

Present continuous

English A2

What this topic teaches

The **present continuous** is the tense of *right now*: actions in progress at this moment. Chinese marks it with 正在 or 在. English marks it with two parts: **be + verb-ing**.

- *I **am eating**. She **is reading**. They **are sleeping**.* (It is 8 a.m. on a Monday; everyone is sleeping.)
- The *be* is the same shape-shifter from A1 topic 1: *am / is / are*. It never left you.
- Memory hook: *be* is the engine, *-ing* is the wheels. A continuous sentence needs both – “*I walking*” is a car with no engine.
- This tense also has a secret second job: **arranged future plans**. More below.

The forms: engine plus wheels

Person	Form	Example
I	am + -ing	I am working.
he / she / it	is + -ing	She is working.
you / we / they	are + -ing	They are working.

Spelling dances before -ing:

Verb ending	The dance	Example
most verbs	just add -ing	work → working
silent -e	drop the e	make → making, write → writing
short vowel + consonant	double the consonant	run → running, sit → sitting
-ie	ie → y	lie → lying, die → dying

- *running* doubles the n because *run* is short and stressed. Long, calm words like *eat* and *sleep* just add -ing: *eating, sleeping*. Short verbs panic; long verbs don’t.
- Negatives: *not* after *be*: *She isn’t working. They aren’t listening.* (The class is empty. It is a Sunday.)

Now vs always: the great collision

This is the core choice of early English, and it deserves a collision table.

Present simple	Present continuous
always true, habits, facts	happening now, around now
I walk to school. (every day)	I am walking to school. (look outside)
She works in a bank. (her job)	She is working late tonight. (today only)
It rains a lot here. (climate)	It is raining. (wet shoes now)

- Signal words: *now, right now, at the moment, today, tonight* invite the continuous; *always, usually, every day* invite the simple.
- Δ “*I am walking to school every day*” mixes the signals: *every day* is a habit, so *I walk to school every day*.

The secret second job: arrangements

The present continuous also reports **arranged future plans** – plans with a time, a place, or another person attached.

- *I am meeting Li tomorrow.* There is a plan, a time, and another person: an arrangement.
- *We are having a test on Monday.* The school arranged it; the continuous reports it.
- Δ Not every future sentence is an arrangement. “*It’s raining tomorrow*” is a weather forecast wearing the wrong tense; forecasts take *will* or *going to* (topic 5).

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- Δ **The engine is not optional.** has no word for *am*, so learners write “*I eating.*” English needs both parts: *I **am** eating.* No engine, no car.
- Δ **One engine only.** “*I am am eating*” and “*I’m is*” are double engines. Pick the right one for your person, once.
- Δ **Statives still don’t move.** “*I am knowing the answer*” × – *know, want, like, need, believe* stay simple, even right now. *I need help **now**,* never “*I am needing*” – the urgency changes nothing.
- Δ **Don’t use it for photos of your life.** “*I am liking music*” for a general truth is the billboard error. General truths: present simple.

Say it aloud

Narrate the present moment like a sports commentator .

- I am sitting in class. The teacher is talking. My pen is moving. Miracles happen.
- Outside, the sun is shining, the birds are singing, and the maths homework is waiting.
- What are you doing right now? – I am learning English. (Full marks for the answer.)

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *Look! It _____ (rain).* – **is raining**. *Look!* means right now.
2. *She _____ (not listen) at the moment.* – **isn't listening**. Engine *is*, wall *not*, wheels *listening*.
3. *I _____ (meet) Li tomorrow at five.* – **am meeting**. An arranged plan takes the continuous.
4. *“He is wanting coffee.”* – **He wants coffee**. *want* is stative; statives don't move, even now.
5. *They _____ (run) in the park now.* – **are running**. Plural *are*, and short stressed *run* doubles: *running*.