

Have something done: the causative explained

CEFR B1-B2 · 20 questions · A4 / US Letter

Have something done puts the focus on the service and the result, not on who did the work: "I had my hair cut" means a professional cut it.

The rule

The basic form

- The pattern is have plus object plus past participle: "I had my hair cut."
- The subject arranges the action; somebody else performs it.
- The tense is carried by have: I had, I am having, I will have, I have had.
- The object receives the action: my hair, the car, the house, the documents.

Why not say "I cut my hair"?

- "I cut my hair" means you did it yourself.
- "I had my hair cut" means a professional did it for you.
- The causative is common for services: cutting, repairing, cleaning, painting, testing.
- The person who does the work appears with by: "I had my hair cut by a new stylist."

Questions and negatives

- Questions use the normal auxiliary: "Did you have your car repaired?"
- Negatives use do or did with have: "I did not have my watch fixed."
- With a continuous tense, the auxiliary moves: "Are you having your eyes tested?"
- Do not add do when the tense already has one: "Have you had your hair cut?"

The get alternative

- Get takes the same pattern and is more informal: "I got my hair cut."
- Get can also suggest a problem or an accident: "He got his phone stolen."
- Have is neutral and safer in formal writing: "She had the documents checked."
- Choose by meaning: get for incidents, have for planned services.

Common traps

- Use the past participle, not the base verb: "had my car repaired", not "had my car repair".
- Keep the object between have and the participle: "had my hair cut", not "had cut my hair".
- Do not confuse the causative with the present perfect: "I have cut my hair" is not a service.
- With want, the pattern is want plus object plus past participle: "I want this printed."

Questions

Write your answer on the line under each question. Check your work with the answer key on the last page.

1. I ___ my hair cut yesterday.

2. She ___ the kitchen painted next week.

3. We need ___ the car serviced.

4. Did you ___ your eyes tested?

5. He ___ his suit cleaned before the wedding.

6. I want this letter ___.

7. She got her nails ___ for the party.

8. He ___ his phone stolen on the train.

9. Have you had your passport ___?

10. They are having a new roof ___.

11. I must ___ my watch repaired.

12. Where did you ___ your photos printed?

13. She ___ her hair done every Friday.

14. We ___ the house cleaned before the guests arrived.

15. He had his car ___ after the accident.

16. I am having my eyes ___ tomorrow.

17. They got their windows ___ in the storm.

18. When will you ___ your computer fixed?

19. She wants the dress ___ by Friday.

20. We had the carpets ___ last month.

Answer key

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1. **had** — The past time yesterday takes had plus the object my hair plus the past participle cut.
2. **is having** — The arrangement for next week uses the present continuous is having.
3. **to have** — After need, the causative keeps have in the base form with to.
4. **have** — After the auxiliary did, the causative verb have stays in the base form.
5. **had** — The finished service in the past takes had plus the past participle cleaned.
6. **translated** — Want plus object plus past participle forms the causative: want this letter translated.
7. **done** — Get takes the past participle done in the same causative pattern.
8. **got** — Get with the past participle stolen describes an unlucky event in the past.
9. **renewed** — The present perfect causative keeps the past participle renewed after the object.
10. **fitted** — The causative uses the past participle fitted after the object a new roof.
11. **have** — After the modal must, the causative verb have stays in the base form.
12. **have** — After the auxiliary did, have stays in the base form in the causative question.
13. **has** — A present habit with she takes has plus the object and the past participle.
14. **had** — The past service takes had plus the object and the past participle cleaned.
15. **repaired** — The causative keeps the past participle repaired after the object his car.
16. **tested** — The continuous causative uses the past participle tested after the object.
17. **broken** — Get plus object plus past participle describes the damage: got their windows broken.
18. **have** — After the auxiliary will, the causative verb have stays in the base form.
19. **delivered** — Want plus object plus past participle forms the causative meaning.
20. **cleaned** — Had plus object plus past participle cleaned is the causative in the past.