Find the Mistake - Present Simple or Present Continuous

Each sentence or group of sentences contains one mistake. Find the mistake and correct it. You'll find the answers further down the page with each correction explained.

Example:

Sentence: I am thinking he's an interesting man.
Correction: I think he's an interesting man.

Explanation: When using 'think' to express an opinion, do not use the continuous form of the verb.

1. Tom works at the moment. Can I take a message?
2. I am often playing tennis on Saturdays.
3. We're working on the Smith account this week. We usually take three weeks to complete a project.
4. We rarely go out for dinner, but this week we go out on Saturday.
5. He is believing every word she says.
6. Peter is asking a lot of questions every day.
7. Jason doesn't know the answer to this question. He is knowing the other answers.
8. We attend a meeting in Chicago this weekend.
9. She is wanting to purchase a new computer.
10. I'm hoping that this quiz is easy.
11. Janet has breakfast at the moment.
12. My friends works in a factory twenty miles from their apartment.
13. She are always complaining about how much she hates her job.
14. The children is being dressed at the moment by the nanny.

Answers

- Tom is working at the moment. Can I take a message?

Use the present continuous with action verbs such as 'work' with the time expression 'at the moment'.

- I often play tennis on Saturdays.

Use the present simple with adverbs of frequency such as 'usually', 'often', 'sometimes', etc.

- We're working on the Smith account this week. We usually take three weeks to complete a project.

The first sentence is correct as the present continuous can be used to discuss something happening around the moment of speaking.

Use the present simple with adverbs of frequency.

- We rarely go out for dinner, but this week we are going out on Saturday.

Use the present continuous to discuss future plans.

- He believes every word she says.
Never use the continuous form with a stative verb (a verb that expresses a state, feeling, opinion, etc.).

- Angela gets up at 7 o'clock and has breakfast every day.

Use the present simple to express something that happens every day.

- Peter asks a lot of questions every day.

Use the present simple to speak about typical behavior.

- Jason doesn't know the answer to this question. He knows the other answers.

Don't use the continuous form with stative verbs.

- We are attending a meeting in Chicago this weekend.

Use the present continuous to speak about scheduled events, especially when using business English.

- She wants to purchase a new computer.

A desire is not an action and takes a stative verb.

- I hope that this quiz is easy.

'Hope' is a stative verb not used with the continuous form.

- Janet has breakfast at the moment.

'Have' is not used with continuous when it shows possession. In this case, 'have breakfast' is an action and can be used with the present continuous.

- My friends work in a factory twenty miles from their apartment.

The plural subject 'friends' takes the plural form of 'work' in the present simple.

- She is always complaining about how much she hates her job.

It's possible to use the continuous with 'always' or 'continually' to express an annoying habitual action. In this case, the helping verb 'are' should be 'is'.

- The children are being dressed at the moment by the nanny.

This is the passive form of the continuous, but the plural 'are' is required.

Tips

- Always look at the context of a sentence when deciding which tense to use. What are the time words and expression used? Is the sentence a continuation of a story in the past, then use the past. It's important to first notice the situation and then make a decision as to which tense to use.

- Be careful with stative and active verbs. Remember that some stative verbs such as 'smell', 'taste', and 'have' can be used in both forms depending on the meaning.

- Learn more about the present perfect and the past simple using these links.