

PRESENT PERFECT TENSE

with Mike Evans

1. How to form it

In English to form certain tenses, instead of changing the ending of a verb (as in many other languages), we add a second verb known as an auxiliary verb. This is sometimes called a “helping” verb”. The most common auxiliary verbs are “do”, “be” and “have”.

So for example

I don't like swimming

(the main verb is “swim” and the auxiliary verb is “don't” or “do”)

I am going

(the main verb is “go” and the auxiliary verb “am” - from the verb “be”)

I have been to the supermarket

(the main verb is “been” - from the verb “go” - and the auxiliary verb is “have”)

Did you want any ice cream?

(the main verb “want” and the auxiliary verb is “did” - the past tense of the auxiliary verb “do”)

The first step in forming the PRESENT PERFECT tense is to use the auxiliary verb, in this case “have”.

I have

you have

he, she, it has

we have

they have

As you can see, only the “he, she, it” version changes and becomes “has”.

The second step is to convert the main verb into something called a “past participle”. Most verbs are regular in that they follow a rule. The rule is to add the letters “ED” to the end of the basic verb. Some examples :

walk walked

jump jumped

wash washed

clean cleaned

Take careful note of the pronunciation of this “ed” ending. A very common mistake is to pronounce it like “ed”. Some people therefore would say walk -ed , jump -ed and so on. This is incorrect. The correct pronunciation is very different. Usually the ending is pronounced like a “t” sound. Listen again to the examples :

walked

jumped

washed

cleaned

Maybe you noticed that the last, “cleaned”, has a slightly different pronunciation. In this case like a “d” sound. This is because after saying the “n” sound as in “clean” it is difficult to move your

tongue into position to say the “t” sound. So instead we say “d”. There are other verbs like “clean” which also use the “d” sound but you can learn these as you go. Don't worry about which sound should be used “t” or “d” - most people find that, after a little practice, it becomes instinctive.

Lastly, if a verb already ends in a “t” or a “d” sound we still add the letters “ed” but in this case, we **pronounce** it like “id”.

Decide decided
Wait waited

So some examples of the PRESENT PERFECT tense showing the auxillary verb “have” and the past participle.

I have come
You have eaten
We have seen
He has taken
I have been
Mr Smith has left
They have not visited
She has not read the book

In speech we often abbreviate the auxillary verb

have = 've
has = 's

So, abbreviating our earlier examples, we would say :

I've come
You've eaten
We've seen
He's taken
I've been
Mr Smith's left

With the negative abbreviation, there are two possibilities – both are OK.

have not = haven't / 've not
has not = hasn't / 's not

They haven't visited OR they've not visited
She's hasn't read the book OR she's not read the book

You'll probably recognise the past participle of regular verbs from another tense – the PAST SIMPLE. In the PAST SIMPLE tense we also add “ed” to regular verbs but, in this case, we don't use an auxillary verb. So, for regular verbs, the past participle is the same as the PAST SIMPLE.

PAST SIMPLE = I waited
PRESENT PERFECT = I have waited

The auxillary verb tells you that it is the present perfect and not the past simple.

We'll talk more about the differences between the PAST SIMPLE tense and the PRESENT PERFECT tense in some later lessons.

Unfortunately there are many irregular verbs which do not form a past participle by simply adding "ed". Many of these verbs are used frequently and so simply have to be learned. In addition, unlike regular verbs, their forms are often irregular in both PAST SIMPLE and PRESENT PERFECT.

VERB	Past Simple	Present Perfect (Past Participle)
Speak	spoke	spoken
eat	ate	eaten
drink	drank	drunk
see	saw	seen
write	wrote	written
come	came	come

There are some patterns and similarities which can sometimes help you guess the correct form of an irregular verb but most simply have to be learned. There is a list of some of the most common irregular verbs at the end of the course which you can download for reference.

As a final note, if you are not sure whether a verb is regular or irregular, simply assume it is regular and add "ed". Everyone will understand you and, if you are lucky, they will correct you. And if someone corrects you when you make a mistake simply say thank you because they are doing you a favour by helping you with your English. Never feel that you have to apologise when you make a grammatical mistake in English.

So to summarise, to make the PRESENT PERFECT tense, we need -

the auxillary verb "have", and then
+
the Past participle of the main verb

Now that you know how to form it, in the next lessons we're going to talk about the most important aspect – when to use the PRESENT PERFECT tense.