

Simple Past vs. Present Perfect

When do we use each tense in English?



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Remember:

Grammar has meaning!

Different grammar tenses are used in different situations or contexts and they carry different meanings.

For example . . .



- Use the simple past for action that happened in the past and is:

over, done,
finished!

- Use the present perfect for action that started in the past, but ...

is still true
today.



- The **simple past** always refers to an action or situation that is finished.
- The **present perfect** connects the past and the present. It is used to show that an action or situation in the past:
 - continues today, OR
 - might happen again



Compare the meaning of these two sentences:

1. Sara lived in Boston for 5 years.
2. Sara has lived in Boston for 5 years.

The first sentence uses:

Simple Past

The second sentence uses:

Present Perfect



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Sara lived in Boston for 5 years.

Meaning: by using the simple past tense, we mean that Sara started living in Boston 5 years ago . . .

AND . . . then she moved!

Now she lives in a different city, like Paris.

Remember, the simple past is used for a situation that is over, finished, done!



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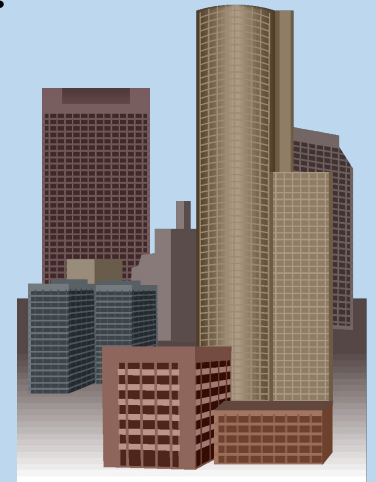
Sara has lived in Boston for 5 years.

Meaning: by using the present perfect tense, we mean that Sara began living in Boston 5 years ago . . .

AND . . . she still lives there.

Remember, present perfect:

connects the past with the present.



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- Use the simple past with time words like:

- yesterday

- last Saturday, week, month, year, etc.

- _____ ago

- when I was...

- in 1990 (past date)

- Use the present perfect with time words like:

- recently/lately

- since ...

- so far this week, month, year, etc.



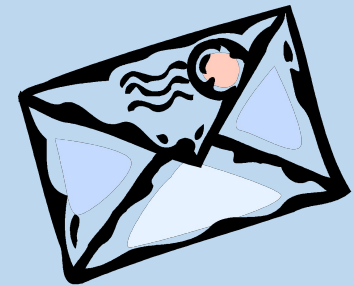
Additional notes about present perfect:

- We often use present perfect to say that something happened sooner than expected.

Example:

Jan: Don't forget to mail that letter.

Tom: *I've already mailed it.*

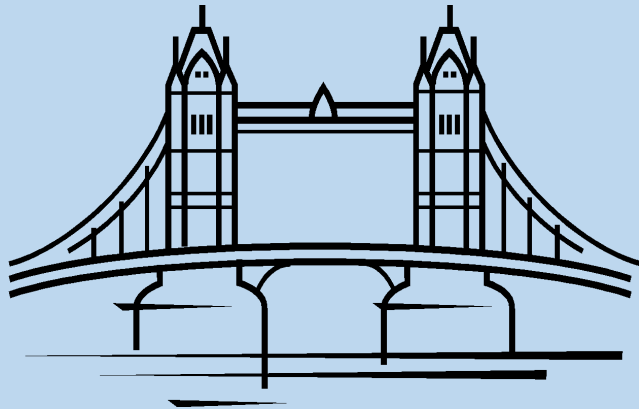


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- We often use present perfect to say that we have never done something at any time in the past.

Example:

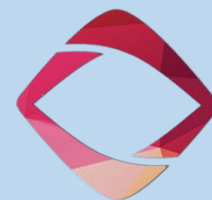
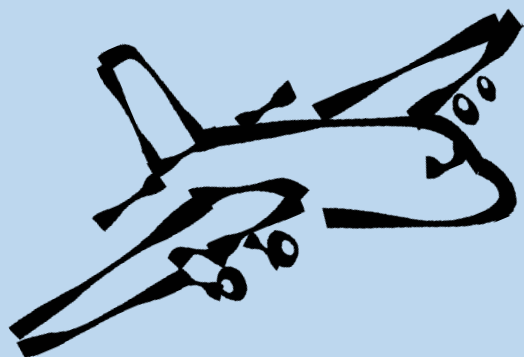
I have never visited London. But someday, I hope to travel there.



- We often use present perfect with the expression: "This is the first time."

Example:

Leonard is nervous. This is the first time he has flown on an airplane!



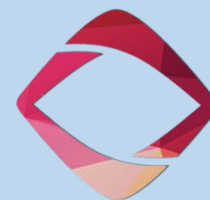
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- We often use present perfect with “ever” and “never.”

Example:

Patricia: Have you ever played tennis?

Linda: No, I've never played before, but I would like to learn!



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Remember!

If you are talking about a specific time in the past (yesterday, last month, etc.), you cannot use the present perfect.

In these cases, use the simple past.



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For

Affirmative

He / She / It

+ HAS + Past Participle (=3rd column)

I / You / We / They

+HAVE + Past Participle (=3rd column)



LinguaLike

Negative

He / She / It

+ HASN'T + Past Participle (=3rd column)

I / You / We / They

+HAVEN'T + Past Participle (=3rd column)



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INTERROGATIVE

HAS + HE / SHE / IT + Past Participle (=3rd column)...?

HAVE + I / YOU / WE / THEY + Past Participle(=3rd column)...?



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Practice!

Do these exercises with your class.

Choose the simple past or present perfect and talk about why each is necessary.

1. When I was a child, I _____ (swim) a lot.
2. So far this week, we _____ (study) a lot.
3. Theo _____ (be) very sick recently.
4. I _____ (have) a terrible headache yesterday.
5. It _____ (rain) a lot lately.
6. They _____ (get) married ten years ago.
7. I _____ (be) to Balboa Park many times.
8. My family _____ (take) a vacation last year.



Answers!

1. When I was a child, I swam a lot.
2. So far this week, we have studied a lot.
3. Theo has been very sick recently.
4. I had a terrible headache yesterday.
5. It has rained a lot lately.
6. They got married ten years ago.
7. I have been to Balboa Park many times. (possibly again in the future)
8. My family took a vacation last year.

