

PRESENT PERFECT VERSUS PAST SIMPLE: An overview

Unit
3
Past simple and present perfect

A Time expressions that refer to the present, such as **this morning / week / month** and **today**, can be used with either past simple or present perfect verbs. Reminder → A6–A12

If we think of **this morning** (etc.) as a past, completed time period, then we use the past simple; if we think of **this morning** (etc.) as a time period which includes the present moment, then we use the present perfect. Compare:

- ☐ I **didn't shave** *this morning*. (= the morning is over and I didn't shave) *and*
- ☐ I **haven't shaved** *this morning*. (= it is still the morning and I might shave later)

B In a sentence which includes a time clause with **since**, we generally prefer a past simple verb in the time clause and a present perfect verb in the main clause. The time clause refers to a particular point in the past:

- ☐ Since Mr Dodson **became** president unemployment **has increased**. (*rather than ... has become ...*)
- ☐ She **hasn't been able** to play tennis *since* she **broke** her arm. (*rather than ... has broken ...*)

Note, however, that we use the present perfect in the time clause if the two situations described in the main clause and time clause extend until the present:

- ☐ **Have you met** any of your neighbours *since* you've lived here? (*not ... you lived ...*)

C With time clauses introduced by **after, when, until, as soon as, once, by the time** and the time expressions **the minute / second / moment** the past simple refers to past, completed events and the present perfect refers to future events. Compare these examples:

- ☐ After she **left** hospital (past), she had a long holiday. *and*
- ☐ After Lucas **has left** school (future), he will be spending six months in India.
- ☐ *The minute* I **got** the news about Anna (past) I telephoned my parents. *and*
- ☐ I'll contact you *the minute* I've got my exam results. (future)

In the time clause in sentences like this it is possible to use the past perfect instead of the past simple (e.g. After she **had left** ...) and the present simple instead of the present perfect (e.g. After Lucas **leaves** ...) with the same meaning (see also Unit 5).

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Exercises

3.1 Complete each sentence with a verb from the box. Use the present perfect or past simple, with a negative form where necessary. A

have
go
oversleep
read
spend
wear

- 1 A: Shall I make us some dinner? It's already eight o'clock.
B: No, thanks. I _____ to the dentist this afternoon and my mouth hurts too much to eat anything.
- 2 I _____ three lectures today and I still have two more later this afternoon.
- 3 It was so hot today that I _____ shorts and a T-shirt at work.
- 4 We _____ £200 on food this month and there's another week to go before I get paid.
- 5 A: Do you want a lift home?
B: No, I _____ this morning because my alarm clock didn't go off, so I need to work late.
- 6 I _____ much of the report yet, but I have to finish it by the weekend.

3.2 Complete the sentences with the pairs of verbs from the box. Choose the most appropriate tense — present perfect or past simple. B

be able – feel
happen – speak
improve – be

not want – fall
rescue – be
work – not have

- 1 Maria _____ to go swimming since she _____ in the river.
- 2 Since she _____ at the company she _____ a day off through illness.
- 3 Since he _____ the girl from a house fire, he _____ on TV almost every day.
- 4 A lot _____ since I last _____ to you.
- 5 Since I _____ to drive I _____ much more independent
- 6 Stefan's reading _____ enormously since he _____ at school.

3.3 One sentence in each pair is wrong. Correct it by replacing the past simple with the present perfect of the italicised verb. C

- 1 a Remember that after you *signed* the contract you won't be able to change your mind.
b Carlo's injury only became apparent after he *signed* to play for Real Madrid.
- 2 a As soon as I *finished* college I want to travel around Australia.
b I didn't have time to check the essay. I handed it in as soon as I *finished* it.
- 3 a By the time Sarah *got* to work the meeting had finished.
b I'll probably have finished breakfast by the time the children *got* up.
- 4 a I recognised her the moment I *heard* her laugh.
b I'll tell you what time we're coming the moment I *heard* from Emil.

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LISTENING ACTIVITY:

- Listen to the following conversation between Steve and his friend.
- Answer to the questions below:

PART A: Sortable answers

1. Have they ever eaten snails?
2. When did Steve's friend eat them?
3. Has she ever eaten fried brains?
4. Steve's friend impression about fried brains was _____.

PART B: Cloze answers: Write a word for these statements.

5. Did she like snails?
6. Did he like the brains?
7. Steve said fried brains were _____ for him.
8. Instead, he ordered a _____, with _____ and a large _____.