Present perfect vs past simple

The present perfect and the past simple are both verb tenses used to talk about past actions or events, but they have different meanings and uses. Let's dive into a detailed explanation of the differences between these two tenses:

1. Time Frame:

Present Perfect: The present perfect tense focuses on the connection between past actions and the present moment. It is used when the exact time of the action is not specified or when the action has relevance to the present. It emphasises the result or impact of the past action on the present.

- Example: "I have lost my keys." (The speaker doesn't specify exactly when the keys were lost, but the fact of not having them is relevant now.)

Past Simple: The past simple tense, on the other hand, refers to actions or events that occurred and ended at a specific point in the past. It is used when the time of the action is known or important. It focuses on the action itself rather than its connection to the present.
Example:

- "I lost my keys yesterday." (The speaker indicates that the keys were lost at a specific time in the past.)

2. Specific Time vs. Unspecified Time:

Present Perfect: The present perfect is often used when the time of the action is not mentioned or when the action extends up to the present. It is suitable for talking about experiences, accomplishments, and events that happened at an indefinite time in the past.
Example:

- "She has visited Paris." (The time of the visit is not specified; the focus is on the experience of visiting Paris.)

Past Simple: The past simple is used when the time of the action is known or when the action is completed in the past without an ongoing connection to the present.
Example:

- "She visited Paris last summer." (The time of the visit is specified as last summer, and the action is seen as complete.)

3. Duration of Action:

Present Perfect: The present perfect can be used to express actions or situations that started in the past and are still relevant or ongoing at the present time. When using "for" or "since," it highlights the duration of the action.
Example:

- "He has lived here for five years." (He started living here in the past, and he is still living here now.)

Past Simple: The past simple is not used to indicate the duration of an action; it only shows that the action happened and ended in the past.

  - Example: "He lived here for five years." (The emphasis is on the fact that he lived here for a specific period in the past, but there is no ongoing connection to the present.)

Adverbs of Time:

Present Perfect: Adverbs such as "already," "just," "ever," "never," "yet," and "recently" are commonly used with the present perfect to indicate the time frame of the action or event.
Example:

- "I have already finished my homework."

Past Simple: Adverbs of time like "yesterday," "last week," "two days ago," etc., are frequently used with the past simple to specify the exact time of the action.
Example:
"She visited her grandparents yesterday."

5. Narration and Storytelling:

Present Perfect: The present perfect is not commonly used in storytelling or narration of past events, as it emphasises the connection to the present rather than focusing solely on past actions.
Example (storytelling):

- "Once upon a time, a brave knight saved the kingdom."

Past Simple: The past simple is the primary tense used in storytelling and narration to recount past events in chronological order.
Example (storytelling):

- "Once upon a time, a brave knight saved the kingdom from a fierce dragon."



In summary, the choice between the **present perfect** and the **past simple** depends on the specific time frame and the connection to the present that you want to convey. The present perfect is used when discussing actions that have a relevance to the present or actions with an unspecified time frame, while the past simple is used when referring to actions or events that happened at a specific time in the past and are completed without an ongoing connection to the present.

Present perfect vs past simple exercise 1:

Complete the sentence/questions with the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. She _____ **(visit)** her grandparents last weekend.
a) has visited
b) visited

2. The students _____ **(finish)** their exams yesterday.
a) have finished
b) finished

3. He _____ **(buy)** a new car two months ago.
a) has bought
b) bought

4. We _____ **(not see)** that movie yet.
a) have not seen
b) did not see

5. They _____ **(travel)** to Europe last year.
a) have travelled
b) travelled.

6. ____ you ever _____ **(read)** this book?
a) Did / read
b) Have / read

7. She _____ **(write)** three emails yesterday.
a) has written
b) wrote

8. Yesterday, he _____ **(play)** soccer with his friends.
a) has played
b) played

9. I _____ **(lose)** my keys last weekend, but I found them today.
a) lost
b) have lost

10. They _____ **(be)** to Japan twice.
a) have been
b) were

11. She ___ (arrive) home ten minutes ago.
a) arrived
b) has arrived

12. She _____ **(finish)** painting her room.
a) has just finished
b) just finished

13. ___ they ___ (meet) the new neighbours yet?
a) Did, meet
b) Have, met

14. He ___ (work) here for five years. He is now the manager
a) work
b) has worked

15. They _____ **(travel)** to Europe last year.
a) travelled
b) have travelled

16. I ___ (buy) a new laptop last week.
a) bought
b) have bought

17. He _____ (graduate) from university last year.
a) has graduated
b) graduated

18. I _____ (have) a difficult day today.
a) had
b) have had

19. We ___ (go) that museum last summer.
a) have been
b) went

20. They _____ (be) friends for years.
a) have been
b) were

Present perfect vs past simple exercise 2:

Complete the following conversation between John and Sarah with the correct form of the present perfect or past simple.



John: Hey, Sarah! I **(1) _____ (just finish)** watching that new movie you recommended. It **(2) _____ (be)** fantastic!

Sarah: Oh, I'm glad you liked it! I **(3) _____ (watch)** it twice already. The plot **(4) _____ (be)** so captivating.

John: Absolutely! By the way, have you **(5) _____ (hear)** about the new art exhibition? I **(6) _____ (go)** there with some friends.

Sarah: Oh, I **(7) _____ (hear)** about it, but I **(8) _____ (not go)** yet. How was it?
John: It **(9) _____ (be)** mind-blowing! The artists created such unique pieces. You should definitely check it out.

Sarah: I will, for sure! Thanks for the recommendation.

John: Anytime! Let me know when you visit it. We could go together.

Sarah: Sounds like a plan! I'll give you a call once I **(12) _____ (make)** plans to go.

John: Great! I'm looking forward to it.

Present perfect or past simple: answer key

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Where two or more answers are given, any of them is correct.

Exercise 1

1. b) visited
2. b) finished
3. b) bought
4. a) have not seen
5. b) travelled
6. b) Have / read
7. b) wrote
8. b) played
9. a) lost
10. a) have been
11. a) arrived
12. a) has just finished
13. b) Have, met
14. b) has worked
15. a) travelled
16. a) bought
17. b) graduated
18. b) have had
19. b) went
20. a) have been

Exercise 2

(1) have just finished / 've just finished
(2) was
(3) have watched / 've watched
(4) was
(5) heard
(6) went
(7) have heard / 've heard / heard
(8) have not been / haven't been / 've not been / have not gone / haven't gone
(9) was
(12) have made / 've made

Corrections to the printed pages

Exercise 1, item 19 should read: We ___ (go) to that museum last summer.

Exercise 2: the last gap is numbered (12). There are no gaps 10 and 11.