

Present Perfect Simple and Continuous

See the introduction to the perfect aspect and the continuous aspect in Unit 1. These tenses have three main uses.

1 Unfinished past

The verb action began in the past and continues to the present. It possibly goes on into the future, as well.

We've lived in this house for twenty years.

Sorry I'm late. Have you been waiting long?

I've been a teacher for five years.

I've been working at the same school all that time.

Notes

- There is sometimes little or no difference between the simple and the continuous.

I've played

I've been playing

tennis since I was a kid.

- The continuous can sometimes suggest a more temporary situation. The simple can sound more permanent.

I've been living with a host family for six weeks.

The castle has stood on the hill overlooking the sea for centuries.

- Certain verbs, by definition, suggest duration, for example, *wait, rain, snow, learn, sit, lie, play, stay*. They are often found in the continuous.

It's been raining all day.

She's been sitting reading for hours.

- Remember that state verbs rarely take the continuous.

*I've known Joan for years. *I've been knowing*

*How long have you had that car? *have you been having*

*I've never understood why she likes him. *I've never been understanding*

2 Present result

The verb action happened in the past, usually the recent past, and the results of the action are felt now.

You've changed. What have you done to yourself?

I've lost some weight.

I've been doing some exercise.

I'm covered in mud because I've been gardening.

In this use, the simple emphasizes the completed action. The continuous emphasizes the repeated activities over a period of time.