

VERBS – PRESENT PERFECT AND SIMPLE PAST TENSES

When speaking or writing about the past, English uses a variety of different tenses, including:

the simple past (*he wrote*), simple present perfect (*he has written*), past continuous/progressive (*he was writing*), simple past perfect (*he had written*), present perfect continuous/progressive (*he has been writing*) and the past perfect continuous/progressive (*he had been writing*).

Knowing when to use which tense can be quite challenging because the time frame within which an event, state or action takes place needs to be taken into consideration.

Mastering and differentiating between **simple present perfect** and the **simple past**, in particular, often poses difficulties because of the time reference.

The most important rules, which govern the use of these two tenses is presented and contrasted in the notes below.

Simple Present Perfect and Simple Past Tenses

Time Reference

Tense	Period of Time
Simple Present Perfect	refers to an event, state or action which has started some time in the past but which may be linked with the present
Simple Past	refers to an event, state or action which has been completed at a specific time in the past

Forms

Simple Present Perfect	
Auxiliary Verb (to have)	Past Participle
I have you have he/she has we have you have they have	<i>-ed or -t endings</i> : dwelled/dwelt, learned/learnt, looked, started <i>irregular verbs</i> : become, drawn, felt, written

STUDY TIPS

When speaking or writing about something, which happened at an unspecified time in the past and is still continuing in the present, use the simple present perfect.

This is also the tense, which is used for news broadcasts, stories in the newspaper and biographical information about a living person.

Simple Past	
<i>regular -ed or -t endings</i>	
Infinitive	Past Tense
burn	burned/burnt
change	changed
learn	learned/learnt
look	looked
start	started
<i>irregular</i>	
eat	ate
become	became
do	did
fall	fell
see	saw
throw	threw
write	wrote

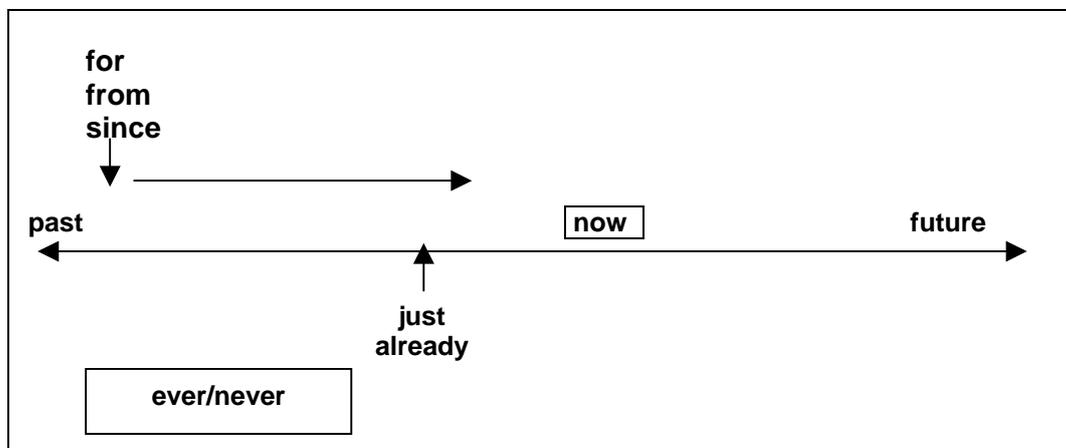
Compare Past Tense and Past Participial Forms

Infinitive	Past Tense	Past Participle
arise	arose	arisen
become	became	become
build	built	built
come	came	come
dream	dreamed/dreamt	dreamed/dreamt
eat	ate	eaten
fall	fell	fallen
give	gave	given
grow	grew	grown
make	made	made
pay	paid	paid
say	said	said
see	saw	seen
sing	sang	sung
teach	taught	taught
throw	threw	thrown
write	wrote	written

Rules of Use – Simple Present Perfect

Simple Present Perfect		
Use	Example	Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a completed action or event which is linked to the present; it refers to the action or event which started at some unspecified time in the past, but extends into the present 	<p>The tsunami has devastated the tourist industry in the region.</p> <p>Have you read the latest <i>Harry Potter</i> book?</p>	<p>the tourist industry is still feeling the effects of the tsunami which occurred some time in the past;</p> <p>if you haven't read the book earlier would you like to read it now</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> commonly used for news broadcasts and newspaper stories 	<p>The Treasurer has said that the economy is strong and performing well.</p> <p>There has been an accident on the Pacific Highway.</p>	<p>the period in which the economy grew precedes the present time, but is relevant to the present;</p> <p>the accident occurred earlier but is being reported now</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which began in the past, and continues up to the present; the following adverbs are commonly used – <i>already, before, ever, never, often, seldom, so far, still, yet</i> 	<p>Have you ever been to the Middle East?</p> <p>The film festival has been fabulous <i>so far</i>.</p>	<p>the question is asking whether the person has been to the Middle East at any time up to now;</p> <p>the festival until now is great but that can change later</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which has repeatedly happened and continues to now; <i>for</i> and <i>since</i> are commonly used as a preposition, <i>for</i> + a duration of time, for example, <i>for twelve hours, for a day, for two hundred years</i> as a preposition <i>since</i> + a specific starting time, for example, <i>since February, since 2004</i>; <i>since</i> can also be used as a conjunction 	<p>I have lived in Australia <i>since 2002</i>.</p> <p>Harry has known Sally <i>for 20 years</i>.</p> <p>He hasn't slept <i>since he arrived from Mongolia</i>.</p>	<p>the person has been living in Australia specifically from 2002</p> <p>they have been acquainted for the specified amount of time</p> <p><i>since</i> is used as a conjunction; introduces the clause which specifies the starting time</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which has happened recently; adverbs such as <i>just, lately</i> and <i>recently</i> are commonly used 	<p>Would you like some coffee? I've just had my morning tea.</p> <p>Have you been to the beach <i>lately</i>?</p>	<p>the person recently finished having a beverage for morning tea</p> <p>the person is asking whether someone has been to the beach recently</p>

The different meanings of the prepositions used with **the simple present perfect** can be illustrated graphically as follows:



Rules of Use – Simple Past

Simple Past		
Use	Example	Meaning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which started and ended in the past; time expressions may also be used such as <i>in 2004, yesterday, last night, two years ago</i> 	<p>She sat the IELTS test last weekend.</p> <p>The new term started <i>yesterday</i>.</p>	<p>taking the test has been completed</p> <p>the commencement of the term has already ended, namely yesterday</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> habitual past actions or events or a sequence of past actions or events 	<p>I watched the boats come in every morning.</p> <p>I got up, had breakfast and caught the early morning train.</p>	<p>the habitual action of watching the boats</p> <p>referring to a sequence of past actions</p>

Contrast – Simple Present Perfect versus Simple Past

Simple Present Perfect	Simple Past
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event happened at an indefinite time <p>I have seen the tall ships in the Harbour.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event happened at a definite time in the past <p>I saw the tall ships in the Harbour on Australia day.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which happened in the past is relevant to the present <p>The negotiators have reached an agreement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which happened in the past bears no relevance to the present <p>The negotiators reached an agreement.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which is unfinished; it started in the past and is still happening <p>She has been in China for two years.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> an action or event which is finished; it started and finished in the past <p>She was in China for two years.</p>