

Grammar Reference

Present perfect and 'for'/'since'

Meaning and use

The present perfect is often used to talk about situations that started in the past and are continuing now. We sometimes use the present perfect in a question with **how long** to ask about how long a present situation has continued.

How long have Sasha and Tanya been married?

We talk about **how long** using the words **for** and **since**.

For = throughout (a period of time).

They've been married for six months.

Since = from (an exact point in time) until now.

They've been married since March.

We can also use present perfect + **since** + past simple.

I haven't seen Tanya since we graduated.

Form

The present perfect is made with **subject + have/has (positive) or haven't/hasn't (negative) + past participle**.

For is used with a length of time.

Since is used with a specific point in the past.

for: ten minutes, one hour, two days, a week, three years, a long time

since: 10 o'clock, Friday, November, 2013, Easter

Positive

I've lived here since 2012.

I've worked for this company for 20 years.

Negative

We haven't seen her for ages.

She hasn't been back to the UK since 2009.

Question

Have you known Sasha since last year?

Have you lived here for more than two years?

How long have you known him?

Have you known Sasha a long time?

Take note: present simple and present continuous

We cannot use the present simple or present continuous with **for** and **since**.

WRONG: *I know him for ten years.*

CORRECT: *I've known him for ten years.*

WRONG: *I'm living here since 2002.*

CORRECT: *I've lived here since 2002.*

Take note: present perfect / present perfect continuous

With verbs like **work** and **live**, which can describe permanent or temporary situations, we usually use the present perfect + 'for' / 'since' for a long period of time. For a short period, we use the present perfect continuous.

I've worked for this company for 20 years. (present perfect)

I've been working here for a week. (present perfect continuous)

Take note: present perfect / past simple

If a situation is finished, we use the past simple + 'for', not the present perfect:

I worked for that company for 20 years and then I retired.

Spoken English

In informal writing and in speech, we often use a contraction with the auxiliary verb.

I've lived in Amsterdam for twelve years.

When you listen to someone using a sentence with **for** + a period of time, listen carefully to the verb. It is sometimes difficult to hear the difference between, for example, **I've lived in New York for five years** and **I lived in New York for five years**, but it makes a big difference in meaning. It tells us whether the speaker still lives there or not.