

Mastering the Present Perfect Tense



Section 1

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*.



Section 2

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:

present	past	past participle
take	took	taken
write	wrote	written
steal	stole	stolen
walk	walked	walked
slip	slipped	slipped
teach	taught	taught
let	let	let

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**...
 Harry **has written**...
 It **has walked**...
 The **handle has slipped**...
 Mrs. Bee **has taught**...
 He **has let**...

I **have taken**...
 They **have written**...
 You **have walked**...
 I **have slipped**...
 I **have taught**...
 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 | _____ | 11 | come | _____ |
| 2 | write | _____ | 12 | be | _____ |
| 3 | live | _____ | 13 | go | _____ |
| 4 | see | _____ | 14 | fly | _____ |
| 5 | buy | _____ | 15 | give | _____ |
| 6 | teach | _____ | 16 | grow | _____ |
| 7 | let | _____ | 17 | know | _____ |
| 8 | arrive | _____ | 18 | break | _____ |
| 9 | announce | _____ | 19 | think | _____ |
| 10 | make | _____ | 20 | shut | _____ |

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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. | take |
| 2 | Mike _____ for a job as a waiter. | apply |
| 3 | I _____ just _____ from my holiday. | return |
| 4 | I _____ this movie before. | see |
| 5 | Since the summer, we _____ three times. | go hiking |
| 6 | Fluffy _____ a good dog today. | be |
| 7 | Norman and Jane _____ their wedding. | postpone |
| 8 | The cats _____ all their food. | eat |
| 9 | The players _____ a rest and they're ready to go. | have |
| 10 | Dustin _____ over thirty books. | write |
| 11 | We _____ already _____ your car. | repair |
| 12 | My secretary _____ here since 2005. | work |
| 13 | Congratulations! You _____ just _____ a million dollars! | win |
| 14 | We _____ all _____ problems like this before. | face |
| 15 | It's too late. Johnson _____ already _____. | leave |
| 16 | Mei Ling _____ a school trip. | organize |
| 17 | Recently, people _____ him with a new girlfriend. | spot |
| 18 | The waiters _____ the tables. We can begin dining. | prepare |
| 19 | It's over! The war _____ finally _____. | end |
| 20 | She _____ always _____ nice to her kids. | be |

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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Section 4

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.

Yet

He hasn't left yet.

Just

Sean has just left.

Ever

Have you ever been to Mexico?

Never

I have never been to Mexico.

Always

He has always been faithful to his wife.

Times

They have been to Mexico three times.

Recently

Have you been to Mexico recently?

Before

Have you been to Mexico before?

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

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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. | _____. |

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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 linking 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.



Section 7



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 |

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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.	(<i>she</i> does the action)
Passive:	She was hit by her brother.	(<i>she</i> receives the action)



- 5 He has built the tower. _____.
- 6 We have sealed the deal. _____.
- 7 I have not opened it. _____.
- 8 She has scheduled a meeting. _____.
- 9 The cops have caught the crooks. _____.
- 10 The cats have caught the rats. _____.

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

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. _____.

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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	taken	11	come	come
2	write	written	12	be	been
3	live	lived	13	go	gone or been
4	see	seen	14	fly	flown
5	buy	bought	15	give	given
6	teach	taught	16	grow	grown
7	let	let	17	know	known
8	arrive	arrived	18	break	broken
9	announce	announced	19	think	thought
10	make	made	20	shut	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 ? | 6 Which one have you chosen ? |
| 2 How long have they lived there ? | 7 How many pounds has she lost ? |
| 3 Who has taken your car ? | 8 How long has she been here ? |
| 4 How long has Vera known about it ? | 9 Where has Joe gone ? |
| 5 How many times have you seen it ? | 10 Who has she married ? |

Exercise 6

Constructing negative sentences in the present perfect tense.

Answers:

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

