

Present time

Adapted from “First Certificate Language Practice” by Michael Vince

Explanations

Recent events

Present perfect simple

The present perfect simple is used to describe recent events.

I've left my shopping bag behind.

The event happened in the past, but there is a result in the present.

I've broken my arm, as you can see.

No definite time is given for the event, but to emphasise the idea of recentness we can use *just*.

I've just broken my watch.

We can also describe events that have not happened.

I haven't found her phone number yet.

Indefinite events

- **Present perfect simple**

No definite time is given for the events. They are a series of actions in our life up to now.

I've been to France three times.

After *It's / This is the first/second time* we use the present perfect.

It also refers to our life up to now.

This is the first time I have eaten Japanese food.

- **Compared with past simple**

Events described using the past simple have definite times.

I went to France last year.

I ate at a Japanese restaurant on Saturday.

If we think of a definite place for an event, this may suggest a definite time.

I left my shopping bag on the train.

Extended or repeated events present.

- **Present perfect simple**

The present perfect simple describes a state which lasts up to the

I've lived in this house for five years.

The present perfect simple can describe a habitual action in a period of time up to the present.

I've never worn a tie to work, and I refuse to start now!

- **Present perfect continuous**

The present perfect continuous can also describe a state which lasts up to the present moment.

I've been living in this house for five years.

There is little difference in meaning between simple and continuous in this case, or with *How long* questions.

*How long have you **lived/been living** in this house?*

The verbs *wait, sit, lie, stay* prefer the present perfect continuous.

I've been waiting for ages.

For, since, ago

See Lesson 14 for contrast between these time expressions.

Present perfect simple or continuous?

- **Completed action**

The present perfect simple can show that an action is complete.

I've finished my homework!

If we say *how many* or *how much* we use the simple form.

A certain amount has been completed.

I've written ten pages of my homework!

- **Not completed**

The present perfect continuous can show that an action is not completed, or that it has finished recently.

We've been walking for hours! Let's have a rest.

I've been digging the garden. That's why I'm so dirty!

- Present result or action in progress

We use the present perfect simple if our attention is on the present result.

I've written my homework. Now I can watch the television.

We use the present perfect continuous if our attention is on the action in progress.

I've been writing my homework all evening! I didn't know it would take so long.

Key points

- 1 The present perfect simple describes events without a definite time. events take place in a period of time leading up to the present moment, result of the event is still evident.

The choice between the present perfect simple and the past simple on how the speaker thinks. Compare:

A: *What's the matter?*

A: *What's the matter?*

B: *I've had an accident.*

B: *I had an accident.*

In the second example, the speaker thinks of the event as finished still connected with the present.

- 2 Events described with the present perfect simple may be recent, or
- 3 The present perfect continuous is used for an action in progress. It the action is unfinished, or recently finished. Compare:

I've read this book.

(completion of the action is

I've been reading this book. (the action itself is emphasised - it may not be complete)

The present perfect continuous can also emphasise the length of time of the action.

- 4 *For* refers to a finished or unfinished period of time.

I waited for three hours.

He's been sitting there for ages.

Since refers to the point at which an unfinished period of time began.

He's been sitting there since two o'clock.

Ago refers to the time of a finished event.

Jill arrived a week ago.

For, since, ago

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