

Present perfect vs past simple

CEFR A2-B1 • 20 questions • A4 / US Letter

The classic contrast: finished time takes the past simple, a link to now takes the present perfect.

The rule

The short rule

- Past simple: the action happened in a finished time. The time is over.
- Present perfect: the action happened at some point before now, or it started in the past and continues now.
- Past simple asks "when?". Present perfect does not.
- If you can add "yesterday", "last week", "in 2019" or "ago", use the past simple.

How to build the two forms

- Past simple: verb + -ed for regular verbs (worked, played), or the second form for irregular verbs (went, saw, took).
- Present perfect: have or has + past participle (the third form). "I have worked", "she has gone", "they have seen".
- Questions with the past simple use did: "Did you call?" The main verb stays in the base form.
- Questions with the present perfect use have or has: "Have you called?"

Time words that choose the tense

- Present perfect signals: ever, never, just, already, yet, so far, recently, since Monday, for three years, this week, today.
- Past simple signals: yesterday, last night, last year, in 2019, three days ago, at 8 o'clock, when I was a child, then.
- "Today", "this week" and "this year" are unfinished periods, so the present perfect fits: "I have answered ten emails today."
- "Yesterday", "last week" and "last year" are finished periods, so the past simple fits: "I answered ten emails yesterday."

Result now vs detail then

- "I have lost my keys" means the keys are still missing. The result matters now.
- "I lost my keys last night" adds the time and closes the story. The result is not the point.
- Life experience uses the present perfect: "I have been to Canada." The exact trip does not matter.
- A specific trip uses the past simple: "I went to Canada in 2022."

Questions

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

1. I ___ my keys. I cannot get into the house.

2. We ___ to Rome in 2019.

3. She ___ in Berlin since 2020.

4. ___ you ever ___ a horse?

5. I ___ that film three times.

6. He ___ his homework an hour ago.

7. They ___ here for ten years.

8. ___ you ___ your mother yesterday?

9. Nobody ___ the dishes yet.

10. When ___ she ___?

11. I ___ never ___ to Japan.

12. The bus ___ at 8:05 this morning.

13. He has just ___ the report.

14. We ___ each other since primary school.

15. ___ she ___ the email already?

16. I ___ my arm last winter.

17. It is the first time I ___ sushi.

18. The film ___ five minutes ago.

19. Would you like some cake? No thanks, I ___.

20. She ___ three countries this year.

Answer key

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1. **have lost** — The keys are still missing, so the result matters now. That is the present perfect: have lost.
2. **went** — In 2019 is a finished time, so the past simple is correct: went.
3. **has lived** — Since 2020 marks the start of a period that continues now. Use the present perfect: has lived.
4. **Have ... ridden** — Ever asks about life experience, and the present perfect needs the past participle ridden: Have you ever ridden a horse?
5. **have seen** — The time is my whole life so far, which is not finished. The present perfect is the natural choice: have seen.
6. **finished** — Ago is a past simple signal: finished.
7. **have worked** — For ten years describes a period that continues to now, so use the present perfect: have worked.
8. **Did ... call** — Yesterday is finished time. Questions in the past simple use did plus the base verb: did you call.
9. **has washed** — Yet signals the present perfect. Nobody is singular, so it takes has: has washed.
10. **did ... arrive** — When asks about a finished time, so use the past simple: did she arrive.
11. **have ... been** — Never describes life experience up to now, and the present perfect uses been as the past participle of be: have been.
12. **left** — A clock time in the past, and this morning here means a moment that is over. Use the past simple: left.
13. **finished** — After has, use the past participle. For a regular verb the past participle is the -ed form: finished.
14. **have known** — The friendship started in the past and continues now. Since plus an open period calls for the present perfect: have known.
15. **Has ... sent** — Already is a present perfect signal, and the past participle of send is sent: Has she sent.
16. **broke** — Last winter is finished time, so use the past simple: broke.
17. **have eaten** — The pattern "It is the first time ..." takes the present perfect: have eaten.
18. **started** — Ago always takes the past simple: started.
19. **have already eaten** — Already belongs to the present perfect, and the past participle of eat is eaten: have already eaten.
20. **has visited** — This year is an open period, so the present perfect fits: has visited. She is singular, so use has.