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Present simple vs present continuous

Presentation

The following are examples comparing the present simple and present continuous:

a Routine vs moment of speaking

1 Henry **works** for PDQ, a business delivery company. Every day he **collects and delivers** packages for local companies.

2 The man in the post room **is packing** some parcels. Henry **is waiting** in reception.

In 1, we are talking about something that Henry does as a routine.

In 2, we are talking about something that they are doing at the moment of speaking.

b General activities vs current projects

1 I **work** for a firm of recruitment consultants. We **design** psychometric tests.

2 At the moment we're **working** on new tests for the personnel department of a large oil company.

In 1, we are talking about a general activity.

In 2, we are talking about a specific current project.

c Permanent vs temporary situations

1 Peter **deals** with enquiries about our car fleet sales.

2 I **am dealing** with enquiries about fleet sales while Peter is away on holiday.

In 1, this is permanently true.

In 2, this is a temporary situation.

d Facts vs slow changes

1 As a rule, cheap imports **lead** to greater competition.

2 Cheap imports **are leading** to the closure of a number of inefficient factories.

In 1, we are making a statement about a general fact that is always true.

In 2, we are talking about a change that is taking place at the moment.

e Stative verbs

There are a number of verbs which describe states rather than actions. They are not normally used in the continuous form. Common examples are:

Verbs of thinking: *believe, doubt, guess, imagine, know, realize, suppose, understand*

Verbs of the senses: *hear, smell, sound, taste, see*

Verbs of possession: *belong to, have (meaning: possess), own, possess*

Verbs of emotion: *dislike, hate, like, love, prefer, regret, want, wish*

Verbs of appearance: *appear, seem*

Others: *contain, depend on, include, involve, mean, measure, weigh, require*

These are usually found in the simple form because they do not refer to actions:

*I'm sorry, I **don't understand** what you mean.*

We do not say: * *I'm not understanding what you mean.*

Practice

EXERCISE 1

Routine vs moment of speaking

Decide if the speaker is talking about routine activities or activities going on at the moment of speaking. Put the verbs into the present simple or the present continuous. See the example.

An interview with Bill Cogges in the dairy business



Interviewer: ¹Do you usually organize (you/usually organize) the delivery of milk to the factory? ²..... (the farmers/bring) it here themselves?

Bill: No, ³..... (we/always collect) the milk ourselves, and the tankers ⁴..... (deliver) it to the pasteurization plant twice a day.

Interviewer: What sort of quality control procedures ⁵..... (you/have)?

Bill: As a rule we ⁶..... (test) samples of every consignment, and then the milk ⁷..... (pass) down insulated pipes to the bottling plant, which ⁸..... (operate) 24 hours a day. I'll show you round a bit later, but the production line

⁹..... (not work) at the moment because the employees ¹⁰..... (change) shifts.



EXERCISE 2

General activities vs current projects

Decide whether the verbs refer to general activities or current projects. Put the verbs into the present simple or present continuous. See the example.

We set up the company in 2002 with a grant from the local government.

We ¹ provide (provide) IT backup and support for a number of small and medium-sized businesses in the area.

We also ²..... (design) web sites for local companies, and we

³..... (look) after them by doing regular maintenance, and so on. When we ⁴..... (get) a new customer, we always ⁵..... (spend) a long time talking to them to find out their needs. At the moment we ⁶..... (set up) a website

for a large local travel agency, and in fact our chief programmer is in charge of that project. She ⁷..... (have) discussions with them to find out what sort of features they ⁸..... (require).

EXERCISE 3

Permanent vs temporary situations

In the following exercise, decide whether these situations are permanent or temporary. Put the verbs into the present simple or present continuous. See the example.

- 1 He joined the company 25 years ago and he still **works** (work) for us.
- 2 We (not/send) out any orders this week because we're waiting for the new lists.
- 3 I (deal) with Mr Matsumi's clients this week because he's away.
- 4 Go down this road, turn right, and the road (lead) straight to the industrial estate.
- 5 Because of the Euro/Dollar exchange rate, EU exports (not/do) very well at the moment.
- 6 The stock market is risky because the price of shares (vary) according to economic conditions.
- 7 I (learn) French because I'm going to be based in the Paris office next year.
- 8 Hello. I'm Heinrich Brandt, I'm German, and I (come) from a small town near Munich.

EXERCISE 4

Facts vs slow changes

In the following newspaper article, decide whether the verbs refer to general statements about change, or to changes that are currently taking place. Put the verbs into the present simple or present continuous. See the example.

Governments cannot last for ever. Normally political parties ¹ **enjoy** (enjoy) a period of great popularity in their early years, then they ² (go) through a period of stability and ³ (put) their ideas into practice. After that, they ⁴ (run) out of ideas, and the opposition ⁵ (take) power. Now it

⁶ (seem) that the present government ⁷ (begin) to run into difficulties, and people ⁸ (start) to criticize the Prime Minister. The newspapers ⁹ (attack) other ministers because of the state of schools, public transport and hospitals, and the government ¹⁰ (lose) popularity.

EXERCISE 5

Stative verbs

In each of the following sentences, put one of the verbs into the present simple and the other into the present continuous. See the example.

- 1 We **are interviewing** (interview) people from outside the company for the new post in the export department, but I **think** (think) we ought to give the job to Mr Janousek.
- 2 At the moment we (carry) out a survey to find out what sort of after-sales service our customers (want).
- 3 We've got a competition on at work to find a name for our new range of cosmetics. The marketing people (try) to find a brand name that (sound) natural and sophisticated.
- 4 (you/know) what Mrs Ericson (do)? She's not in her office and nobody has seen her since lunch.
- 5 Could you help me? I (try) to translate this letter from a Spanish client and I don't know what this word (mean).
- 6 I (apply) for a transfer to our London office, but I don't know if I'll be successful. It all (depend) on whether or not they have any vacancies.
- 7 Their new 'own brand' instant coffee (taste) very good, so it isn't surprising that it (become) more and more popular.

Production

TASK 1

Write sentences using the following prompts. The first verb should be in the present simple, and the second verb in the present continuous. See the example.

1 come from/but/live

I come from Austria, but at the moment I'm living in Switzerland.

2 speak/and/learn

3 normally/like my work/but/not enjoy

4 want to be a consultant/so/do an MBA

5 work from 9 to 5/but/stay late

6 travel a lot/and/visit Australia

7 have several subsidiaries in Europe/and/set up another one in Brussels

8 normally/export a lot to Greece/but/not get many orders

TASK 2

Write questions to go with the answers. Use either the present simple or present continuous. See the example.

1 Where do you come from?

I come from a little town called Zug, near Zurich.

2

I'm writing to Markson's to ask for an up-to-date catalogue.

3

I think he's a consultant.

4

I usually cycle in, but sometimes I bring the car.

5

Our Sales Director goes abroad about three or four times a year.

6

No, not at all well. In fact, the factory is doing a three-day week.

7

Yes, very well. We met in 1980.

8

No, not at the moment. But we'll start taking on new staff again in May.