

Main Rules for Simple Past vs. Present Perfect

1. **Simple Past:** use for past events or actions that started & ended at a specific time / are not connected to the present.
2. **Present Perfect:** use for actions which started in the past and continue to present -or- for completed actions that are connected to the present.

***Important note:** Use Simple Past with finished time words & Present Perfect with unfinished time words. (eg. Incorrect: ~~I've been to the museum yesterday~~)

Simple Past

Use the simple past for past events or actions that started & ended at a specific time / are not connected to the present.

Construction: [VERB]+ed

• Past Actions with a Specific Start/End Time:

- Completed Action: I went grocery shopping.
- Series of Completed Actions: I woke up, ate breakfast, went to work, and then attended English class.
- Duration of Event (with specific start/end): I lived in Brazil for two years.

• Past Actions not connected to the present:

- Habits / Past states that are not true now: I played the piano when I was a kid, but I don't play anymore.
- Past facts or generalizations not connected to present: He never went to class during high school.

• When-Clauses / Interrupted Action:

- I was brushing my teeth when the phone rang.

Present Perfect

Use the present perfect for actions which started in the past and continue to present -or- for completed actions that are connected to the present.

Construction: Have/Had + [past participle of verb]

• **Past Actions of Unspecified Time:**

- Actions that started in the past & continue to the present: I have known Katya for several years now.
- Uncompleted Action: It has not stopped raining outside.
- Multiple actions at different times in past: I have taken three oral exams so far.
- Change over time: I have become more fluent in English; my English has improved a lot.

• **Past completed actions that are connected to the present:**

- Emphasis on the *RESULT*:
 - General emphasis on Result: I have cleaned my room. (emphasizes the clean room) // I have attached my resume below for you to review. (emphasizes result of attached resume)
 - Experience: I have been to France.
 - Accomplishment: Scientists have split the atom.

Indicator Words

| Simple Past | Present Perfect |
|--|---|
| <i>completed time words</i> | <i>uncompleted time words</i> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• yesterday• [____ time] ago• [specific date] ie, in 2012• the other day• last [specific time] ie, last Friday, last month | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• just• already• up to now• until now / till now• ever• (not) yet• so far• lately / recently• for / since |

Comparisons

- **Finished Action vs. Unfinished Action**

- I saw John last week (complete action) vs. I have seen John around the station a lot this week (unfinished time word).

- **Finished Action vs. Action Started in Past Continues til present**

- I knew Monica when I was in high school (does not continue to present) vs. I have known Monica since high school (you still know Monica)

- **Emphasis on Action vs. Emphasis on Result**

- I bought a new bike (emphasis on the buying) vs. I have bought a new bike (emphasis on the result of having a new bike).

- **Action Occurred at a Certain Time vs. Action “Already” Occurred, Action “Just” Occurred or Action has “Not Yet Happened”**

- I called you two minutes ago (occurred at a specific time in the past) vs. I have already called you // I have just called you // I have not called you yet. (trigger words just, already & not yet)

- **Action Occurred vs. Experience**

- I went to Jamaica last year (expresses action occurred) vs. I have gone to Jamaica (experience, emphasis on result of action)