

Present continuous

English Grammar · A2

Structure (be + V-ing)



The Present Continuous tense describes actions that are **happening right now**.

Structure: + am / is / are + -ing (I → am; he / she / it → is; you / we / they → are)

I am reading a book.

I am reading a book.

They are playing football.

They are playing football.

Spelling of -ing:

- Generally add -ing directly: read → reading.
- End in silent -e, drop e and add -ing: make → making, write → writing.
- Stressed closed syllable (consonant + vowel + consonant), double the final consonant: run → running, sit → sitting.

She is writing an email.

She is writing an email.

Note

- Don't forget the be verb: ~~I reading~~ × → I am reading ✓.
- State verbs (like, know, want, have = possess) generally do **not** use the continuous tense: ~~I am knowing~~ × → I know ✓.

Present Continuous vs. Present Simple

Both tenses relate to “now,” but their meanings differ:

- **Present Simple:** Habits or repeated actions.
- **Present Continuous:** Actions happening at this very moment.

He usually walks to work.

He usually walks to work. (Habit → Present Simple)

Today he is taking the bus.

He is taking the bus today. (Right now → Present Continuous)

Time expressions help distinguish them:

- Present Simple: every day, usually, often, always.
- Present Continuous: now, right now, at the moment, today.

Note

- Temporary situations use the continuous tense: *She is living with her aunt this month.* (She is temporarily staying with her aunt this month.)
- Long-term facts use the Present Simple: *She lives in Beijing.* (She lives in Beijing.)

Common Errors

- × ~~They are play football now.~~ → ✓ They are **playing** football now. — With be, the verb must also take -ing; both elements are required.
- × ~~She is cooking every day.~~ → ✓ She **cooks** every day. — every day signals a habit, so use the Present Simple.
- × ~~Where is Tom? — He plays football.~~ → ✓ He **is playing** football. — To answer “what is he doing right now?”, use the continuous tense.
- × ~~He is writeing a letter.~~ → ✓ He is **writing** a letter. — Verbs ending in a silent -e drop the e before adding -ing.