Present Perfect vs Past Simple

These two tenses are often confused because they both refer to **past events** — but they focus on **different aspects of time**.



Structure:

Subject + have/has + past participle (3rd form)

Use:

- Actions with a result in the present
- Unfinished time periods (e.g., today, this week)
- Life experience (no time given)
- Recent events (usually with just, already, yet)
- Actions that started in the past and continue now

Focus:

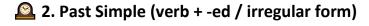
Connection to the present

(the exact time of the action is not important or not mentioned)

- Time Expressions:
 - ever, never, just, already, yet, for, since
 - so far, recently, lately, still

Examples:

- I have visited Paris three times.
- She hasn't finished her homework yet.
- We have known each other since 2010.
- He has just left the office.





Subject + verb in past form (regular or irregular)

(Use did for negatives and questions)

Use:

- Actions that happened at a specific time in the past
- Finished time periods (e.g., yesterday, last year)
- A sequence of completed events in the past
- Stories, chronological accounts, historical events

Focus:

When the action happened is important. It's clearly in the past and over.

Time Expressions:

- yesterday, last week/month/year
- in 1999, two days ago, when I was a child
- then, after that, suddenly

Examples:

- I visited Paris in 2020.
- She didn't finish her homework yesterday.
- We met at a conference last year.

Key Differences: Present Perfect vs Past Simple

Feature	Present Perfect	Past Simple
Time reference	Unspecified or connected to the present	Specific time in the past
Time expressions	ever, just, already, yet, since, for	yesterday, last year, ago, in 2000
Focus	Result or experience	Completed past action
Can use with "since/for"?	✓ Yes	X No
	Yes Unfinished (this week, today)	No Finished (last week, yesterday)
"since/for"? Finished or	_	Finished (last week,

Watch Out For:

- "I have been to Paris in 2018"

 → Wrong! Use Past Simple because the time is specific.
- "I went to Paris" (in 2018)
- "I have been to Paris" (no time mentioned)

Typical Contrast Examples:

X Incorrect ✓ Correct

I have seen that movie yesterday. I saw that movie yesterday. Did you ever go to Italy? Have you ever been to Italy?

I have met him last year. I met him last year.

I lived here since 2010. I have lived here since 2010.