

How long have you (been) . . . ?

A

Study this example situation:



Bob and Alice are married. They got married exactly 20 years ago, so today is their 20th wedding anniversary.

They **have been** married for 20 years.

We say, "They **are** married." (*present*)

but How long have they **been** married? (*present perfect*)
(*not* How long are they married?)

They **have been** married for 20 years.

(*not* They are married for 20 years.)

We use the present perfect (especially with *how long*, *for*, and *since*) to talk about something that began in the past and still continues now. Compare the *present* and the *present perfect*:

- We **know** each other very well.
- but* We've **known** each other since we were in high school. (*not* We know)
- Do you **have** a pain in your stomach?
- but* How long have you **had** the pain? (*not* How long do you have)
- I'm **learning** English.
- but* I've **been learning** English for six months. (*not* I am learning)
- He's **waiting** for somebody.
- but* He's **been waiting** all morning.

B

I have known/had/lived, etc., is the *present perfect simple*.

I have been learning / been waiting / been doing, etc., is the *present perfect continuous*.

In most situations with *how long*, *since*, and *for*, the continuous is more usual:

- I've **been studying** English for six months. (more usual than I've studied)
- It's **been raining** since lunchtime.
- Richard **has been doing** the same job for 20 years.
- "How long have you **been driving**?" "Since I was 17."

But some verbs (for example, *know/like/believe*) are not normally used in the continuous:

- How long have you **known** Jane? (*not* have you been knowing)

For a list of these verbs, see Unit 4A.

C

You can use either the present perfect continuous or present perfect simple with *live* and *work*:

- John **has been living** / **has lived** in Denver for a long time.
- How long have you **been working** / **have you worked** here?

But we use the simple (*I've done / I've lived*, etc.) with *always*:

- John **has always lived** in Denver. (*not* has always been living)

D

We use the present perfect simple in negative sentences like these:

- I **haven't seen** Tom since Monday. (= Monday was the last time I saw him)
- Jane **hasn't called** me for two weeks. (= the last time she called was two weeks ago)

Exercises

11.1 Are the underlined verbs right or wrong? Correct them if they are wrong.

- Bob is a friend of mine. I know him very well. RIGHT
- Bob is a friend of mine. I know him for a long time. I've known him
- Sue and Scott are married since July. _____
- The weather is awful. It's raining again. _____
- The weather is awful. It's raining all day. _____
- I like your house. How long are you living there? _____
- Mike is working in Las Vegas for the last few months. _____
- I'm going to Moscow tomorrow. I'm staying there until next Friday. _____
- "Do you still work?" "No, I'm retired. I don't work for years." _____
- That's a very old watch. How long do you have it? _____

11.2 Read the situations and write questions from the words in parentheses.

- John tells you that his mother is in the hospital. You ask him:
(how long / be / in the hospital?) How long has your mother been in the hospital?
- You meet a woman who tells you that she teaches English. You ask her:
(how long / teach / English?) _____
- You know that Jane is a good friend of Carol's. You ask Jane:
(how long / know / Carol?) _____
- Your friend's brother went to Australia a while ago, and he's still there. You ask your friend: (how long / be / in Australia?) _____
- Chris always wears the same jacket. It's a very old jacket. You ask him:
(how long / have / that jacket?) _____
- You are talking to a friend about Scott. Scott now works at the airport. You ask your friend: (how long / work / at the airport?) _____
- A friend of yours is taking guitar lessons. You ask him:
(how long / take / guitar lessons?) _____
- You meet somebody on a plane. She tells you that she lives in San Francisco. You ask her: (always / live / in San Francisco?) _____

11.3 Complete B's answers to A's questions.

- | A | B |
|---|---|
| 1. Amy is in the hospital, isn't she? | Yes, she <u>has been</u> in the hospital since Monday. |
| 2. Do you see Ann very often? | No, I <u>haven't seen</u> her for three months. |
| 3. Is Margaret married? | Yes, she _____ married for ten years. |
| 4. Are you waiting for me? | Yes, I _____ for the last half hour. |
| 5. Do you still play tennis? | No, I _____ tennis for years. |
| 6. Is Jim watching TV? | Yes, he _____ TV all night. |
| 7. Do you watch a lot of TV? | No, I _____ TV much recently. |
| 8. Do you have a headache? | Yes, I _____ a headache all morning. |
| 9. Are you feeling sick? | Yes, I _____ sick since I got up. |
| 10. Sue lives in Miami, doesn't she? | Yes, she _____ in Miami for the last few years. |
| 11. Do you still go to the movies a lot? | No, I _____ to the movies for ages. |
| 12. Would you like to go to Australia some day? | Yes, I _____ to go to Australia.
(use always / want) |