GRAMMAR · LEVEL A1

Present Simple vs Present Continuous

Things you do every day, and things happening right now

1 The basic rule

Ask one question: **Is it a habit, or is it happening now?**

	Habit · every day	Now · at this moment
I / you / we / they	**I play** I **play** tennis every Saturday. 	**I'm playing** I**'m playing** tennis right now. 
he / she / it	**she plays** She **plays** the piano every day. 	**she's playing** She**'s playing** the piano now. 

Remember the -s! With **he / she / it**, the present simple adds **-s**: *she play**s**, he work**s**, it rain**s***. The present continuous uses **is**: *she **is** playing*.

2 Time words help you choose

Look for these words in the sentence. **every day** = present simple. **now** = present continuous.

Present simple · habits	Present continuous · now
I walk to school **every day**.	I'm reading a book **now**.
She **usually** gets up at seven.	She's sleeping **right now**.
We **always** eat at home. *(also: often, sometimes)*	We're eating lunch **at the moment**.
He **never** cooks dinner.	**Look!** It's raining.
They play tennis **on Mondays**.	**Listen!** The baby's crying.

Word order *always, usually, often, sometimes* and *never* go **before** the verb: *She **often** dances. We **never** eat meat.*

Tip for French speakers: *je mange* can be **I eat** (a habit) or **I'm eating** (now). *Je suis en train de manger* = **I'm eating**.

3 How to make each tense

The present simple uses **do / does** for negatives and questions. The present continuous uses **am / is / are + -ing**.

	Present simple	Present continuous
+ **I / you / we / they**	I **play** football.	I **am playing**. / They **are playing**.
+ **he / she / it**	She **plays** football.	She **is playing** football.
− **Negative**	I **don't play**. / She **doesn't play**.	I**'m not playing**. / She **isn't playing**.
? **Question**	**Do** you **play**? / **Does** she **play**?	**Are** you **playing**? / **Is** she **playing**?

Careful with does: after **does** and **doesn't**, there is **no -s**: *She doesn't play. Does he work?*

4 Spelling tips

Most verbs just add **-s** or **-ing**. A few change their spelling.

he / she / it + -s

- **Most verbs** -s → play → **plays**, work → **works**
- **-sh, -ch, -o** -es → wash → **washes**, go → **goes**
- **consonant + y** -ies → study → **studies**

verb + -ing

- **Most verbs** -ing → play → **playing**, read → **reading**
- **-e** drop e → make → **making**, write → **writing**
- **short verbs** double → swim → **swimming**, run → **running**

> Short verbs with one vowel + one consonant double the last letter: *sit → sitting, get → getting, stop → stopping.*

5 Quick check before the exercise

For each gap, ask yourself three questions:

1 — Time word?
every day, usually → simple
now, Look! → continuous

2 — Who?
he / she / it → + -s or is + -ing
I → am we / they → are

3 — Spelling?
washes, studies, making, swimming
Check section 4!