Perfect tenses are used to show that an action or state happened, or began to happen, before another time. For the present perfect, this means that the past action happened at any point in time before the present (rather than at a specific time in the past as used by the simple past tense). When used with states, the present perfect is used to show the state began in the past and continued for a specified period to the present.

**How to form the present perfect**

### POSITIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>HAVE/HAS</th>
<th>PAST PARTICIPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I / You / We / They</td>
<td>have</td>
<td>played</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He / She / It</td>
<td>has</td>
<td>eaten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Contractions: I’ve / You’ve / He’s / She’s / It’s / We’ve / They’ve*

*Positive examples:*

- I have seen Game of Thrones.
- She has been to Spain.
- They have arrived.

### NEGATIVE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>HAVE/HAS NOT</th>
<th>PAST PARTICIPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I / You / We / They</td>
<td>have not</td>
<td>played</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He / She / It</td>
<td>has not</td>
<td>eaten</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Contractions: I've not / You've not / He's not / She's not / It's not / We've not / They've not
  I haven’t / You haven’t / He hasn’t / She hasn’t / It hasn’t / We haven’t / They haven’t*

*Negative examples:*

- I haven’t finished my homework.
- He hasn’t helped me.
- We’ve not decided.

### QUESTIONS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HAVE/HAS</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
<th>PAST PARTICIPLE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Have</td>
<td>I / you / we / they</td>
<td>played?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has</td>
<td>he / she / it</td>
<td>eaten?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Questions examples:*

- Have you had anything to eat?
- What sports have you played?
- Has it worked?
Finished actions in the past

If an action (or actions) happened in the past, but the time it happened is unknown, unstated or not important, we use the present perfect. We use this to talk about:

1. Life experiences
2. Multiple actions that happened before the present
3. Recently finished actions
4. Past actions that have a present result or consequence
5. Changes over time before the present
6. With incomplete time words

### 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 & 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. Multiple past actions & events

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. Recently finished 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.

Here, there is no real difference between using the present perfect or simple past. Some sources say that the present perfect is preferred in British English, while the simple past is more common in American English, although you will hear people from both countries using both:

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

4. Result or consequence 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 before the present

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. With incomplete time words

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.

*These times can also be used with the simple past.

Note: We cannot use the present perfect with completed time words (such as yesterday, last week, last month, last year, in 1999, etc). You must use the simple past with these words:

- 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.

Note: 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 completed 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.
**When and the present perfect tense**

*When* usually refers to a single event that happened at a specific time in the past, and is therefore usually used with the simple past:

- *When did* they arrive?
- *When did* England win the World Cup?
- *When did* you send the report?

However, we can use the present perfect if it is known, anticipated, or possible that the answer to a *when* question may refer to multiple events in the past. This is very common in job interviews:

- *When has* Brazil won the World Cup?
- *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*:

- *Sheffield Wednesday are a massive club. Eh?! When have* they had an average attendance of over 30,000 fans in the last 20 years? *(This has never happened)*
- *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)*
**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*.

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)

**Note:** While it is possible under certain circumstances, if you don’t mention the duration of the state, and the state still exists in the present, we would usually just use the simple present:

- *They have believed in some crazy things*. They *believe* in some crazy things.
- *I have known John*. *I know* John.
- *We have liked the new TV series*. *We like* the new TV series.