Past Progressive

1. Formation

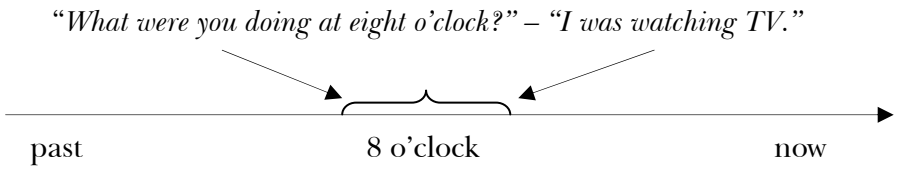
The past progressive uses **was/were** with the present participle (*-ing*):

I was working.
She was not reading.
Were you listening to me?

2. Use

We use the past progressive to say that **something was in progress** (going on) **around a particular past time**.

"What were you doing at eight o'clock yesterday?" – "I was watching TV."
(NOT "~~What did you do~~ …?" – "~~I watched TV~~.")



We often use the past progressive together with the simple past. The past progressive refers to a **longer 'background' action or situation**; the simple past refers to a shorter action or event that happened in the middle of the longer action, or that interrupted it.

As I was walking down the road, I saw Bill.
The phone rang while I was having dinner.

Because we often use the past progressive to talk about something that is a 'background', not the main 'news', we can make something seem less important. Compare:

I had lunch with the President yesterday.
(important piece of news)
I was having lunch with the President yesterday, and she said…
(as if there was nothing special for the speaker about lunching with the President.)

The past progressive is **not** the normal tense for talking about **repeated or habitual past actions**. (Use the simple past here.)

I rang the bell six times.
When I was a child we made our own amusements.