

Frank Novotny and the Case of the Present Perfect

Teaching materials

Exercise 1

The Form of the Present Perfect

The present perfect simple is made of the verb „to have” and the past participle.

Find the past participles of these verbs....

Present	Past simple	Past Participle
want	wanted	
swim	swam	
happen	happened	
think	thought	
ride	rode	
sing	sang	

Now change these present simple forms into the present perfect simple.

I want

You swim

Something happens

We think

You ride

They sing

The Use of the Present Perfect

There are three main occasions when we use the present perfect.

1) TIME UP TO NOW (How long, for, since)

E.g. How long have you known your boyfriend?

I have known him since 1995.

We have been waiting for the teacher to come for 15 minutes.

(Note 1: it is actually more common to use the present perfect continuous for these examples when possible. So „I have been living in Prague for 3 years“ is more common than „I have lived in New York for 3 years“ although both are correct.

Note 2: French uses the present simple to express this use of the present perfect. E.g. „J’habite à Paris depuis 2003.“ The other examples below would be translated into the past simple tense.)

2) EXPERIENCE (ever, never)

E.g. I have never ridden a motorbike.

Have I ever told you about my sister?

3) NEWS (just, yet, already)

E.g. Have you heard the news? Susan is going to have a baby.

Come quickly. There has just been an accident.

I’ve already made the soup, but I haven’t started cooking the goulash yet.

Look at these examples. Which group do they belong to?

- Hello Karen. How are you? I haven’t seen you for a long time!
- Arsenal have scored. They’re winning two – nil now.
- Have you met my mother?
- Excuse me. Has the train for London left yet?
- Peter has been very sad since his girlfriend left him.
- I’m really looking forward to this evening. I’ve never been to the national theatre before.

Translate these sentences from French to English (Be careful – not all of them are present perfect.)

- J'ai appelé Stéphane pour savoir s'il était allé à la fête.
- Je ne vois toujours rien.
- Es-tu déjà allé à la comédie française?
- Combien de temps avez-vous attend le bus?
- Nous attendons depuis 20 minutes et le professeur n'est toujours pas là.

Role play

The most important use of the present perfect for this performance is the one expressing NEWS, especially the idea that if I use the present perfect I believe that I am saying something that the people listening don't already know. This is often something that has just happened a short while before, but it can also be used when two old friends meet after a long time. In this case they use the present perfect even though they are talking about things which happened some time ago. They use the present perfect because they know that what they are saying is new information for the person who is listening. Look at this dialogue.

Sally – Hello David. Do you remember me?

David – Sally! Of course I remember you. How are you? What's new?

Sally – I've changed my job. I stopped working in the bank last year, now I work for a television company. And I've got married.

David – Congratulations. That's wonderful. I haven't got married, but I have met a wonderful girl. We're living together in Montmartre. We've been together since New Year's Eve.

Now work in pairs and imagine that you are two old friends that haven't met for a long time. Tell each other what is new. Like in the example above, use the present perfect to introduce the topic, but use the past simple to talk about the details.

Discussion - Family Fighting

The story is about two brothers who fight over the same girl.

Do you have any brothers or sisters? Do they ever make you feel angry? What do they do?

In the story the brothers are identical twins.

What are twins? If twins look the same do they have the same personality? Do you know any twins personally? Twins are also famous for having telepathic connections. When one twin is ill, often the other knows it, even if they don't live in the same town. Do you know any stories like this?