

Compare :

**Present Simple**

**Present Continuous**

We use the present simple to talk about things in general or which are always true.

We use the present continuous to talk about things happening at or around the time of speaking (the action is not complete)

- + Water boils at 100 degrees Celsius.
- + It doesn't rain very much in summer.

- + The water is boiling. Can you turn it off?
- + Let's go out. It isn't raining now.

To talk about repeated or regular actions and events

To talk about temporary or new habits

- + I drink coffee every morning.

- + I'm drinking too much coffee these days because I'm so busy at work.

With "always"

I always do (something) = I do it every time.

I'm always doing something = I do it very often, perhaps too often, or more often than normal. (to emphasize the repetitiveness of the action and/or to express annoyance and irritation)

- + I always go to work by car. (not: I'm always going)

- + I've lost my pen again. I'm always losing things.
- + Jacob is a really kind person. He's always offering to help me with my work.

For permanent situations

For temporary situations

- + Joe lives in New York. New York is his home. He lives there all the time.
- + I work in London, but

- + Joe is living in Paris for a few months (usually he lives in New York).
- + I'm working in the Cambridge office this month.

For changing situations

- + I'm getting better at speaking English.

Future events which are part of a timetable, schedule, etc.

To talk about what we have already arranged to do (definite future plans)

- + What time does the movie begin?
- + The train leaves at 7:30 p.m.

- + I'm meeting John after class today.
- + What are you doing tomorrow?
- + I'm going to the theater.

To talk about the future after certain words (when, until, after, before, as soon as)

- + I'll call you when I get home.

When narrating or telling stories and jokes :

The main events are usually described in sequence using the present simple

and longer background events are described using the present continuous.



## Verbs not normally used in the continuous tenses

**Stative verbs** (expressing a state) in contrast to action verbs are not normally used in the continuous tenses and have only one present tense, the simple present. These verbs can be grouped as follows:

A) **Verbs of the senses**(involuntary actions): feel, hear, smell, see, also notice and observe (= notice), and feel, look, smell, taste used as link verbs.

Verbs such as gaze, listen, look (at), observe (=watch), stare, and watch imply deliberate use of the senses, and can, of course, be used in the continuous tenses:

Examples: Watch! I am watching but I don't see anything unusual.

He is listening to a tape, but he is wearing earphones so nobody else hears it.

b) **Verbs expressing feelings and emotions**: admire (=respect), adore, appreciate (= value), care for (=like), desire, detest, dislike, fear, hate, like, loathe, love, mind (care), respect, value, want, wish.

But the continuous can be used with admire meaning "look at with admiration", appreciate meaning "increase in value", care for meaning "look after", long for, mind meaning "look after/ concern oneself with", value meaning "estimate the financial worth of", enjoy and sometimes like/love meaning "enjoy", and hate meaning the opposite, though it is safer to use the simple tenses with like, love, and hate.

Examples: He is enjoying his holiday in the arctic. He hates touristy places and he doesn't mind the cold.

I'm minding my own business

How are you liking/do you like your new job?

I'm hating it/ I hate it. I just don't like work, you see.

C) **verbs of mental activity**: agree, appreciate (=understand), assume, believe, expect (=think), feel(=think), feel, sure/certain, forget, know, mean, perceive, realize, recall, recognize, recollect, remember, see (understand), see through someone (=penetrate his attempt to deceive), suppose, think (=have an opinion), trust (= believe/ have confidence), understand.

But the continuous can be used with appreciate meaning "to increase in value".

D) **Verbs of possession**: belong, owe, own, possess

Example: how much do I owe you?

E) **The auxiliaries**: except **be** and **have** in certain uses.

F) **Appear (= seem), concern, consist, contain, hold (= contain), keep (= continue), matter, seem, signify, sound (= seem/appear)**

Examples: It concerns us all.

This box contains explosives.

But appear meaning "to come before the public" can be used in the continuous

## Feel, look, smell and taste used in the continuous forms

### a) Feel

- Feel, when followed by an adjective indicating the subject's emotions or physical or mental condition, e.g. angry/ pleased, happy/sad, hot/cold, tense/relaxed, nervous/confident, is normally used in the simple tenses but can also be used in the continuous:



Examples: How do you feel/ are you feelingnow? I feel/ am feeling better.

But: I usually feel tired in the morning. ( not: I'm usually feeling)

- Feel meaning “**touch**” ( usually in order to learn something) can be used in the continuous.

Ex. The doctor was feeling his pulse.

- Similarly, Feel for meaning “**try to find something by touching**”

Ex. He was feeling for the keyhole in the dark.

BUT , Feel is not used in the continuous:

when it means “**sense**”

Ex. Don't you feel the house shaking?

When it means “**think**”

Ex. I feel you are wrong

And when it is used as a Link verb.

Ex. The water feels cold.

#### b) Look

The continuous is not used with look used as a link verb, e.g. that cake looks good, or with “look on” (= consider), “look up to” (= respect) and “look down on” (= despise)

But **look (at), look for/ in/ into/ out and look on (=watch) are deliberate actions** and can be used in the continuous tenses.

Ex. He is looking for his glasses

I'm looking out for a better job.

You can use the present simple or continuous to say how somebody looks now

Ex. You look well today. Or you're looking well today.

#### c) Smell

The continuous is not used with smell meaning ‘perceive a scent/ an odour), e.g. I smell gas, or with smell used as a link verb,

but can be used with smell meaning “sniff at”

Ex. Why are you smelling the milk? Does it smell sour?

#### d) Taste

Taste as a link verb is not used in the continuous

This coffee tastes bitter (has a bitter taste)

But taste meaning “**to test the flavor of**” can be used in the continuous

Ex. She was tasting the pudding to see if it was sweet enough.

### See and hear used in the continuous forms

- A) See** can be used in the continuous when it means “**meet by appointment**” (usually for business) ‘interview’

Ex. The doctor is seeing the applicants this morning.

Also when it means “**visit**” (usually as a tourist): Ex. Tom is seeing the town/ sights

It can also be used in the continuous *in the following combinations*:

See about= *make arrangements or enquiries*: we are seeing about a work permit for you (trying to arrange this)

See to = *arrange, put right, deal with*: the plumber is here. He is seeing to the leak in our tank.

See somebody out = escort him/her to the door

See somebody home = escort him/her home

Ann: is Bill seeing you home after the party?

See somebody to+ place = escort him/her to + place. Mary: no, he is just seeing me to my bus.

See someone off= say goodbye to a departing traveler at the starting point of his journey (usually the station, airport, etc) Ex. We are leaving tomorrow. Bill is seeing us off at the airport.

#### **B) Hear**

Hear can be used in the continuous when it means “**listen formally to**” (complaints/evidence, etc)

Ex. The court is hearing evidence this afternoon.

Hear meaning “**receive news or letters**” can also be used in the continuous form but only in the present perfect and future



Ex. I've been hearing all about your accident  
You'll be hearing about the new scheme at our next meeting.

### Think, assume and expect used in the continuous forms

**A) Think** can be used in the continuous *when no opinion is given or asked for (or, when think means 'consider')*

Ex. What are you thinking about? I'm thinking about the play we saw last night.  
BUT What do you think of it? (opinion asked for) I don't think much of it. (opinion given)  
Tom is thinking of emigrating. (he is considering it) What do you think of the idea?  
I think it is a stupid idea. He should stay where he is.

When think means 'believe' or 'have an opinion', we do not use the continuous:

Ex. I think Mary is Canadian, but I'm not sure. (not: I'm thinking)  
What do you think about my plan? (=what is your opinion?)

**B) Assume** can be used in the continuous when it means "accept as a starting point"

Ex. I'm assuming that you have time to do a lot of research.

**Assume power/ control of a country or organization** can also be used in the continuous.

Ex. The new government is assuming power at once.

**C) Expect** can be used in the continuous when it means 'await'

Ex. I'm expecting a letter  
She is expecting a baby in May.

**D) Is / is being**

- Be is the verb normally used to denote the existence of, or to give information about, a person or thing:  
Tom is a carpenter, Malta is an island, gold is a metal, Peter was tall and fair
- Be is used to express physical or mental condition  
I am cold, he was excited, they will be happy.

- **With certain adjectives, e.g. quite, noisy, good, bad, wise, foolish, it is possible to use the continuous form of be, e.g. Tom is being foolish, to imply that the subject is showing this quality at this time.**

Compare: Tom is being foolish which means Tom is talking or acting foolishly **now**, with Tom is foolish which means that he always acts or talks foolishly.

**He's being = he is behaving / he is acting.** Compare:

- I can't understand why he is being so selfish. He isn't usually like that.  
(being selfish = behaving selfishly at the moment)
- He never thinks about other people. He is very selfish. (not he is being)  
(= he is selfish generally, not only at the moment)

Other adjectives include: annoying, cautious, rash, clever, stupid, difficult, economical, extravagant, formal, funny, generous, mean, helpful, unhelpful, irritating, mysterious, optimistic, pessimistic, polite, selfish, unselfish.

With some of these, e.g. stupid, difficult, funny, polite, the continuous form may imply that the subject is deliberately acting in this way

-You're being stupid may mean you are not trying to understand.

-He is being difficult usually means he is raising unnecessary objections

He is being funny usually means he is only joking. Don't believe him

She is just being polite probably means she is only pretending to admire your car, clothes, house, etc.

We use am/ is/ are being to say how somebody is behaving.

It is not usually possible in other sentences:

It's hot today. (not: it is being hot)

Sarah is very tired. (not: is being tired)

**E) Have**

When Have is used to mean

Take – a meal/ food or drink, a bath / a lesson etc.

Give- a party, entertain (guests)

Encounter- difficulties/ trouble

we have lunch at one

they are having a party tomorrow

did you have trouble with customs



Experience, enjoy, usually with an adjective, e.g. good I hope you will have a good holiday.

undergo, or hold, **it can be used in the present continuous**

Examples: compare: We're having lunch now (action of eating)

We have a big kitchen. (state – own)

Note:

We can use the present continuous with some state verbs (e.g. **attract, like, look, love, sound**) to emphasize that a situation is temporary or for a period of time around the present. Compare:

Examples: Ella stays with us quite often. The children **love** having her here. *and*

Ella's with us at the moment. The children **are loving** having her here.

