

The present perfect tense is a tense which is specific to the English language. Many learners of English as second language find it particularly difficult. This is because the present perfect uses ideas or concepts that do not exist in those languages. French, for example, has no present perfect aspect. Actually, the **structure** of the present perfect tense is very simple. The difficulties come with the **use** of the tense.

## 1. THE PRESENT PERFECT

**Structure:** have /has + past participle

Present perfect time expressions include: **ever, never, not...yet, already, so far, up to now, till now, this week, this month, this year, for** (+ a period of time), **since** (+ an exact point in time).

The Present perfect creates a connection between the past and the present; it is used:

**i. to describe an action that happened at an indefinite time in the past**  
(Here, we don't want to know when you did something, but only if you did it.)

My sister and her husband have bought a computer.  
We have already met this man.

**Note:** The simple past is used if the time of the activity or situation is mentioned.

They bought a computer **last week**.  
We met this man **in 2008**.

**i. to describe life experiences**

I've already visited Paris.  
Have you ever seen an elephant?

**iii. to talk about past actions with results in the present**

Pascal has lost his keys. (Now, he can't unlock the door.)  
I've eaten too much. (Now, I have a stomach ache.)

**iv. when the time period has not finished**

This political leader has had two meetings this week.

**Note:** We are talking about "this week" and this week isn't finished yet, so the politician may have several other meetings before the end of the week.)

**v. with "just" to describe recent events**  
(Events that have just been completed at the moment of speaking.)

This boy has just eaten a sandwich.  
The secretary has just finished typing her report.

**vi. with "for" and "since" to talk about actions which started in the past and are still in progress.** In this respect the present perfect and present perfect continuous are very similar.

Greg has lived in Port-Gentil for twenty years. (He still lives in Port-Gentil)  
Greg has lived in Port-Gentil since 1990. (He still lives in Port-Gentil)

**Note:** The simple past is used with **for** and **since**, when the actions have already finished:

Greg lived in Port-Gentil for twenty years. (He doesn't live in Port-Gentil now.)

## 2. THE PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS

**Structure:** have /has + been + V-ing

Time expressions which are used with the present perfect continuous include **for, since, all week, for days, lately, recently, over the last few months.**

There is usually a connection with the **present** or now. The present perfect continuous tense is basically used to talk about:

**i. an action that started in the past and continues to the present. This is often used with 'for' or 'since'.**

I have been reading for two hours. (I am still reading now.)

*Je lis depuis deux heures.*

We've been studying since 9 o'clock. (We're still studying now.)

*Nous étudions depuis 9h00.*

**ii. an action that has recently stopped and where you can still see evidence**

She is tired <sup>[now]</sup> because she has been running.

*Elle est fatiguée <sup>[maintenant]</sup> car elle courait à l'instant. = Elle vient de courir.*

You're sweating. <sup>[now]</sup> What have you been doing?

*Tu transpires. <sup>[maintenant]</sup> Que faisais-tu à l'instant?*

**iii. a series of actions**

I've been thinking about you.

*Je n'ai cessé de penser à toi.*

My girlfriend has been phoning me all week for an answer.

*Ma petite amie m'a téléphoné toute cette semaine pour me demander une réponse.*

You haven't been doing well over the last few months.

*Tu as bien travaillé ces derniers mois. (Et cela continue.)*

This woman hasn't been talking to her husband for days.

*Cela fait des jours que cette femme ne parle pas à son mari.*