

## Grammar notes: present perfect

### [General idea of the present perfect](#)

The present perfect is formed using the **present simple of have** as the auxiliary and then **the past participle**.

I've **been** working all afternoon, but I've **finished** everything now.

It's important to remember this because when you use the present perfect you're making a connection between something in the past and something in the present. If what you're referring to only relates to the past or the present, then you'll need to use a different tense.

### [Experience](#)

When we talk about experience, we're usually talking about something that happened at an unspecified time in the past. The important thing is that we did it or it happened, and that today we remember the experience of it. This is the connection between the present and the past.

The most typical way you learn to talk about experience on an English course is by using a question including the word 'ever':

**Have** you ever **been** to India?

**Have** you ever **eaten** haggis?

**Have** you ever **programmed** a video?

The question is asking for general information, but if you want to give specific details, then you will have to change tenses.

Yes, I **have**. I went there on holiday two years ago.

No, I **haven't**. I'm a vegetarian.

I've **tried**, but I always get someone else to do it.

It would be very difficult to use the continuous form to talk about experience. A question like '*Have you ever been flying in a glider?*' looks like the continuous, but the infinitive of the verb is 'to go flying', so in fact it's the simple.

Sometimes it can be difficult to see the difference between talking about experience and talking about the present result of something that happened in the past:

My colleague's **been** to New York (experience).

My colleague's **gone** to New York (he's there now, not here).

As long as you remember both uses are the present perfect, it doesn't really matter what category you think a sentence belongs in.

### [Present result of something that happened in the past](#)

The way we use the present perfect here is self-explanatory and basically the same as Spanish.

Imagine you see a friend in the street, a friend you haven't seen since you left school years ago. It's very likely they'll look different, and the conversation might include sentences like these:

You've **changed** a lot since I last saw you.

You've **lost** a lot of weight.

You've **cut** your hair.

When you use the simple, it often refers more to a completed action. The continuous refers more to repeated actions over a period of time:

I've **been** going to the gym.

I've **been** doing lots of exercise.

I've **been** trying lots of different hairstyles.

If you use the present perfect simple, you generally have to supply more information and make a longer sentence. Often with the continuous you can just use the verb:

~~I've worked.~~ I've **been** working.

~~I've watched TV.~~ I've **been** watching TV.

~~I've drunk.~~ I've **been** drinking.

### Past continuing into the present

In Spanish you have more than one way of expressing this idea, but in English you have to use the present perfect. It describes a verb action that began in the past and continues into the present and quite possibly into the future.

I've **lived** in Spain for over ten years.

My uncle's **been** working in the same company for twenty years.

Sorry I'm late. **Have** you **been** waiting long?

There is sometimes little or no difference between the simple and the continuous:

I've **lived** in this flat since 1998.

I've **been** living in this flat since 1998.

My sister's **worked** in personnel since she left school

My sister's **been** working in personnel since she left school.

Her daughter's **played** chess since she was four.

Her daughter's **been** playing chess since she was four.

If both the simple and the continuous are possible, an English speaker will probably use the continuous.

The simple can sometimes imply something permanent, while the continuous can refer to something more temporary:

This building **has stood** in the centre of town for over five centuries.

He's **been** standing outside waiting for half an hour.

It **has rained** on bank holidays for as long as I can remember.

It's **been** raining since I got up this morning.

### Some comparisons with Spanish

People in Valencia usually use the present perfect to refer to anything that has happened today. We can only do that in English if we are in the same time period:

What **have** you **done** this morning? (It's 11.30 am)

What did you do this morning? (It's 1.30 pm)

**Have** you **had** a nice day? (the day is continuing)

Did you have a nice day at the office? (the day at the office is finished)

If an action is completely finished, even if it happened seconds ago, we use the past simple and not the present perfect. In class it's not impossible to hear someone ask someone else:

¿Qué ha dicho?

What did he say?

The idea of the past continuing into the present often presents problems:

Llevo cinco años trabajando aquí.

Trabajo aquí desde hace cinco años.

I've **been** working here for five years.