

7. Special Tenses: Present Perfect and Past Perfect

Present Perfect (Past-to-Present)

We have two basic reasons for using the present perfect (past-to-present):

- 1) to show that a situation began in the past and still continues into the present

Carl has lived in Texas *for many years*. (He still lives there.)

Carl and Jim have lived in Texas *since* 1985. (They still live there.)

If we want to show the continuous nature of a situation, we use another form:

Carl has been living in Texas *since* 1985.

Whenever you use *since* to name a specific time in the past (*since* 1985, *since I was a child*, *since yesterday*), you have to use present perfect.

Use the simple past if a situation no longer exists:

Carl lived in Utah before moving to Texas. (He no longer lives in Utah.)

- 2) to show a situation that happened at an unspecified time in the past

She has visited Mexico. (We don't know exactly when.)

I have seen that movie several times. (We don't know exactly when.)

In both sentences, the experience, rather than the specific time or number of events, is emphasized.

Use simple past tense if a specific past point in time is mentioned:

She visited Mexico *last summer*.

I saw that movie again *yesterday*.

We have three forms of the present perfect:

- 1) *has/have* + *-ed* ending (past participle):

My family has lived in San Francisco for many years.

My cousins have lived in San Francisco since 1992.

- 2) *has/have* + *been* + *-ing* word (present participle):

My family has been living in San Francisco for as long as I can remember.

I have been studying Spanish since I was in middle school.

3) *has/have + been + -ed* ending (past participle):

They have been cheated by their landlord many times.

She has been fired twice.

Exercise 1

Examine the sentences presented in the previous section on the two reasons for using the present perfect, and decide, in each sentence below, why the present perfect was used.

Mark 1 if it shows a situation that began in the past and continues into the present:

1 My boss has worked at the Magic Spa for two years.

Mark 2 if it indicates that something happened at an unspecified time in the past:

2 Cheryl has starred in a TV commercial.

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- _____ 1. Frank has made several videos of his family vacations.
- _____ 2. My brothers have liked science-fiction movies since they were children.
- _____ 3. I have already seen that movie.
- _____ 4. Their store has been burglarized many times.
- _____ 5. I have tried to reach you by phone for hours.
- _____ 6. A new vaccine has been developed.
- _____ 7. Professor Carlson has been teaching at this university for two years.
- _____ 8. No one has seen Mark since Tuesday.
- _____ 9. I have been working on my essay for five hours.
- _____ 10. The bay has always been polluted.

Exercise 2

Use either the present perfect or the simple past as needed.

Examples: I (visit) visited my sister *last night*.

I (visit) have visited my sister *many times this week*.

1. I (go) _____ to a movie with Amy last night.
2. I (see) _____ many movies with Amy since we met.
3. Frank (play) _____ baseball since he was a little boy.
4. Bill (be) _____ in Chicago for two weeks.
5. I (read) _____ many books since summer began.
Last week, I (read) _____ three historical novels.
6. For several years, medical researchers around the world (do) _____ a great deal of research on AIDS.
7. Families (change) _____ a great deal in this century.
8. Yesterday in my psychology class, I (learn) _____ why some people are afraid of being in a small crowded space.
9. I (know) _____ Diana for several years, but I just recently (discover) _____ that she has a twin sister.
10. Cindy (borrow) _____ several books last month and still (return, not) _____ them.

Exercise 3

This paragraph discusses the writer's experiences as a language learner. The moment of speaking or writing is now, so some of the verbs are in the present tense. Many of the verbs are in the simple past tense, but some of them should be in the present perfect (past-to-present). Change the verbs that are inappropriate in the simple past tense to present perfect. (Do not change present tense verbs.)

I think that I should speak at least three languages. I can speak English, my native language, and I studied Spanish all my life, so I can speak two languages fluently. For many years, I wanted to learn how to speak Portuguese, and now I finally have the opportunity because I enrolled in a beginning Portuguese class last month. Since then, I went to class regularly and studied the assigned textbook, but my pronunciation is comical, so I work with a tutor every Tuesday. Luckily, my tutor also speaks Spanish and traveled many times in Spain, Portugal, and South America, so he can answer my questions about language and culture. He helped me a great deal, especially with idioms, which take a long time to learn, particularly if you didn't go to the country where the idioms are spoken.

PAST PERFECT (Past-Before-Past)

We use the past perfect to show that something happened in the past before another past action:

By the time you arrived, I had left.
2 1

The thief simply walked in because I had forgotten to lock the door.
2 1

Her eyes were red because she had been crying.
2 1

In the above sentences, the past perfect (1) shows which past action happened first, and simple past tense (2) shows what happened after the first action.

But some sentences can be tricky:

Until yesterday, I had never heard about it.

In this sentence, something is missing, but understood:

3. Joe suddenly (realize)_____ that the teacher (ask) _____ him a question.
4. It (be)_____ midnight when I finally (go)_____ to bed.
5. I (feel)_____ better after I (take)_____ some medicine.
6. When I (go)_____ to see my math teacher about why I (receive) _____ a failing grade on the last test, he (examine)_____ my paper and then (announce)_____ that he (make)_____ a mistake and (change)_____ my grade to an "A."
7. When I (try)_____ to explain to my friend why I (call, not)_____ him in several weeks, he (tell)_____ me not to worry because he (be)_____ out of town for a month.
8. When Sharon and Will (get married)_____ last month, they (knew)_____ each other for only two weeks.
9. I (go)_____ to the movies after I (finish)_____ my homework even though I (see)_____ the movie many times.
10. Jerry (come)_____ to the party, but no one (invite) _____ him.

Exercise 5

Much of the following paragraph is written in the simple past tense. But many of the verbs would be more appropriate in the past perfect. Change the ones that should be changed into past perfect.

All of us can think of annoying or embarrassing experiences we have had. One in particular comes to mind when I am reminiscing about the past. It occurred on the Tuesday before Thanksgiving in 1990; I just finished doing the dishes and was ready to take the garbage out. Wrapping it securely and walking downstairs, I suddenly felt something underfoot and heard a snapping noise. A second later, my feet slipped and I found myself sitting on the stairs. It got dark early, so I couldn't see very well, but I finally spotted what I stepped on: it was a very small, hard pine cone. I was so annoyed that I threw it into the neighbor's yard. Then I picked up the garbage and put it in the trash can, limped upstairs, and examined my foot. It already got red and slightly swollen. When I went to the doctor the next day, he took an X-ray, examined it and

announced that I broke my foot. When I told him what happened, he laughed out loud, then sent me to have a cast put on. I never wore a cast or used crutches in my whole life, but I learned how to get around quite efficiently. Ever since then, I have had a healthy respect for the power of the pine cone.

Exercise 6

In this exercise, you will review the verb tenses you have practiced in this unit. Choose the correct verb tense of the verb in parentheses—either present perfect, simple past, or past perfect.

Example: Last year, Louise (quit) quit her job because she (save) had saved enough money to travel around the world. When I (see) saw her last week, she (tell) told me that she (travel) had traveled to four continents. I'm jealous because I (be) have been to only two!

1. Interest in making English the official language of the United States (increase) _____ lately.
2. When the Surgeon General's report (come) _____ out warning people of the dangers of smoking, millions of Americans (quit) _____ even though they (smoke) _____ regularly.
3. Magazines such as Good *Housekeeping* and Family *Circle* (be) _____ popular from the time they (appear) _____ on the market.
4. By the time I (reach) _____ my thirteenth birthday five years ago, I (spend) _____ thousands of hours watching television.
5. When Frank (look) _____ in the mirror, he (realize) _____ that he (gain) _____ a lot of weight.
6. The widespread use of "crack" cocaine among teenagers (be) _____ a problem the government (solve, not) _____ yet.