

Present Simple and Present Continuous

What's the difference between the Present Simple / Present Continuous and how to use them.

We use the present simple tense when we want to talk about fixed habits or routines – things that don't change.

We use the present continuous to talk about actions which are happening at the present moment, but will soon finish.

Compare these two statements:

(present simple) I play tennis.

(present continuous/ progressive) I am playing tennis.

(present simple) 'I play tennis' tells us that playing tennis is something the speaker always does. It is part of a routine or habit. We can call this a permanent situation.

(present continuous/ progressive) 'I am playing tennis' tells us that the speaker is playing tennis right now. Soon the game will be over. We call this a temporary situation.

With the present simple we say:

I play tennis

You play tennis

We play tennis

They play tennis

He/she/ it plays tennis.

With the present continuous we say:

I am playing tennis

You are playing tennis

We are playing tennis

He/she/it is playing tennis

Frequency Adverbs we use with the Present Simple

With the present simple we use these frequency adverbs:

(Notice that the adverb comes before the main verb in the sentence.)

Always: I always read before I go to bed.

Often: Her sister often comes shopping with us.

Frequently: Michael frequently visits his family.

Sometimes: You sometimes go to the gym, don't you?

Occasionally: It occasionally rains in summer.

Seldom: They seldom ask for help.

Rarely: He rarely goes out without his backpack.

Hardly ever: I hardly ever eat pizza.

Never: Japanese people never wear shoes inside.

Time Expressions we use with the Present Continuous:

With the present continuous we use these time expressions:

(Notice that the time expression can come at the start or at the end of the sentence.)

At the moment: I'm watching TV, at the moment.

These days: Paul is living in Canada, these days.

Now: What are you doing, now?

Nowadays: I think you are smoking too much, nowadays.

We also use the present continuous to talk about:

*Something which is happening before and after a specific time:

At eight o'clock we are usually having breakfast.

When I get home the children are doing their homework.

*Something which we think is temporary:

Tom is at university. He's studying history.

I'm working in London for the next two weeks.

*Something which is new and contrasts with a previous state:

These days most people are using email instead of writing letters.

What sort of clothes are teenagers wearing nowadays?

What sort of music are they listening to?

*Something which is changing, growing or developing:

The children are growing up quickly.

The climate is changing rapidly.

Your English is improving.

*Something which happens again and again:

He's always laughing.

It's always raining in London.

They are always arguing.

Note: that we normally use always with this use.

We can use the present continuous to talk about the past when we are:

***Telling a story:**

The other day, I'm just walking down the street when suddenly this man comes up to me and asks me to lend him some money. Well, he's carrying a big stick and he looks a bit dangerous, so I'm wondering what to do ...

***Summarizing a book, film or play:**

Harry Potter is a pupil at Hogwarts school. One day when he is playing Quidditch he sees a strange object in the sky. He wonders what is happening ...

Present perfect

The present perfect is formed from the present tense of the verb have and the past participle of a verb.

We use the present perfect for something that started in the past and continues in the present:

- They've been married for nearly fifty years.
- She has lived in Liverpool all her life.

when we are talking about our experience up to the present:

- I've seen that film before.
- I've played the guitar ever since I was a teenager.
- He has written three books and he is working on another one.

We often use the adverb ever to talk about experience up to the present:

- My last birthday was the worst day I have ever had.

and we use never for the negative form:

- Have you ever met George?
- Yes, but I've never met his wife.

For something that happened in the past but is important in the present:

- I can't get in the house. I've lost my keys.
- Teresa isn't at home. I think she has gone shopping.

have been and have gone

We use have/has been when someone has gone to a place and returned.

- Where have you been?
- I've just been out to the supermarket.
- Have you ever been to San Francisco?
- No, but I've been to Los Angeles.

But when someone has not returned, we use have/has gone:

- Where's Maria? I haven't seen her for weeks.
- She's gone to Paris for a week. She'll be back tomorrow.

Present perfect with time adverbials

We often use the present perfect with adverbials which refer to the recent past:

Recently / just / yet

- Scientists have recently discovered a new breed of monkey.
- We have just got back from our holidays.

Or adverbials which include the present:

so far / until now / up to now

ever (in questions)

yet (in questions and negatives)

- Have you ever seen a ghost?
- Where have you been up to now?

- Have you finished your homework yet?
- No, so far I've only done my history.

After a clause with the present perfect we often use a clause with since to show when something started in the past:

- I've worked here since I left school.
- I've been watching that programme every week since it started.

Be careful!

We do not use the present perfect with adverbials which refer to a finished past time:

yesterday /last week /month/ year / in 2017 /when I was younger /etc.

- I have seen that film yesterday. X
- We have just bought a new car last week. X
- When we were children we have been to California. X

but we can use the present perfect with adverbials which refer to a time which is not yet finished:

today/ this week/ this month/ this year /now that I am 18 /etc.

- Have you seen Helen today?
- We have bought a new car this week.

Present perfect continuous

The present perfect continuous is formed with have/has been and the -ing form of the verb.

We normally use the present perfect continuous to emphasise that something is still continuing in the present:

- She has been living in London all her life.
- It's been raining for hours.
- I'm tired out. I've been working all day.
- They have been staying with us since last week.

We do not normally use the present perfect continuous with stative verbs. We use the present perfect simple instead:

- I've always **been liking** / **liked** John.