

LUC WRITING CENTER – “USES OF THE PRESENT PERFECT”

The Rules:

The **perfect tenses** are used to describe action that is completed before another action or event occurs. The **present perfect** is used to describe action that was completed before the present time.

Perfect Tenses	Use this tense when describing an action that is completed before another time or event occurs.	Example Verb Form (form of “to have” + past participle)
Present Perfect	Describes events that were finished before now. Example: She has already purchased her lunch.	I have eaten.
Past Perfect	Describes events that were finished before now. Example: She had already found her keys before she arrived home.	I had eaten.
Future Perfect	Describes events that finished before another time in the future. Example: She will have finished her essay by the time she exits the train.	I will have eaten.

Other uses of the present perfect:

I. Describing *events that have happened before now, the exact time of which is unspecified.*
This usage is often indicated by adverbs such “as ever,” “yet,” “never,” “still,” and “already.”

Examples:

1. My teacher has never graded an assignment without also providing helpful advice and encouragement. (the present perfect “has graded” indicates that the teacher's actions have happened before now.)
2. Overuse injuries from running and cycling have never been successfully treated without rest. (here the present perfect “have been” is used to emphasize that the rest treatment has happened before the present.)

II. Describing an event *that has occurred repeatedly from a point in the past up to the present time, and may happen again.*

Examples:

1. My sister has met many interesting people on her backpacking trip along the Appalachian Trail. (here the present perfect has met is used to indicate that the sister met interesting people multiple times, or repeatedly, on her trip.)
2. I waited for spring, and today it has arrived! (the present perfect has arrived is used to indicate that spring's arrival is a repeated, cyclical action.)
3. My chemistry class has had three different substitute teachers in three weeks. (the present

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Some Reasons Why These Rules Can Be Confusing:

I. The uses of the present perfect can sometimes be confused with the uses of the simple past. The present perfect *is often used without an indication of time, whereas the simple past is often used with a word or phrase describing specifically when an action took place.*

Examples:

1. I watered my garden yesterday. (the simple past “watered” is used with the word “yesterday” to indicate when the action occurred.)
2. I have eaten twelve cupcakes, and now I have a stomach ache. (here, the past perfect “have eaten” indicates that the cupcakes were recently eaten, and that they were the cause of the stomach ache.)

II. Has and is are both contracted with an ’s when used with personal pronouns.

Examples:

1. She’s eaten pizza at her best friend’s birthday party. (“She’s “is a contracted form of “she has eaten,” not “she is;” here, “has eaten” is the present perfect form of “to eat.”)
2. She’s eating pizza at her best friend’s birthday party. (here, “she’s” is the contracted form of “she is,” and the action is in the present rather than the recent past.)
3. It’s been an interesting class today. (“It’s” is a contraction of “it has been,” not “it is”.)
4. It’s interesting being in class today. (“It’s” is a contraction of “it is,” not “it has.”)

Practice:

Complete the following sentences with a correct form of the verb in parentheses.

1. I _____ (to hope) this day would finally come.
2. My granddaughter _____ (to grow) three inches since last summer.
3. James _____ (to ride) his bike every day for a week.
4. After hiking along the creek, she _____ (to find) an abandoned treehouse.
5. He _____ (to find) the error in his experimental method.

Further Resources:

- [“Active Verb Tenses”](#) (Purdue Owl)
- [“Verb Tense Consistency”](#) (Purdue Owl)

These materials were partially adapted from *Understanding and Using English Grammar*. 4th ed. Ed. Betty S. Azar and Stacy A. Hagen. New York: Pearson Longman, 2009. Print.