Section1

What does ‘present perfect’ mean?

Exploring the meaning of the present perfect tense

English learners often get confused when they hear the phrase ‘present perfect’. After all, it does not seem to be a present tense. For instance:

I have been to China three times.

I have been to China three times and each time happened in the past. So why do we use a present tense for this? Why don’t we just say, ‘I went to China three times’?

The important thing to note is that the present perfect tense explains a connection between the present and the past. When we say we have been to China three times, our time reference is so far or until now. We don’t actually use the phrases so far or until now, because the meaning is contained in the tense itself.

This may be difficult to grasp at first, especially if there are no ‘perfect’ tenses in your own language. Here are some examples of the present perfect tense, explaining how they form a link between the present and the past:

Example 1  Have you ever been on TV?

Ever means at anytime in your life until now.

Example 2  He has recently gotten divorced.

Recently signifies the near past – and therefore a link with the present.

Example 3  I have lost my keys.

We use present perfect if losing the keys in the past causes a problem now.

Example 4  We have lived here for three years.

We have lived here from three years ago until now.
Section2

Identifying the present perfect tense

Learning to recognize the present perfect tense

The present perfect tense is formed by using two verbs. The first verb is called the auxiliary verb. It is either HAVE or HAS, depending on the subject:

I have finished.
She has finished.
Joe has finished.
My parents have finished.

We use HAVE with I, YOU, WE and THEY. We use HAS with HE, SHE or IT (or the name of a singular person place or thing).

The second verb is what we call the ‘past participle’. You will often see a chart where a verb is displayed in three forms, such as take/took/taken. The past participle is the third form. As we can see from the following table, the third form is sometimes the same as the second form and sometimes different. For a few verbs, all three forms are the same:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>present</th>
<th>past</th>
<th>past participle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>take</td>
<td>took</td>
<td>taken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>write</td>
<td>wrote</td>
<td>written</td>
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<td>steal</td>
<td>stole</td>
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<td>walk</td>
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<td>slip</td>
<td>slipped</td>
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<td>teach</td>
<td>taught</td>
<td>taught</td>
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<tr>
<td>let</td>
<td>let</td>
<td>let</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As we have learned, the present perfect tense is formed using two verbs, the auxiliary verb (have/has) and the past participle. Here are some examples:

She has taken…
I have taken…
Harry has written…
They have written…
It has walked…
You have walked…
The handle has slipped…
I have slipped…
Mrs. Bee has taught…
I have taught…
He has let…
My friends have let…
Exercise 1

Which of these sentences are in the present perfect tense?

Tick the sentences that are present perfect. Answers are on page 16.

1  □ We have seen the light.
2  □ I have finished my work for today.
3  □ She saw him and she liked him.
4  □ We had a great time in Switzerland.
5  □ They have given us their full support.
6  □ She had already eaten before she arrived.
7  □ We have to achieve our targets.
8  □ Since July, the company has lost money.
9  □ You are advised to stop what you are doing.
10 □ They have asked us to stop what we are doing.
11 □ They bought three loaves of bread.
12 □ They had bought three loaves of bread.
13 □ They have bought three loaves of bread.
14 □ All my friends have already seen that movie.
15 □ Many people have commented on my blog.

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect
Section 3

Exercise 2

Fill in the blanks with HAVE or HAS

Answers are on page 16.

1. I ______ seen this movie before.
2. She ______ just finished her exams.
3. We ______ asked for an extension.
4. They ______ invited us for dinner.
5. Sue ______ traveled around the world.
6. Iraq ______ had a lot of trouble.
7. Pete and Bob ______ formed a band.
8. Since July, Ahmad ______ made four thousand dollars.
9. The dogs ______ escaped.
10. Someone ______ let the dogs loose.

Exercise 3

What are the past participles of the following verbs?

Answers are on page 17.

1. take ______
2. write ______
3. live ______
4. see ______
5. buy ______
6. teach ______
7. let ______
8. arrive ______
9. announce ______
10. make ______
11. come ______
12. be ______
13. go ______
14. fly ______
15. give ______
16. grow ______
17. know ______
18. break ______
19. think ______
20. shut ______

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect
Exercise 4

Constructing the present perfect tense.

Fill in the blanks with the present perfect tense. Answers are on page 17.

1. They ________ ________ the train to Kyoto.
2. Mike ________ ________ for a job as a waiter.
3. I ________ just ________ from my holiday.
4. I ________ ________ this movie before.
5. Since the summer, we ________ ________ three times.
6. Fluffy ________ ________ a good dog today.
7. Norman and Jane ________ ________ their wedding.
8. The cats ________ ________ all their food.
9. The players ________ ________ a rest and they’re ready to go.
10. Dustin ________ ________ over thirty books.
11. We ________ already ________ your car.
13. Congratulations! You ________ just ________ a million dollars!
14. We ________ all ________ problems like this before.
15. It’s too late. Johnson ________ already ________.
16. Mei Ling ________ ________ a school trip.
17. Recently, people ________ ________ him with a new girlfriend.
18. The waiters ________ ________ the tables. We can begin dining.
19. It’s over! The war ________ ________.
20. She ________ always ________ nice to her kids.

We can also use the present perfect tense with there. Instead of using there is/there are, we use there has/have been. Try the following questions. Answers are on page 17.

1. There ________ ________ an accident on Highway 32.
2. There ________ ________ many accidents so far this year.
3. There ________ ________ a good response from our customers.
4. There ________ ________ an increase in sales.
5. There ________ ________ ongoing discussions since 2003.
6. There ________ ________ no records broken so far in these games.
7. There ________ ________ a lot of people complaining about it.
8. There ________ ________ a lot of turmoil in that country, recently.

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Keywords

Recognizing and using present perfect tense keywords.

Another way to approach the present perfect tense is to look at keywords. There are a few keywords that we associate with the present perfect. Note: these words can be used with other tenses, too.

For
I have lived here for three years.

Since
I have lived here since 2005.

Already
Sean has already left.

Always
He has always been faithful to his wife.

Yet
He hasn’t left yet.

Times
They have been to Mexico three times.

Just
Sean has just left.

Recently
Have you been to Mexico recently?

Ever
Have you ever been to Mexico?

Before
Have you been to Mexico before?

Never
I have never been to Mexico.

So far
So far, he has scored three goals this season.

Can you spot the keywords in these sentences?

They have recently moved to Arizona.
Being from Saudi Arabia, he has never seen snow before.
How many times has this happened to you?
We haven’t had a holiday for ages.
Since Saturday, we have had rain every day.
We have already painted that room.
Section 5

Negative and question forms

Constructing negative sentences and questions in the present perfect tense.

It is easy to form questions in the present perfect tense. We use HAVE/HAS followed by the subject and the past participle:

Have you seen Jack lately?

Has Jack finished reading his book?

To form a WH question, just add the WH word on to the beginning of the sentence:

Where have you been?
What have you done?

* We don’t often use WHEN with the present perfect tense. Because WHEN indicates a specific time, we use the past tense.

Exercise 5

Constructing questions in the present perfect tense.

Change these sentences to questions using the prompts. Answers are on page 18.

Example: He has bought a pen. => What has he bought?

1 He has been to China.
2 They have lived here for three years.
3 Scott has taken your car.
4 Vera has known about it for a long time.
5 I have seen it three times.
6 We have chosen the red one.
7 She has lost five pounds.
8 She has been here since July.
9 Joe has gone to Alabama.
10 She has married Bill.

Where ____________________________?
How long ____________________________?
Who ________________________________?
How long ____________________________?
How many times ______________________?
Which one ___________________________
How many pounds _____________________?
How long ____________________________?
Where ______________________________?
Who ________________________________?

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect
To form a negative sentence using the present perfect tense, use *not* between HAVE/HAS and the past participle:

He **has not eaten**.

In speech, we can use the contracted form:

He **hasn’t eaten**.

We can also use the word never to give a negative meaning to the sentence:

He **has never eaten** pigeon.

### Exercise 6

**Constructing negative sentences in the present perfect tense.**

Change these sentences to negative sentences using the prompts. Answers are on page 18.

**Example:** He has returned. => **He has not returned.**

1. He has been to China. ______________________________.
2. They have sent the package. ________________________.
3. Scott has taken your car. ____________________________.
4. Jacy has completed her project. ____________________.
5. I have ordered Chinese food. ________________________.
6. We have lost your records. _________________________.
7. She has lost a lot of weight. ________________________.
8. She has kept her promise. __________________________.
9. Joe has gone fishing. ______________________________.
10. The cats have caught the mice. ____________________.

Change these sentences to negatives, using *never*:

1. He has been to China. ______________________________.
2. I have seen a ghost. ________________________________.
3. They have eaten sashimi. ____________________________.
4. My son has seen a rainbow. ________________________.
5. We have discussed it. ______________________________.

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at [www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect](http://www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect)
Section 6

When do we use the present perfect tense?

Gaining a complete understanding of when to use the tense

So far, we have understood that the present perfect forms a link between the present and the past. We have also seen that the present perfect tense is often used with certain keywords, such as ever, never, yet, for and since.

You may also have noted that we use the present perfect to show completion. Therefore, we often use it with words such as completed, finished or done:

He has completed the test.
Have you done it yet?

We often use the present perfect tense to give news or announcements, since this is a way of lining the present and the past:

The President has announced a new healthcare plan.
A tornado has destroyed part of a shopping mall in Oklahoma.

Remember that we use the present perfect tense to describe a non-specific time in the past. If we specify the time, we do not use the present perfect tense. We use the simple past tense:

Wrong: I have seen that movie last week.
Right: I saw that movie last week.

If the time is not specified, it can be possible to use either tense. In this case, the speaker gives the sentence a current emphasis by using the present perfect tense:

Right: I tried sushi, but I didn’t like it.
Right: I’ve tried sushi, but I didn’t like it.
Exercise 7

Complete these sentences with either the present perfect tense or the past tense.

Answers are on page 19.

1 He ________________ last night on a train to New York.    leave
2 ________ Sally ever ________ her son to the zoo?    take
3 I ________ not ________ golf for a couple of years.    play
4 Where ________ you ________ last night?    go
5 How long ________ you ________ your motorbike?    have
6 His boss ________________ at him many times for being late.    shout
7 Johnson ________________ smoking last week.    give up
8 Sarah ________________ to open the window but she couldn’t.    try
9 Good news! The hijacker ________________ all the hostages.    release
10 So far, nobody ________________ any interest in the red Toyota.    show
11 I ________ never ________ a bone.      break
12 Of course I ________________ sushi before. I’m Japanese.    try
13 At the first performance, he ________________ a standing ovation.    get
14 She ________________ me a cup of coffee when I got back.    fix
15 The van ________________ on the way to the campsite.    break down

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect

Section 8

Passive Voice

Using the passive voice with the present perfect

As with any tense, there is a passive form of the present perfect tense. Instead of doing the action, in the passive voice, the subject receives the action:

Active:         She hit her brother.         (she does the action)
Passive:       She was hit by her brother.  (she receives the action)
In the present perfect tense, we form the passive by using the present perfect form of the BE verb (has been/have been) followed by the past participle:

Zoe has been given another chance by her boss.
The people have been cheated out of their money.

Question form: Have the people been cheated out of their money?
Negative form: The people haven’t been cheated out of their money.

Exercise 8

Are these sentences active or passive? Write P or A in the space provided.

Answers are on page 19.

1  ___ Mum has bought some cheese and biscuits for you.
2  ___ Winter has ended and Spring is here.
3  ___ Some of our men have been captured by the enemy.
4  ___ Mary has been ill for a few days.
5  ___ They have not been given enough food.
6  ___ The pets have been fed.
7  ___ Duncan has not told us his plans yet.
8  ___ She has been back here again.
9  ___ Have these kittens been neutered?
10  ___ Have you been approached by that salesman?
11  ___ Maria has been promoted to Assistant Manager.
12  ___ It has been a long and tiring day.

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect

Exercise 9

Change these sentences to the passive voice.

Answers are on page 20.

Example: He has broken his watch. => His watch has been broken.

1 Scott has sent some supplies.
2 I have completed my homework.
3 Sherry has baked a cake.
4 She has lost the files.
Section 9

Exercise 10

Have you mastered the present perfect yet? Prove it by correcting the mistakes in these sentences

Answers are on page 20.

Example: He have lived here for five years. => He has lived here for five years.

1 Joe have finished his homework. ________________________________.
2 Have you finish reading that book? ____________________________.
3 I have seen that movie last week. ________________________________.
4 John and Mary has started a company. ____________________________.
5 Have you wrote that email yet? ________________________________.
6 The police have been caught the criminal. ________________________.
7 The food has prepared by a master chef. ________________________.
8 I have never saw a ghost before. ________________________________.
9 Last summer, he has built a new shed. ____________________________.
10 Mary has already been fed the dogs. ____________________________.

Do you need more practice? Try many more exercises at www.roadtogrammar.com/presperfect
Section 10

FAQ

Frequently asked questions about the present perfect tense

Q: I have heard that been or gone can both be used as the past participle of go. What is the difference?

A: **gone** indicates that the speaker has not returned. ‘Andy has gone fishing’ means that he is still away. **been** indicates that the speaker has returned. ‘Andy has been to Tokyo’ means that he has already returned.

Q: I am confused about when to use been.

A: We can use **been** in four different ways. Firstly, as the past participle of **go** (see above). Secondly, as the past participle of the verb **be** – ‘She has been ill’. Thirdly, we use it in passive constructions – ‘He has been given a medal’. Finally, we use it in the present perfect continuous tense – ‘She has been jogging’.

Q: I have heard people using the present perfect tense with the word today. Shouldn’t we use the present tense with the word today?

A: ‘Today’ has a past (this morning), a present (now) and a future (later today). We can use the present perfect to mean ‘so far, today’: They have sold five cars today.

Q: Does the present perfect tense indicate that the action is finished or ongoing?

A: It depends on the context. If we say, ‘I’ve lived here for three years’, it means I am still living here. If we say, ‘I have finished my essay’, it means the action is complete. The same applies to the present perfect continuous tense.

Q: I have heard people using the phrase ‘have had’. Why use the same word twice?

A: You can hear people saying **have had**, **has had** and **had had** (in the past perfect tense). It does not mean that they are using the same word twice. The first is an auxiliary verb, has no meaning, but it shows that you are using the present perfect tense. The second is the past participle of the verb **have**. Here are some examples:

I have had a shower. (I have taken a shower)
I have had a rough day.
Q: What is the difference between these sentences: ‘I have seen it’ and ‘I had seen it’?

A: *I have seen it* is the present perfect tense. *I had seen it* is the past perfect tense. The past perfect tense has a very specific meaning – something that happened before or up to a certain point in the past. In comparison, the present perfect tense describes something that happened before or up to the present time. The past perfect tense is used much less than the present perfect tense.

Q: Is there a difference between the way that we use the present perfect tense in spoken English and in written English?

A: In spoken English, we tend to use contractions:

He has returned  =>  He’s returned.
We have done it  =>  We’ve done it.

If you use the long form in spoken English, it is not incorrect, but it will not sound natural.

Q: What is the present perfect continuous tense? How is it different from the present perfect tense?

A: The present perfect continuous tense is sometimes called the present perfect progressive tense. Like present perfect, it uses HAVE/HAS as an auxiliary verb, but it is followed by BEEN plus the –ing form of the verb:

Present perfect:   He has climbed the tree.
Present perfect continuous:  He has been climbing the tree.

The present perfect continuous tense is very close in meaning to the present perfect tense. Often, both are correct to use. However, the present perfect emphasizes *completion* and the continuous form emphasizes the *process*. In other words, the continuous form focuses on the action itself:

He has climbed the tree.  (He was able to do it; he completed it.)
He has been climbing the tree.  (That’s why he’s dirty.)
Section 11

Answer key

Exercise 1

Which of these sentences are in the present perfect tense?

Answers:

1 We have seen the light.
2 I have finished my work for today.
5 They have given us their full support.
8 Since July, the company has lost money.
10 They have asked us to stop what we are doing.
13 They have bought three loaves of bread.
14 All my friends have already seen that movie.
15 Many people have commented on my blog.

Exercise 2

Fill in the blanks with HAVE or HAS

Answers:

1 I have seen this movie before.
2 She has just finished her exams.
3 We have asked for an extension.
4 They have invited us for dinner.
5 Sue has traveled around the world.
6 Iraq has had a lot of trouble.
7 Pete and Bob have formed a band.
8 Since July, Ahmad has made four thousand dollars.
9 The dogs have escaped.
10 Someone has let the dogs loose.
Exercise 3

What are the past participles of the following verbs?

Answers:

1. take  
2. write  
3. live  
4. see  
5. buy  
6. teach  
7. let  
8. arrive  
9. announce  
10. make  
11. come  
12. be  
13. go  
14. fly  
15. give  
16. grow  
17. know  
18. break  
19. think  
20. shut

Exercise 4

Constructing the present perfect tense.

Answers:

1. They have taken the train to Kyoto.
2. Mike has applied for a job as a waiter.
3. I have just returned from my holiday.
4. I have seen this movie before.
5. Since the summer, we have been hiking three times.
6. Fluffy has been a good dog today.
7. Norman and Jane have postponed their wedding.
8. The cats have eaten all their food.
9. The players have had a rest and they’re ready to go.
10. Dustin has written over thirty books.
11. We have already repaired your car.
12. My secretary has worked here since 2005.
13. Congratulations! You have just won a million dollars!
14. We have all faced problems like this before.
15. It’s too late. Johnson has already left.
16. Mei Ling has organized a school trip.
17. Recently, people have spotted him with a new girlfriend.
18. The waiters have prepared the tables. We can begin dining.
19. It’s over! The war has finally ended.
20. She has always been nice to her kids.
1 There **has been** an accident on Highway 32.
2 There **have been** many accidents so far this year.
3 There **has been** a good response from our customers.
4 There **has been** an increase in sales.
5 There **have been** ongoing discussions since 2003.
6 There **have been** no records broken so far in these games.
7 There **have been** a lot of people complaining about it.
8 There **has been** a lot of turmoil in that country, recently.

**Exercise 5**

Constructing questions in the present perfect tense.

Answers:

1 Where **has he been?**
2 How long **have they lived there?**
3 Who **has taken your car?**
4 How long **has Vera known about it?**
5 How many times **have you seen it?**
6 Which one **have you chosen?**
7 How many pounds **has she lost?**
8 How long **has she been here?**
9 Where **has Joe gone?**
10 Who **has she married?**

**Exercise 6**

Constructing negative sentences in the present perfect tense.

Answers:

1 He has not been to China.
2 They have not sent the package.
3 Scott has not taken your car.
4 Jacy has not completed her project.
5 I have not ordered Chinese food.
6 We have not lost your records.
7 She has not lost a lot of weight.
8 She has not kept her promise.
9 Joe has not gone fishing.
10 The cats have not caught the mice.

Answers:

1 He has never been to China.
2 I have never seen a ghost.
3 They have never eaten sashimi.
4 My son has never seen a rainbow.
5 We have never discussed it.
Exercise 7

Complete these sentences with either the present perfect tense or the past tense.

Answers:

1 He left last night on a train to New York.
2 Has Sally ever taken her son to the zoo?
3 I have not played golf for a couple of years.
4 Where did you go last night?
5 How long have you had your motorbike?
6 His boss has shouted at him many times for being late.
7 Johnson gave up smoking last week.
8 Sarah tried to open the window but she couldn’t.
9 Good news! The hijacker has released all the hostages.
10 So far, nobody has shown any interest in the red Toyota.
11 I have never broken a bone.
12 Of course I have tried sushi before. I’m Japanese.
13 At the first performance, he got a standing ovation.
14 She fixed me a cup of coffee when I got back.
15 The van broke down on the way to the campsite.

Exercise 8

Are these sentences active or passive? Write P or A in the space provided.

Answers:

1 A Mum has bought some cheese and biscuits for you.
2 A Winter has ended and Spring is here.
3 P Some of our men have been captured by the enemy.
4 A Mary has been ill for a few days.
5 P They have not been given enough food.
6 P The pets have been fed.
7 A Duncan has not told us his plans yet.
8 A She has been back here again.
9 P Have these kittens been neutered?
10 P Have you been approached by that salesman?
11 P Maria has been promoted to Assistant Manager.
12 A It has been a long and tiring day.
Exercise 9

Change these sentences to the passive voice.

Answers:

1 Some supplies have been sent.
2 homework has been completed.
3 A cake has been baked.
4 The files have been lost.
5 The tower has been built.
6 The deal has been sealed.
7 It has not been opened.
8 A meeting has been scheduled.
9 The crooks have been caught.
10 The rats have been caught.

Exercise 10

Have you mastered the present perfect yet? Prove it by correcting the mistakes in these sentences

Answers:

1 Joe has finished his homework.
2 Have you finished reading that book?
3 I saw that movie last week.
4 John and Mary have started a company.
5 Have you written that email yet?
6 The police have caught the criminal.
7 The food has been prepared by a master chef.
8 I have never seen a ghost before.
9 Last summer, he built a new shed.
10 Mary has already fed the dogs.