



Present perfect

The present perfect tense connects the past with the present. It is formed with **have** or **has** + the past participle of the main verb, such as *I have finished* or *She has arrived*. We use it for experiences and repeated events before now, recent past actions with a present result, actions in unfinished time periods, and states that began in the past and continue now.

How to form the present perfect

Form the present perfect with the present tense of the auxiliary verb **have** followed by the past participle of the main verb. Use **has** with *he, she, it* and singular noun subjects; use **have** with *I, you, we, they* and plural noun subjects.

The table below shows how to form the present perfect in affirmative, negative, question, and short answer sentences:

Form	Structure	Example
Affirmative	subject + have/has + past participle	<i>She has finished the report.</i>
Negative	subject + have/has + not + past participle	<i>She hasn't finished the report.</i>
Question	have/has + subject + past participle?	<i>Has she finished the report?</i>
Short answer	Yes, subject + have/has. / No, subject + haven't/hasn't.	<i>Yes, she has. / No, she hasn't.</i>

Regular past participles normally end in -ed, while irregular verbs have forms such as been, gone, seen, done and eaten.

When do we use the present perfect?

We use the present perfect when a past action or state is viewed in relation to the present rather than simply as a finished event at a finished time in the past. The main uses are summarised below:

Use	Examples
Life experiences	<i>I've seen the Mona Lisa.</i> <i>She has been to France.</i> <i>Gillian has eaten octopus.</i>
Repeated actions up to the present	<i>I've seen Star Wars more than fifty times.</i> <i>My brother has visited Spain twice.</i> <i>We have sent 20 emails today.</i>
Recent actions	<i>He's just left.</i> <i>We have just eaten.</i> <i>They have just arrived.</i>
Past actions with a present result	<i>I've lost my wallet.</i> <i>He has forgotten his key,</i> <i>They have missed the bus.</i>
Changes over time	<i>My city has changed a lot.</i> <i>You've grown since I last saw you.</i> <i>Crime has got worse in this city.</i>
Actions in unfinished time periods	<i>We've sold seven cars this month.</i> <i>I've not eaten today.</i> <i>He hasn't called in the last week.</i>
States that continue to the present	<i>I've known him for two years.</i> <i>They have lived here since 2011.</i> <i>She has liked Oasis since she was little.</i>

1. Life experiences

The present perfect is commonly used to talk about life experiences. These are events or actions that happened at some point in a person's life, but when they happened is not relevant. When we talk about our experiences, we don't mention the time (if you do mention the time the action or event happened, you must use the past simple):

- *I **have seen** the Mona Lisa.*
- *She's **learned** to speak Mandarin.*
- *They **have moved** to London.*

Been vs gone

We usually use the verb *go* to talk about visiting places, but while the past participle of *go* is *gone*, when talking about travel experiences, we use *been* to represent the experience. *Gone* means that a person has left their location and not returned; *been* means that the person has visited a place and returned (and this trip has therefore become an experience):

- *Can I speak to James please? I'm sorry, James is not in the office today; he's **gone** to Preston for a business meeting. (James has not returned from Preston)*
- *Where's David? He's **gone** to the shops to buy some milk. (David has not returned from the shops)*
- *I've **been** to Paris five times. (this person has visited Paris five times and has returned, so this trip is now an experience)*
- *They are really adventurous; they have even **been** to Mongolia on the Trans-Siberian Railway. (this trip is one of their experiences)*

2. Repeated actions up to the present

We can also use the present perfect to say that multiple actions or events have happened some time before the present:

- *I have seen Star Wars **more than fifty times**.*
- *She has won **five Olympic gold medals**.*
- *My parents have eaten in this restaurant **many times**.*

3. Recent actions

We can use the present perfect with the adverb just to show that an action finished very recently:

- *I've **just** eaten.*
- *He's **just** left.*
- *They have **just** landed.*

In **British English**, the present perfect is particularly common with just, already and yet when a recent action is connected to the present. In **American English**, the past simple is also commonly used in these situations.

- *I just **ate**.*
- *He just **left**.*
- *They just **landed**.*

4. Past actions with a result in the present

If an action or event that happened in the past has a consequence for the present (e.g., it prevents or restricts a present action), we use the present perfect to explain this connection:

- *I've **lost** my wallet (so I can't pay for the taxi).*
- *Colin **has broken** his ankle (so he can't play in the final).*
- *They've **missed** the plane (so they won't be arriving on time).*

Note: We don't use the present perfect if the past action has no connection to the present. In that case, we just use the simple past:

- *I **lost** my wallet, but I found it in the kitchen.*
- *Colin **broke** his leg, and it took three months to heal.*
- *They **missed** the plane, so they arrived late.*

5. Changes over time

If you want to describe changes between the past and the present, you can use the present perfect (notice how it's common to use *since* as a preposition or subordinating conjunction to say when the change began):

- *You've grown a lot **since** the last time I saw you.*
- *My city has changed a lot **since** I was a child.*
- *This government has become more authoritarian **since** last year.*

6. Actions in unfinished time periods

An incomplete time is one that connects to the present, i.e., the time is still in progress.

Incomplete times include *today, this morning, this afternoon, this week, this month, this year, in the last week, in the last month, in the last year*. We use the present perfect with these times:

- *I have answered five calls **today**.*
- *We've sold seven cars **this month**.*
- *She's been to Spain three times **in the last year**.*

With expressions such as *today, this morning* and *this afternoon*, the past simple is also possible when the speaker treats the relevant period or event as finished.

7. States that continue to the present

A state is a situation or condition that exists at a particular point in time. Common state or stative verbs include *be, have* (for possession), *want, like, love, prefer, know* and *believe*. These are not actions. We use the present perfect to show that a state began in the past and continues to the present. If we are using the present perfect, we usually say for how long the state has existed using the prepositions *for* or *since*.

For vs since

Use *for* with periods of time (e.g., for two hours, for several weeks, for seven years):

- *I've known him **for** two years.*
- *We have had this car **for** six weeks.*
- *I've been into techno **for** ages.*

Use *since* with specified times in the past (e.g., since last week, since 1999, since we last met):

- *I haven't had this much fun **since** the summer of '69.*
- *She hasn't lived here **since** March last year.*
- *The kids have not believed in the tooth fairy **since** they caught their dad putting money under their pillows. (here, since is used as a subordinating conjunction to create a time clause)*

If you simply want to describe the current state and the starting point or duration is not relevant, use the present simple instead:

- *I **know** John.*
- *We **like** the new TV series.*

Use the present perfect when you want to connect that state to a period beginning in the past:

- *I've **known** John **for ten years**.*
- *We've **liked** the series **since the first episode**.*

Common time expressions with the present perfect

The table below shows some common time expressions used with the present perfect:

Expression	Typical use	Example
ever / never	life experience	<i>Have you ever been to Japan?</i> <i>I've never been.</i>
just / recently	recent actions	<i>She has just left.</i> <i>They have recently moved in.</i>
already	something happened before now or earlier than expected	<i>I've already finished.</i> <i>We have already eaten.</i>
yet	questions and negatives meaning "up to now"	<i>Have you finished yet?</i> <i>I haven't finished yet.</i>
so far / up to now	an unfinished period	<i>We've sold 20 tickets so far.</i> <i>I've sent 23 emails up to now.</i>
for	length of time	<i>I've known her for ten years.</i> <i>She's lived here for six months.</i>
since	starting point	<i>I've known her since last year.</i> <i>We've owned this since 2016</i>

Present perfect vs past simple

The table below summarises the situations when we use the present perfect or the past simple:

Present perfect	Past simple
Unspecified time before now: <i>I have seen that film.</i>	Specific finished past time: <i>I saw that film last night.</i>
Present result: <i>I've lost my keys.</i>	Finished past event: <i>I lost my keys yesterday, but I found them.</i>
Unfinished period: <i>I've seen her twice this week.</i>	Finished period: <i>I saw her twice last week.</i>
State continuing now: <i>I've lived here for five years.</i>	Finished past state: <i>I lived there for five years.</i>

Use the past simple with finished time expressions

We do not normally use the present perfect with finished past-time expressions such as yesterday, last week, in 2022 or two hours ago:

- I **have answered** five calls **yesterday**. → I **answered** five calls **yesterday**.
- We **'ve sold** seven cars **last month**. → We **sold** seven cars **last month**.
- She **'s been** to Spain three times **last year**. → She **went** to Spain three times **last year**.

Use the present perfect tense with *in the last* time expressions

Don't confuse last (e.g., *last week, last month, last year*, etc) with in the last (e.g., *in the last week, in the last month, in the last year*, etc). *Last* + time refers to finished times in the **past** and is therefore used with the simple past. *In the last* + time, on the other hand, means from the **present minus the time** (for example, today minus seven days for *in the last week*) and therefore connects to the present, which means we use it with the present perfect:

- We **sold** seven cars **in the last month**. → We **have sold** seven cars **in the last month**.
- She **went** to Spain three times **in the last year**. → She **has been** to Spain three times **in the last year**.
- I **sent** over 50 emails **in the last hour**. → I **have sent** over 50 emails **in the last hour**.

Can you use when with the present perfect?

When usually asks about a particular time in the past, so it is normally used with the past simple:

- When **did** they arrive?
- When **did** you send the report?

However, the present perfect can be used when *when* asks about one of several possible occasions up to now, or when the speaker questions whether something has ever happened: This is very common in job interviews:

- When **have** you **had** to meet a deadline?
- When **have** you **solved** a problem?

We can also use the present perfect in when questions to be dismissive of, or cast doubt on, another person's claims, often using the adverb *ever*:

- Helen said she spoke to the Queen. – What?! When **has** Helen ever **met** the Queen? (It is doubtful that Helen has met the Queen)
- I'll ask John to help us. – When **has** John ever **agreed** to help us? (John is not known to help us)

Common mistakes with the present perfect

The table below highlights some common mistakes that people make when using the present perfect tense in English:

Incorrect	Correct	Why
<i>I have seen him yesterday.</i>	<i>I saw him yesterday.</i>	<i>Yesterday</i> is a finished past time.
<i>She have finished.</i>	<i>She has finished.</i>	Use <i>has</i> with third-person singular subjects.
<i>He has went home.</i>	<i>He has gone home.</i>	Use the past participle after <i>have/has</i> .
<i>I've lived here since five years.</i>	<i>I've lived here for five years.</i>	Use <i>for</i> with a duration and <i>since</i> with a starting point.