



APEX ENGLISH

Your voice. Global.

B1 · GENERAL ENGLISH

UNIT 1 · B1·1B

Life stories

Theme · Who am I?



Unit 1 · B1·1B

Life stories

Theme: *Who am I?*

B1 · General English



Learning objectives

- Tell a short personal story from your past in 4–6 sentences.
- Use past simple for main events and past continuous for the background.
- Ask 3 good follow-up questions about someone else's story.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Class Book

Warm-up · Three photos

Think of 3 photos on your phone: an old one, a recent one, and one from this month. In ONE sentence each, tell your partner what was happening in the photo.

The old one (more than 5 years ago).

A recent one (last year).

One from this month.

Lead-in · Guess the story

Match each opening line to the kind of story it starts.

1. "I was walking home when suddenly..."

2. "We were sitting at dinner when the phone rang."

3. "I met her the summer I turned 17."

4. "It was raining, and I had no umbrella."

5. "I'll never forget the day my grandma..."

followUp: Which of those openings sounds most like a story you'd tell?

Reading · The night the lights went out

I was twelve years old, and I was sitting on the floor of the living room, doing my maths homework. My mother was cooking dinner in the kitchen, and my little brother was watching cartoons.

Suddenly, everything went dark. The TV died. The fridge stopped. The whole street lost power at exactly the same moment. My brother started to cry. My mother laughed and lit a candle.

For three hours, we sat around the kitchen table with two candles between us. My father came home from work and told us stories about his childhood — stories we had never heard before. My brother stopped crying and asked question after question. Nobody looked at a screen.

The lights came back at ten o'clock. Everyone went to bed. But the next morning, at breakfast, my brother said, "Can we do that again next week?" That was fifteen years ago, and I still remember that evening better than most birthdays.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



1. How old was the writer at the time?
(A) 10
(B) 12
(C) 17
2. What was the mother doing when the lights went out?
(A) Reading
(B) Cooking dinner
(C) Watching TV
3. Why does the writer remember that evening so well?
(A) Because it was scary
(B) Because the family talked with no screens
(C) Because they ate a big meal

Vocabulary in context

Find these words in the text and match them to the meaning.

lost power — the electricity stopped working

lit a candle — started a small flame on a candle

childhood — the time when someone was a child

question after question — many questions, one after another

True / False / Not Given

Based only on the text, choose the correct option.

1. The writer was doing homework when the lights went out.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
2. The little brother laughed when the lights went out.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given
3. The father usually told stories about his childhood.
(A) True
(B) False
(C) Not Given

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



4. The power came back at exactly 10:00 pm.

- (A) True
- (B) False
- (C) Not Given

5. The writer's brother is now 20 years old.

- (A) True
- (B) False
- (C) Not Given

React to the text

Choose *ONE* question and answer in 3–4 sentences.

1. Do you have a similar 'no-screen' memory from your childhood or teens? What happened?

2. Why do you think small moments (like a power cut) stay in our memory more than big planned events?

Scan for meaning

Find and write down the word or phrase from the text that means the same as each definition.

1. the whole neighbourhood lost electricity

2. made a small flame with a match

3. the years of being a child

4. one question, then another, then another

Vocabulary · Life events & time

childhood — the years when you were a child

adolescence — roughly ages 13–19

grow up — become an adult (over time)

relocate — change where you live

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



wed — have a wedding, become husband/wife/partner

retire — stop working, usually because of age

in my formative years — in my early childhood

in those days — at that time in the past

at that precise moment — at the exact time an event happened

the day I... — opens a specific memory ('the day I met her')

a considerable time ago — a long time in the past

I'll always treasure the memory of... — opens a strong personal memory

practice

Complete each sentence with ONE word or phrase from the lists.

1. I ____ in a small village near the mountains.

2. ____ we didn't have smartphones, and it was fine.

3. My parents ____ when they were only 22.

4. I'll never forget ____ I first went on a plane — I was 8.

5. My grandfather ____ at 65 and started painting.

6. We ____ from Lisbon to Porto in 2018.

Collocations · verbs + life-event nouns

Match each verb with the noun it usually goes with.

make — a friend / a decision / a mistake

start — school / a job / a family

leave — home / a job / a country

meet — someone / your partner / a friend for the first time

have — a baby / an argument / a great time

lose — a friend / a job / touch with someone

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

**Odd one out**

Choose the word that does *NOT* belong with the others.

1. childhood · adolescence · retire · grew up
(A) childhood
(B) adolescence
(C) retire
(D) grew up
2. yesterday · last year · at the moment · a considerable time ago
(A) yesterday
(B) last year
(C) at the moment
(D) a considerable time ago
3. start · begin · finish · kick off
(A) start
(B) begin
(C) finish
(D) kick off

Word building · verb ↔ noun

Complete the pair (the action and the noun for it).

1. marry → the event: ____

2. decide → the result: ____

3. arrive → the moment of arriving: ____

4. leave → the act of leaving: ____

5. remember → the thing remembered: ____

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Grammar · Past simple vs past continuous

1. Past simple — completed actions in the past — Use it for main events, one after another. • I opened the door. I saw the box. I laughed. • She lived in Paris for 3 years. • We didn't go to the party.

2. Past continuous — background action in progress — Use it for what was happening around the main event. • I was walking home when it started to rain. • At 8 pm last night, we were watching a film. • She wasn't listening because she was thinking about work.

3. The classic combination — when / while — Use past continuous for the LONGER background, past simple for the SHORT event that interrupts it. • I was cooking dinner WHEN the lights went out. • WHILE she was reading, her phone rang.

Exercise A — Choose the correct form

Past simple or past continuous? Complete each sentence.

1. Yesterday at 8 pm, I ____ (watch) a film with my flatmate.

2. I ____ (walk) to the bus stop when it started to rain.

3. She ____ (open) the letter and ____ (read) it quickly.

4. We ____ (not / listen) to the teacher because we ____ (talk).

5. He ____ (live) in Berlin for two years, then ____ (move) to Vienna.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



6. What ____ (you / do) at 10 last night?

Exercise B — Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake. Rewrite it correctly.

1. I was going to school and I was seeing a car accident.

2. When she called, I cooked dinner.

3. We watched a film when suddenly the lights went out.

4. I was knowing the answer, but I didn't say anything.

Exercise C — Combine the two sentences

Join each pair using when or while and the correct past forms.

1. I / walk / in the park. It / start / to snow.

2. She / read / a book. Her friend / call.

3. We / have / dinner. The doorbell / ring.

4. He / drive / on the motorway. He / see / a rainbow.

Exercise D — Rewrite for context

Rewrite each sentence to fit the new time frame.

1. I'm cooking dinner. (yesterday at 7 pm)

2. She lives in Paris. (from 2015 to 2018)

3. The children play in the garden. (all Sunday afternoon)

4. It rains a lot. (during our trip last week)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

**Exercise E — Short answers about you**

Answer these questions truthfully in ONE short sentence each.

1. Where did you live when you were 10?

2. What were you doing this time yesterday?

3. Who did you meet last week that was interesting?

4. What were you thinking about just before this lesson started?

Exercise F — Complete the story

Put each verb in past simple or past continuous.

1. Last Saturday, I ____ (sit) in a café. It ____ (rain) outside. Suddenly, an old friend ____ (walk) in.

2. She ____ (not / see) me at first, because she ____ (look) at her phone.

3. I ____ (call) her name. She ____ (turn), ____ (smile), and ____ (come) over to my table.

Listening · A story about a lost passport

Two friends are having coffee. One tells the story of the day she lost her passport in a foreign country.

pre

Have you ever lost anything important on a trip? What was it?

What is the first thing you would do if you lost your passport abroad?

gist

1. Where was Voice A when she lost her passport?

2. Did she find the passport again?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. How does the story end?

detail

1. What was Voice A doing when she realised the passport was missing?

2. Where had she left it?

3. Why did the taxi driver find her again?

Third listen — read between the lines

Answer from what is IMPLIED.

1. Was Voice A calm or stressed at the airport? How do you know?

2. Why does she still send a postcard every Christmas?

Useful language from the audio

Match each phrase to what it does in the story.

"I was standing in the queue when..." — sets the scene with past continuous + past simple

"I couldn't breathe." — shows a strong emotional reaction

"To cut a long story short..." — signals a summary is coming

"I nearly cried." — means: I almost cried, but didn't

"I still can't believe it." — shows the story still surprises her

Voice A: So — I was standing in the queue at Istanbul airport, at like 5 in the morning, when I put my hand in my bag and... nothing. No passport.

Voice B: Oh no. What did you do?

Voice A: I couldn't breathe for a second. I emptied the whole bag on the floor. Chewing gum, receipts, a broken pen — no passport. I nearly cried in front of the check-in lady.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Voice B: So you missed the flight?

Voice A: I did. I sat down in the airport and started thinking. Where was I last? A taxi from the hotel. That was the last place.

Voice B: But you don't know the taxi driver!

Voice A: No — but the boarding pass was clipped inside the passport, with my name and phone number. So at 7 am, my phone rang. It was him. He said, 'Madam, I have your passport.' I nearly cried again, but for a different reason.

Voice B: That's amazing.

Voice A: To cut a long story short, he drove one hour back to the airport, gave me the passport, refused to take money, and I caught a flight the same evening. I still send him a postcard every Christmas.

Voice B: That's... I still can't believe it.

Voice A: Neither can I. Ten years later.

Fourth listen — fill the gaps

Listen again and complete the exact phrases.

1. I was ____ in the queue when I put my hand in my bag.

2. I ____ ____ breathe for a second.

3. The boarding pass was ____ inside the passport.

4. To ____ a long story short, he drove one hour back.

Speaking · Tell me a story

Prepare a 60-second true (or half-true) story from your life. Use at least ONE past continuous (background) and 3 past simple verbs (main events). Then swap with a partner and ask 3 follow-up questions.

Scene: The day you got lost

A: You were 8, in a supermarket.

B: You were an adult, in a foreign city.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

**Scene:** A surprise meeting

A: You met someone from your childhood by accident.

B: You met a famous person very briefly.

Scene: A small disaster

A: You broke something important.

B: You forgot something important on a big day.

Discussion · life stories

Choose 2 questions and speak for 30–45 seconds each. Then swap.

What is one story from your childhood that your family always tells?

Is there a small object in your house that carries a big memory? What is it?

Do you prefer to tell stories, or to listen to them? Why?

Is there any story you know you will tell your grandchildren one day?

Role-play · The interview

Read your role card, take 30 seconds to prepare, then run the conversation for 2 minutes.

Scene: A journalist interviews a local hero

A: You: local hero. Last month, while you were walking to work, you saw a small fire in a shop and helped everyone get out. Tell the story naturally, with details.

B: You: journalist for a local newspaper. Ask 4 questions: what were you doing? what did you see? what did you do? how did you feel?

Scene: Meeting a friend after 10 years

A: You: haven't seen your old school friend in 10 years. You bumped into them at the airport. Tell them the 3 biggest things that happened in your life in those years.

B: You: the old friend. Ask 3 real follow-up questions, then share ONE big thing from your own life.

Mini-presentation · 60-second story

Prepare and deliver a 60-second personal story to a partner. Follow the 4-beat structure. Time yourself.

Beat 1 (10s) — Set the scene: WHERE and WHEN, in past continuous.

Beat 2 (15s) — The main event: WHAT HAPPENED, in past simple.

Beat 3 (20s) — Two more actions, one after the other (past simple).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Beat 4 (15s) — How the story ended AND how you feel about it now.

sample: One Saturday evening last winter, I was walking home from a friend's house. It was raining, and I was carrying a huge cake in a box. Suddenly, I slipped on the wet pavement. The box flew into the air. A stranger caught it with one hand — I couldn't believe it. He handed the cake back to me, smiled, and just kept walking. I got home five minutes later and told my flatmates. Every time I see rain now, I hope to be that kind of stranger for somebody else.

Writing · A short personal story

Write a 70–100 word story about a small memorable moment from your life. Use at least ONE past continuous (background) and 3 past simple verbs (events). End with ONE sentence that says why you still remember it.

bonus: Bonus — Micro-story (max 30 words). One sentence for the scene, one sentence for the event, one sentence for the ending.

Wrap-up · What did we cover?

Past simple = the main events, one after another.

Past continuous = the background, what was in progress.

'When' + past simple, 'while' + past continuous is the classic combination.

A good story has a scene, a main event, and a small ending line.

Quiz

1. Choose the correct sentence.
(A) I was walking home when I saw her.
(B) I walked home when I was seeing her.
(C) I was walking home when I was seeing her.
2. "At 8 last night, we ____ a film."
(A) watched
(B) were watching
(C) watch
3. "While she ____ (read), the phone rang."
(A) was reading
(B) read
(C) reads
4. Which is NOT a life event?
(A) get married
(B) grow up
(C) retire
(D) hometown

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



5. "I ____ (know) the answer, but I didn't say anything."

(A) was knowing

(B) knew

(C) am knowing

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class

Workbook — home practice



1. Vocabulary gap-fill

Complete each sentence with ONE word from the box.

Word bank: upbringing · was raised · relocated · tied the knot · in those days · recollection

1. My grandparents _____ in 1962 in a small church.

2. I _____ in a village near the mountains.

3. My favourite ____ from ____ is Sunday lunch at my grandma's.

4. We from São Paulo to Lisbon in 2015.

5. _____, we didn't have smartphones, and life felt slower.

2. Past simple or past continuous?

Put the verb in brackets in the correct past form.

1. Yesterday at 8 pm, I _____ (watch) a film.

2. I _____ (walk) to the bus stop when it started to rain.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. She ____ (open) the door and ____ (see) her old friend.

4. We ____ (not / listen) because we ____ (talk).

5. He ____ (live) in Berlin for two years, then ____ (move) to Vienna.

6. What ____ (you / do) at 10 last night?

7. I ____ (know) the answer, but I didn't say anything.

3. Background or main event?

Read each sentence and choose the correct label for the underlined verb.

1. I was reading when the phone rang. → 'was reading'

(A) Background (in progress)

(B) Main event (short action)

2. I was reading when the phone rang. → 'rang'

(A) Background (in progress)

(B) Main event (short action)

3. She opened the letter and screamed. → 'opened'

(A) Background (in progress)

(B) Main event (short action)

4. While we were driving, we saw a rainbow. → 'were driving'

(A) Background (in progress)

(B) Main event (short action)

5. The children were playing in the garden all afternoon. → 'were playing'

(A) Background (in progress)

(B) Main event (short action)

4. Find and fix the mistake

Each sentence has ONE mistake. Rewrite it.

1. I was going to school and I was seeing a car accident.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. When she called, I cooked dinner.

3. We watched a film when suddenly the lights went out.

4. I was knowing the answer, but I said nothing.

5. Listening — a short 'first day' story

A person tells the story of her very first day at university. Listen for tenses and small details.

1. Where was she going when the story starts?

2. What went wrong?

3. How does the story end?

Voice A: My first day at university was a disaster. I was walking to my first lecture on a rainy Monday, and I couldn't find the room. I asked three different people. Nobody knew.

Voice A: I finally opened a door — the wrong door — and interrupted a lecture in French. Everyone stared at me. I was 20 minutes late for MY class.

Voice A: I sat down in the first empty seat. The girl next to me smiled and just pushed her notes so I could copy. That girl is my best friend now, 12 years later. She still teases me about the French door.

6. Writing — a short personal story

Write a 70–100 word story about a small memorable moment from your life. Use at least ONE past continuous and 3 past simple verbs. End with ONE sentence that says why you still remember it.

7. Reflection

Look back at the reading 'The night the lights went out'. Answer briefly, in your own words.

1. Why do you think the writer remembers that evening better than most birthdays?

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



2. Describe your own 'no-screen' memory in 2–3 sentences (real or invented).

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Class Book

Lead-in · Guess the story

1. an unexpected event in the street
2. news that changed the evening
3. the start of a friendship or romance
4. a small memorable moment
5. a family memory

Reading · The night the lights went out

1. (B) 12
2. (B) Cooking dinner
3. (B) Because the family talked with no screens
1. (A) True
2. (B) False
3. (B) False
4. (A) True
5. (C) Not Given
1. Model: yes — one summer at the beach house we had no wifi for a week. I was 14. I read three books and learned to play chess with my cousin — and I remember it much better than that year's school trip.
2. Model: because we don't expect them, so we pay real attention. Big planned events are usually rehearsed — we know what to feel.
1. the whole street lost power
2. lit a candle
3. childhood
4. question after question

Vocabulary · Life events & time

1. grew up
2. in those days
3. wed
4. the day
5. retired
6. relocated
1. (C) retire
2. (C) at the moment
3. (C) finish
1. marriage / wedding
2. decision
3. arrival
4. departure / leaving
5. memory

Grammar · Past simple vs past continuous

1. was watching
2. was walking
3. opened / read
4. weren't listening / were talking
5. lived / moved
6. were you doing
1. I was going to school when I saw a car accident.
2. When she called, I was cooking dinner.
3. We were watching a film when suddenly the lights went out.
4. I knew the answer, but I didn't say anything.
1. I was walking in the park when it started to snow.
2. While she was reading a book, her friend called. (Or: She was reading a book when her friend called.)

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



3. We were having dinner when the doorbell rang.
4. He was driving on the motorway when he saw a rainbow.
1. I was cooking dinner at 7 pm yesterday.
2. She lived in Paris from 2015 to 2018.
3. The children were playing in the garden all Sunday afternoon.
4. It was raining a lot during our trip last week.
1. Model: I lived in a small town near the coast with my parents and two sisters.
2. Model: I was travelling home on the bus and listening to a podcast.
3. Model: I met my sister's new boyfriend at Sunday lunch — he was really funny.
4. Model: I was thinking about the report I still have to finish tonight.
1. was sitting / was raining / walked
2. didn't see / was looking
3. called / turned / smiled / came

Listening · A story about a lost passport

1. In Istanbul, at the end of a two-week trip.
2. Yes — a taxi driver returned it the next morning.
3. She got home on time, and she still sends the driver a postcard every Christmas.
1. She was standing in the check-in queue at the airport.
2. In the taxi, in the back seat pocket.
3. Because her flight boarding pass was clipped inside the passport, with her name and phone number.
1. Very stressed — 'I couldn't breathe', 'I nearly cried in front of the check-in lady'.
2. Because that small kindness was one of the most important things that happened to her — she doesn't want to forget it.
1. standing
2. couldn't
3. clipped
4. cut

Quiz

1. (A) I was walking home when I saw her.
2. (B) were watching
3. (A) was reading
4. (D) hometown
5. (B) knew

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class



Answer key — Workbook

1. Vocabulary gap-fill

1. tied the knot
2. was raised
3. recollection / upbringing
4. relocated
5. In those days

2. Past simple or past continuous?

1. was watching
2. was walking
3. opened / saw
4. weren't listening / were talking
5. lived / moved
6. were you doing
7. knew

3. Background or main event?

1. (A) Background (in progress)
2. (B) Main event (short action)
3. (B) Main event (short action)
4. (A) Background (in progress)
5. (A) Background (in progress)

4. Find and fix the mistake

1. I was going to school when I saw a car accident.
2. When she called, I was cooking dinner.
3. We were watching a film when suddenly the lights went out.
4. I knew the answer, but I said nothing.

5. Listening — a short 'first day' story

1. She was walking to her first lecture, on a rainy Monday morning.
2. She got lost in the building and arrived 20 minutes late.
3. She sat next to a stranger who is now her best friend, 12 years later.

7. Reflection

1. Model: because it was unplanned and there were no screens, everyone was fully present. The father shared new stories, and the family really talked. Birthdays are usually similar every year.
2. Model: once we spent a whole camping weekend with no signal at all. We played cards until 2 in the morning and laughed until it hurt — I still remember every joke.

Ask the teacher — notes to bring to class