

The present perfect tense

A/ Form : The present perfect tense is formed with **the present tense of have + the past participle:**

I have worked etc.

The past participle in regular verbs has exactly the same form as the simple past, i.e. loved, walked etc.

In irregular verbs, the past participles vary.

The negative is formed by adding not to the auxiliary.

The interrogative is formed by inverting the auxiliary and subject.

Affirmative	Question	Negative
	Yes/ No questions:	
I have worked	Have I worked	I have not worked
He/ she/ it has worked	Has he/she/it worked	He/ she/it has not worked
You/ we/ they have worked	Have you/we/they worked	You/ we/ they have not worked.
	WH questions:	Negative interrogative: has he not worked?
	What have I/you/we/they prepared?	etc.
	What has he/she/it prepared?	
	Where have you been?	
	What has he done?	

Contractions: have/has and have not/has not can be contracted.

I've, you've, he's, she's, it's, you've, we've, they've.

I haven't, he/she/it hasn't, you haven't, we haven't, they haven't.

Alternative negative contractions (chiefly used in perfect tenses)

have not and **has not** contract to **haven't** and **hasn't**, but in perfect tenses **'ve not** and **'s not** are also possible:

We haven't seen him / We've not seen him.

He hasn't /He 's not come yet.

Negative interrogative contractions: have I not/haven't I? have you not/haven't you? has he not/ hasn 't he? etc.

Haven't you worked, hasn't he worked? etc.

The contracted forms are often almost inaudible in colloquial speech.

B/ Use

This tense may be said to be a sort of mixture of present and past. It always implies a strong connection with the present and is chiefly used in conversations, letters, newspapers and television and radio reports.

If we say that something has happened, we are thinking of the past and the present at the same time. We could often change a simple present perfect sentence into a present sentence with a similar meaning.

Examples: I've broken my leg---my leg is broken now. Mary has had a baby---Mary now has a baby.



Utopia has invaded Fantasia---Utopia is at war with Fantasia. Our dog has died---our dog is dead.

We do not use the present perfect if we are not thinking principally about the present.

Compare: We've learnt enough to pass the exam. (the exam is still to come)

We learnt enough to pass the exam. (the exam is over)

Look what John's given me! (focus on the gift)

Who gave you that? (focus on the past action of giving)

1/ We often use the present perfect to talk about finished actions when we are thinking of their present consequences; the results that they have now.

Examples: Somebody has shot the manager. (The manager is dead now)

Where's your key? I don't know. I've lost it. (I haven't got it now)

He told me his name but I've forgotten it. (I can't remember it now)

Is Sally here? No, she's gone out. (She is out now)

2/ We often use the present perfect to give new information or to announce a recent happening.

Examples: The road is closed. There has been an accident.

(from the news) the police have arrested two men in connection with the robbery.

And here are the main points of the news again. The pound has fallen against the dollar. The Prime Minister has said that the government's economic policies are working. The number of unemployed has reached five millions...

The present perfect is not often used to talk about a finished event, if we say when it happened.

Compare: there has been an explosion at Edinburgh castle.

There was an explosion at Edinburgh castle last night. (not: there has been... last night)

Note that after using the present perfect to announce a piece of news, we usually change to simple or progressive tenses to give the details.

Examples: There has been a plane crash near Bristol. Witnesses say that there was an explosion as the aircraft was taking off...

3/ Indefinite events, which happened at an unknown time in the past (indefinite past). No definite time is given. The past is indefinite because the time it happened is not important, or because we do not know when it happened

Example: Jim has had three car accidents. I've been to Paris.

They have met my parents. Elina has arrived.

4/ Finished actions: time up to now (unfinished time period)

We often use the simple present perfect for past events when we are thinking of a period of time continuing up to the present- for example when we use **indefinite time adverbs** that mean "at some/ any time up to now" like: ever, before, never, yet, already.

Examples: Have you ever seen a ghost? You've only ever called me "darling" once.

I'm sure we've met before. She's never apologized for anything in her life.

"Has Ben come yet?" "yes, and he's already started to make trouble."

I haven't seen Peter since Christmas. We haven't had a holiday for ages.

Other examples: with today, this week, this morning, etc.

I've read two books this week. I've seen him twice today.



5/ When we are describing actions, states or situations that have started in the past and still continue.

Examples: I've studied hard for years. (not: I study hard for years)
We've known each other since 1960. (not: We know each other since 1960).
I've never liked you.
How long have you been a doctor? (not: how long are you a doctor?)
We've always lived here.

6/ When we are describing repeated actions that have continued from some time in the past until now.

Examples: We've seen three movies this week.
I've been to every one of their concerts since they started playing together.
I've written six letters since lunchtime.

7/ With state verbs, a state which lasts up to the present. e.g. be, believe, have, know, think, like , etc.

Example: I've disliked bananas since I was a child.
I have known him for a long time.
I have never believed their theories.
I've lived here for the past ten years.

think and wonder :

Examples: I have sometimes thought that I should have emigrated.
I have often wondered why he didn't marry her.

8/ To talk about experience; that is things that have happened at some times in our lives.

Examples: We have been to Athens before. She has met a lot of famous people.
She has read all of Graham Greene's novels. I've heard this music before.

9/ When we talk about our first, second, etc. experience of something.(after the pattern it/ this/ that is/will be the first time...) We can use this construction, without ever. with the first, the second etc. and the only:

Examples: It/This is the first time I have seen a mounted band.
It is only the second time he has been in a canoe.
This is the only book he has written.
It won't be the first time she has voted against the government in her long career.(talking about a future event)

10/ When we use the superlative (describing personal experience with superlatives)

Example: Maria is the most beautiful girl I've ever seen She is the most intelligent person I've met.

11/ The present perfect is often used to stress the idea of completion or achievement.

Examples: At last! I've finished!
Have you done all the housework?

12/ We often use the present perfect with the past participle been. We use "been" like the verb to go and often say been to.

I went to Paris last year. I've been to Paris (not: I've gone to Paris)

Compare these two sentences: Ann is on holiday. She's gone to Canada (= she is there now or in her way there)

Jane is back home now. She's been to Canada (but, she has now come back)

13/ Expressions of finished time: present perfect not used

We do not often use the present perfect with expressions that refer to a completely finished period of time like: yesterday, last week, then, when, three years ago, in 1970. This is because the present perfect focuses on the present, and time expressions like these focus on the past, so they contradict each other.

Examples: I saw Lucy yesterday. (not: I've seen Lucy yesterday)
Tom was ill last week. (not: Tom has been ill last week)

14/ We do not use the present perfect to ask about time.



When did you go there?

NOT When have you been there?

Time Expressions with present perfect

1/ We can use the present perfect with “just, already and yet”

a) The present perfect used with “just” (= a short time ago) for a recently completed action

Examples: He has just gone out = He went out a few minutes ago.

Are you hungry? No, I've just had lunch.

This is a special use of this tense, “just” must be placed between the auxiliary and the main verb. This combination is used chiefly in the affirmative, though the interrogative form is possible:

Example: Has he just gone out?

It is not normally used in the negative.

b) We use “already” to say that something happened sooner than expected.

Examples: Don't forget to post the letter, will you? I've already posted it.

What time is Mark leaving? He's already gone.

c) Yet = “until now” and shows that the speaker is expecting something to happen. Use “yet” only in questions and negative sentences.

Examples: Has it stopped raining yet?

I've written the letter but I haven't posted it yet.

2 / lately, recently used with the present perfect also indicate an incomplete period of time.

In the sentences: Has he been here lately/recently? and He hasn't been here lately/recently, **lately/recently** means 'at any time during the last week/month etc. and in: He has been here recently, **recently** means 'at some undefined time during the last week/month etc.'

lately is less usual with the affirmative, except for actions covering periods of time:

There have been some changes lately/recently.

He's had a lot of bad luck lately/recently.

recently, used with a simple past tense, means 'a short time ago';

He left recently = He left a short time ago.

3/ The present perfect can be used similarly with ever, never, always, occasionally, often, several times etc. and since + a point in time, since + clause, or since:

• ANN: Have you **ever** fallen off a horse?

But if Tom's riding days are over, we would have;

TOM: Yes, I've fallen off quite

ANN: Did you ever fall off a horse? (past tense)

often/occasionally.

TOM: Yes. I did occasionally/frequently.

• I haven't seen him **since** November.

Has he written **since** he left home?

We had a letter last week. We haven't heard **since**.

I've **since** changed my mind = I've changed my mind since then-

The present perfect can be used here for habitual actions:

They've **always** answered my letters.

I've **never** been late for work.

Sometimes these appear to be **continual rather than repeated action:**



Since my accident I have written with my left hand.

I've worn glasses **since** my childhood.

We can then use **for + a period of time** as an alternative to **since + a point in time**:

I've used my left hand **for a month now**.

I've worn glasses **for ten years**.

4/ The present perfect used for actions occurring in an incomplete period indicated by "today or this morning /afternoon/evening/week/month/year/century etc."

Time expressions that refer to the present such as this morning, / week/ month and today can be used with either past simple or present perfect verbs.

- If we think of this morning(etc.) as a past, completed period, then we use the past simple;
- If we think of this morning (etc.) as a time period which includes the present moment , then we use the present perfect.

Compare: I didn't shave this morning. (= this morning is over and I didn't shave) and:

I haven't shaved this morning. (= it is still the morning and I might shave later)

The present perfect used with an incomplete period of time implies that the action happened or didn't happen at some undefined time during this period:

Have you seen him today? (at any time today)

Yes, I have/ Yes, I've seen him today. (at some time during the day)

But if we know that an action usually happens at a certain time or in a certain part of our incomplete period we use the simple past tense.

If my alarm clock normally goes off at six, I might say at breakfast: My alarm clock didn't go off this morning.

Imagine that the postman normally comes between nine and ten. From nine till ten we will say:

Has the postman come yet/this morning?

But after this nine to ten period we will say: Did the postman come this morning?

We use the past tense here because we are thinking about a complete period of time even though we do not mention it.

5/ The present perfect used for an action which lasts throughout an incomplete period

Time expressions include for, since, all day/night/week, all my etc. life, all the time, always, lately, never, recently.

The action usually begins in the past and continues past the time of speaking in the present

Examples:

He has been in the army for two years. (He is still in the army.)

He has always worked for us. (He still works for us)

I have smoked since I left school. (I still smoke.)

We have waited all day. (We are still waiting.)

He has lived here all his life. (He still lives here.)

Compare the above sentences with:

He was in the army for two years. (He is not in the army now.)

I smoked for six months. (and then stopped smoking)

He lived here all his life. (Presumably he is now dead.)

In each of the last three examples we are dealing with a completed period of time, so the simple past tense is used.

Sometimes, however, the action finishes at the time of speaking:



ANN (on meeting someone): I haven't seen you for ages? (but I see you now)

This room hasn't been cleaned for months, (but we are cleaning it now)

It has been very cold lately but it's just beginning to get warmer.

6/ The present perfect used with for and since

A) for is used with a period of time: for six days, for a long time.

- **for** used with the simple past tense denotes a terminated period of time:

We lived there for ten years. (but we don't live there now)

- **for** used with the present perfect denotes a period of time extending into the present:

We have lived in London for ten years. (and still live there)

- **for** can sometimes be omitted, especially after be, live and wait.

We've been here an hour/two days.

- **for** (of time) is not used before expressions beginning with all:

They've worked all night.

B) since is used with a point in time and means 'from that point to the time of speaking'. It is used with a perfect tense. (we do not use since with the past simple)

She has been here since six o'clock. (and is still here)

We've been friends since our schooldays.

- **since + clause** is also possible:

I've worked here since I left school

- **it is + period + since + past or perfect tense**

We can say:

It is three years since I (last) saw Bill or It is three years since I have seen Bill.

I last saw Bill three years ago or I haven't seen Bill for three years.

It is two months since Tom (last) smoked a cigarette or It is two months since Tom has smoked a cigarette.

He last smoked a cigarette two months ago or He hasn't smoked a cigarette for two months.

- We can use the **it is ... since** construction without the adverb **last**:

It is two years since he left the country.

This, however, is replaceable only by:

He left the country two years ago.

We could not use a negative present perfect here as in the sentence about Bill above. He hasn't been (living) in this country/or the last two years is possible but isn't an exact equivalent of He left two years ago.

This construction can be used in the past:

He invited me to go riding with him. But it was two years since I had ridden a horse. (I hadn't ridden a horse for two years previous to the invitation so I wasn't sure that I would enjoy it.)

7/ With time clauses introduced by after, when, until, as soon as, once, by the time and the time expressions the minute/second/ moment the past simple refers to past, completed events and the present perfect refers to future events.

Compare these examples:

After she left hospital (past), she had a long holiday. And



After Dominic has left school (future), he will be spending six months in India.

The minute I got the news about Sue (past), I telephoned my parents. And

I'll contact you the minute I've got my exam results. (future)

