

Present perfect continuous and simple (I have been doing and I have done)

A

Compare these two situations:



There is paint on Kate's clothes. She **has been painting** her bedroom.

has been painting is the *present perfect continuous*.

We are thinking of the activity. It does not matter whether it has been finished or not. In this example, the activity (painting the bedroom) has not been finished.



The bedroom was green. Now it is yellow. She **has painted** her bedroom.

has painted is the *present perfect simple*.

Here, the important thing is that something has been finished. 'She **has painted**' is a completed action. We are thinking about the *result* of the activity (the painted bedroom), not the activity itself.

B

Compare these examples:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> My hands are very dirty. I've been repairing my bike. <input type="checkbox"/> Joe has been eating too much recently. He should eat less. <input type="checkbox"/> It's nice to see you again. What have you been doing since we last met? <input type="checkbox"/> Where have you been? Have you been playing tennis? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> My bike is OK again now. I've repaired it. (= I've finished repairing it) <input type="checkbox"/> Somebody has eaten all the chocolates. The box is empty. <input type="checkbox"/> Where's the book I gave you? What have you done with it? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you ever played tennis? |
|--|---|

C

We use the continuous to say *how long* (for something that is still happening):

- ☐ How long **have** you **been reading** that book?
- ☐ Amy is writing emails. She's **been writing** emails all morning.
- ☐ They've **been playing** tennis since 2 o'clock.
- ☐ I'm learning Arabic, but I **haven't been learning** it very long.

We use the simple to say *how much, how many* or *how many times* (for completed actions):

- ☐ How many pages of that book **have** you **read**?
- ☐ Amy **has sent** lots of emails this morning.
- ☐ They've **played** tennis three times this week.
- ☐ I'm learning Arabic, but I **haven't learnt** very much yet.

D

Some verbs (for example, **know**) are not normally used in continuous forms (**be + -ing**):

- ☐ I've **known** about the problem for a long time. (*not* I've been knowing)
- ☐ How long **have** you **had** that camera? (*not* have you been having)

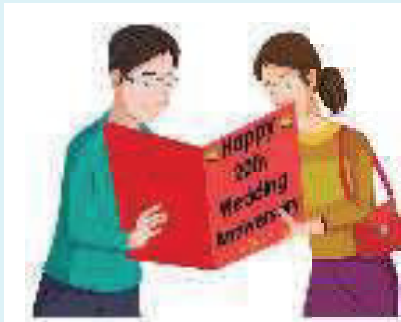
For a list of these verbs, see Unit 4A. For **have**, see Unit 17.

But note that you *can* use **want** and **mean** in the present perfect continuous (**have/has been + -ing**):

- ☐ I've **been meaning** to phone Anna, but I keep forgetting.

how long have you (been) ... ?

A Study this example situation:



Dan and Kate are married. They got married exactly 20 years ago, so today is their 20th wedding anniversary.

They **have been** married **for 20 years**.

We say: They **are** married. (*present*)

but How long have they **been** married?
(*not* How long are they married?)

They **have been** married **for 20 years**.

(*not* They are married for 20 years)

(*present perfect*)

We use the *present perfect* to talk about something that began in the past and still continues now.

Compare the *present* and *present perfect*:

- ☐ Paul is in hospital.
- but* He's **been** in hospital **since Monday**. (= He **has** been ...)
(*not* Paul is in hospital since Monday)
- ☐ We **know** each other very well.
- but* We've **known** each other **for a long time**.
(*not* We know)
- ☐ Do they **have** a car?
- but* How long **have** they **had** their car?
- ☐ She's **waiting** for somebody.
- but* She **hasn't been** waiting very long.

present
he is
we know
do they have
she is waiting

present perfect
he has been
we have known
have they had
she has been waiting

past

now

B I've known / I've had / I've lived etc. is the *present perfect simple*.

I've been learning / I've been waiting etc. is the *present perfect continuous*.

When we ask or say 'how long', the continuous is more usual (see Unit 10):

- ☐ I've **been learning** English **since January**.
- ☐ It's **been raining** all morning.
- ☐ Richard **has been doing** the same job **for 20 years**.
- ☐ 'How long **have you been driving**?' 'Since I was 17.'

Some verbs (for example, **know** and **like**) are not normally used in the continuous:

- ☐ How long **have** you **known** Jane? (*not* have you been knowing)
- ☐ I've **had** these shoes for ages. (*not* I've been having)

See also Units 4A and 10C. For **have**, see Unit 17.

C You can use either the continuous or simple with **live** and **work**:

- ☐ Julia **has been living** in this house for a long time. *or* Julia **has lived** ...
- ☐ How long **have** you **been working** here? *or* How long **have** you **worked** here?

But we use the simple (**have lived** etc.) with **always**:

- ☐ I've **always lived** in the country. (*not* always been living)

D We say 'I haven't (done something) **since/for** ...' (*present perfect simple*):

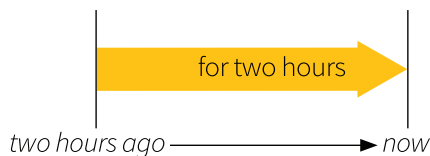
- ☐ I **haven't seen** Tom since Monday. (= Monday was the last time I saw him)
- ☐ Sarah **hasn't phoned** for ages. (= the last time she phoned was ages ago)

for and since when ... ? and how long ... ?

A We use **for** and **since** to say how long something has been happening.

We use **for** + a period of time:

- ☐ We've been waiting **for two hours**.

**for**

two hours	a long time	a week
20 minutes	six months	ages
five days	50 years	years

- ☐ Sally has been working here **for six months**. (*not since six months*)
☐ I haven't seen Tom **for three days**.

We use **since** + the start of a period:

- ☐ We've been waiting **since 8 o'clock**.

**since**

8 o'clock	April	lunchtime
Monday	2001	we arrived
12 May	Christmas	I got up

- ☐ Sally has been working here **since April**. (= from April until now)
☐ I haven't seen Tom **since Monday**.

B We often leave out **for** (but not usually in negative sentences):

- ☐ They've been married **for ten years**. or They've been married **ten years**.
☐ They **haven't had** a holiday **for** ten years. (you need **for**)

You can use **in** instead of **for** in negative sentences (**I haven't ...** etc.):

- ☐ They **haven't had** a holiday **in ten years**. (= **for** ten years)

We do *not* use **for** + **all ...** (**all day** / **all my life** etc.):

- ☐ I've lived here **all my life**. (*not for all my life*)

C Compare **when ... ?** (+ *past simple*) and **how long ... ?** (+ *present perfect*):



A: **When** did it start raining?

B: It started raining **an hour ago** / **at 1 o'clock**.

A: **How long** has it been raining?

B: It's been raining **for an hour** / **since 1 o'clock**.



A: **When** did Joe and Kate first meet?

B: They first met { **a long time ago**.
when they were at school.

A: **How long** have they known each other?

B: They've known each other { **for a long time**.
since they were at school.

D We say:

it's (= it is)	a long time	since something happened
or it's been (= it has been)	six months (<i>etc.</i>)	

- ☐ **It's two years since** I last saw Joe. or **It's been two years since ...**
 (= I **haven't seen** Joe for two years)
☐ **It's ages since** we went to the cinema. or **It's been ages since ...**
 (= We **haven't been** to the cinema for ages)
☐ **How long is it since** Mrs Hill died? or **How long has it been since ...**
 (= when did she die?)

Present perfect and past 1 (I have done and I did)

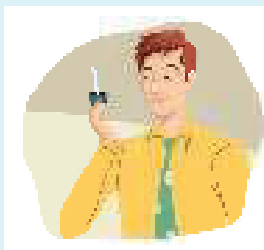
A Study this example situation:



Tom is looking for his key. He can't find it.

He **has lost** his key. (*present perfect*)This means that he doesn't have his key *now*.

Ten minutes later:

Now Tom **has found** his key. He has it now.**Has** he **lost** his key? No, he **has found** it.**Did** he **lose** his key? Yes, he **did**.He **lost** his key (*past simple*)but now he **has found** it. (*present perfect*)

The *present perfect* (something **has happened**) is a *present* tense. It tells us about the situation *now*.
 'Tom **has lost** his key' = he doesn't have his key *now* (see Unit 7).

The *past simple* (something **happened**) tells us only about the *past*. If somebody says 'Tom **lost** his key', we don't know whether he has the key now or not. We know only that he lost it at some time in the past.

Compare *present perfect* and *past simple*:

- ☐ They've **gone** away. They'll be back on Friday. (they are away *now*)
- ☐ They **went** away, but I think they're back at home now. (*not* They've gone away)
- ☐ It **has stopped** raining now, so we don't need the umbrella. (it isn't raining *now*)
- ☐ It **stopped** raining for a while, but now it's raining again. (*not* It has stopped)

B You can use the present perfect for new or recent happenings:

- ☐ I've **repaired** the washing machine. It's working OK now.
- ☐ 'Hannah **has had** a baby! It's a boy.' 'That's great news.'

Usually, you can also use the past simple:

- ☐ I **repaired** the washing machine. It's working OK now.

Use the past simple (*not* the present perfect) for things that are not recent or new:

- ☐ Mozart **was** a composer. He **wrote** more than 600 pieces of music.
(*not* has been ... has written)
- ☐ My mother **grew** up in Italy. (*not* has grown)

Compare:

Somebody **has invented** a new type of washing machine.Who **invented** the telephone? (*not* has invented)

C We use the present perfect to give new information (see Unit 7). But if we continue to talk about it, we normally use the past simple:

- ☐ A: Ow! I've **burnt** myself.
B: How **did** you **do** that? (*not* have you done)
A: I **picked** up a hot dish. (*not* have picked)
- ☐ A: Look! Somebody **has spilt** something on the sofa.
B: Well, it **wasn't** me. I **didn't do** it. (*not* hasn't been ... haven't done)

Present perfect and past 2 (**I have done** and **I did**)

A

We do not use the present perfect (**I have done**) when we talk about a *finished* time (for example, **yesterday** / **last year** / **ten minutes ago** etc.). We use a past tense:

- ☐ It **was** very cold **yesterday**. (*not* has been)
- ☐ Paul and Lucy **arrived ten minutes ago**. (*not* have arrived)
- ☐ **Did** you **eat** a lot of sweets **when you were a child**? (*not* have you eaten)
- ☐ I **got** home late **last night**. I **was** very tired and **went** straight to bed.

Use the past to ask **When ... ?** or **What time ... ?**:

- ☐ **When did** your friends **arrive**? (*not* have ... arrived)
- ☐ **What time did** you **finish** work?

Compare:

Present perfect

- ☐ Tom **has lost** his key. He can't get into the house.
- ☐ Is Carla here or **has** she **left**?

Past simple

- ☐ Tom **lost** his key **yesterday**. He couldn't get into the house.
- ☐ **When did** Carla **leave**?

B

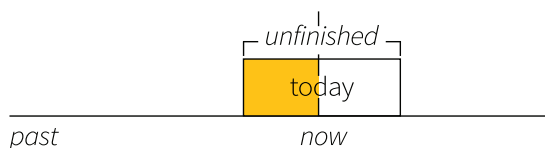
Compare:

Present perfect (have done)

- ☐ I'**ve done** a lot of work **today**.

We use the present perfect for a period of time that continues *until now*. For example:

today / **this week** / **since 2010**.



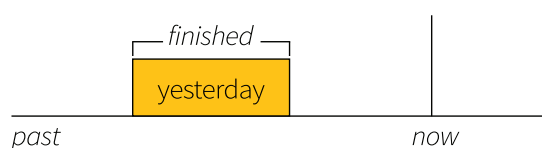
- ☐ It **hasn't** rained **this week**.
- ☐ **Have** you **seen** Anna **this morning**? (it is still morning now)
- ☐ **Have** you **seen** Ben **recently**? (in the last few days or weeks)
- ☐ I'**ve been** **working** here **since 2010**. (I still work here now)
- ☐ I don't know where Lisa is. I **haven't** **seen** her. (= I haven't seen her recently)
- ☐ We'**ve been** **waiting** for an hour. (we are still waiting now)
- ☐ Jack lives in Los Angeles. He **has lived** there for seven years.
- ☐ I'**ve never** **ridden** a horse. (in my life)
- ☐ It's the last day of your holiday. You say: It's **been** a really good holiday. I'**ve really **enjoyed** it.**

Past simple (did)

- ☐ I **did** a lot of work **yesterday**.

We use the past simple for a *finished* time in the past. For example:

yesterday / **last week** / **from 2010 to 2014**.



- ☐ It **didn't** rain **last week**.
- ☐ **Did** you **see** Anna **this morning**? (it is now afternoon or evening)
- ☐ **Did** you **see** Ben **on Sunday**?
- ☐ I **worked** here **from 2010 to 2014**. (I don't work here now)
- ☐ A: **Was** Lisa at the party **on Sunday**?
B: I don't think so. I **didn't** **see** her.
- ☐ We **waited** (*or were waiting*) for an hour. (we are no longer waiting)
- ☐ Jack **lived** in New York for ten years. Now he lives in Los Angeles.
- ☐ I **never rode** a bike **when I was a child**.
- ☐ After you come back from holiday you say: It **was** a really good holiday. I really **enjoyed** it.