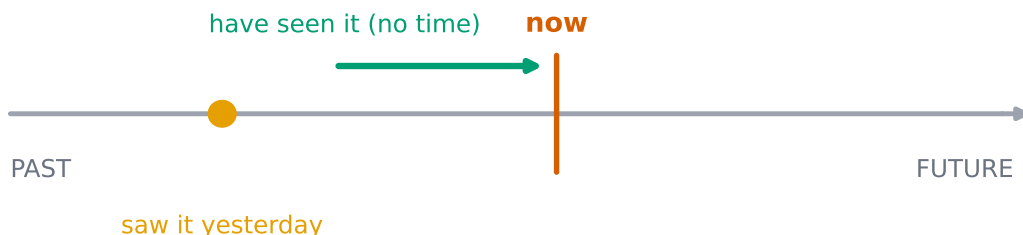


Present perfect vs past simple

English Grammar · B1

Definite Past vs. Relevance to the Present

Past simple vs present perfect



Past simple vs present perfect: tense timeline

Both tenses refer to the past, but they differ based on whether a **specific time** is mentioned and whether there is a connection to the **present**:

- **Past Simple:** The action ended at a **definite time in the past** and has no relevance to the present.
- **Present Perfect:** No specific time is mentioned; it emphasizes the impact on or experience related to the **present**.

I saw him yesterday.

I saw him yesterday. (Definite time → Past Simple)

I have seen that film.

I have seen that movie. (Experience, no specific time mentioned → Present Perfect)

Note: Once definite past time markers such as *yesterday*, *last week*, *in 2019*, or *ago* appear, use the Past Simple, not the Present Perfect.

Signal Words

Pay attention to these words to help you determine which tense to use:

- **Past Simple:** *yesterday*, *last night*, ... *ago*, *in 2019*, *then*, *when*.
- **Present Perfect:** *just*, *already*, *yet*, *ever*, *never*, *so far*, *recently*, *since*, *for*.

She has just arrived.

She has just arrived. (just → Present Perfect)

They left an hour ago.

They left an hour ago. (ago → Past Simple)

Note: Do not mix them within the same sentence: ~~I have seen him yesterday~~ ×
→ I saw him yesterday ✓.

Been vs. Gone

Both are forms related to *go*, but they have different meanings:

- **Have been to:** Have visited (and returned) — indicates experience.
- **Have gone to:** Have gone (and are still there / on the way).

He has been to Japan.

He has been to Japan. (Visited, and has returned now)

She has gone to the bank.

She has gone to the bank. (Not here now, still over there)

Note: Use **been to** for “have visited somewhere”; use **gone to** for “have gone and haven’t returned yet”.

Common Errors

- × ~~When have you arrived?~~ → ✓ **When did** you arrive? — *When* asks for a specific past time, so the Past Simple must be used.
- × ~~I have finished it just now.~~ → ✓ I finished it **just now**. / I have **just** finished it. — *Just now* (a moment ago) pairs with the Past Tense; *just* (very recently) pairs with the Present Perfect.
- × ~~I lost my keys — can you help me look?~~ → ✓ I **have lost** my keys... — The keys have not been found yet, and the effect continues into the present, so the Present Perfect is more accurate.
- × ~~This is the first time I go there.~~ → ✓ This is the first time I **have been** there. — The pattern “the first time / the best time” is fixed with the Present Perfect: the first time / the best film I **have ever seen**.