

3

Verb tenses 2:

Present perfect

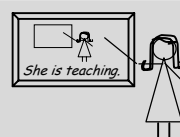
Past perfect

Future perfect

3.1 Present perfect tense

The two sentences in part 2 of our story below exemplify the PRESENT TENSE, PERFECT ASPECT, or as we telescope it, the PRESENT PERFECT TENSE (with further SIMPLE and CONTINUOUS aspects):

TENSE SITUATIONS – PART II



So far Sue **has written** (PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE) two essays and four lesson plans.

She **has been working** (PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS) hard for the last few weeks, studying, preparing lessons, surfing the job market.

Please note in the story that although the *writing* and most if not all of the *working* occurred in the *past time* the tense is called *present* perfect. In case you have difficulty with this remember:

1. The auxiliary verb *have* is in the *present* tense;
2. The action has a *present* relevance or consequence;
3. The action occurs in a time zone up to the present.

The grammatical term *perfect* has little if any explanatory value for ELT.

Teaching note 3.1

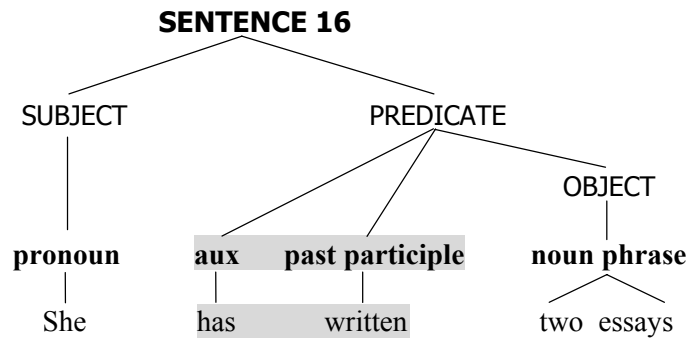
The present perfect tense in English, unlike many other related languages, does not allow mention of a past time (except with *since*), so concerned is it with the present. **Yesterday we have decided ...* is ungrammatical (as indicated by the prefixed asterisk). Even **This morning we have decided ...* is ungrammatical when the morning is over.

In contrast, the past tense must be accompanied somewhere in the discourse by a reference to past time. This is a simple but important difference often overlooked in teaching. **WHEN A PAST TIME IS MENTIONED THE PAST TENSE MUST BE USED.**

When teaching the difference between the present perfect and the past simple don't push too hard; a little now and again is better than a long tiring session. With good input, interesting topics and communicative activities it will look after itself.

Incidentally, by 'rich/good input' is meant meaningful interaction (and reading/listening) with language containing a good proportion of the targeted language.

3.1.1 Form of the present perfect simple



Please don't be distracted by the word *past* in *past participle*. The past participle can be used with any tense. The aux. verb here (*have/has*) is a primary auxiliary verb, not a modal.

past participle: the third form of the verb, e.g.
broken as in *break - broke - broken*, or
loved as in *love - loved - loved*.
 (See chapter 12.)

3.1.2 Uses of the present perfect simple

In the example in our story, *she has written...*, we have only dealt with one use of the present perfect simple: **recent event with relevance to the present**. There is one more important use – **an experience or achievement** anytime in one's (present) life. An example of this would be *Sue has been to Peru*, or *Sue has photographed seven royal families*. You notice again we don't mention the past time as we are not concerned with it. What we are concerned with is *Sue*, in the present, through her experience. However, if we wish to shift the focus to the time of her experience we must use the past tense, e.g. *When did she visit Peru?*

- 1 The grammar in the following sentences is correct, but the sentences don't make sense. The endings have been mixed up. Rearrange the sentences so that they make sense.
 - a) Have you ever ridden a snake?
 - b) Have you ever been asked to the top of a mountain?
 - c) Have you ever met a desert?
 - d) Have you ever driven a television programme?
 - e) Have you ever been to make a speech?
 - f) Have you ever crossed a famous person?
 - g) Have you ever appeared on a Ferrari?
 - h) Have you ever caught a horse on the beach?

- 2 Work with a partner. How do you think your partner would answer each question?
 - a) Yes, I have.
 - b) No, never ... but I'd like to.
 - c) No, never ... and I wouldn't like to.

From *Inside Out Intermediate* by S. Kay and V. Jones (Macmillan). Present perfect for life experience.

A time line can show the present perfect and past tense contrasted. The one below is slightly overloaded for economy of space – normally only two, sometimes three, examples are shown:

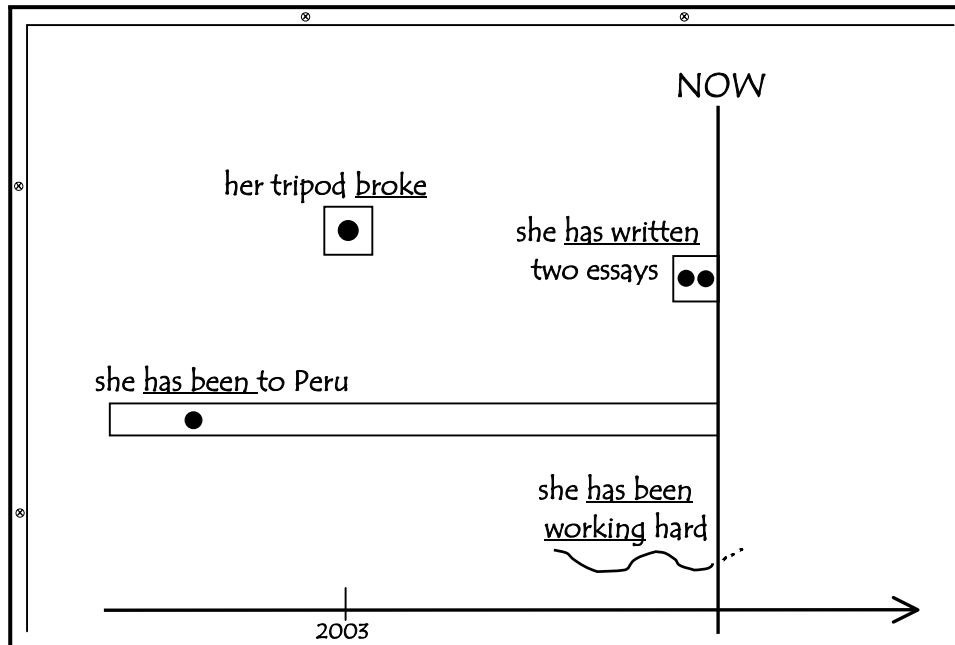


Figure 2. Time line for past simple and present perfect simple and continuous.

3.1.3 Form of the present perfect continuous

In the example *she has been working hard*, the first auxiliary, *has*, as usual, shows the tense. It is followed by the past participle of the second auxiliary *be*, then the main verb *work* in the *-ing* participle form

	The tense is contained in the aux. verb.		
PRESENT	<i>has</i>		
	Aux. <i>have</i> + past participle make up the perfect aspect.		
PRESENT PERFECT	<i>has</i>	<i>been</i>	
PRESENT PERFECT	<i>has</i>	<i>worked</i>	
PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS	<i>has</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>working</i>
	Aux. <i>be</i> + <i>-ing</i> participle make up the continuous aspect.		

Compare and preview:

	The tense is contained in the aux. verb.		
PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS	<i>had</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>working</i>
FUTURE PERFECT CONTINUOUS	<i>will have</i>	<i>been</i>	<i>working</i>

3.1.4 Uses of the present perfect continuous

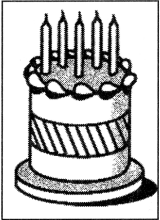
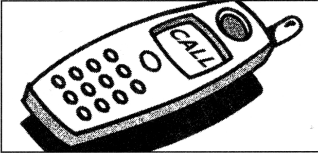
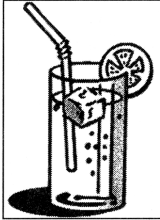


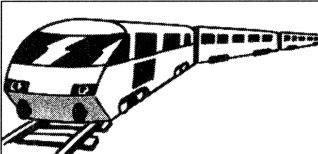
The present perfect continuous refers to an activity (or state) continuous up to now. In the time line above, the wavy line is continued with dots to imply that the activity is not yet completed.

That use, however, refers mainly to when a time (e.g. *for the past three hours*) is highlighted. In another context the activity indeed may have stopped, e.g. the famous *Someone's been eating my porridge* (don't neglect storytime when teaching children) or *What have you been doing?* The activity itself and not its completion is the focus, hence the continuous aspect; the consequence is on the present, hence the present perfect. We shan't adjust the use 'continuous up to now' in our tense tables, however, in order to retain brevity.

Always have good examples ready when explaining. This one consisting of a doctor's questions would help in showing how the focus can be on either completion or continuity:

- [1] *Have you taken the medicine?*
- [2] *Have you been taking the medicine?*

See 4.3.2 for other considerations to be taken into account when explaining the present perfect simple and continuous.

<p>You've been <u>making</u> a birthday cake.</p> 	 <p>You've been <u>talking</u> to a classmate on the phone.</p>	<p>You've been <u>drinking</u> in the pub with your classmates.</p> 
 <p>You've been <u>studying</u> mathematics in the library.</p>	<p>You've been in town <u>shopping</u> for new boots.</p> 	 <p>You've been <u>travelling</u> by train.</p>


From *Inside Out Resource Pack Upper Intermediate* (Macmillan). Present perfect continuous, guessing game (card holder is not allowed to say the underlined words in answer to yes/no questions). 18 cards in all.

Task 3.1

1. Draw a time line to show the difference between *since* and *for* in *We've been working here since January/for four months.*
2. Fill in the blanks:
For and *since* are (a) p_____ of time.
 (b) _____ indicates duration; (c) _____ refers back to a starting point in time (there is one exception, where the perfect may be used instead of a starting time, e.g. *We have known her since we have lived here*).
 In informal use with certain verbs (d) _____ is often omitted, e.g. *We've been here five hours now.*

And now to update our list of tenses to include the present perfect, simple (s.) and continuous (c.):

TENSE	EXAMPLE	USE
present simple	<i>She takes photos.</i>	regular/habitual event; fact; job
present continuous	<i>She is taking a course.</i>	happening now (temporary)
past simple	<i>Her tripod broke.</i>	completed past event
past continuous	<i>She was taking a photo.</i>	'simultaneous' past event
future simple	<i>She will sail through her test.</i>	prediction of completed event
future continuous	<i>She will be presenting a lesson.</i>	prediction of 'simultaneous' event / happening as a matter of course.
present perfect s.	<i>She has written an essay.</i>	recent event / life experience
present perfect c.	<i>She has been working hard.</i>	continuous up to now



Teaching note
3.2

Although most British English textbooks stipulate only the present perfect with patterns such as *Have you done your homework yet? Have you ever been to Peru?* the past tense is also acceptable in AmE and some other varieties: *Did you do your homework yet? Did you ever go to Peru?*

In assessing English as an international language, then, one should not penalize the student for producing the past simple in lieu of the present perfect when there is no risk of ambiguity.

Task 3.2 Fill in the tenses in the right hand column below, following the example.

0. <i>It went okay.</i>	<i>past simple</i>
1. <i>I'll be with you now.</i>	
2. <i>I want it yesterday.</i>	
3. <i>He's seen the light.</i>	
4. <i>Are you joking?</i>	
5. <i>I wanted to know your name.</i>	
6. <i>You've been trying that all night.</i>	
7. <i>She'll be going up the wall.</i>	
8. <i>You weren't really listening.</i>	