**Present Simple and Present Continuous**

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| **Present Simple** | **Present Continuous** |
| Things which are always true:   * Water **boils** at 100 degrees. | Things which are happening at the moment of speaking:   * The water **is boiling** now, so you can put in the pasta. |
| Permanent situations (or nearly permanent; true for a few years at least):   * Julie **lives** in London. | Temporary situations:   * Julie **is living** in Paris for a few months (usually she lives in London).   Situations which are slowly changing:   * I**'m getting** better and better at speaking English. |
| Habits or things we do regularly:   * I **drink** coffee every morning. | Temporary or new habits:   * I**'m drinking** too much coffee these days because I'm so busy at work.   Annoying habits (usually with 'always'):   * My flatmate **is always leaving** the kitchen in a mess! |
| Future events which are part of a timetable:   * My plane **leaves** at eight tonight.   To talk about the future after certain words ('when' 'until' 'after' 'before' 'as soon as'):   * I'll call you **when I get** home. | Definite future plans:   * I**'m meeting** John after class today. |
| To talk about what happens in books, plays and films:   * At the end of the book, the detective **catches** the killer. | To talk about people in pictures and photos:   * In this photo, my mother **is walking** beside a lake. |

**Remember:**

* We use the present simple with **[stative verbs](http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/stative-verbs.html)**. We can't use any continuous tense (including the present continuous tense, of course) with stative verbs.

# When to use Present Simple Tense

**Present Uses**  
1: We use the present simple when something is generally or always true.

* People need food.
* It snows in winter here.
* Two and two make four.

2: Similarly, we need to use this tense for a situation that we think is more or less permanent. (See the present continuous for temporary situations.)

* Where do you live?
* She works in a bank.
* I don't like mushrooms.

3: The next use is for habits or things that we do regularly. We often use adverbs of frequency (such as 'often', 'always' and 'sometimes') in this case, as well as expressions like 'every Sunday' or 'twice a month'. (See the present continuous for new, temporary or annoying habits).

* Do you smoke?
* I play tennis every Tuesday.
* I don't travel very often.

4: We can also use the present simple for short actions that are happening now. The actions are so short that they are finished almost as soon as you've said the sentence. This is often used with sports commentary, or in demonstrations.

* He takes the ball, he runs down the wing, and he scores!
* First I put some butter in the pan and turn on the cooker.

**Future Uses**  
5: We use the present simple to talk about the future when we are discussing a timetable or a fixed plan. Usually, the timetable is fixed by an organisation, not by us.

* School begins at nine tomorrow.
* What time does the film start?
* The plane doesn't arrive at seven. It arrives at seven thirty.

6: We also use the present simple to talk about the future after words like ' 'when', 'until', 'after', 'before' and 'as soon as'. These are sometimes called subordinate clauses of time.

* I will call you when I have time. (Not 'will have'.)
* I won't go out until it stops raining.
* I'm going to make dinner after I watch the news.

**Conditional Uses**  
7: We use the present simple in the first and the zero conditionals. (See the [**conditionals section**](http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/conditionals.html) for more information.)

* If it rains, we won't come.
* If you heat water to 100 degrees, it boils.

# When to use Present Continuous

**Present Uses**  
1: First, we use the present continuous for things that are happening at the moment of speaking. These things usually last for quite a short time and they are not finished when we are talking about them.

* I'm working at the moment.
* Please call back as we are eating dinner now.
* Julie is sleeping.

2: We can also use this tense for other kinds of temporary situations, even if the action isn't happening at this moment.

* John's working in a bar until he finds a job in his field. (He might not be working now.)
* I'm reading a really great book.
* She's staying with her friend for a week.

Compare this with the present simple, which is used for permanent situations that we feel will continue for a long time.

* I work in a school. (I think this is a permanent situation.)
* I'm working in a school. (I think this is a temporary situation.)

3: We can use the present continuous for temporary or new habits (for normal habits that continue for a long time, we use the present simple). We often use this with expressions like 'these days' or 'at the moment'.

* He's eating a lot these days.
* She's swimming every morning (she didn't use to do this).
* You're smoking too much.

4: Another present continuous use is for habits that are not regular, but that happen very often. In this case we usually use an adverb like 'always', 'forever' or 'constantly'. Often, we use the present continuous in this way to talk about an annoying habit.

* You're forever losing your keys!
* She's constantly missing the train.
* Lucy's always smiling!

**Future Uses**  
5: The next use is for definite future arrangements (with a future time word). In this case we have already made a plan and we are pretty sure that the event will happen in the future.

* I'm meeting my father tomorrow.
* We're going to the beach at the weekend.
* I'm leaving at three.

# We can't use this tense (or any other continuous tense) with stative verbs.

**Present Perfect and Past Simple**

# When to use Present Perfect Tense

We use this tense for unfinished and finished actions.  
  
**Unfinished Actions**  
1: We use this tense when we want to talk about unfinished actions or states or habits that started in the past and continue to the present. Usually we use it to say 'how long' and we need 'since' or 'for'. We often use stative verbs.

* I've known Karen since 1994.
* She's lived in London for three years.
* I've worked here for six months.

'Since' and 'For'  
We use 'since' with a fixed time in the past (2004, April 23rd, last year). The fixed time can be another action, which is in the past simple (since I was at school, since I arrived).

* I've known Sam since 1992.
* I've liked chocolate since I was a child.
* She's been here since 2pm.

We use 'for' with a period of time (2 hours, three years, six months).

* I've known Julie for ten years.
* I've been hungry for hours.
* She's had a cold for a week.

**Finished Actions**  
2: Life experience. These are actions or events that happened sometime during a person's life. We don't say when the experience happened, and the person needs to be alive now. We often use the words 'ever' and 'never' here.

* I have been to Tokyo.
* They have visited Paris three times.
* We have never seen that film.

3: With an unfinished time word (this month, this week, today). The period of time is still continuing.

* I haven't seen her this month.
* She's drunk three cups of coffee today.
* I've already moved house twice this year!

We CAN'T use the present perfect with a finished time word.

Incorrect : I have seen him yesterday.

4: A finished action with a result in the present (focus on result). We often use the present perfect to talk about something that happened in the recent past, but that is still true or important now. Sometimes we can use the past simple here, especially in US English.

* I've lost my keys (so I can't get into my house).
* She's hurt her leg (so she can't play tennis today).
* They've missed the bus (so they will be late).

5: We can also use the present perfect to talk about something that happened recently, even if there isn't a clear result in the present. This is common when we want to introduce news and we often use the words 'just / yet / already / recently'. However, the past simple is also correct in these cases, especially in US English.

* The Queen has given a speech.
* I've just seen Lucy.
* The Mayor has announced a new plan for the railways.

**Been and Gone**  
In this tense, we use both 'been' and 'gone' as the past participle of 'go', but in slightly different circumstances. We use 'been' (often when we talk about life experience) to mean that the person we're talking about visited the place and came back.

* I've been to Paris (in my life, but now I'm in London, where I live).
* She has been to school today (but now she's back at home).
* They have never been to California.

We use 'gone' (often when we are talking about an action with a result in the present) to mean that the person went to the place and is at the place now.

* Where's John? He's gone to the shops (he's at the shops now).
* Julie has gone to Mexico (now she's in Mexico).
* They've gone to Japan for three weeks (now they're in Japan).

# When to use Past simple

This is the basic past tense. We use it whenever we want to talk about the past and we don't have any special situation that means we should use the past perfect, present perfect or past continuous.  
  
**Finished actions, states or habits in the past.**  
1: We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past when we have a finished time word (yesterday, last week, at 2 o'clock, in 2003).

* I went to the cinema yesterday.
* We spent a lot of time Japan in 2007.

2: We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past when we know from general knowledge that the time period has finished. This includes when the person we are talking about is dead.

* Leonardo painted the Mona Lisa.
* The Vikings invaded Britain.

3: We use it with finished actions, states or habits in the past that we have introduced with the present perfect or another tense. This is sometimes called 'details of news'.

* I've hurt my leg. I fell off a ladder when I was painting my bedroom.
* I've been on holiday. I went to Spain and Portugal.

4: For stories or lists of events, we often use the past simple for the actions in the story and the past continuous for the background.

* He went to a café. People were chatting and music was playing. He sat down and ordered a coffee.

**Unreal or imaginary things in the present or future.**  
5: We use the past simple to talk about things that are not real in the present or future. So we use it with the second conditional and after words like 'wish'.

* If I won the lottery, I would buy a house.
* I wish I had more time!

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| **Present Perfect Simple** | **Past Simple** |
| Unfinished actions that started in the past and continue to the present:   * I**'ve known** Julie for ten years (and I still know her). | Finished actions:   * I **knew** Julie for ten years (but then she moved away and we lost touch). |
| A finished action in someone's life (when the person is still alive: life experience):   * My brother **has been** to Mexico three times. | A finished action in someone's life (when the person is dead):   * My great-grandmother **went** to Mexico three times. |
| A finished action with a result in the present:   * I**'ve lost** my keys! (The result is that I can't get into my house now). | A finished action with no result in the present:   * I **lost** my keys yesterday. It was terrible! (Now there is no result. I got new keys yesterday). |
| With an unfinished time word (this week, this month, today):   * I**'ve seen** John this week. | With a finished time word (last week, last month, yesterday):   * I **saw** John last week. |

**Remember:**

1. We use the past simple for past events or actions which have no connection to the present.
2. We use the present perfect for actions which started in the past and are still happening now OR for finished actions which have a connection to the present.
3. We CAN'T use the present perfect with a finished time word:
   * NOT: I've been to the museum yesterday.

# Present Perfect and Present Perfect Continuous

We use both of these tenses for finished and unfinished actions.  
  
The present perfect simple can be used (often with 'since' and 'for') to talk about unfinished actions that started in the past and are still true in the present. It's often used with stative verbs:

* I've known John for three years.

The present perfect continuous can also be used (often with 'since' and 'for') to talk about unfinished actions that started in the past and are still true in the present. (Of course, we don't use the present perfect continuous with stative verbs):

* She's been living here for three years.

Sometimes there's really no difference in meaning between the two tenses. This is especially the case with verbs such as 'live', 'work' and 'study':

* They've lived in London since 2004.
* They've been living in London since 2004.
* I've studied French for ten years.
* I've been studying French for ten years.
* He's worked at the company since 2009.
* He's been working at our company since 2009.

Sometimes, there is a difference in meaning:  
  
1: The present perfect continuous can be used to emphasise the length of time that has passed. The present perfect simple is generally neutral:

* They've been waiting for hours! (This emphasises the length of time).
* They've waited for hours. (This doesn't emphasise the length of time).

2: On the other hand, the present perfect simple is often used when we're talking about how much or how many. This isn't possible with the present perfect continuous:

* She's drunk three cups of coffee this morning.
* She's drunk at least a litre of coffee today.
* (Incorrect: She has been drinking three cups of coffee this morning)

3: The present perfect continuous often focuses on the action itself, while the present perfect simple focuses on the fact that the action is completed:

* I've been reading the book you recommended. (I'm enjoying it, but I'm not finished).
* I've read the book you recommended. (I've finished it, so we can talk about it).

We use 'yet' and 'already' with the present perfect simple:

* Have you read the book yet?
* She's finished her work already.

This difference is often used to talk about different kinds of results in the present. The present perfect simple is used when the action is finished, and the result comes from the action being finished:

* I've eaten dinner, so let's go out.
* She's done all her homework, so she can relax this evening.
* I've made a cake. Would you like some?

The present perfect continuous is used when the result comes from the action itself. It doesn't matter if the whole action is finished or not. The result is often something we can see, hear, smell, or feel:

* I've been eating dinner, so there are plates all over the table.
* She's been doing her homework, so she's tired.
* I've been making a cake, that's why the kitchen is such a mess.

4: Finally, the present perfect continuous can be used to emphasise that something is temporary:

* She's been running a lot recently. (She doesn't usually do this).
* Usually I study at home, but I've been studying in the library for the last week.

# When to use present perfect continuous

**Unfinished actions**  
1: To say how long for unfinished actions which started in the past and continue to the present. We often use this with 'for' and 'since' .

I've been living in London for two years.

* She's been working here since 2004.
* We've been waiting for the bus for hours.

This use is very similar to how we use the present perfect simple, and often it's possible to use either tense. Of course, with stative verbs, we can't use the present perfect continuous.

* I've been here for hours.
* Incorrect: I’ve been being here for hours.

2: For temporary habits or situations. The action started in the past and continues to the present in the same way as with use number 1, but we don't answer the questions about 'how long' so clearly. Instead, we use a word like 'recently'.

* I've been going to the gym a lot recently.
* They've been living with his mother while they look for a house.
* I've been reading a lot recently.

This is very similar to the use of the present continuous for temporary habits and often either tense is possible.

**Finished actions**  
3: Actions which have recently stopped (though the whole action can be unfinished) and have a result, which we can often see, hear, or feel, in the present. We don't use a time word here.

* I'm so tired, I've been studying.
* I've been running, so I'm really hot.
* It's been raining so the pavement is wet.

# The present perfect simple has a very similar use, which focuses on the result of the action, whereas the present perfect continuous focuses on the action itself.

**Past Perfect**

**When to use Past Perfect Tense**

1: A finished action before a second point in the past.

* When we arrived, the film had started (= first the film started, then we arrived).

We usually use the past perfect to make it clear which action happened first. Maybe we are already talking about something in the past and we want to mention something else that is further back in time. This is often used to explain or give a reason for something in the past.

* I'd eaten dinner so I wasn't hungry.
* It had snowed in the night, so the bus didn't arrive.

If it's clear which action happened first (if we use the words 'before' or 'after', for example), the past perfect is optional.

* The film started before we arrived / the film had started before we arrived.

2: Something that started in the past and continued up to another action or time in the past. The past perfect tells us 'how long', just like the present perfect, but this time the action continues up to a point in the past rather than the present. Usually we use 'for + time'. We can also use the past perfect continuous here, so we most often use the past perfect simple with **[stative verbs](http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/stative-verbs.html)**.

* When he graduated, he had been in London for six years. (= He arrived in London six years before he graduated and lived there until he graduated, or even longer.)
* On the 20th of July, I'd worked here for three months.

3: To talk about unreal or imaginary things in the past. In the same way that we use the past simple to talk about unreal or imaginary things in the present, we use the past perfect (one step back in time) to talk about unreal things in the past. This is common in the [**third conditional**](http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/third-conditional.html) and after [**'wish'**](http://www.perfect-english-grammar.com/wish.html).

* If I had known you were ill, I would have visited you.
* She would have passed the exam if she had studied harder.
* I wish I hadn't gone to bed so late!