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These two tenses can be confusing for English learners. In this lesson, we will look at how these verb tenses are used and how they are the same and different. We just use a past tense verb to make a sentence in the past tense. I saw Mark yesterday. I went to Ohio University. She didn't come yesterday. We use "have/has + past participle verb" to make a sentence in the present perfect tense. I have been to Europe. He has not met Sally. We have lived in Korea for 10 years. Here are some important things to remember. 1. We can use both the past tense and the present perfect tense to talk about things in the past. I went to China. Did you go to China? I have been to China. Have you been to China? However, we cannot use a specific time with the present perfect tense. I went to China in 2007. Did you go to China in 2007? I have been to China in 2007. Have you been to China in 2007? If we need to use a specific time, then we need to use a past tense sentence. I met her last year. She called us three days ago. We got together last Christmas. We use the present perfect to talk about experiences. The time is not important. I have tried raw fish. She has visited many countries. They have been here before. We cannot use a specific time with the present perfect tense, but we can tell how many times. I have been to Brazil 3 times. She has been surfing many times. We have gone camping twice. We can also tell the number of times with past tense sentences. We usually do this when we are telling the number of times and a specific time. I visited Australia two times in 2015. She called 3 times while you were in the shower. We went to that restaurant 4 times last week. We can use the present perfect tense to talk about life experiences or recent experiences. We usually use adverbs to express this clearly. Here are some examples of sentences and questions that are talking about life experiences. I have been to Canada before. I have been to Canada. She has tried raw fish. Have you ever been to Japan? Have you been to Kenya before? Here are some examples of sentences and questions that are about recent experiences. Have you traveled recently? Have you seen any good movies recently? I have been to Europe recently. She hasn't been here lately. 2. We also use the present perfect tense to talk about things that started in the past, but are not finished. They are still happening or continuing. This is very different than the past tense because the past tense only talks about things that finished in the past. We use "for + total time" and "since + starting time" with these sentences to show how long the action has continued. I have lived in Korea for 9 years. She has played the piano since 2005. We have known each other since high school. I have studied English for a long time. It is possible to use "since + clause". We have known each other since we were babies. I have liked baseball since I was a little kid. We can also use the present perfect continuous tense in the same way. We usually use this for short-term actions. We make the present perfect continuous with "have/has + been + present participle". The present participle is just "verb + ing". He has been crying for 3 hours. We have been talking since 3 pm. It is now 6 pm. They have been fighting since this morning. 3. We can use the present perfect in two ways - to talk about experiences or to talk about things that started in the past, but are still continuing. The easiest way to tell the difference is to look for the words "for" or "since". Look at the difference between these sentences. I have lived in Korea. (Life Experience) This is talking about a life experience. It means that I have experience living in Korea, but that I do not live in Korea anymore. This sentence is the same as "I lived in Korea". I have lived in Korea for 10 years. (Unfinished Action) I have lived in Korea since 2007. (Unfinished Action) The words "for" and "since" tell us that this is an unfinished action. That means that I still live in Korea now. 4. Sometimes, the present perfect can be used for things that finished very recently. In these situations, we can use either the past tense or the present perfect tense. We usually use the word "just" with these sentences. The company just announced their sales results. (Past Tense) The company has just announced their sales results. (Present Perfect) Summary/Remember that the past tense and present perfect tense can both be used to talk about things that happened in the past. The only difference is that we can use a specific time with the past tense, but we cannot use a specific time with the present perfect tense. I did it yesterday. I have done it. If there is no specific time, then we can use both. They have the same basic meaning. I went there. I have been there. We can also use the present perfect to talk about unfinished actions. These are things that started in the past and are still happening. We use the words "for" and "since" with these sentences. I have lived here for many years. I have known her since high school. There are many other details about the past tense and the present perfect tense that we need to know, but this lesson should help you understand the main differences between the past tense and the present perfect tense. If you want to speak English well, then it is important that you know the difference between the past tense and the present perfect tense in English. The simple past and the present perfect both refer to past actions, but are not interchangeable in English grammar. The simple past is used with a specific time marker for actions that started and finished in the past. The present perfect is used without a time marker for actions that began in the past, but still have a connection to the present. Learn the difference between the simple past and the present perfect in English grammar with Lingolia, then practice using them in the interactive exercises. When comparing the simple past and the present perfect, there are two key differences that can help us: Key difference 1: the simple past refers to a specific action and often tells us when it happened the present perfect does not tell us when an action happened, only that it did. Examples: I went to Norway in 2014. (simple past) when? in 2014 I've visited Norway several times. (present perfect) when? not specified Key difference 2: present perfect actions happened in the past, but are connected to the present simple past actions started and finished in the past. Examples: Chris can't come on the trip, he has broken his leg. (present perfect) his leg is still broken I broke my leg when I was fifteen. (simple past) my leg is fine now The table below shows when to use the simple past and when to use the present perfect simple: Signal words can help us to recognise which tense to use in a sentence. Below is a list of signal words for the simple past and present perfect simple tenses. Improve your English with Lingolia. Each grammar topic comes with one free exercise where you can review the basics, as well as many more Lingolia Plus exercises where you can practise according to your level. Check your understanding by hovering over the info bubbles for simple explanations and handy tips. Simple Past/Present Perfect Simple - free exercise Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 1 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 2 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 3 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 4 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 5 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 6 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: comparison 7 B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (1) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (2) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (3) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (4) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (5) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (6) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: questions B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: recent or further back? B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: finished vs. unfinished time periods (1) B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: mini dialogues B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: Malala Yousofzai B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: dialogue B1 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (7) B2 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple (8) B2 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: finished vs. unfinished time periods (2) B2 Simple Past - Present Perfect Simple: Phiona Mutesi B2 Gapfill Multiple choice Drag-and-drop Mixed Understanding the difference between Present Perfect and Past Simple is crucial for mastering English grammar. This comprehensive guide will help you choose the right tense with confidence through clear explanations and practical examples. Present Perfect: Basic Structure Formation Subject + have/has + past participle Examples: I have worked She has studied They have gone Key Time Markers Just Already Yet Ever Never Since For Recently Lately Past Simple: Basic Structure Formation Subject + verb in past tense Examples: I worked She studied They went Key Time Markers Yesterday Last week/month/year Two days ago In 2020 When Then At that time When to Use Present Perfect 1. Actions Continuing into the Present / "I have lived in London for five years." (still living there) / "She has studied English since 2020." (still studying) 2. Recent Past with Current Relevance / "I have just finished my homework." (emphasis on completion) / "He has already eaten lunch." (effect on current situation) 3. Life Experiences / "I have visited Paris three times." (in my life until now) / "She has never seen snow." (in her life until now) 4. Unfinished Time Periods / "I have worked hard this week." (week isn't over) / "She has made five sales this month." (month continues) When to Use Past Simple 1. Completed Actions at a Specific Time / "I lived in London in 2019." (not living there now) / "She studied English last year." (finished studying) 2. Sequential Past Events / "I woke up, ate breakfast, and went to work." / "She called me, and I answered." 3. Historical Facts / "Shakespeare wrote many plays." / "The Wright brothers invented the airplane." 4. Finished Time Periods / "I worked hard last week." / "She made five sales last month." Common Mistakes to Avoid Mistake 1: Using Present Perfect for Specific Past Times "I have gone to Paris last year." / "I went to Paris last year." Mistake 2: Using Past Simple for Unfinished Time Periods "I already finished my homework." / "I have already finished my homework." Mistake 3: Mixing Tenses Incorrectly "I have gone to Paris, and I visited the Eiffel Tower." / "I went to Paris and visited the Eiffel Tower." / "I have gone to Paris and have visited the Eiffel Tower." Practice Scenarios Scenario 1: Job Experience / "I worked at Microsoft from 2015 to 2018." (specific finished period) / "I have worked in tech for ten years." (continuing experience) Scenario 2: Travel / "I went to Japan in 2019." (specific past trip) / "I have been to Japan twice." (life experience) Scenario 3: Daily Activities / "I ate breakfast at 8 AM." (specific time today) / "I have eaten breakfast already." (relevant to now) Special Cases and Exceptions 1. Recent News Both tenses can be correct: "The President has announced new policies." (emphasis on current relevance) "The President announced new policies." (emphasis on the event) 2. Dead vs. Living People "Shakespeare wrote plays." (dead - Past Simple) "J.K. Rowling has written many books." (living - Present Perfect possible) 3. With "Ever" and "Never" Present Perfect for life experiences: "Have you ever visited Rome?" Past Simple for specific times: "Did you ever visit Rome when you lived in Italy?" Language Functions and Context 1. Talking About Experience / Present Perfect: "Have you ever tried sushi?" / Past Simple: "Did you try the sushi at the party?" 2. Reporting News / Present Perfect: "Scientists have discovered a new species." / Past Simple: "Scientists discovered a new species last month." 3. Discussing Achievements / Present Perfect: "She has won three awards." / Past Simple: "She won the award in 2022." Quick Reference Guide Use Present Perfect When: Action continues to present Recent past affects present Talking about life experiences Time period is unfinished Use Past Simple When: Action completed at specific time Sequence of past events Historical facts Time period is finished Practice Tips 1. Time Markers Exercise List activities with time markers Decide which tense fits each marker 2. Personal Timeline Create timeline of life events Practice describing them in both tenses 3. News Headlines Read news headlines Notice tense usage patterns Some of the most confusing tenses in the English language are the present perfect and past perfect. They become especially confusing when you have to identify which tense to use and which one is being used. So today, let's practice both of those tenses. Present perfect: The present perfect is formed by using 'has' or 'have' and the past participle of the verb. For example, "I have watched the movie" or "She has watched the movies." So when do you use the present perfect? That is a great question. We use the present perfect when we are talking about an event that started in the past and the event still has some influence in the present. This influence could be something that you have experienced in your life that still has an impact on your life. It could also be used for things that have changed over a time, or a task that was unfinished in the past and will be completed in the future. Let's take a look at each example: An experience: "I have been to India." Change over time: "Her English has improved since she joined EF English Live." An unfinished task: "He has not finished cleaning the house." "All of these tasks started in the past, but something about them still applies in the present time. Something about them could change in the present or future. Improve your English grammar, vocabulary and more with EF English Live Get started for free! Past perfect: This is formed by combining 'had' with the past participle of the verb. The past perfect is very similar to the present perfect because the event also started in the past. However, the difference between the events is that the past perfect event also ended in the past. This can be used with a specified time. For example, "I had studied in China last year." This also implies the event happened a long time ago. This diagram may help to explain further: Also, a confusion that students tend to have is when they see 'have had' placed together in a sentence. For example, "I have had a cold". So is this the present perfect because of 'have', or is the past perfect because of 'had'? In order to identify the correct tense, always look at the first 'have' or 'had.' In this sentence, we first used 'have', therefore this sentence is the present perfect. Related guide: ENGLISH GRAMMAR FOR YOUR CV. Image: Alejandro Escamilla. Click here for our complete programme to perfect your English grammar. Watch the video here or read the explanation and do the exercises below. Present Perfect Simple Past Simple Unfinished actions that started in the past and continue to the present: I've known Julie for ten years (and I still know her). Finished actions: I knew Julie for ten years (but then she moved away and we lost touch). A finished action in someone's life (when the person is still alive: life experience): My brother has been to Mexico three times. A finished action in someone's life (when the person is dead): My great-grandmother went to Mexico three times. A finished action with a result in the present: I've lost my keys! (The result is that I can't get into my house now). A finished action with no result in the present: I lost my keys yesterday. It was terrible! (Now there is no result. I got new keys yesterday). With an unfinished time word (this week, this month, today): I've seen John this week. With a finished time word (last week, last month, yesterday): Click here to download this explanation as a PDF. Click here for more information about the present perfect tense. Click here for more information about the past simple tense. Remember: We use the past simple for past events or actions which have no connection to the present. We use the present perfect for actions which started in the past and are still happening now OR for finished actions which have a connection to the present. We CAN'T use the present perfect with a finished time word: NOT: I've been to the museum yesterday. Present perfect or past simple exercise 1 Present perfect or past simple exercise 2 Present perfect or past simple exercise 3 Present perfect or past simple exercise 4 Click here for our complete programme to perfect your English grammar. function playAudio(zz) { document.getElementById("myAudio").src = zz var x = document.getElementById("myAudio"); x.play(); } She had gone to New York. Here, we are referring to an action that happened in the past and is already finished. Page 2 Share This lesson explores the Present Perfect with concise explanations and practical examples to help you grasp the concept better. Home Grammar tenses present perfect perfect tenses present perfect Past tense and present perfect are both verb tenses used to indicate actions that have already occurred. However, there are key differences between the two. Past tense is used to describe actions that happened at a specific point in the past, while present perfect is used to describe actions that have been completed at an unspecified time in the past or have relevance to the present moment. Additionally, past tense is formed by adding -ed to regular verbs, while present perfect is formed by using the auxiliary verb "have" or "has" followed by the past participle of the main verb. Overall, both tenses serve different purposes in conveying the timing and completion of actions in English grammar. When it comes to verb tenses in English, two of the most commonly used are Past Tense and Present Perfect. Both tenses have their own unique attributes and are used in different contexts. In this article, we will explore the differences between Past Tense and Present Perfect, and when it is appropriate to use each. Formation Past Tense is formed by adding "-ed" to the base form of regular verbs, while irregular verbs have unique past tense forms. For example, the past tense of the verb "walk" is "walked," while the past tense of "go" is "went." On the other hand, Present Perfect is formed by using the auxiliary verb "have" or "has" followed by the past participle of the main verb. For example, "I have eaten" or "She has gone." Time Frame Past Tense is used to talk about actions that were completed in the past and have no connection to the present. It is often used to narrate events that happened at a specific point in time. For example, "I visited Paris last summer." Present Perfect, on the other hand, is used to talk about actions that started in the past and have a connection to the present. It is often used to describe experiences or actions that have relevance to the present moment. For example, "I have lived in this city for five years." Specificity When using Past Tense, the focus is on a specific point in time when the action took place. It is used to describe actions that have a clear beginning and end. For example, "She finished her homework yesterday." Present Perfect, on the other hand, is more focused on the result or consequences of the action rather than the specific time it occurred. It is used to describe actions that have an impact on the present moment. For example, "I have lost my keys." Frequency Past Tense is often used to talk about actions that happened once or a specific number of times in the past. It is used to describe completed actions. For example, "He called me yesterday." Present Perfect, on the other hand, is used to talk about actions that have occurred at an unspecified time in the past or actions that have relevance to the present. It is often used with adverbs like "never," "ever," "already," or "yet." For example, "I have never been to Japan." Examples To further illustrate the differences between Past Tense and Present Perfect, let's look at some examples: Past Tense: "She cooked dinner last night." Present Perfect: "I have already eaten dinner." Past Tense: "They went to the beach last weekend." Present Perfect: "I have been to the beach many times." Conclusion In conclusion, Past Tense and Present Perfect are two important verb tenses in English that are used in different contexts. Past Tense is used to talk about completed actions in the past, while Present Perfect is used to talk about actions that started in the past and have a connection to the present. Understanding the differences between these two tenses can help improve your English language skills and communication abilities. Comparisons may contain inaccurate information about people, places, or facts. Please report any issues.