

We can use the present continuous for a series of actions that are more frequent than we would normally expect: *Now that I've bought a Toyota Prius, I'm seeing them everywhere!*

We can use the present continuous with an adverb such as *always*, *forever* or *continually* for frequently repeated actions: *The baby's always making cute little gurgling noises.*

This use is more emphatic than using the present simple for repeated actions, and, with a stressed adverb, expresses annoyance with the person who is doing the action:

The neighbours are continually slamming doors and shouting during the night. I'm always forgetting people's birthdays. It's so annoying.

3 Series of events/actions

We use the present simple to give directions or instructions, often with impersonal *you*:

From here you cross the road, go through an iron gate and follow the path west ...

This is similar to the imperative, but the imperative can sound more abrupt:

Cross the road, go through an iron gate and follow the path west ...

We use the present simple to express the immediacy of an event, e.g. in sports commentaries, particularly when the action is over before the description finishes:

France kicks off, Vieira passes to Henry, Henry cuts inside ... and it's a goal!

Compare the use of the present continuous used in sports commentaries, when the action is in progress throughout the time of speaking:

They're now entering the back straight and Bekele is starting to pull away from the other runners ... he crosses the line two seconds ahead of his closest rival ...

4 Describing pictures, plots and telling anecdotes

We use the present continuous to describe pictures:

Our head of our department is the one who's standing slightly apart in the college photo.

We can use the present continuous with the present simple to give more immediacy to an anecdote. We use the continuous for actions which form a background and the simple for the actions that make up the narrative:

There's an old woman with thick glasses who's serving the hot drinks, so I go up to her and ask ... (She started serving before the action of the narrative.)

This is often the way that we describe the beginning of books, films or plays:

At the start of the play, Hamlet is walking along the castle walls when he hears a strange voice.

Newspaper headlines often use the present simple to express a past event, which again gives more immediacy to the event: *UK jobless total climbs to 2.4 million.*

5 Other uses

We use the present continuous to describe things which are in the process of changing, i.e. trends:

X British summers get hotter and winters get wetter.

✓ British summers are getting hotter and winters are getting wetter.

The cost of bringing up children is increasing all the time.

ACADEMIC ENGLISH The use of the present continuous for trends is common in academic English:

While it is often assumed that violent crime is increasing, statistics show that it is actually decreasing in most areas.

FORMALITY CHECK We use the present simple in formal speech or writing for certain actions:

I note that you referred to the National Curriculum in your speech ...

I look forward to receiving a prompt reply to my enquiry.

Present simple for fixed future events or for future after *when*, *after*, etc. ► Unit 28.1

Present continuous for arrangements in the future ► Unit 27.3