

Past simple and present perfect

Reminder → A6–A12

A Time expressions that refer to the present, such as **this morning / week / month** and **today**, can be used with either past simple or present perfect verbs. If we think of **this morning** (etc.) as a past, completed time period, then we use the past simple; if we think of **this morning** (etc.) as a time period which includes the present moment, then we use the present perfect. Compare:

- I **didn't shave** *this morning*. (= the morning is over and I didn't shave) *and*
- I **haven't shaved** *this morning*. (= it is still the morning and I might shave later)

B In a sentence which includes a time clause with **since**, we generally prefer a past simple verb in the time clause and a present perfect verb in the main clause. The time clause refers to a particular point in the past:

- Since* Mr Dodson **became** president unemployment **has increased**. (*rather than ... has become ...*)
- She **hasn't been able** to play tennis *since* she **broke** her arm. (*rather than ... has broken ...*)

Note, however, that we use the present perfect in the time clause if the two situations described in the main clause and time clause extend until the present:

- Have you met** any of your neighbours *since* you've **lived** here? (*not ... you lived ...*)

C With time clauses introduced by **after, when, until, as soon as, once, by the time** and the time expressions **the minute / second / moment** the past simple refers to past, completed events and the present perfect refers to future events. Compare these examples:

- After* she **left** hospital (past), she had a long holiday. *and*
- After* Lucas **has left** school (future), he will be spending six months in India.
- The minute* I **got** the news about Anna (past) I telephoned my parents. *and*
- I'll contact you *the minute* I've **got** my exam results. (future)

In the time clause in sentences like this it is possible to use the past perfect instead of the past simple (e.g. *After* she **had left** ...) and the present simple instead of the present perfect (e.g. *After* Lucas **leaves** ...) with the same meaning (see also Unit 5).

D In news reports, you will often read about or hear recent events introduced with the present perfect, and then the past simple or other past tenses are used to give details:



A Russian spacecraft **has returned** safely to Earth with its two passengers. US astronaut Scott Keane and Russian cosmonaut Olga Kaleri **landed** in the early hours of Wednesday.

An American woman **has become** the first person to make 2 million contributions to Wikipedia. Esther Miller **began** editing the site eight years ago.

E After the pattern **It / This / That is / will be the first time ...** we generally use the present perfect in the next clause:

- That's the first time* I've **seen** Jan look embarrassed. (reporting a past event)
- It won't be the first time* she **has voted** against the government. (talking about a future event)

Note that after **It / This / That was the first time ...** we generally use the *past perfect* (see Unit 5):

- It was the first time* I'd **talked** to Dimitra outside the office.

Exercises

3.1 Complete each sentence with a verb from the box. Use the present perfect or past simple, with a negative form where necessary. **A**

have go oversleep read spend wear

- 1 A: Shall I make us some dinner? It's already eight o'clock.
B: No, thanks. I to the dentist this afternoon and my mouth hurts too much to eat anything.
- 2 I three lectures today and I still have two more later this afternoon.
- 3 It was so hot today that I shorts and a T-shirt at work.
- 4 We £200 on food this month and there's another week to go before I get paid.
- 5 A: Do you want a lift home?
B: No, I this morning because my alarm clock didn't go off, so I need to work late.
- 6 I much of the report yet, but I have to finish it by the weekend.

3.2 Complete the sentences with the pairs of verbs from the box. Choose the most appropriate tense — present perfect or past simple. **B**

be able – feel happen – speak improve – be
not want – fall rescue – be work – not have

- 1 Maria to go swimming since she in the river.
- 2 Since she at the company she a day off through illness.
- 3 Since he the girl from a house fire, he on TV almost every day.
- 4 A lot since I last to you.
- 5 Since I to drive I much more independent
- 6 Stefan's reading enormously since he at school.

3.3 One sentence in each pair is wrong. Correct it by replacing the past simple with the present perfect of the italicised verb. **C**

- 1 a Remember that after you *signed* the contract you won't be able to change your mind.
b Carlo's injury only became apparent after he *signed* to play for Real Madrid.
- 2 a As soon as I *finished* college I want to travel around Australia.
b I didn't have time to check the essay. I handed it in as soon as I *finished* it.
- 3 a By the time Sarah *got* to work the meeting had finished.
b I'll probably have finished breakfast by the time the children *got* up.
- 4 a I recognised her the moment I *heard* her laugh.
b I'll tell you what time we're coming the moment I *heard* from Emil.

3.4 Here are some extracts from a television news report. Choose the more appropriate tense – present perfect or past simple – for the verbs in brackets. **D & E**

- 1 When President Nelson *arrives* (arrive) in Paris this evening, it will be the first time she (visit) Europe since her election victory in May.
- 2 The Victoria Hospital in Milltown (close) to new patients after more cases of food poisoning. Three elderly patients (die) last week in the outbreak.
- 3 The rate of inflation (drop) to 4.8%. It's the first time in nearly two years that the rate (fall) below 5%.
- 4 Nearly 600 laptops (steal) from Ministry of Defence staff over the past five years. However, a spokesperson (insist) that there had been no security problems as none of the computers (hold) secret information.