

In each sentence both the simple and continuous can be used, with the following exception. The Continuous form **I'm not knowing why* in number 3 is not possible. *I've been cutting my finger* in number 5 is possible, but a highly unlikely utterance.

1 *What do you do?/What are you doing?*

The question in the Present Simple form asks about something that is always true. The most common context for this question is to ask someone what their permanent job is: *What do you do? I'm a dentist.* The question in the Present Continuous form asks about something that is happening now. It is temporary and has duration. The question *What are you doing?* often expresses puzzlement or annoyance. Note that you can ask someone, *What are you doing these days?* to ask about work or activities which are in progress in their lives at the moment.

2 *I see him every Wednesday./I'm seeing him every Wednesday.*

The Present Simple form of the verb indicates a timetabled or scheduled event. A common context here would be a series of ongoing appointments, perhaps with a physiotherapist or other medical professional. The Present Continuous form uses a state verb *see*, in a continuous form. This use of a state verb is quite unusual, and indicates that the verb has changed in meaning to stress the repeated action. Students may have learned that state verbs

should always be used in the simple form. However, note that state verbs can be used in the continuous form to signify a temporary (and often deliberate) mode of behaviour that is different from the norm or is presented as a new arrangement.

- 3 *Everyone's being very nice to me./Everyone's very nice to me.*

The Continuous form describes something happening now – illustrating the point mentioned in 2. Here the speaker is clearly puzzled by the amount of attention they are receiving and wonders *why* everyone is being nice, when perhaps they are not usually.

The Simple form describes something that is generally true. People are nice, not just now, but all the time.

**I'm not knowing why* cannot be used. *Know* is a state verb that can only be used in the Simple form in this context.

- 4 *I'll take a taxi to the airport./I'll be taking a taxi to the airport.*

The Future Simple form is used to express an intention made at the moment of speaking. Here the speaker is making a decision. The Future Continuous form, depending on the context, could either be describing something in progress at a particular time in the future, *What will you be doing at 7 a.m. tomorrow? I'll be taking a taxi to the airport*, or to

describe an intention or decision that's already been made (with a similar meaning to *I'm going to take a taxi ...*).

5 *I've cut my finger./I've been cutting my finger.*

In this context the Present Perfect Simple form is used to describe the present result of a past action – one action, completed before now, with a result now, which is that the finger is cut and it hurts. The Present Perfect Continuous is highly unlikely because the continuous aspect implies that the cutting action is repetitive and has duration. You could point out to students that you might use *cut* in a continuous form in other contexts, e.g. *I've been cutting wood for the fire. It really hurts./It's really hurting.*

Both can be used, with little change in meaning.

6 *Dave always gives Pam expensive presents./Dave is always giving Pam expensive presents.*

Using the Present Simple form expresses a habitual action and is neutral in tone. Using the Present Continuous form expresses a habitual action, but also conveys the speaker's attitude. This depends on context. It could express annoyance – in that the speaker is annoyed that Dave spends all his money on Pam.

- 7 *When I popped round to see her, she baked a cake./When I was popping round to see her, she was baking a cake.*

We use the Past Simple to describe finished past actions. *I popped round to see her* describes a single event. We use the Past Continuous to describe something in progress at a time in the past.

Due to the idea of duration suggested by the Continuous form, the sentences could have multiple meanings:

When I popped round to see her, she baked a cake.

= I arrived, she decided to bake a cake.

When I popped round to see her, she was baking a cake.

= I interrupted her baking with my visit.

When I was popping round to see her, she was baking a cake.

= as I was going to her house, she was baking (these actions occurred at the same time, and had a similar duration).

- 8 *I've been checking my emails./I've checked my emails.*

Both forms refer to a past event with present results. If the Present Perfect Simple is used, it means that the action is completed, and the main result that is emphasized is a logical result of the completion – the emails are now checked, so I can do something else.

If the Continuous form is used, it does not say whether all the emails have been checked or not. The emphasis will therefore be on an incidental result of the activity: *I've been checking my emails. That's why I'm late. I've received loads./I've been receiving loads.*

Again, both forms refer to a past event with present results. The Present Perfect Continuous form signifies a temporary and perhaps unusual situation which might be reflected in the speaker's attitude, e.g. *I've been receiving loads lately, and I'm not very happy about it. There must be a problem with my anti-spam software.*

- 9 *The train leaves in five minutes./The train is leaving in five minutes.*

We use the Present Simple to talk about an impersonal, timetabled future. We use the Present Continuous to refer to a personal, diary future. So the Present Simple might be used in a train announcement, whereas the harassed parent might shout *Come on, kids! The train is leaving in five minutes.*

10 *they'd been staying at the Ritz/they'd stayed at the Ritz*

We use the Past Perfect Continuous form to express the duration of the situation or activity, e.g. how long the residence at the Ritz was, whereas the Past Perfect form suggests a short periodic event – perhaps the stay was for one night only.

11 *is interviewed by Sky News/is being interviewed by Sky News*

The first sentence is in the Present Simple passive. We use this form to describe something that is always a true occurrence – it's a fact that the winner will be interviewed. The second sentence is in the Present Continuous passive, describing an event happening now, at the moment of speaking.

