

When should I use the Present Continuous?

Present Uses

1: First, we use the present continuous for things that are happening at the moment of speaking. These things usually last for quite a short time and they are not finished when we are talking about them.

- I'm working at the moment.
- Please call back as we are eating dinner now.
- Julie is sleeping.

2: We can also use this tense for other kinds of temporary situations, even if the action isn't happening at this moment.

- John's working in a bar until he finds a job in his field. (He might not be working now.)
- I'm reading a really great book.
- She's staying with her friend for a week.

Compare this with the present simple, which is used for permanent situations that we feel will continue for a long time.

- I work in a school. (I think this is a permanent situation.)
- I'm working in a school. (I think this is a temporary situation.)

3: We can use the present continuous for temporary or new habits (for normal habits that continue for a long time, we use the present simple). We often use this with expressions like 'these days' or 'at the moment'.

- He's eating a lot these days.
- She's swimming every morning (she didn't use to do this).
- You're smoking too much.

4: Another present continuous use is for habits that are not regular, but that happen very often. In this case we usually use an adverb like 'always', 'forever' or 'constantly'. Often, we use the present continuous in this way to talk about an annoying habit.

- You're forever losing your keys!
- She's constantly missing the train.
- Lucy's always smiling!

Future Uses

5: The next use is for definite future arrangements (with a future time word). In this case we have already made a plan and we are pretty sure that the event will happen in the future.

- I'm meeting my father tomorrow.
- We're going to the beach at the weekend.
- I'm leaving at three.

We can't use this tense (or any other continuous tense) with stative verbs.