

## Past simple and present perfect

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.

Reminder → A6-A12

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.