

FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

Present simple vs present continuous

Use the present simple for habits, routines, facts and timetables: I study every evening. Use the present continuous (am, is, are + -ing) for actions happening now, temporary situations and changing trends: I am studying at the moment. State verbs such as know, like and want stay in the simple form.

What to know

The big idea

Both tenses talk about the present, but they show different pictures. The **present simple** is a wide, steady picture: what is generally true or what you regularly do. The **present continuous** is a close-up picture: what is happening now or around now, and what is changing.

- *She works in a hospital.* · a permanent job
- *She is working on a night shift this week.* · temporary

Present simple: form and use

The form is the base verb, with **-s or -es** for he, she and it: I work, she works, he watches. Questions and negatives use do or does: Do you live here? She does not like coffee.

Present continuous: form and use

The form is **am, is or are + the -ing form**: I am studying, she is working, they are waiting. Questions put the helper first: Are you listening? Negatives add not: He is not working today.

State verbs: no continuous

Some verbs describe a state of mind or a situation, not an action. They are not normally used in the continuous: know, believe, understand, like, love, hate, want, need, prefer, own, belong and seem. Say **I know the answer**, not I am knowing it.

Changes and trends in IELTS

The present continuous is useful for describing change in Task 2 and Speaking Part 3: More people are working from home. The city is growing quickly. Technology is changing how we learn. It shows that the situation is not finished.

Exercises

1. She usually _____ to university by bus.
 - a. is going
 - b. goes
 - c. go
2. Look! The children _____ in the garden.
 - a. are playing
 - b. play

c. plays

3. I _____ you are right about this.

a. believes

b. believe

c. am believing

4. At the moment, the population of the city _____ fast.

a. grows

b. grow

c. is growing

5. Every day, the sun _____ in the east.

a. rise

b. is rising

c. rises

6. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) I am knowing (2) the answer (3) to that question.

7. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) Sorry, I can't (2) talk: I (3) am drive (4) right now.

8. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): gym / goes / the / morning. / every / go / He / to

9. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): this / for / week. / study / exam / studying / We / the / are

10. Correct this: *I am agree with this opinion.*

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/present-simple-vs-present-continuous/practice/

IELTS tip. In Speaking Part 1, use the present simple for routines and facts about you, and the present continuous for what is changing: I live in a small town, but it is growing fast. In Writing Task 2, use the continuous for trends and the simple for general facts.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Present simple vs present continuous

AIM	Learners choose between the present simple and present continuous by meaning, use state verbs correctly, and describe change and routine in speaking and writing.
TIME	30 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Ask learners to write one thing they do every day and one thing they are doing this month. Share and write both on the board.

Lesson steps

1. Draw two pictures on the board: a wide landscape for the simple, a close-up lens for the continuous.
2. Drill the form with quick substitution: he/work, they/study, I/not/understand.
3. Sort a list of verbs into action and state verbs and discuss the two-meaning verbs (think, have).
4. Pairs describe a graph or a trend in their city using the continuous, then describe routines using the simple.
5. Learners write a short paragraph about changes in how people study, mixing both tenses.

Extension

Learners record a one-minute talk about their daily life and what is changing in their life this year, then check the tenses.

Answer key

1. b) goes. A regular routine takes the present simple, and she needs -es.
2. a) are playing. Look! signals an action happening now: use the present continuous.
3. b) believe. Believe is a state verb, so use the present simple.
4. c) is growing. A change in progress takes the present continuous.
5. c) rises. A general fact takes the present simple.
6. Part 1: *I am knowing* → **I know**. Know is a state verb, so use the simple form.
7. Part 3: *am drive* → **am driving**. An action in progress needs am + -ing.
8. He goes to the gym every morning. A regular habit takes the present simple.
9. We are studying for the exam this week. A temporary situation around now takes the present continuous.
10. I agree with this opinion. Agree is a verb, not an adjective, so do not add am.

Questions learners often ask

What is the difference between the present simple and the present continuous? The present simple is for habits, routines and facts. The present continuous is for actions happening now, temporary situations and changes in progress.

Which verbs do not take the continuous? State verbs such as know, believe, understand, like, want, need and own. Use the present simple with them.

Can I use the present continuous for the future? Yes, for fixed arrangements with a time: I am meeting my tutor on Friday. This is a common use in Speaking Part 1.

Why can't I say I am agree? Agree is a verb, so it takes no helper in the present simple: I agree. Only adjectives follow am, as in I am happy.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage, 4th edition. Oxford University Press.
- Biber, D., Johansson, S., Leech, G., Conrad, S. and Finegan, E. (1999). Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English. Longman.

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