



GRAMMAR PRACTICE

Past Simple and Continuous in Achievement Stories

People and Achievement | Narrating events | Cambridge IGCSE ESL 0511

1. Lead-in discussion

Talk with a partner. You may already use this grammar without noticing it.

No.	Question
1	Describe a challenge someone overcame.
2	What were they doing when the problem started?
3	Name a famous person who achieved something difficult.
4	What happened while they were working towards their goal?

2. Grammar in context

Read the text. The bold phrases show the grammar used in a natural topic context.

A Young Athlete's Challenge

Maya **was training** for a school competition when she **injured** her ankle. At first, she felt disappointed because she had practised for months.

While her friends **were preparing** for the final race, Maya **worked** with a coach to build strength slowly. She did not give up.

On the day of the competition, she **felt** nervous, but she **was smiling** when the race started. She finished second and proved that patience matters.

3. Notice the pattern

Use the past continuous for background actions in progress. Use the past simple for completed actions or main events.

Use	Form / signal	Example
Past continuous	was/were + -ing	Maya was training for a competition.
Past simple	completed event	She injured her ankle.
Interrupted action	was/were + -ing when + past simple	She was training when she injured her ankle.
Two background actions	while + past continuous	While friends were preparing , she was recovering .

4. Build accurate sentences

Complete each sentence using the grammar focus. Then write two examples of your own.

No.	Prompt	Use	Your answer
1	Maya / train / when she / injure / her ankle.	was -ing / past simple	
2	Her friends / prepare / while she / work / with a coach.	were -ing / past simple	
3	She / feel / nervous when the race / start.	past simple	
4	She / smile / when the race / begin.	was -ing / past simple	

1. _____

2. _____

5. Use it in exam answers

Complete the tasks using the grammar focus naturally.

Task	What to do
Speaking	Tell a short achievement story using past simple and past continuous.
Writing	Write a paragraph about someone who overcame a challenge.
Reading	Underline past simple and past continuous forms in the context text.

6. Common mistakes

Correct the mistakes.

No.	Mistake	Your correction
1	Maya trained when she was injuring her ankle.	
2	While friends prepared, Maya was worked with a coach.	
3	She was felt nervous when the race started.	
4	She smiling when the race began.	

7. Topic discussion questions

Use these for pair work, small-group discussion, or speaking-test warm-up practice.

1. What qualities help people overcome challenges?
2. Have you ever achieved something after a difficult start?
3. Why do some people give up while others continue?
4. Which famous achievement story inspires you?

Past Simple and Continuous in Achievement Stories

4. Build accurate sentences

1. Maya was training when she injured her ankle.
2. Her friends were preparing while she worked with a coach.
3. She felt nervous when the race started.
4. She was smiling when the race began.

Own answers will vary. Check that the grammar focus is accurate and natural.

6. Common mistakes

1. Maya was training when she injured her ankle.
2. While friends were preparing, Maya worked with a coach.
3. She felt nervous when the race started.
4. She was smiling when the race began.

Notes for checking

1. Past continuous: was/were + -ing - Maya was training for a competition.
2. Past simple: completed event - She injured her ankle.
3. Interrupted action: was/were + -ing when + past simple - She was training when she injured her ankle.
4. Two background actions: while + past continuous - While friends were preparing, she was recovering.