

**Part**  
**A**

## *Tenses in context*

- 1** Present perfect
- 2** Past perfect
- 3** Present continuous
- 4** *Will* or *be going to*?
- 5** *Be + to* forms and other tenses with future reference

## Unit

## 1

## Present perfect

## A Introduction

- 1 These two news stories use different tenses. Text (a) uses present perfect (e.g. *have spoken, have looked*); text (b) uses mostly past simple (e.g. *spoke, looked*). The important verbs are marked in bold.

- Why do you think the tenses are different in the two texts?

a) Unemployed Terry Fitton **has applied** for an amazing 2,350 jobs ... and he's still out of work. Terry, 50, **has posted** applications at the rate of nearly four a day for the past two years.

b) Superstar Paul McCartney last night **watched** a heart-stopping sea search for his 15-year-old son James. The ex-Beatle and his wife Linda **stood** ashen-faced on a beach after the youngster **was** swept out of sight while surfing. But thirty minutes later they were joyfully hugging James as he **stepped** unharmed from the waves.

## Observations

- Text (a) has a time phrase: *for the past two years*, which sets the time as time coming up to now. Text (b) has the time phrase *last night*, which sets the time as time finished, separated from now. These can be shown as diagrams:

Time coming up to now:

<i>has applied / has posted</i> → NOW
---------------------------------------

Time finished, separated from now:

<i>watched/stood/was/stepped</i>	NOW
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- 2 Organise these phrases into three columns headed *used with past simple*, *used with present perfect* and *used with either*. 🔑


up to now      in the last century      during President Kennedy's lifetime  
 over the last hundred years or so      for three months      three months ago  
 since three months ago      recently      this is the first time I      lately  
 throughout the 17th century      since the Vietnam War      today  
 within the last three months      after the Second World War

## B Discovering patterns of use

### 1 Present perfect in spoken language

In these pieces of real spoken English, the tenses change.

- In (a), when Pat comments, the tense changes to present perfect and in (b), when Mary talks about finding the bottle-opener, she also changes tense.

Why? 

- a) [Roger is a guest at Pat's house. He is just finishing a personal ghost story, which he has told all in the **past simple** tense, which is normal for stories.]


Roger: It was definitely there, some figure there, definitely a figure there ...

Pat: Well, as long as you haven't brought it down here with you. This is a friendly house, we don't have any ghosts here.

- b) [Mary and Peter are in the kitchen. They are trying to open a bottle of wine.]

Mary: What have we done with the bottle-opener? We found one, didn't we?

Peter: Yeah.

- Below are some rules for the use of the present perfect and the past simple when *no explicit time phrases* are used. Tick which one you think sounds most useful, based on the ghost story and the woman in the kitchen. 

Possible rules:

- Present perfect is for things that are very **recent**; past simple is for things that happened a **long time ago**.
- It doesn't matter which tense you choose when there is no time phrase. Both are always possible.
- Present perfect is used for things the speaker considers important in relation to **now**; past simple is used for things the speaker considers as **separated** in his/her mind from now.

### 2 Past simple and present perfect in news stories

If you read English language newspapers, it is useful to observe how the two tense-forms are used in news stories. Look at this newspaper story.

- What tense should the first sentence be in?
- Does it change for the same reasons as in the spoken extracts you have just studied?
- Does it make you want to add anything to the rule you chose for the use of the two tenses?

## OUR ROADS THE SHAME OF EUROPE

Britain's motorways [**vote**] the second worst in Europe, according to a new survey. They are plagued by poor facilities, roadworks and bad signposting, say continental motorists.

Only Portugal's motorways were rated worse than ours. The survey, by rental giant Eurocar, put Germany way out in front, then France miles ahead of the rest – Belgium, Switzerland, Italy, Holland, Spain, Britain and Portugal.


### Observations

- The examples we have looked at so far point to a difference between (a) things that we want to bring to the foreground and say 'This is new or important or relevant or connected in some way in my mind to **now**' and (b) things that we want to report/narrate or simply to say 'This is not important any more, or not relevant to **now**, or I have chosen to separate it **in my mind** from **now**'.
- Newspaper language is often distinctive. A typical pattern in a news story is for the opening sentence to be in the present perfect, and the details of the story to be in the past simple. In the text above, about roads, the verb in brackets was *have been voted*.

## C Grammar in action

### 1 Deciding to use the present perfect

Look at these examples of spoken language.

- Why do you think the speakers chose the particular tense of each verb in bold? 

a) [Clare and Sam are brother and sister.]

Clare: I think I've **broken** Mum's hair-dryer.

Sam: How?

Clare: Don't know. It doesn't work any more.

b) [A teacher is talking about her class that day.]

Teacher: I **had** a bit of a row today and I **practised** my shouting in the classroom and Liz reckons my lesson **went** really really well.

c) [Faye has a problem with her camera and Dave is helping her. The film is stuck; they discuss whether to take it out.]

Faye: I can't take it out half way through and ...

Dave: Well, **have you started** it?

## 2 Switching between present perfect and past simple

- In this example, why do you think the speaker changes the tense? (The important verbs are in bold.) See 'Observations' below for answer.

I've **been going** to the weightwatchers, but I **went** the first time and I'd lost three and a half pound, and I went last week and I'd lost half a pound, so I went down to the fish shop and got fish and chips, I was so disgusted.

- What do you think they said? Here are some mini-extracts from real conversations. See if you can guess which answer B gave in the original tape-recording. 🔑

(Remember this may not be a question of right or wrong answers, but what B might have been likely to say, given the context. The key tells you which one B did in fact say.)

a) A: I live in Exeter. D'you know it?

Did B say:

Yes, I was there. I've stayed there a couple of days.

**or:** Yes, I've been there. I stayed there a couple of days.

**or:** some other combination of the two tenses? If so, write what you think it was.

b) A: I've been to Barcelona for a few conferences, I don't know if you've ever been?

Did B say:

Yeah, I went to one, yeah.

**or:** Yeah, I've gone to one, yeah.

**or:** Yeah, I've been to one, yeah.

c) A: We make our own pasta.

Did B say:

Yeah, we did that, we started off using recipes, and then we soon discovered it was easier to make it our own way.

**or:** Yeah, we've done that, we've started off using recipes, and then we've soon discovered it's been easier to make it our own way.

**or:** Yeah, we've done that, we started off using recipes, and then we soon discovered it was easier to make it our own way.

### Observations

- Speakers use present perfect to indicate that a topic is still happening, or is still relevant within the conversation:

'I've been going to the weightwatchers.' (She is still going every week.)

- Speakers use past simple to indicate that an event is completed. For example, the woman who went to weightwatchers changed to the past simple to talk about the separate past events which depressed her.

## D Follow-up

- If you can buy an English language newspaper or if you can get English language news on radio or TV, make a note of how news stories are reported. Do the reports use present perfect at the beginning, followed by past tenses for the details, as we have seen in this unit, in the written and spoken news?
- If you want more practice exercises, do the Further exercises at the end of this unit.
- If you want further details of points relating to this unit, go to the Reference notes section on pages 185–7.

### Summary

- Past simple is used by speakers to talk about past events which are, or which they regard as, finalised, or over and done with.
- Present perfect is used by speakers to talk about events which are still current, or which they want to highlight as being incomplete or still relevant.
- Do not use time expressions which suit completed events (e.g. *two months ago*) with the present perfect tense.
- Do not use time expressions which suit current events (e.g. *lately*) with the simple past tense.
- Some time expressions (e.g. *today, this morning*) can be used with either tense depending on the attitude of the speaker:
  - ‘I’ve seen him this morning.’ (The morning is not finished, and the speaker saw him at some point in it. Note that you could not say ‘I’ve seen him this morning’ in the afternoon or evening, and be correct.)
  - ‘I saw him this morning.’ (If the morning is not yet finished, then the speaker is looking back at an earlier part of the morning as if it is completely separate from the time of speaking, for example, before coming to work.)

## Further exercises

### 1 Match each question on the left with a suitable answer from the right.

- |                                      |                               |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Have you ever* been to Moscow?       | I studied there, actually.    |
| How long have you been at college?   | I’ve studied a lot.           |
| What did you do in Oxford last year? | I’ve been there three weeks.  |
| How many weeks were you in Paris?    | I’ve studied there, actually. |
| What have you done at college?       | I was there three weeks.      |

\* *Ever* is similar in meaning to ‘up to now’.

**2** Somewhere in these texts, the tense changed from present perfect to past simple. Where?

- Put the verbs in brackets in the tense you think the writer used.

a)

**SAM DIES AT 109**

The oldest man in Britain [**die**] aged 109 – six weeks after taking the title. Sam Crabbe, from Cadgwith, Cornwall, [**not give up**] smoking until he was 98 and [**enjoy**] a nightly tot\* of whisky. He [**be**] taken ill just hours before his death.

b)

**A WORLD STAGE FOR BRU BORU**

(an Irish music/dance group)

The Bru Boru group [**return**] from a most successful engagement at Expo '92 in Seville. They [**be**] there at the invitation of the Irish Government. In addition to performing at the many Irish events at Expo, they also [**give**] an unprecedented performance at the American Pavilion.

**3** Now imagine how you might report a news event you have just heard on the radio to a friend who hasn't heard it. If you are in class, do this with a partner. Here are some events to help you. What tenses will you use?

You begin: 'Have you heard? ...'

- Woman in Madrid wins five million dollars in lottery. Only buys one ticket. Loses ticket. Finds it in rubbish bin. Claims prize.
- President has heart attack. Collapses during a debate in Parliament. Rushed to hospital.
- Canadian woman becomes first person to cross the Pacific Ocean solo on a raft. Only one small sail. Built it herself. Journey six months.

**4** Choose between the present perfect and past simple tenses for the verbs in brackets. If you think both are equally possible, write both forms.

- Nowadays I take a vitamin C tablet every day. I [**do**] so ever since a friend [**tell**] me it was good for you.
- I [**buy**] a computer with a DVD/drive. You must come round and have a go on it. It [**teach**] me a lot in the few weeks I [**have**] it.
- I [**buy**] a personal stereo but I [**sell**] it to my teenage daughter as it [**look**] silly on me at my age.
- The other night I [**hear**] a noise coming from the garden. I [**not hear**] anything since, but it [**worry**] me at the time. There [**be**] a few burglaries round here lately.
- I [**notice**] I was having trouble reading small print so I [**go**] to the optician's and I [**have**] my eyes tested. She [**say**] I need reading glasses. I know my eyes [**get**] worse. I think it's working with computers that [**cause**] it. I wish I didn't have to use them so much.
- He always manages to look so neat, doesn't he, as if he [**just come**] from his tailor's.

\*A *tot* is a small amount.

**5 Complete these sentences in any way you like, taking care to choose appropriately between the present perfect and past simple tenses.**

- a) Ever since I was a child I ...
- b) Lately the weather ...
- c) During the 1980s, the economy in my country ...
- d) A: Do you still have your school books from when you were a kid?  
B: No, my parents ...
- e) Over the last six months I ...
- f) This is the first time I ...

**6 What do you think the speaker would be most likely to say in these mini-conversations? Choose the most likely tense for the verb in brackets. If you think past simple and present perfect are both equally possible, write both forms.**

- a) A: A letter, for me?  
B: Yes.  
[A opens letter.]  
A: Oh! I [**win**] two tickets for the U2 concert in London next month!
- b) A: Where's that thing you used to have for slicing tomatoes?  
B: Oh, that stupid thing. I [**throw**] it away. It was useless. I've got a new one now.
- c) A: Isn't she married to a Scandinavian or something?  
B: Yes, she [**marry**] to a Swede, but she's married to a New Zealander now.
- d) A: Who [**write**] *A Tale of Two Cities*?  
B: Charles Dickens, I think.
- e) A: Who [**eat**] my sandwich?  
B: Oh, I'm sorry. I thought you didn't want it.
- f) A: I see they [**dig**] another hole in the road. I wonder what the problem is?  
B: Where? Oh yes, I see it. No, no idea.
- g) A: Who [**be**] the first to get to the top of Everest, Hillary or Tensing?  
B: Don't know.



# Unit 2

## Past perfect

### A Introduction

**1** In this extract, a woman describes being invited into the pilot's cabin on an aeroplane she was travelling on:

The pilot said, 'You can go in the cabin,' you see. Well, my mouth dropped open ... you see ... Oh, I'd had a joke with one of the girls, you know, the stewardess girls, and, maybe it was her. Or there was a young man with us who had been in our hotel, maybe he'd said something. Somebody had, anyway. So they took me right into where the two pilots were. It was absolutely fantastic.

- How did the woman react when the pilot told her she could visit the cabin?
- The woman says 'Somebody had, anyway'. Can you expand her sentence to help you explain the story?
- Underline the verbs which are in the past simple tense.
- Use a different colour to underline the verbs which are in the past perfect tense.
- Which tense is used to try to explain why she was invited to see the pilots' cabin? 🔑

**2** In the following extract another woman describes an accident in her car, when she hit a tramp.

- Work out which tense the woman used for the verbs which are in brackets. They are either in the past simple or the past perfect. (Although other tenses might be possible, we are interested in what the speaker actually used.) 🔑

Woman: I wasn't going very fast, you see, I (only just) [turn] the corner ... and there [be] a bit of a line of traffic, and then ...

Friend: So it was a bit of a miracle he wasn't hurt, wasn't it?

Woman: Apparently, it [be] his party-piece\*, because the police told me that he [do] it very often, this, 'cos it [get] him a bed for the night, you know, it got him in hospital. And they were getting a bit fed up. He already [have] them there that morning apparently, saying someone [put] a bomb under his bed. But then he picked on me, and it got him a bed for the night in hospital.

Friend: Good grief!

\*The expression *party-piece* means that the tramp regularly did this in order to gain attention.

### Observations

- You have probably learned that the past perfect tense is used in English to describe events which happened before other events in the past (i.e. that it is primarily to do with time and sequences of events). This is a fundamental part of learning about the past perfect. However, in this unit you can learn about how speakers use the past perfect, and the typical clause patterns it is found in.

## B Discovering patterns of use

### 1 Past perfect and explanations


In the extract where the woman describes her visit to the pilots' cabin, we saw that she used the past perfect tense quite a lot when trying to explain something.

<i>Main events of the story</i>	<i>Possible cause of main events</i>	<i>Tense</i>
The pilot said, 'You can ...'		past simple
my mouth dropped open		past simple
	I'd had a joke with one of ... the stewardess girls ...	past perfect
	young man ... maybe he'd said something.	past perfect
	Somebody had (said something)	past perfect
So, they took me right into (the cabin)		past simple

- Add any rules which you can think of for the uses of the past perfect tense.

- Past perfect is used to describe events which happened before other events in the past.
- ...
- ...

### 2 Past perfect and clause construction

- If you wanted to join the following sentences together, which conjunctions would you use? 

but    because    when    as

- I wasn't going very fast. I had only just turned the corner.
- John came round on Sunday. He only stayed about ten minutes.
- John came round on Sunday. I had promised to lend him a video.
- I was out celebrating last night. I'd had my exam results.