

# The present perfect simple

## Introduction



I've bought some new shoes. Do you want to see them?

## Definition

The present perfect simple is a tense that we use to talk about events which occurred in a current, unfinished time frame.

It is used to talk about actions in the past but, unlike the past simple, there is no reference to a specific time. We use it when it is not important when something happened.

## Construction

**affirmative:** subject + 'have' + past participle  
I've read the report.

**negative:** subject + 'have' + 'not' + past participle  
I haven't read the report.

**interrogative:** 'have' + subject + past participle  
Have you read the report?

## Uses

This tense is particularly useful in the following situations:

| Situation | Examples |
|-----------|----------|
|-----------|----------|

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>To ask about and share life experiences - a good way to begin a conversation in English. It does not matter when the experience happened. There may be a link to a current topic of conversation.</p> | <p>"<b>Have</b> you <b>been</b> to Japan?"<br/>         "No I <b>haven't</b> but I've <b>met</b> a lot of Japanese people in my job."</p>  |
| <p>To talk about recent actions.</p>   | <p>I've <b>drunk</b> a lot of coffee today.<br/>         I've <b>had</b> four meetings with him recently.<br/>         I've just <b>spoken</b> to her.</p>   |
| <p>To talk about actions in an unfinished period, including someone's life. There is a suggestion that, because the time frame is unfinished, the situation could change in the future.</p>              | <p>I <b>haven't seen</b> him much in the last few years.<br/>         The U.K. <b>has had</b> three Prime Ministers this century.<br/>         He's <b>written</b> four books.</p>   |
| <p>To explain something in the present. It often answers the question, 'why?'</p> <p>The action itself is finished, but there is an effect in the present.</p>   | <p>I can't read this because I've <b>lost</b> my glasses.<br/>         "Why are you so hot?"<br/>         "I've <b>run</b> all the way here."</p> <p>Oh, no. I've <b>spilt</b> milk all over the floor. I'd better clear it up before the guests arrive.</p> |
| <p>To announce new information.</p> <p>This is often heard on news programmes.</p>   | <p>I've <b>found</b> my glasses.</p> <p>The Prime Minister <b>has returned</b> from his visit to France.</p>   |
| <p>To report on progress - talking about what has and has not been done.</p> <p>The project or activity is still 'alive' - it is an example of a current time frame.</p>                                 | <p>There's a meeting tomorrow - I've <b>booked</b> a room and <b>sent</b> an email to everyone with the details but I <b>haven't written</b> the agenda or <b>ordered</b> the lunch yet.</p>   |

When something started in the past and continues until now, we use the **present perfect continuous** but the present perfect simple can also be used with certain verbs, including 'to live', 'to work', 'to teach' and 'to manage'.

There is a suggestion of permanence similar to the difference between the **present simple** and **present continuous**.

I've **lived** in this house since 2006.

I've always **worked** for a big company.

She's **taught** English for many years now.

He's **managed** the sales department since Thierry retired.

With **stative verbs** when something started in the past and continues until now.

I've **known** him for a long time.

I've **had** this car since Christmas.

## Words and expressions commonly used with the present perfect simple

### 1. Yet

We use 'yet' to add an extra meaning to negative sentences and questions. Maybe something has not been done but there is an understanding that it will be at some point.

Contrast these two sentences:

**Have** you **seen** the new James Bond film? [The speaker has no idea if the other person has seen it or is likely to.]

**Have** you **seen** the new James Bond film **yet**? [The speaker knows that if the other person has not, he is likely to later.]

Examples:

The deadline for this report is tomorrow and I **haven't started** it yet! [but I will.]

**Have** you **met** the new manager yet? [If you haven't, I know you will later.]

I've **been** to Rome but I **haven't been** to Venice **yet**. [but I intend to.]

These can be contrasted with the following examples which do not need 'yet'.

I **haven't been** to China. [and maybe I never will.]

**Have** you **seen** the new James Bond film? [Maybe you will and maybe you won't.]

'Yet' can also be used in informal English in this kind of affirmative sentence where there is some doubt: I'd like to see your report tomorrow. That is, if you've finished

it yet.

## 2. Already

We use 'already' in affirmative sentences and questions. It usually suggests that something has been done sooner than expected.

A. It's 12.30. Shall we go to lunch now?

B. Sorry - I've already had mine!"

Have you already finished it? I'm surprised; I thought it would take longer.

Less formally, we might change the word order and stress 'already':

Have you eaten the whole cake already?!

## 3. Just

We use 'just' in affirmative sentences and questions to suggest a very recent action:

I've been working on this report all day and I've just finished it - time to go home now!

You look very tanned; have you just been on holiday?

## 4. Ever/never

In questions, it is very common to add the word 'ever'. This emphasises that we are referring to any time at all in the past and so it is not used for more recent events. The link with the present is the fact that these events and life experiences have an effect on the person you are now.

Have you ever met a famous person?

Have you ever ridden a horse?

If you get a positive answer to this kind of question, you can continue in the past simple:

A. Have you ever been to Paris?

B. Yes, I have.

A. When did you go? Did you enjoy it?

B. Two years ago. I went with some friends - we had a great time.

Similarly, the word 'never' emphasises 'at no time in the past' and gives an alternative negative form.

I've never been to Paris but I'd love to.

## 5. How long..? For/since

When something started in the past and continues until now, we can ask questions using 'How long..?'

How long have they been married?

How long **have** you **lived** in London?

We can specify duration with either 'for' or 'since'. We use 'for' with a period of time and 'since' with a specific point in the past.

They've **been** married for two years.

I've **lived** in London since 2008.

Some more examples:

| For          | Since                    |
|--------------|--------------------------|
| five minutes | yesterday                |
| two hours    | last week                |
| days         | October                  |
| three weeks  | 1974                     |
| a long time  | I was a child            |
|              | she started working here |

**Note that** in negative sentences with 'for' or 'since', there are different possible meanings between the present perfect simple and the **present perfect continuous**. The **present perfect continuous** is less likely to be heard. For example:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>I <b>haven't been</b> to the theatre for ages - so I'm really excited about seeing <i>Phantom of the Opera</i> with Susan tonight.<br/>[It is a long time between my last visit to the theatre and the present one.]</p> | <p>"Don't you go to the theatre on Wednesdays?"<br/>"No, I haven't been going to the theatre for ages."<br/>[I used to go to the theatre regularly but now I don't.]</p>   |
| <p>I <b>haven't spoken</b> to Patty since Monday.<br/>[We have had no contact between Monday and today.]</p>  | <p>I haven't been speaking to Patty since Monday. [When we 'are not speaking to someone', it means we are deliberately not communicating because of an argument. So this means that between Monday and today, we have chosen not to have any contact.]</p> |

**Note that** these words and expressions can also be used with some other tenses.

The past participle of this verb is 'gone' but we can also use 'been'.

'Been' is used when someone went somewhere, maybe more than once, and has now returned.

'Gone' is used when someone went somewhere and hasn't returned.

He's **been** to Italy. [He isn't there now.]

He's **gone** to Italy. [He's in Italy now.]

A. Where's Jack?

- B. He's **gone** to lunch.  
A. And Robert?  
B. I think he's **been** to lunch and is back in his office now.

**Note** that the present perfect is less common in American English where the past simple is preferred in some of the above situations

I just had dinner.  
I already finished it.  
Did you send that email yet?  
Look! There was an accident.  
Sorry, I forgot your name.

## Simple or continuous

Use the present perfect simple for actions and experiences at finished but unspecified times in the past and the present perfect continuous for recent or ongoing activities.

Compare:

1. She's **studied** maths and physics but works as a yoga teacher now.  
She's been studying Japanese because she's going to a conference in Tokyo next month.
2. He's **learned** to drive at last - he passed his test last week.  
He's been learning to drive but it's not going well.

We also use the present perfect simple for actions that involve something we can count or measure. Compare:

1. I've **drunk** three glasses of wine this evening.  
I've been drinking wine all evening.
2. He's **run** 5km this morning.  
He's been running this morning.

## Present perfect simple or past simple?

If we mention or know when something happened, use the **past simple**. If we don't know, or it isn't important, use the present perfect simple.

"I read that book when I was a child. **Have** you **read** it?"

"Yes, I **have**."

"I saw Penny yesterday and I asked her to call me today but she **hasn't** yet."

If something happened in a finished time frame, use the **past simple**. In a current, unfinished time frame, use the present perfect simple.

Charles Dickens wrote more than 30 books.

Dan Brown **has written** 5 books.

## Examples



**Have** you **had** a blood test before, Mr Brown? Yes, lots of times.



I've **handed** in my notice - I just couldn't go on working here anymore.

**Have** you **told** your husband yet?

No, I'm going to tell him tonight.



Hello, George. Where **have** you **been**? I **haven't seen** you around lately.

I've **been** away a lot - visiting clients in the UK.



**Have** you **had** a break today? You look really tired.

No, I **haven't had** a break since I got here.



Where **have** you **put** my keys? I can't find them anywhere.

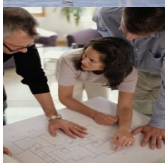


We've **had** three holidays already this year and we've just **booked** another one!

We've always **wanted** to go to China.



The government **has announced** that the increase of the retirement age to 67 will now take place between 2026 and 2028.



Look, we've **made** a mistake here.



We're going to Paris for the weekend next month. I've booked the hotel and bought a good guide book but I haven't decided whether to fly or go by Eurostar yet.



Hello Bill, this is Helen.  
Yes, I know; we've already met. How have you been?



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