

The perfect tenses made simple.

THE PERFECT EBOOK

The 'Perfect' Ebook

In this lesson, I will explain some of the important uses of the perfect tenses. We'll look at the past, present and future perfect tenses in a way that's easy to grasp. You'll learn to confidently talk about experiences, ongoing situations and actions that lead to later consequences. With practical examples, you'll see how these tenses work in real life so that you can start using them with ease.

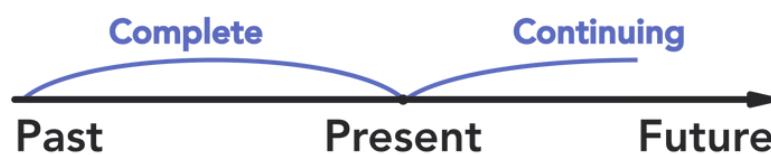
Aspects vs Tenses

I don't normally talk about **tense** versus **aspect** in my lessons, but I think it's important and useful to mention today.

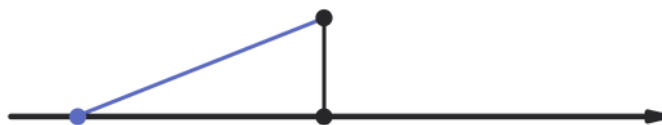
We only have two tenses in English:

present		past	
I go .	She goes .	I went .	She went .

Aspects add information about the way we view a verb. For example, an aspect can show whether an action is complete or continuing.



When we use the **perfect aspect**, we look back from a certain point in time to another point in time. I'm going to explain more about this and give you lots of examples.



I'm going to refer to these aspects as the **perfect 'tenses'** from now on because I think that's the name most of you are familiar with.

Present Perfect Simplesubject + **have/has** + **past participle**I **have been** to London.**negative:**

Add 'not' after 'have' or 'has'.

She **has not been** to London.**questions:**

Invert the subject and 'have' or 'has'.

Have you **been** to London?**Past Perfect Simple**subject + **had** + **past participle**I **had been** to London before moving to Paris.**negative:**

Add 'not' after 'had'.

She **had not been** to London before
that day.**questions:**

Invert the subject and 'had'.

Had you **been** to London before
moving to Paris?**Future Perfect Simple**subject + **will have** + **past participle**I **will have been** to London by next year.**negative:**

Add 'not' after 'will'.

I **will not have been** to London by next
year.**questions:**

Invert the subject and 'will'.

Will you **have been** to London by next
year?

In speech and informal writing, we commonly use contractions

‘Have’ is often contracted to ‘ve,’ and ‘has’ is often contracted to ‘s’.

- have → **‘ve** = I **‘ve** been to London.
- has → **‘s** = He **‘s** been to London.

In negative sentences, we usually contract ‘have not’ to **‘haven’t’** and ‘has not’ to **‘hasn’t’**.

- have not → **haven’t** = You **haven’t** been to London.
- has not → **hasn’t** = She **hasn’t** been to London.

‘Had’ is often contracted to **‘d**

- had → **‘d** = He **‘d** been to London.

In negative sentences, ‘had not’ is often contracted to **‘hadn’t’**.

- had not → **hadn’t** = We **hadn’t** been to London.

‘Will’ is often contracted to **‘ll**

- will → **‘ll** = They **‘ll** have been to London.

And ‘will not’ is usually contracted to **‘won’t’**.

- will not → **won’t** = I **won’t** have been to London.

Lucy's Tip!

Notice the pronunciation of **‘have’** /əv/ when used in fast speech -

- They’ll have /ðeɪl əv/ been to London.



How to use the perfect tenses

In very general terms, we use the **present perfect simple** to look back from the present time. We use the **past perfect simple** to look back from a point in the past. And we use the **future perfect simple** to look back from a point in the future.

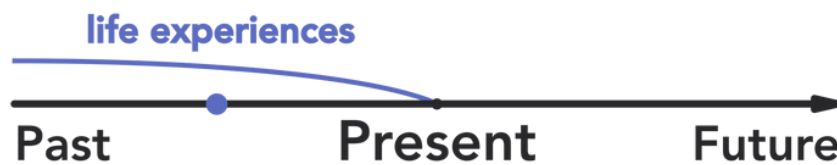
Let's talk about the 3 key uses.

● Life Experiences

The Present Perfect Simple

First, we don't say exactly when these life events happened when we use a perfect tense.

We use the **present perfect simple** to talk about life experiences up to now. The experiences happened in the past, but we are looking at them from the present.



- I **have been** to New York.

That means that at some point in my life up to now, I went to New York. You don't know when exactly, but you know it was before the present time and that this event is completed.

The **present perfect simple** is often used to express actions that have been repeated up to the present, for example -

- I **have been** to New York three times.

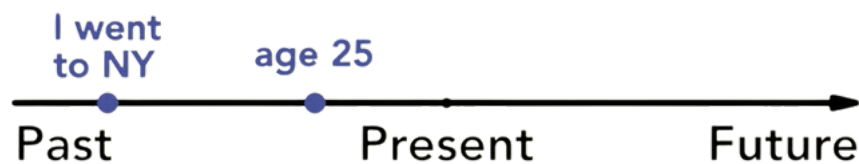
We can also use the negative construction that we saw earlier to talk about life experiences.

- I **haven't been** to New York.

The Past Perfect Simple

We can use the **past perfect simple** to talk about life experiences that happened before a point in the past. Here's an example.

- I **had been** to New York by the time I was 25.

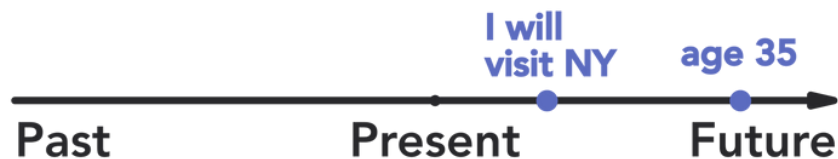


In this example, the point we are looking back from is age 25. I was 25 in the past. And the sentence tells you that before I was 25, I went to New York.

The Future Perfect Simple

We use the **future perfect simple** to talk about life experiences that will be complete by a specific point in the future. Here's the same example again:

- I **will have been** to New York by the time I am 35.



Age 35 is in the future. This sentence tells us that before I am 35, I will visit New York. You don't know when, but the action of visiting New York will happen before I'm 35.

● Unfinished States and Actions

The next use I want to talk about is for **unfinished states and actions**. We can use the perfect tenses to talk about states and actions that begin before a point in time and continue up to that point. This usage often tells us **the duration of the action up to a certain point**.



We can sometimes use the perfect simple or perfect continuous tenses when talking about how long something lasts.

The Present Perfect Simple

We use the **present perfect simple** to talk about states or actions that began in the past and continue to the present. We don't know if they will continue in the future.

Here's an example:

- I **have lived** in Manchester for 5 years.



I started living in Manchester 5 years ago, and I live there now.

If we want to talk about how long something lasts in the present perfect simple, we can use time expressions like **'for'** (a duration) and **'since'** (a point in time).

- **For** is used when we want to give a length of time an action has been happening. This can be a specific or non-specific time.
 - I **have lived** here **for** a long time. (unspecified time)
- **Since** is used to indicate the starting point of the action or situation.
 - She **has lived** here **since** 2015.

I also said we can use the present perfect continuous to talk about the duration of an activity.

The Present Perfect Continuous

When we want to highlight how long an action has been happening up to the present moment, we use the **present perfect continuous**. This tense is particularly useful when the exact starting time is not known or is not important, but the focus is on the ongoing nature of the activity. Here's an example:

- I **have been studying** French for three years.

The emphasis is on the duration of studying French, which continues up to now.

Like the present perfect simple, we can use time expressions such as **'for'** and **'since'**.

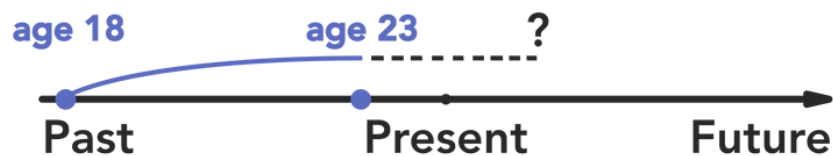
- They **have been working** here **for** over a decade.
- I **haven't been eating** out **since** the start of the year.



The Past Perfect Simple

We use the **past perfect simple** to talk about states or actions that began in the past and continued to a later point in the past.

- I **had lived** in Manchester for 5 years by the time I was 23.

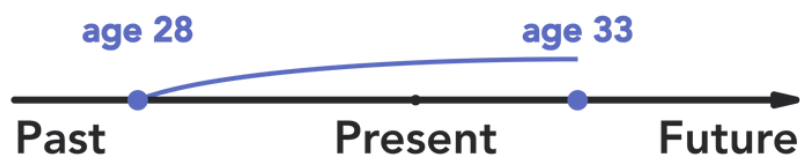


I started living in Manchester when I was 18, and I still lived there when I was 23, five years later. You don't know if I continued living there after that.

The Future Perfect Simple

We use the **future perfect simple** to talk about states and actions that will continue to a point in the future.

- I **will have lived** in Manchester for 5 years by the time I am 33.



In this sentence, the starting point for living in Manchester is age 28, which is in the past. Five years later, I will be 33 and still living in Manchester.

● Consequences

I'm calling the final use '**consequences**'. We can use the perfect simple tenses to talk about **things that happened before a point in time but are relevant at that point**. It's like talking about the consequences of an action or event.

The Present Perfect Simple

We use the **present perfect simple** to talk about an event that happened in the past but is important in the present. Here's an example:

- I've **been** out every night this week so I'm really tired today. (past action with present consequence)

I was out every night up to now and I am tired now.

The Past Perfect Simple

We use the past perfect simple to talk about an event that happened in the past that was important at a later time in the past.

- I'd **been** out every night that week so I was really tired. (past action with past consequence)

I went out every night of a week in the past and the next day, I was tired. Both of those events are in the past.

The Future Perfect Simple

We use the **future perfect simple** to talk about something that will happen before a point in the future that will be relevant at a later time.

- I **will have been** out every night that week so I will be really tired. (future action with likely future consequence)

I will go out every night for a week in the future and then I will be tired.



Additional Practice Sentences

Life Experiences		
Present Perfect Simple	Past Perfect Simple	Future Perfect Simple
We have already seen them live in concert.	He'd never seen snow until he went to Canada.	We will have moved to a new house by June.
They have written three novels already.	They had already ordered when I arrived.	By next year, I will have completed my degree.
I have tried sushi but only once!	By the age of 55, she had climbed the highest mountains in Europe.	My parents will have celebrated their tenth anniversary by May.

Unfinished States and Actions		
Present Perfect Simple	Past Perfect Simple	Future Perfect Simple
Carmin has been a teacher for ten years.	I had been a vegetarian for five years before I went vegan.	I'll have completed my marathon training by April.
We've known each other since childhood.	Bisa hadn't studied French before moving to France.	We will have known each other for twenty years by next month.
I have lived in this town all my life.	Before she retired, she'd worked there for twenty years.	They will have renovated their kitchen by summer.



Consequences

Present Perfect Simple	Past Perfect Simple	Future Perfect Simple
She hasn't slept well so she's very tired.	They had left by the time we arrived so we didn't see them.	By tomorrow, I will have finished the report so I'll be free to help you.
He has eaten too much so he feels sick.	We had spent all our money so we couldn't go on holiday.	They will have moved out so we'll need to find new tenants.
Frankie and Esther have finished the project so we can relax now.	She had forgotten her umbrella so she got soaked.	She will have saved enough by next year so she will get a new car.



QUIZ!

Choose the correct answer for each question.

- 1) By the time you arrive, we _____ (finish) the project.
 - a. have finished
 - b. will have finished
 - c. had finished
- 2) How do we form a negative sentence in the present perfect simple?
 - a. Subject + have/has + not + past participle
 - b. Subject + had + not + past participle
 - c. Subject + will + not have + past participle
- 3) When do we use the past perfect simple tense?
 - a. To talk about experiences up to the present
 - b. To describe actions that had happened before another action in the past
 - c. To predict actions that will be finished in the future
- 4) Before the pandemic, I _____ (never/think) about remote work as a permanent option.
 - a. have never thought
 - b. had never thought
 - c. will have never thought
- 5) He _____ (not/complete) his homework yet.
 - a. hasn't completed
 - b. hadn't completed
 - c. won't had completed
- 6) I can't believe she _____ (never/to visit) Paris before now.
 - a. will have never visited
 - b. hadn't never visited
 - c. has never visited
- 7) The future perfect simple is used to talk about actions complete before a current moment.
 - a. true
 - b. false
- 8) What is the form of a positive sentence in the Past Perfect Simple?
 - a. subject + had + past participle
 - b. subject + will had + past participle
 - c. subject + have/has + past participle

The End!

1) b 2) a 3) b 4) b 5) a 6) c 7) b 8) a

