

Present perfect vs. Past simple

In this session you'll review the difference in use between simple past and present perfect, and the time expressions to use with each tense.

Past simple

- We use the **past simple** to talk about finished actions and events in the past when there is a clear reference to a specific time in the past, or when the past time reference is clearly implied or understood.

*Example: I **had** a great time at the party last night. **Did** you **enjoy** it, too?*

(It's clear in this context that this question refers to *last night*.)

Present perfect

- We use the **present perfect simple** to talk about finished actions and events in the past when there is no time reference, or when it's not important, or we don't know exactly when the action happened.

*Example: I've **read** that book many times.*

- We also used the **present perfect** to talk about unfinished actions and events.

*Example: I've **lived** in this city for many years, and I'm not planning to move.*

- Common expressions that refer to periods of time which continue to the present include *so far, up to now, over/during the last four years*.

Some *time* expressions, such as *this morning, today, this week, this month*, can refer to both a period of time that has finished and a period of time that continues in the present.

Examples:

Have you **seen** Mary this morning? (*It is still morning.*)

Did you **see** Mary this morning? (*It is the afternoon; the morning has finished.*)

for/since

We use **for** with a length of time.

*Example: I have worked here **for** 12 years.*

We use **since** with a point of time to describe when the period of time began.

*Example: We've lived here **since** 2005.*

already

We use **already** to emphasise the fact that an action has happened before the present moment in time:

*Example: He's **already** left for work.*

We can use **already** in questions to express surprise at the fact that something has happened sooner than expected.

*Example: Have you finished your homework **already**?*

ever/never

We use **ever/never** to talk and ask about life experiences when the person is still alive.

Examples:

*Have you **ever** been to China? (ever = at any time during your life so far)*

*I've **never** been to Australia. (never = at no time during my life so far)*

If the person is dead, we use the **past simple**.

*Example: My grandfather **never** returned to Italy.*

(not) ... yet

We use **(not) ... yet** to emphasise that an action or event has not happened at any time up to the present moment.

*Example: I haven't finished **yet**. Can you give me more time?*

We use **yet** in questions to ask if an action or event has happened before the present moment in time.

*Example: Has the package arrived **yet**?*