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Learn English > English lessons and exercises > English test #66482: Past simple / Present perfect (simple / continuous)Past simple and Present perfectThe past simple is used to talk about completed actions at a particular point in the past, often with dates or times and words like yesterday, last and ago:Kurt went to Canada in 1991. I didn't see you yesterday. Where were you?The Present perfect is used to talk about recent actions or events when no fixed time is given (e.g. news reports) often with words like just, recently and lately:A volcano has erupted in Japan. I've just seen your mother in the street) actions which have a result in the present:what's wrong? Have you lost your keys?etc.) actions in a period of time which is not yet finished, and experiences in someone's life so far, often with yet, so far, ever, for and since haven't had any letters this week. (Compare : I had five letters last week)She's visited New York five times. (in her life so far)Have you ever been to Greece? The present perfect continuous is used to talk about actions which started in the past and are still happening, or which have recently stopped but have a result in the present:I've been waiting here for ten minutes.Your eyes are red. You haven't been crying, have you? Twitter ShareEnglish exercise "Past simple / Present perfect (simple / continuous)" created by anonymous with the test builder.Click here to see the current stats of this English test Please log in to save your progress.End of the free exercise to learn English: Past simple / Present perfect (simple / continuous)A free English exercise to learn English.Other English exercises on the same topics : | Past | Present perfect | All our lessons and exercises Download this explanation in PDF. Click here for our complete programme to perfect your English grammar. We use both of these tenses for finished and unfinished actions. The present perfect simple can be used (often with 'since' and 'for') to talk about unfinished actions. The present perfect continuous can be used (often with 'since' and 'for') to talk about completed actions that started in the past and are still true in the present. (Of course, we don't use the present perfect continuous with stative verbs): She's been living here for three years. Sometimes there's really no difference in meaning between the two tenses. This is especially the case with verbs such as 'live', 'work' and 'study': They've lived in London since 2004. They've been living in London since 2004. I've studied French for ten years. I've been studying French for ten years. He's worked at the company since 2009. Sometimes, there is a difference in meaning: 1: The present perfect continuous can be used to emphasise the length of time that has passed. The present perfect simple is generally neutral: They've been waiting for hours! (This emphasises the length of time). They've waited for hours. (This doesn't emphasise the length of time). 2: On the other hand, the present perfect simple is often used when we're talking about how much or how many. This isn't possible with the present perfect continuous: She's drunk three cups of coffee this morning. She's drunk at least a litre of coffee today. (NOT: she's been drinking three cups of coffee this morning). 3: The present perfect continuous often focuses on the action itself, while the present perfect simple focuses on the fact that the action is completed. I'm enjoying it, but I'm not finished. I've read the book you recommended. (I've finished it, so we can talk about it). We use 'yet' and 'already' with the present perfect simple. Have you read the book yet? She's finished her work already. This difference is often used to talk about different kinds of results in the present. The present perfect simple is used when the action is finished, and the result comes from the action being finished: I've eaten dinner, so let's go out. She's done all her homework, so she can relax this evening. I've made a cake. Would you like some? The present perfect continuous is used when the result comes from the action itself. It doesn't matter if the whole action is finished or not. The result is often something we can see, hear, smell, or feel: I've been eating dinner, so there are plates all over the table. She's been doing her homework, so she's tired. I've been making a cake, that's why the kitchen is such a mess. 4: Finally, the present perfect continuous can be used to emphasise that something is temporary: She's been running a lot recently. (She doesn't usually do this). Usually I study at home, but I've been studying in the library for the last week. Click here for more about the present perfect simple tense. Click here for more about the present perfect continuous tense. Download this explanation in PDF. Click here for our complete programme to perfect your English grammar. Present perfect or present perfect continuous exercises 1 Present perfect or present perfect continuous exercises 2 Present perfect or present perfect continuous exercise 3 English ESL WorksheetsGrammarsVerb tenses When teaching Europeans, ESL tutors spend a lot of time explaining the difference between the simple past vs. present perfect and, the present perfect vs. present perfect continuous. Here are some exercises to help your students understand the difference. The difference between these two tenses is all about the time. We use the simple past when the action occurs in a time-frame that is finished. Another way to say this is 'closed time.' For example: 'Steve played tennis yesterday.' We use the present perfect when the action occurs in a time frame that continues. Another way to say this is 'open time.' Note: With present perfect, usually the action is finished, but it's the time that continues. For example: 'Jane has eaten an apple this week.' Jane finished eating the apple in the past but this week continues. Help your students distinguish between these two tenses, with this activity. Step one: Explain the 'closed time,' 'open time' concept. Step two: Ask your student to give you examples using closed time markers such as 'yesterday', 'last week', 'last year' and open time markers such as 'today', 'this week', 'this year'. Step three: Next, ask your student to imagine that it is 3pm. Step four: You say a time marker and ask your student whether it is open time or closed time. Each time they answer, ask them to give you an example. Make the time-frame gradually smaller until you end with '10 minutes ago.' Closed time Open time Yesterday Today Last week This month Last year This year This morning This afternoon 2pm This hour 10 minutes ago So far. In the last few hours, days, weeks, months, years. Step five: Finally, get your student to answer these questions using the past simple or present perfect. Then practice the other tense by saying things like: And this week? How many coffees did you drink yesterday? (past simple) And today? (present perfect) How many packages have you sent this week? And last week? How many emails did you write this morning? And this afternoon? How many people did you see yesterday? And today? How many times have you gone to the gym this month? And last month? Continue until your student understands the difference between the two tenses. We use the present perfect continuous when the action starts in the past and continues to the present. For example: 'She has been working for the company for 5 years.' With the present perfect, the action has usually finished but in a time-frame that continues. For example: 'I have watched two films this week.' Watching the films happened in the past, but the week continues. However, state verbs such as, 'to have' for possession and 'to know,' cannot usually be put into continuous tense. Therefore, we use the present perfect if the action continues and not the present perfect continuous. For example: 'I have known John for 10 years', not, 'I have been knowing John for 10 years' or 'how long have you had that pen?' not, 'how long have you been having that pen.' Opinions: To love, to like, to have, to think (as in opinion), to believe, to prefer, to appear, to seem, to suppose. Descriptions of things: To belong, to contain, to exist, to consist, to be + adjective. Also: To know, to understand, to have (as in possession), to remember. Some verbs, however, can be either an action or a state as they have two meanings. These are: Think: Is a state when it is an opinion; 'She thinks France is a lovely country' and an action when speaking about ideas: 'He is thinking about going on holiday.' Have: Is a state when it talks about a possession: 'He has a car' and an action when talking about 'having food' or 'having a good time.' Remember: Is a state when talking tasks: 'Remember to turn off the light' and an action when talking about memories: 'He sat on the porch, remembering his Grandfather.' This is mainly used in literature. Help your students understand when to use the present perfect and when to use the present perfect continuous, with this exercise for homework. Present-perfect-tenses-worksheetsDownload Melissa and John (1. to be married) for 10 years. Melissa (2. work) for her company for 10 years. She has also (3. study) for her MBA for the last two years. John owns a furniture company. He (4. have) his company for 5 years. This week John (5. sell) 10 dining tables and 5 sofas. Melissa and John (6. live) in their apartment for 8 years. They live next door to a young couple. They (7. known) their neighbours for three years. John likes home improvement. He (8. paint) the terrace for two weeks. It is a large terrace and he (9. use) two sets of paint already. Melissa and John are looking after a friend's dog called Sam. Sam (10. have) a long walk today and so he is happy. He (11. stay) with Melissa and John for quite a long time - over two weeks already. Melissa and John don't mind. They (12. enjoy) the company. Sam likes to watch the wildlife in the garden. He (13. chase) three cats around the garden so far. Answers I have been married, 2. has been working, 3. has been studying, 4. has had, 5. has sold, 6. have been living, 7. have known, 8. has been painting, 9. has used, 10. has had, 11. has been staying, 12. have been enjoying, 13. has chased. We hope that exercises prove useful for your classes and students. If you'd like another grammar exercise, please leave your suggestions in the comments below. Andromeda is a Fluent English tutor. She has been teaching English in Spain and online since 2012. 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