

Present perfect simple vs continuous

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

A result or a count takes the simple form; a continuing activity takes the continuous.

The rule

The one-question shortcut

- Ask: am I talking about a result, a finished action or a count? Use the simple form.
- Ask: am I talking about the activity, its length or its visible side effects? Use the continuous form.
- "I have painted the door" means the job is complete. "I have been painting the door" means the activity has filled your time, and the door may not be finished.
- The tense follows the focus, not the length of the activity. A long action can still take the simple form if the result is the point.

Results and completed actions: the simple form

- Use the simple form for a completed action with a present result: "She has broken her arm." The arm is broken now.
- "I have lost my keys." The keys are still missing, so the present result matters.
- Use it when the action is complete, even if the time period continues: "I have read three chapters today."

Counting and experience: the simple form

- Use the simple form to count completed actions: "He has answered thirty emails since nine."
- Use it for experience with ever and never: "Have you ever been to Japan?" "I have never seen that film."
- Use it with superlatives and ordinals: "This is the best meal I have ever eaten", "It is the third time I have called."
- A total is a result, so the simple form is the natural home for numbers.

Duration and ongoing activity: the continuous form

- Use the continuous when the activity is still going on: "I have been learning Spanish for two years."
- Use it when the activity has just stopped but its effects remain: "The ground is wet. It has been raining."
- Use it for repeated actions seen as one continuing process: "I have been calling you all day."
- For plus a period and since plus a start point both attract the continuous when the activity is the point.

Verbs that choose the form for you

- Stative verbs take the simple form only: know, own, believe, want, like, belong. "I have known her for years."
- Completed actions with a clear end take the simple form: finish, arrive, break, lose, buy. "I have finished the report."
- Activities without a natural end take the continuous: wait, study, rain, run, work, call, look for. "I have been

waiting for an hour."

- A few verbs work with both, with a small change of picture: live, work, teach and study often do.

Questions

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

1. I ___ three chapters today.

2. I ___ all morning, and I am still tired.

3. She ___ her arm, so she cannot play tennis.

4. She ___ tennis, so she is tired.

5. We ___ this film twice.

6. How long ___ you been waiting?

7. He ___ thirty emails since nine o'clock.

8. Why is she out of breath? — She ___ .

9. I ___ my keys! I cannot find them anywhere.

10. I ___ for my keys for an hour.

11. She ___ five letters this morning.

12. My hands are dirty because I ___ the car.

13. He ___ the car, so it is clean now.

14. How many pages ___ you read?

15. I ___ you all day, but the line is always busy.

16. We ___ each other since 2020.

17. It ___ all week, so the river is high.

18. She ___ just ___ the news, so she is upset.

19. Why is the kitchen so messy? — We ___ .

20. I ___ never ___ that film.

Answer key

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1. **have read** — Three chapters is a completed count, so the present perfect simple is correct: have read.
2. **have been reading** — The activity fills the morning and continues, so the continuous describes it: have been reading.
3. **has broken** — The broken arm is a present result of a completed action: has broken.
4. **has been playing** — The activity just stopped and left her tired, so the continuous fits: has been playing.
5. **have seen** — Twice is a count of completed experiences, so the simple form is right: have seen.
6. **have** — The waiting continues up to now, so the continuous question uses have: How long have you been waiting?
7. **has answered** — Thirty emails is a total of completed actions, so the simple form fits: has answered.
8. **has been running** — The recent activity explains her present condition, so use the continuous: has been running.
9. **have lost** — The keys are missing now, which is a present result, so the simple form is correct: have lost.
10. **have been looking** — The search is an activity continuing for an hour, so the continuous fits: have been looking.
11. **has written** — Five letters is a count of completed actions, so use has written.
12. **have been washing** — The activity left a visible present result, so the continuous describes it: have been washing.
13. **has washed** — The car is clean because the job is complete: has washed. The result takes the simple form.
14. **have** — A question about a completed total uses the present perfect simple: How many pages have you read?
15. **have been calling** — The repeated calls are one continuing effort, so the continuous is natural: have been calling.
16. **have known** — Know is a stative verb, so it takes the simple form: have known.
17. **has been raining** — The recent weather activity continues and explains the high river: has been raining.
18. **has ... heard** — Just with a present result takes the simple form: has just heard.
19. **have been cooking** — The activity has just stopped and left a mess, so the continuous fits: have been cooking.
20. **have ... seen** — Never with an experience takes the simple form: have never seen.