

Using 'While' and 'When' with Past Tenses

Both **'while'** and **'when'** are commonly used to describe actions that happened in the past. However, they have distinct purposes and are paired with different tenses to convey specific meanings.

1. 'While'

Used to describe **two ongoing actions** happening at the same time.
Often paired with the **past continuous tense**.

Structure:

- **While** + [past continuous], [past continuous/simple past].
- OR [past continuous/simple past] + **while** + [past continuous].

Examples:

- **While** I **was cooking**, my friend **was setting** the table.
- I **was reading** a book **while** she **was watching** TV.
- He **called** **while** I **was driving**.

Key Rule: 'While' emphasizes actions that occurred simultaneously for a period of time.

2. 'When'

Used to describe an **interruption** or a **sequence of events**.
Often paired with the **past simple** and **past continuous**.

Structure:

- **When** + [past simple], [past continuous].
- OR [past continuous] + **when** + [past simple].

Examples:

- **When** I **arrived**, she **was cooking**.

- I was walking home **when it started to rain**.
- He was watching TV **when the phone rang**.
- I **woke up**, **took** a shower, **ate** my breakfast and **went** to work. -> sequence of events

Key Rule: 'When' often introduces the shorter or interrupting action.

Quick Tip for Remembering:

- Use **'while'** for **two ongoing actions**.
 - Use **'when'** for **an interruption or a sequence of events**.
-

Practice:

1. Fill in the blanks with 'while' or 'when':

1. I was brushing my teeth _____ the power went out.
2. _____ I was walking to the store, I saw an old friend.
3. He hurt his ankle _____ he was playing soccer.
4. My phone rang _____ I was in the shower.
5. _____ she was cooking, her husband was setting the table.
6. I was reading a book _____ my cat jumped onto my lap.
7. _____ I arrived home, my parents were watching TV.
8. He was driving to work _____ his car broke down.
9. I listened to music _____ I was cleaning my room.
10. _____ the teacher was explaining the lesson, some students were chatting

2. Choose the correct option (while/when):

1. I was drinking coffee (**while / when**) the phone rang.
2. (**While / When**) I was walking to the park, it started raining.
3. She was texting me (**while / when**) I was driving home.

4. I cut my finger (**while / when**) I was chopping vegetables.
5. He called me (**while / when**) I was taking a shower.
6. (**While / When**) I was waiting for the bus, I saw a dog chasing a cat.
7. The lights went out (**while / when**) we were watching a movie.
8. I was playing video games (**while / when**) my brother was finishing his homework.
9. (**While / When**) I got home, everyone was already asleep.
10. We were laughing (**while / when**) the teacher walked into the room.
11. I was cleaning the house (**when/while**) my brother was doing homework.
12. She was cooking (**when/while**) the doorbell rang.
13. I fell asleep (**when/while**) I was watching TV.