

## While Versus When

It can be confusing to know in which situations one should use the subordinating conjunction “while” and in which situations one should use the subordinating conjunction “when.” Both these words are used when two things are happening at the same time.

### **While**                    **Two continuous and simultaneous actions**

We usually use **while** when we have two *continuous* actions taking place at the same time. The key is the word “continuous.” The following are examples of using while for continuous actions: One example is taking place now, and the other example took place in the past, but both are continuous and simultaneous actions.

Ex. 1:                    I *am preparing* this document now in my office, **while** my cat *is licking* her paws beside me.

In this example, two actions are taking place at the same time, and they are ongoing (they do not stop).

Ex. 2:                    Yesterday for hours, my friend *was packing* boxes, **while** I *was taping* and *labeling* them.

In this example, two actions took place at the same time and were ongoing (they did not stop).

### **When**                            **Two single and simultaneous or close together actions**

We usually use **when** for single actions that happen almost simultaneously or very close together (one after the other).

Ex. 1.                    Little Miss Muffet *screamed* **when** the spider “*sat down* beside her.”

In this example, first the spider sat down next to Miss Muffet, and then, she immediately screamed. These were single actions that happened close together, **not** continuous actions.

Ex. 2                    In the warm weather, **when** I *get home* from work, I *drink* a cold glass of white wine.

In this example, we have two single actions that happen almost at the same time or close together. I get home and I have a glass of wine.

So, both while and when are used when two things happen at the same time, but we tend to use **while** with two continuous actions and **when** with two single actions.



In the first example, the single action is “called” and in the second example, the single action is “got into.” Because the subordinating conjunction comes before the single action “called,” and the single action “got into,” we must use **when**, not while.

Adapted from: <https://www.espressoenglish.net/difference-between-while-and-when/>

