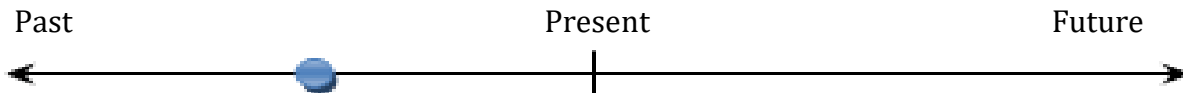


English Verb Tenses: Simple Past vs. Present Perfect

Understanding when to use simple past or present perfect can be a challenge when speaking – or writing – in English. In fact, using the past tense is difficult for many English learners, so you are not alone! These exercises will teach you the rules of each verb tense, describe some of the differences, and provide you opportunities to practice. To understand the difference between the two past verb tenses, see the timeline below.

Simple Past is normally understood as a completed event that happened a specific point in the past. Complete the conversations with the correct past simple form of the verb in parentheses. Once finished, see the answers below.



Melissa: Have you sent the invitations?
David: Yes, I (1) _____ (**to send**) them yesterday.

Melissa: (2) _____ (**To do**) you send the invitations?
David: Yes, I (3) _____ (**to do**).

Answers: sent; Did; did

Present Perfect is also used for events in the past, but over an extended period of time. The period can be specified/known (see first timeline) or unspecified/unknown (second timeline). Specified, or a specific period of time in the past, normally uses the words *for* or *since*. Complete the conversations with the correct present perfect form of the verb in parentheses. Once finished, see the answers below.

Timeline 1	Specified (Known time period in the past)	<div style="border: 1px solid black; border-radius: 10px; background-color: #f9a825; padding: 10px; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p style="text-align: center;">present perfect + } <i>since</i> <i>for</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">_____ } past present</p> </div> <p>John: How long have you been here? Lisa: I've (1) _____ here (2) _____ about 1 hour. *for is used for a length of time (50 minutes, 3 days, 4 hours) John: Oh, okay. How long have you played the piano? Lisa: I (3) _____ played the piano since I was 6 years old! *since is used for a specific point in time (Wednesday, 2010, last week)</p>
Timeline 2	Unspecified (Unknown time period in the past)	<div style="text-align: center; margin-bottom: 10px;"> <p>past ? ? ? present future</p> <p>_____ _____</p> <p style="text-align: center;">X X X</p> </div> <p>Melissa: (4) _____ you shopped for food? David: Yes, I have. Melissa: Have you ever skydived? David: Yes, I actually have (5) _____ before.</p>

Answers: been; for; Have; Have; skydived

Same vs. Different Meaning

There are some cases in which using the simple past and present perfect have the same or a different meaning. In general, simple past refers to a specific time in the past, whereas present perfect is an unspecified time. In addition, the meaning of the sentences changes when more specific information (e.g. dates, times) is provided. See the examples in the chart below.

Generally Same Meaning	Different Meaning
<p><u>Simple Past</u></p> <p><i>They completed the game.</i></p> <p><u>Present Perfect</u></p> <p><i>They have completed the game.</i></p> <p>Both games were completed in the past, but simple past emphasizes more a completed past event</p>	<p><u>Simple Past</u></p> <p>a) <i>They completed the game at 5pm.</i> b) <i>Ann was in Los Angeles for 3 days.</i></p> <p><u>Present Perfect</u></p> <p>a) <i>They have completed the game.</i> b) <i>Ann has been in Los Angeles for 3 days.</i></p> <p>In Example A, the Simple Past form means the game was completed at a specific time in the past, whereas in Present Perfect it is an unknown time.</p> <p>In Example B, the Simple Past form means the activity started in the past and finished, whereas in Present Perfect it started in the past and still continues to the present.</p>

Grammar Forms

To begin forming the simple past or present perfect, it's important to know how the verb forms change from present, past simple, and the past participle. See how each tense is formed below.

Past Simple Form	Present Perfect Form
<p>Regular Verbs: add -ed (<i>walk</i> → <i>walked</i>)</p> <p>Irregular Verbs: Learn them (<i>go</i> → <i>went</i>)</p>	<p>3rd Person Singular (he, she, it): has + past participle Examples: <i>He has walked; Larry has gone</i></p> <p>All others (I, you, we, they): have + past participle Examples: <i>I have spoken with him; They have finished</i></p> <p>Regular Verbs: add -ed (same form as simple past) Irregular Verbs: Learn them (<i>go</i> → <i>gone; speak</i> → <i>spoken</i>)</p>

Practice Exercises

Exercise 1: Complete the chart with the correct form of the verbs (base form, past simple, or simple past). In some cases, past simple and the participle are the same, and other times different. Remember that you use the past participle for present perfect.

Present (Base Form)	Past Simple	Past Participle
Awake	awoke	<i>awaken</i>
Break	Broke	<i>broken</i>
Drive		Driven
Eat		
	Forgot	Forgotten
Leave		left
Forgive	Forgave	
Get		Gotten
	Rose	Risen
Shake		Shaken
Feel		felt
	Kept	kept
Write	Wrote	
Sing	Sang	
Ring	Rang	
Hang	Hanged	
	Meant	meant
Catch		Caught
Pay		Paid
	Spent	
Fight	Fought	
Shrink	Shrank	
	Met	Met
Hear		Heard
Read	Read	
	Found	Found

Swing	Swang	
	slept	slept
	Taught	Taught
Tell	Told	
Know	Knew	
Light	Lit/lighted	
Lose	Lost	
Think	thought	
Meet		met

Exercise 2: Complete the sentences with either simple past or present perfect.

Ex. A: Have you ever been to Seattle?

B: Yes, I have been (*be*) there. I went (*go*) there 4 years ago.

1. A: Are you going to finish your chores before you go to sleep?

B: Yes, I finished (*already / finish*) them. I finished (*finish*) these tasks well over 30 minutes ago.

2. A: Have you ever been to Brady Street?

B: Yes, I went. I went (*go*) for a stroll there last night. It was very pleasant.

3. A: I'm watching a great series on Netflix right now called *Stranger Things*. Would you like to watch it with me tonight?

B: Thanks, but I watched (*already / see*) it. I watched (*watch*) it a few months ago.

Exercise 3: Complete the exercises for Part A and Part B below.

Part A: What's the past tense?

Leave left Read _____

Feel felt Meet _____

Keep _____ Sleep _____

Part B: Write a sentence using each verb (listed above) in the **simple past tense**.

Example: Bob felt sad because his dog died.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.

Exercise 4: If working individually, read the questions below and answer them in complete sentences. If you have a teacher or other student available, ask them the questions and write their answers. The questions are in present perfect, but you can answer in either present perfect or simple past. Check your answers for correct grammar, spelling, and punctuation.

Ex. What have you done today?

I have walked my dog, done the dishes, and cleaned my room.

1. What cities have you visited this past year?

2. How many times have you been in a hospital?

3. Have you ever lost your passport? If so, when and where did it happen?

4. Have you eaten at a restaurant this week? If so, which one?

5. Have you ever lied about your age?

Exercise 5: Change the following sentences from simple past to present perfect, or from present perfect to simple past. Then, think about how the two sentences change meaning or stay the same.

Example: I **have already gone** to the movies. → I **went** to the movies.
(Present Perfect) (Simple Past)

1. She has written five letters today. → _____.

2. They haven't started the soccer game yet. → _____.

3. I have never been to China. → _____.

4. I went to the Bucks game. → _____.

5. I already did my homework. → _____.

6. I haven't washed the dishes. → _____.

7. She has gone to Paris for a week. → _____.