

# Present Simple vs. Present Continuous — When to Switch

## The One-Line Rule

- **Present Simple** → the action repeats or is permanent: *habits, routines, facts, time tables*
- **Present Continuous** → the action is happening *right now* or is *temporary*

## Quick Decision Test (teach her this question!)

Ask yourself: "Is it happening NOW?"

- **YES** → Present Continuous: "*Shh! The baby is sleeping.*"
- **NO — it's a habit/routine/fact** → Present Simple: "*The baby sleeps a lot.*"

That's the whole decision. One question, two outcomes.

## Side-by-Side Comparison

| Situation                           | Present Simple                     | Present Continuous                                |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| A routine — happens again and again | I <b>feed</b> the baby at 7 AM.    | —                                                 |
| Happening at this moment            | —                                  | I <b>am feeding</b> the baby right now.           |
| A fact that stays true              | She <b>has</b> blue eyes.          | —                                                 |
| Temporary, only this week           | —                                  | My husband <b>is working</b> from home this week. |
| Every day / always / never          | She <b>always wakes up</b> at six. | —                                                 |
| Look! Listen! Right now!            | —                                  | Look! She <b>is smiling</b> !                     |

## Signal Words — Your Clues

- **Present Simple:** every day · always · usually · often · sometimes · never · on Mondays · twice a week
- **Present Continuous:** now · right now · at the moment · today · this week · Look! · Listen! · Be quiet!

 **The trick when speaking:** you don't need to remember the rule — you need to hear the *signal word* and react: "every day" → say it simple. "Look!" or "now" → add **-ing**. That's it.

## The Two Most Common Mistakes (and the fix)

1. I am working every day. → **I work** there every day. ("Every day" = routine, not now)
  2. She works right now — quiet! → She **is working** right now. ("Quiet!" means it's happening at this moment)
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## Now — the real problem: speaking under pressure

Learners often describe *the* classic gap: **declarative knowledge vs. automatized knowledge**. Rules you understand live in your "thinking" brain; speech runs on "autopilot" — and automation only comes from *fast, repeated choosing*, not from more reading. Here's a practice progression that builds exactly that bridge:

**Step 1 — Signal-word reflex drills (orally, 5 min/day)** Your teacher or learning partner says a phrase; you react instantly with the correct tense, out loud:

- "every morning..." → you complete: "*I **feed** my daughter at 7.*"
- "Look! The baby..." → "*The baby **is crying**!*"
- "right now" · "usually" · "this week" · "on Sundays" — mix them, rapid-fire, like a game. Speed is the point: decisions in under 3 seconds slowly become automatic.

**Drill 2 — The interruption game** One past-tense "anchor" sentence, then a "right now" sentence — alternating. This forcing-switch drills the *choice* itself:

- "*I cook dinner every evening, but right now I am making soup.*"
- "*She usually naps at one, but today she is napping at three.*"

Create five of these paired sentences about your real life with the baby, at school, at the office — your material, your retention.

**Drill 3 — Correct the mistakes out loud (orally, not written — this is the crucial difference!)**

- "I am testing samples every day." → "*I **test** samples every day.*"
- "She works right now, quiet!" → "*She **is working** right now.*"

Written correction uses your reading brain; spoken correction trains the speaking reflex. Same sentences, different channel.

**Drill 4 — The "photo description" game:** show any photo (or a picture on your phone — a park, a kitchen) and ask: "*What do these people usually do here? What are they doing today?*" One picture, both tenses, spoken. This simulates exactly the moment of speaking where you "forget."

**Drill 5 — Live narration:** encourage a tiny daily habit — narrating one action aloud as you do it ("I am making coffee now... I always drink coffee at ten"). Two minutes, attached to a **real** routine.

One encouraging truth from me to you: forgetting is *normal and temporary*. The choice feels slow and effortful right now — but with a few weeks of daily 5-minute reflex practice, the signal-word reaction becomes as automatic as buckling a seatbelt. Understanding first, speaking second — Thus, you will be exactly on schedule.

If you scroll a little more, you'll find a brief exercise for you. Be sure and practice it both ways!

### Signal Word Exercise: Present Simple vs. Present Continuous

**Instructions:** Read the signal word carefully, then complete each sentence with the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Every morning, she \_\_\_\_\_ (drink) coffee on the balcony. (signal: every morning)
2. Listen! The neighbors \_\_\_\_\_ (argue) again. (signal: Listen!)
3. Water \_\_\_\_\_ (boil) at 100 degrees Celsius. (signal: general fact)
4. Shh! The baby \_\_\_\_\_ (sleep) — don't wake her. (signal: Shh!)
5. Twice a week, he \_\_\_\_\_ (play) tennis after work. (signal: twice a week)
6. This month, I \_\_\_\_\_ (learn) to drive — it's harder than I expected. (signal: this month)
7. Look! It \_\_\_\_\_ (snow) — in April! (signal: Look!)
8. My father never \_\_\_\_\_ (eat) dessert. (signal: never)
9. At the moment, they \_\_\_\_\_ (paint) the kitchen. (signal: at the moment)
10. The train to Manchester \_\_\_\_\_ (leave) at 8:15 every day. (signal: every day / timetable)

