

## Past simple and past continuous: grammar exercise

To talk about two simultaneous short actions we use simple tenses. To talk about a longer background action which was going on when something else happened, we use the past continuous tense. We usually use the past simple tense to refer to the shorter action that interrupted the longer background action.

Complete the following sentences using an appropriate past simple or past continuous tense.

1. When I ..... to work, I  
..... Peter.

drove, saw

was driving, saw

drove, was seeing

2. When I ..... a bath, the  
telephone .....

was having, rang

had, was ringing

was having, was ringing

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3. I ..... when someone  
knocked on the door.

was sleeping

slept

am sleeping

4. While she ..... games, I  
.....

was playing, was working

played, worked

Either could be used here

5. As I ..... my eyes, I  
..... a strange sight.

opened, saw

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was opening, was seeing

was opening, saw

6. James ..... the lounge while  
I ..... supper.

tidied, cooked

was tidying, cooked

tidied, was cooking

7. While they ..... caroms  
somebody ..... into the  
house.

were playing, broke

played, broke

were playing, was breaking

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8. I ..... of it just when you  
..... your mouth.

thought, opened

was thinking, were opening

thought, were opening

9. When she ..... a bath, the  
child ..... to cry.

was having, began

had, was beginning

was having, was beginning

10. She took out her pen and  
..... writing.

started

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was starting

## Answers

1. When I was driving to work, I saw Peter.
2. When I was having a bath, the telephone rang.
3. I was sleeping when someone knocked on the door.
4. While she was playing games, I was working. (OR While she played games, I worked.)
5. As I opened my eyes, I saw a strange sight.
6. James tidied the lounge while I cooked supper.
7. While they were playing caroms somebody broke into the house.
8. I thought of it just when you opened your mouth.
9. When she was having a bath, the child began to cry.
10. She took out her pen and started writing.