

PRESENT PERFECT VS. PAST SIMPLE

PAST SIMPLE

Form:

infinitive + -ed

(Irregular forms vary considerably in their past form. Learn the list!)

Uses:

A) It is used for actions completed in the past at a definite time. It is therefore used:

1. for a past action when the time is given:

e.g. *I met him yesterday.*

e.g. *Pasteur died in 1895.*

2. or when the time is asked about:

e.g. *When did you meet him?*

3. or when the action clearly took place at a definite time even though this time is not mentioned:

e.g. *The train was ten minutes late.*

e.g. *How did you get your present job?*

e.g. *I bought this car in Montreal.*

4. Sometimes the time becomes definite as a result of a question and answer in the present perfect:

e.g. *Where have you been? – I've been to the opera. – Did you enjoy it?*

e.g. *Have you ever been to Australia? – Yes, I have. – When did you go?*

B) The simple past tense is used for an action whose time is not given but which

a) occupied a period of time now terminated:

e.g. He *worked* in that bank for four years. (but he doesn't work there now)

e.g. She *lived* in Rome for a long time. (but she's not living there now)

or

b) occurred at a moment in a period of time now terminated:

e.g. My grandmother once *saw* Queen Victoria.

e.g. *Did* you ever *hear* Maria Callas sing?

C) The simple past tense is also used for a past habit:

e.g. He always *carried* an umbrella.

e.g. They never *drank* wine.

PRESENT PERFECT

Form:

have/has + past participle

Uses:

1. An action that began in the past and continues until the present:

e.g. I **have lived** in London for two years. (=I still live in London)

e.g. How long **have** you **been** there? (=You are still there)

2. For recent actions when time is not mentioned:

e.g. I **have read** the instructions but I don't understand them.

e.g. I've already **had** dinner.

e.g. **Have** you **had** breakfast? – No, I **haven't had** it **yet**.

3. Recent actions in the present perfect often have results in the present:

e.g. Tom **has had** a bad car crash. (=He's probably still in hospital)

e.g. The lift **has broken** down. (=We have to use the stairs)

e.g. I **have washed** the car. (=It looks lovely)

* But actions expressed by the simple past without a time expression do not normally have results in the present:

e.g. Tom **had** a bad car crash. (=but he's probably out of hospital now)

e.g. The lift **broke down**. (=but it's probably working again now)

e.g. I **washed** the car. (=but it may be dirty again now)

4. An action that has happened very recently in time. In this case, we use 'just':

e.g. The plane **has just taken off**.

e.g. He **has just gone** out. (=He went out a few minutes ago)

5. Actions that occur further back in the past, provided that the connection with the present is still maintained:

e.g. I **have seen** wolves in that forest (=it is still possible to see them)

e.g. John Smith **has written** a number of short stories (=he's still alive and can write more)

But if the wolves have been killed and John Smith is dead we would say:

e.g. I **saw** wolves in that forest.

e.g. John Smith **wrote** a number of short stories.

COMMON EXPRESSIONS WITH PRESENT PERFECT:

Ever, never, just, yet, already, recently, lately, how long...?, since, for

Actions expressed by the present perfect + **yet** usually have results in the present:

e.g. He **hasn't come yet**. (=so we are still waiting for him)

OTHER EXAMPLES:

e.g. The plane **has just taken off**.

e.g. *How long **have** you **studied** for the test?*

e.g. *How long **have** you **lived** here?*

e.g. *I **have taken** pictures of famous actors **for** two years.*

e.g. *We **have** **recently moved** home.*

e.g. *She **has been** here **since** six o'clock (=and is still here)*

e.g. *He **has been** here **recently** (=recently means 'at some undefined time during the last week/month, etc')*

Main differences between present perfect and past simple:

Past Simple:

It indicates what happened (completed action) at a specific point in the past.

e.g. *Did you **see** the match **last night**?*

Present Perfect:

Past action where no specific time is mentioned:

e.g. *I've **been** to Paris **twice**.*

There is a connection with the present:

e.g. *I've **worked** here **for** two years. (=I still work here).*

But:

e.g. *I **worked** here **for** two years. (=I don't work here any more)*

Example of contrast between Past Simple and Present Perfect:

e.g. *I **put** an advert in the newspaper last Monday, but no one **has phoned** yet.*

Compare:

e.g. *I **have read** the instructions but I don't understand them.*

e.g. *I **read** the instructions last night.*