrupted by a sudden event.

16. “twisted / was running” (d)

'Twisted' is a sudden action; 'was running' is what was happening when it occurred.

17. “went” (d)

A completed trip with a specific duration uses Past Simple.

18. “tried / were talking” (d)

'Tried' is a completed attempt; 'were talking' describes what was happening at that time.

19. “was typing / crashed” (a)

'Was typing' is the ongoing action; 'crashed' is the sudden interruption.

20. “was / swam” (c)

Both describe past states and habits: 'was' for state and 'swam' for regular activity (not happening at one moment).