ENGLISH A2 · UNIT 3 · GRAMMAR Name: _____ Date: _____

Past simple or past continuous? when and while

Focus: past simple vs past continuous with when and while: background and event; the comma rule

BACKGROUND AND EVENT

Background (long action) = **past continuous**. Event (short action) = **past simple**.
I **was driving** home **when** the car **stopped**. **While** I **was cooking**, Tom **called**.
Clause first → comma. Two finished events: **When** I **heard** the news, I **called** Sara.

1 Choose the correct form.

Example: I _____ TV when the phone rang. (watched / was watching) → was watching

1. She _____ her finger while she was cooking. (cut / was cutting)
2. When the thief took my bag, I _____ for the bus. (waited / was waiting)
3. We _____ in the garden when the rain started, so we went home. (sat / were sitting)
4. Ben _____ over while he was running for the train. (fell / was falling)
5. They _____ dinner when the ambulance arrived. (still had / were still having)
6. When I _____ the news, I called my mother immediately. (heard / was hearing)
7. While I _____ the car, I found a wallet under the seat. (cleaned / was cleaning)

2 Complete with the past simple or the past continuous. Use short forms.

Example: I _____ (sleep) when the phone _____ (ring). → was sleeping, rang

1. I _____ (paint) the kitchen when I _____ (fall) over.
2. While we _____ (have) a staff meeting, a fire _____ (start).
3. The driver _____ (not / look) when he _____ (hit) the wall.
4. What _____ (you / do) when the accident _____ (happen)?

3 Correct the mistake in each sentence.

Example: While I cooked dinner, the phone rang. → While I was cooking dinner, the phone rang.

1. I was breaking my arm when I was playing football.

   _____

2. While we were waiting for the ambulance the rain started.

   _____

ANSWER KEY

1 1 cut, 2 was waiting, 3 were sitting, 4 fell, 5 were still having, 6 heard, 7 was cleaning **2** 1 was painting / fell, 2 were having / started, 3 wasn't looking / hit, 4 were you doing / happened **3** 1 I broke my arm when I was playing football. | 2 While we were waiting for the ambulance, the rain started.

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