

SIMPLE AND CONTINUOUS ASPECTS

The simple aspect

The simple aspect describes an action that is seen to be complete.

The action is viewed as a whole unit.

The sun rises in the east. (= all time)

I've read the book and seen the film. (complete)

My father always wore a suit to work. (habit)

He died in 1992. (action completed in the past)

This shop will close at 5.30. (simple fact)

Because the simple aspect expresses a completed action, we must use it if the sentence contains a number that refers to 'things done'.

She's written three letters today. I drink five cups of tea a day.

The continuous aspect

Continuous verb forms express activities, or a series of activities, viewed at some point between their beginning and end. The continuous aspect focuses on the duration of an activity: we are aware of the passing of time. The activity is *not* permanent, and its duration is limited.

I'm staying with friends until I find a place of my own. (temporary)

Why are you wearing that silly hat? (in progress)

I've been learning English for years. (duration)

The activity may not be complete.

I've been painting the kitchen. (We don't know if it's finished.)

He was dying, but the doctors saved him.

Who's been drinking my beer? (There's some left.)

Compare: *Who's drunk my beer?* (It's all gone.)

The action of some verbs, by definition, lasts a long time, for example, *live* and *work*. The continuous aspect gives these actions limited duration and makes them temporary.

Hans is living in London while he's learning English.

I'm working as a waiter until I go to university.

The action of some other verbs lasts a short time. These are often found in the simple aspect.

She's cut her finger. He hit me.

In the continuous aspect, the action of these verbs becomes longer or repeated.

I've been cutting wood. (for a long time)

He was hitting me. (again and again)

Where possible, change the verb forms in these sentences from simple to continuous or continuous to simple. What is the change in meaning? Why is the change sometimes not possible?

1) Everyone's very nice to me. I don't know why.

2) I'll see Luis later.

3) I've cut my finger. It's really hurting.

4) David always gives Pam expensive presents.

5) What do you do?

6) He fired a gun.

7) She was dying.

8) I've been checking my emails.

9) The train leaves in five minutes

10) That room is used as a study.