

GRAMMAR

# Present perfect simple vs continuous

LEVEL

Intermediate (B1)

NUMBER

EN\_B1\_2062G

LANGUAGE

English



## Learning outcomes

- I can distinguish between the present perfect simple and present perfect continuous.
- I can use both present perfect tenses to talk about personal finances.



# Warm-up

**Interview** a classmate in a breakout room or in the classroom.

1

What's the name of the village, town or city where you live?

2

How long have you been living there?

3

Is there any place where you've always wanted to live?



After the breakout room, **share** one interesting fact about your partner with the class.

# Reading

Read the text below, where Alex, 28, talks about his current living situation.

## Alex, 28, Irish, lives in Dublin

My name's Alex, and I've been living in Dublin since 2010. For as long as I can remember, I've wanted to own my own home. So, since I started working here in 2014, I've been saving up to buy one. Transport is very expensive in Dublin, so to help me save money, since the start of this year, I've been cycling to and from work every day. I've also been avoiding taking taxis around the city, especially at weekends. Just by doing that, I've saved around €2,100 so far.



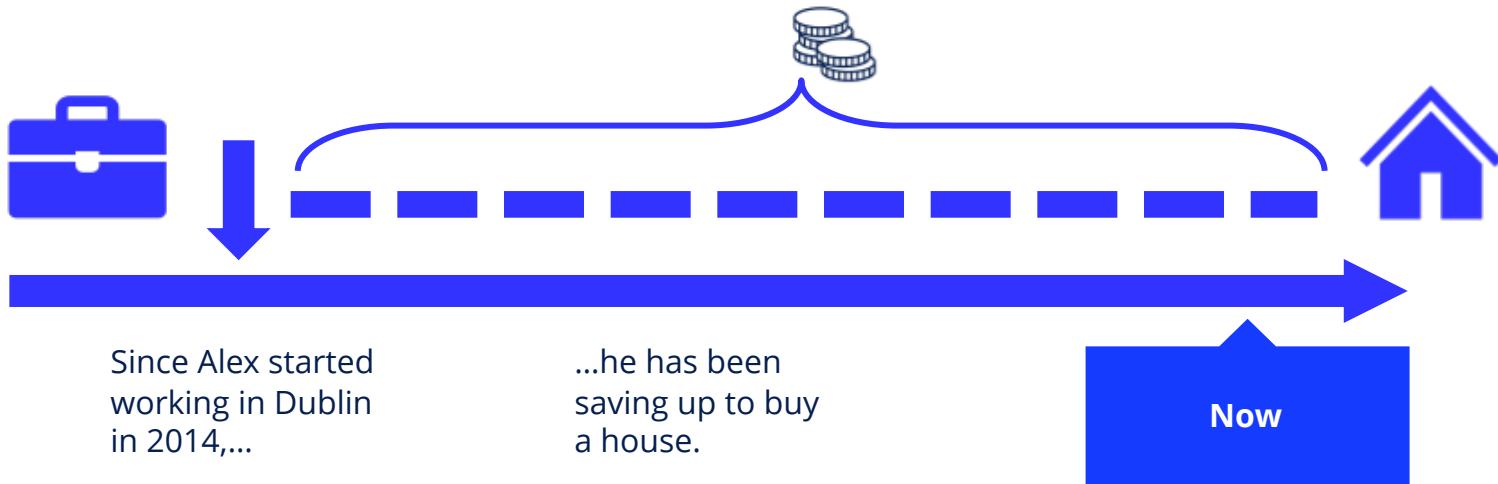
When did Alex start working in Dublin?

What is he trying to buy there?

Why does he talk about transport in Dublin?

# Looking at the present perfect continuous

We use the **present perfect continuous** to talk about the **duration** of a **present action** or to say **when it began**.



- Identify the present action in the sentence above.
- Do we know when it began?

# Using the present perfect continuous

We often use this tense with the prepositions **for** or **since** to talk about **duration**.

**Since I started working in 2014,  
I've been saving up to buy a house (= and I am still saving).**

**For as long as I can remember,  
I've wanted to own my own home (= and I still want to!).**

Both sentences tell us when a present event began in Alex's life. However,...

- ...which sentence talks about when an **action** began?
- ...which sentence talks about when a **state** or **feeling** began?

Now, identify the tense used in each sentence:

- **Sentence 1 uses:**  
*present perfect simple or continuous?*
- **Sentence 2 uses:**  
*present perfect simple or continuous?*



Alex **has been saving**  
up for a house for  
almost ten years.

Alex **is saving up** for a  
house for almost ten  
years.

Why is the second sentence  
incorrect?

Which tense is being used here?

# Choose the correct option

Present perfect simple or present perfect continuous? Explain why.

1 I \_\_\_\_\_ about Alex wanting to buy a house for quite a long time!

- a. have known
- b. have been knowing

2 The Smithson family \_\_\_\_\_ for a new car since we met them.

- a. has saved up
- b. has been saving up

3 Abdul \_\_\_\_\_ a second job since the end of last year to increase his income.

- a. has had
- b. has been having

# Reading

Now, **read** the text about Jenny, 29, talking about her living situation.

## Jenny, 29, American, lives in Los Angeles

Hey! I'm Jenny. I've been living in L.A. for around six years and, to be honest, I've grown a bit tired of life here. I've always wanted to live abroad, so I've been saving up to move to Europe next year. I usually spend a large part of my money on eating out, so I've been cooking almost all of my meals at home and going to restaurants way less often recently. I finally have some money in my savings for the move to Europe and some new recipes, as well!



How long has Jenny been living in L.A.?

What is Jenny's dream?

What changes has she made to her lifestyle?

# Present perfect simple or continuous?

We use **both tenses** when **talking about actions**, but with a different emphasis.

I've been saving up to move to Europe next year.

I've saved around €2,100 so far.

- Identify the **actions** in the examples above. Then, decide:
- Which sentence focusses **more on the activity** itself?
- Which sentence focusses **more on the result**?

Choose the correct option to complete the rule:

1. We use *present perfect simple / present perfect continuous* to focus on the activity.
2. We use *present perfect simple / present perfect continuous* to focus on the result.

# Present perfect continuous for new habits

We also use **this tense** with **certain adverbs** to stress an action is **new** or **temporary**.

I've been going to restaurants less often and cooking almost all of my meals at home recently.

Lately, I've also been avoiding taking taxis around the city, especially at weekends.

- Can you identify the adverbs in the two sentences above?
- How do they stress each action is new or temporary?

# What else have you been doing to save money?

Imagine you are Alex or Jenny. Which other ways have you been trying to save money? How well have they worked? Use the ideas in the red box to help you.



Alex

Lives in Dublin

Saving up for a house



Jenny

Lives in L.A.

Saving up for a move to Europe

*I've also only been taking one holiday abroad per year!*

*That's helped me save quite a lot of money, actually!*

- Holidays
- Entertainment
- Utility bills
- Clothing
- Food
- Alcohol
- Tobacco
- Mobile phone

# Discuss

Ask one of your classmates the following questions.

**Who is more likely to achieve their goal, Alex or Jenny?**



**Why do you think so?**

# Time to talk!

Ask a classmate as many of the following questions to **find out more about them**.



- Whose story from the text did you relate to more, Jenny's or Alex's?
- Have you been saving up to buy or do anything lately?
- What steps have you been taking for that?
- What's the cost of living like where you live?
- Has anything been getting more expensive where you live?
- Have any of your spending habits changed in order to deal with that?

## Let's reflect

- Can you distinguish between the present perfect simple and present perfect continuous?
- Can you use both present perfect tenses to talk about personal finances?

Your teacher will now make one suggestion for improvement for each student.

# End of the lesson

Idiom

## ***To save for a rainy day***

**Meaning:** To reserve something, especially money, for use in a difficult time.

**Example:** I've been *saving for a rainy day* and putting £100 aside every month.



# Additional practice

# Match the action with its result



Which **tense** is used in each **part of the sentence?** Present perfect continuous or simple?

1 I've been doing a lot of exercise recently and...

2 Rebecca has been cutting back on eating out, that's why...

3 Phil and Louisa have been saving for a new kitchen but...

4 My dad has been giving me some money advice and....

5 They have been splashing out on presents and trips so...

a she has saved a good amount of money.

b they haven't saved enough yet.

c I have lost 4 kilograms.

d they haven't paid their rent.

e I have been able to put some money in the bank.

# Present perfect simple or continuous?



Complete the sentences with the right form of the verb in brackets, **present perfect simple** or **present perfect continuous**.

- 1 It has been difficult, but this year I \_\_\_\_\_ (manage) to save enough to go on holiday to Africa.
- 2 A: I noticed you \_\_\_\_\_ (not go out) much recently. What's happening?
- 3 B: Well, I am saving for a new car, but I \_\_\_\_\_ (not be) very successful. I am not good with money.
- 4 It seems Tamara got a lot of money for her 21st birthday. She \_\_\_\_\_ (splash out) on new clothes recently.
- 5 Since we moved to Australia, we \_\_\_\_\_ (spend) a lot of money in international calls.

# Time to role-play

Imagine one of your friends **suddenly has lots of money** and you want to find out how they've got it. **Role-play the conversation** with your teacher and try to find out what they **have been doing** to get that much money!



*So, this year, I seem to have made quite a bit of money*

*Oh! What's your secret?! Have you been investing in cryptocurrency?*

*Not exactly...*



# Managing my money

Choose one of the questions and ask a classmate.

**Have you always been good at managing your money or not?**



**Have you been doing anything differently recently when it comes to money?**

# Answer key

- P.4:** Alex started working in Dublin in 2014.  
He's trying to buy his own home.  
Alex says transport is expensive in Dublin, so he's been cycling and avoiding taxis to save money.
- P.5:** **Present action:** saving money to buy a home.  
Yes, the saving began when Alex started working in 2014.
- P.6:** "I've been saving.." describes an action.  
"I've wanted.." describes a state or feeling  
**Sentence 1:** present perfect continuous; **Sentence 2:** present perfect simple
- P.7:** Present continuous describes a current action, but cannot be used to tell us when the action began. Compare: "*Alex is saving up for a house*" with "*Alex has been saving up for a house for almost 10 years*".
- P.8:** 1. a; 2. b; 3. a
- P.9:** Jenny has been living in L.A. for around six years.  
Jenny's dream is to live abroad.  
She's been spending less money on eating out and cooking more meals at home.

# Answer key

P.10: **Actions:** saving (up) money

"I've saved..." focusses more on the result.

"I've been saving up" focusses more on the activity.

We use ***present perfect continuous*** when we want to focus on the activity itself.

We use ***present perfect simple*** when we focus on the result.

P.11: Recently, lately

P.18: 1.c; 2.a; 3.b; 4.e; 5.d

- P.19:
1. have managed;
  2. have not been going out;
  3. have not been;
  4. has been splashing;
  5. have been spending

# Summary

- We use the **present perfect continuous** to talk about the **duration** of a **present action** or to **say when it began**. (e.g. *I've been living in New York City for a long time*).
- We often talk about the **duration of a present action** using the prepositions **for** or **since**.

However, for an **ongoing state or feeling**:

- We don't usually use the **present perfect continuous**, we use the **present perfect simple** instead. (e.g. *Sarah has needed to cut back on her spending for a while*.)

- We use **both tenses** to refer to **completed actions**, but to stress different information.
  - We use **present perfect continuous** when we want to focus **on the activity itself**.
  - We use **present perfect simple** when we focus on the **completed result**. (e.g. *I've been cooking all my meals at home this week vs I've cooked a meal for you!*)

- We also use the **present perfect continuous** to stress an ongoing action is **new** or **temporary**.
- We often use this tense with the adverbs ***lately*** or ***recently*** to clarify it is this kind of action.
  - (e.g. *Lately, I've been taking public transport to and from work*)

# Vocabulary

to save up for something

lately

recently

# Notes