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# BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

## 6 Minute Grammar

### Present perfect and past simple



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*This is not a word-for-word transcript*

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**Catherine**

Hello and welcome to 6 Minute Grammar with me, Catherine.

**Neil**

And me, Neil. Hello.

**Catherine**

Today we're talking about the present perfect and the past simple tenses.

**Neil**

Yes – we're going to tell you how to form them, and give you three rules to help you decide which one to use and when.

**Catherine**

... we'll also look at using **ever** and **never** with the present perfect....

**Neil**

...and we'll finish with a quiz.

**Catherine**

Right then: let's start with the present perfect. And here's our first example:

**Example**

**I've looked at the sales figures. They've shot up by 20%!**

**Neil**

So, it's **subject**, plus **have** or **has**, plus a **past participle**.

**Catherine**

To make past participles of regular verbs, add **-ed** to the main verb... so **look** becomes **looked**.

**Neil**

But some verbs, like **shoot**, are irregular. The past participle of **shoot** is **shot**. You just have to learn your irregular verbs.

**Catherine**

That's right. And we often use short forms in the present perfect, like **I've**, **he's**, and **they've**.

**Neil**

Now, here's an example of the past simple.

**Example**

**I looked at the sales figures this morning. They shot up by 20% last month.**

**Neil**

For the past simple of regular verbs, add **-ed** to the main verb...

**Catherine**

So **look** becomes **looked**, but don't forget those irregular verbs. The past simple of **go** is **went**.

**Neil**

Now it's often difficult to know which tense to use.

**Catherine**

It can be so we've got some rules for you. Listen to the first example again:

**Example**

**I've looked at the sales figures. They've shot up by 20%.**

**Catherine**

And it's present perfect here because we're focusing on **what** happened, not **when**. But in the second example:

**Example**

**I looked at the sales figures this morning. They shot up by 20% last month.**

**Neil**

... it's the **past simple** because we say **when** the actions happened. So that's rule 1: use the present perfect to say **what** happened, but the past simple for **when** or **where** something happened.

**Catherine**

That's right. Now Neil just a minute because I actually... **I haven't eaten this morning...**

**Neil**

And that's an example of the present perfect with a time phrase. So sometimes, we **can** use the present perfect to say when something happened, when a situation started in the past and **is still true, or still happening** now. Here you go... Here's a biscuit Catherine...

**Catherine**

Thank you, Neil.

**Neil**

... because you haven't eaten anything this morning...

**Catherine**

... I haven't. But, if I said, **I didn't eat anything this morning**, with the past simple, it would mean it isn't morning any more – now, it's the afternoon or evening...

**Neil**

Yes, the action started and finished in the past... and you must be starving – go on, have another biscuit!

**Catherine**

Thank you very much. So that's rule 2: use the present perfect for events that started in the past and are **continuing now...**

**Neil**

...and the past simple for actions that started and finished in the past.

**Catherine**

Nice biscuits, Neil.

**IDENT**

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**Catherine**

And we're talking about when to use the present perfect and the past simple.

**Neil**

Now, we often use the present perfect with **ever** and **never**... for life experiences – things we've done at some point in the past. Here's a question for you, Catherine.

**Catherine**

Okay...

**Neil**

**Have you ever eaten** insects?

**Catherine**

Funnily enough, Neil, no, **I've never eaten** an insect, and I don't think I ever will. How about you?

**Neil**

Yes, actually **I have eaten** insects. I've eaten ants that were given to me by a friend from Colombia.

**Catherine**

Very good. So, rule 3: use **ever** with the present perfect to **ask** about a past experience, and **never** to talk about an experience you **haven't** had.

**Neil**

... but if you add information about time and place, use the past simple – **I ate insects last summer in Colombia.**

**Catherine**

... and Neil used present perfect in **I have eaten insects** because he was focusing on the event itself, not when it happened.

**Neil**

Actually, I wasn't focussing on anything. I kept my eyes shut the whole time! They didn't look very nice.

**Catherine**

But they tasted alright?

**Neil**

They tasted Okay, yes.

**Catherine**

Good.

**Neil**

It's now time for a quiz. Which is correct? Number one: a) **I've been for a job interview last week** or b) **I went for a job interview last week.**

**Catherine**

And it's b) **I went for a job interview last week.** Use the past simple when you say **when** something happened.

**Neil**

Number two: a) **I never went for a job interview** or b) **I have never been for a job interview.**

**Catherine**

And it's b) **I have never been for a job interview.** We use the present perfect with **never**.

**Neil**

And the last one: a) **Who has eaten all my biscuits?** or b) **Who ate all my biscuits?**

**Catherine**

And that's a trick question because actually both are correct! And by the way, Neil, it wasn't me! I didn't eat all your biscuits.

**Neil**

Yes, I'm sure. And that means we **have** now come to the end of our programme. Don't forget our three rules: One. Use the present perfect to say **what** has happened, but the past simple to say **when** or **where** it happened.

**Catherine**

Two: Use the present perfect for something that started in the past and is continuing now, but the past simple for something that started and **finished** in the past.

**Neil**

And three: Use **ever** with the present perfect to **ask** about a past experience, and **never** to talk about an experience you **haven't** had.

**Catherine**

There's more about this on our website at [bbclearningenglish.com](http://bbclearningenglish.com). Join us again for more 6 Minute Grammar.

**Both**

Bye.