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Present Perfect or Past Simple Tense?

L5 Grammar

Lesson Contents

Present Perfect or Past Simple Tense?

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Summary

Past Simple	Present Perfect
<p>An action which happened at a specific time in the past:</p> <p><i>I tasted shark fin soup yesterday.</i></p>	<p>An action which happened in the past, but the time isn't mentioned:</p> <p><i>I've tasted shark fin soup.</i></p>
<p>An action which started and finished in the past:</p> <p><i>She lived there two years ago.</i></p>	<p>An action which started in the past and continues to the present:</p> <p><i>She has lived there for two years.</i></p>

Is the **time** in the past given?

For an action which happened at a **specific time** in the past, use the **past simple**.

For an action which happened in the past, but the **time isn't given**, use the **present perfect**.

Example 1

I visited Ocean Park last year .	specific time given → past simple
I 've visited Ocean Park before.	no specific time given → present perfect

Is the **time** in the past given?

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For an action which happened at a **specific time** in the past, use the **past simple**.

For an action which happened in the past, but the **time isn't given**, use the **present perfect**.

Example 2

I **read** that book **last week**. **specific time given** → **past simple**

I've **read** that book. **no specific time given** → **present perfect**

Is the **time** in the past given?

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For an action which happened at a **specific time** in the past, use the **past simple**.

For an action which happened in the past, but the **time isn't given**, use the **present perfect**.

Example 3

I **won** this competition **a year ago**. **specific time given** → **past simple**

I've **won** this competition. **no specific time given** → **present perfect**

Is the **time** in the past given?

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You can **never** have the **present perfect tense** with a **specific time phrase**. Use the **past simple** instead.

Wrong X

Correct

I **have eaten** dinner at **6pm**.

I **ate** dinner at **6pm**.

They **have asked** the teacher for help **earlier**. They **asked** the teacher for help **earlier**.

We **have met** each other **a year ago**.

We **met** each other **a year ago**.

Is the action **completed**?

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For an action which started **and finished** in the past, use the **past simple**.

For an action which started in the past, but **is still happening** in the present, use the **present perfect**.

Example 1

I **studied** Japanese two years ago.  **i don't study it any more.**

I've **studied** Japanese for two years.  **I still study it.**

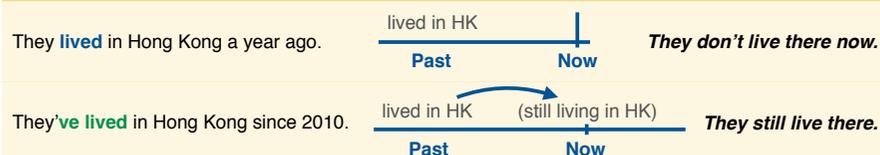
Is the action completed?

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For an action which started **and finished** in the past, use the **past simple**.

For an action which started in the past, but **is still happening** in the present, use the **present perfect**.

Example 2



Is the action completed?

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For an action which started **and finished** in the past, use the **past simple**.

For an action which started in the past, but **is still happening** in the present, use the **present perfect**.

Example 3



Present Perfect & Past Simple: Key Words

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Present Perfect	Past Simple
since/for	last time/night/month/week/...
already/yet	just now
after/before	this morning
just	once upon a time
ever/never	three years/two days/long/... ago
times/once/twice	in 2002
recently	in the past
so far	the other day
till now	yesterday

Test your learning 1

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Fill in the gaps in the following sentences using the correct verb from the box in the present perfect or past simple tense.

work	have	write	read
------	------	-------	------

- I _____ this book already.
- I _____ this book last year.
- She _____ a pet cat for three years. Then it ran away.
- She _____ a pet cat for three years. She feeds it every day.
- The author _____ two chapters of her book yesterday.
- The author _____ two chapters of her book so far.
- My mum _____ as a doctor since 2008.
- My mum _____ as a doctor five years ago.

Test your learning 2

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Read the following dialogue and fill in the blanks using the words in the box.

Tom: Shall we watch the new Batman film tonight?

Eleanor: No, I 1. _____ (see) that film already.

Tom: Oh, ok. I 2. _____ (want) to watch it yesterday, but there were no tickets left.

What did you do yesterday?

Eleanor: My friend Sophie and I 3. _____ (play) tennis after school. We 4. _____ (practise) tennis together since we were very young.

Tom: I 5. _____ (love) tennis for years, but now I find it too tiring.

Eleanor: Yes, you 6. _____ (be) very good at tennis a few years ago. You 7. _____ (win) a big competition in 2013.

Tom: That's right! Now, I prefer golf to tennis.

Eleanor: Cool! I _____ (never try) playing golf. Maybe you could teach me!