Section 5  perfect tenses

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language notes

Western European languages have a verb form that looks like the present perfect (constructed with the equivalent of have + past participle). However, in most cases this is used as a conversational equivalent of the past tense, and can be used with expressions of past time, unlike the English present perfect:

*I've seen Peter yesterday.
*I've asked her a question.

The exact differences of use between the present perfect and the simple past are complex, as are the exact differences between the present perfect simple and progressive: the rules given in these pages are useful simplifications. Note that mistakes with the present perfect are generally unimportant.

Pronunciation: the unstressed forms of auxiliary have, has and had can be difficult for some students to hear. The CD-ROM exercises will help with this.

possible further activities

The two texts and the quotations are simply provided as introductory reading material, to show students examples of the tenses in context. It’s best to just let students read them in their own time. There is no need for comprehension questions or other types of exercise.

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language notes

In some languages, the verb for be is used with certain verbs to make present perfect forms:

*I'm arrived last night.

possible further activities

Contractions  Write up or say full-form present perfect sentences and get students to say them with contractions.

Past or past participle?  Say a series of irregular past tenses or past participles (of verbs for which the two forms are different): for example ‘broke’, ‘eaten’, ‘seen’, ‘went’, ‘drank’. Students reply as quickly as possible, adding either ’I’ or ’I’ve’, depending on the form.

Like this:
‘broke’ – ’I broke’  ‘eaten’ – ’I’ve eaten’

pages 60–61

possible further activities

Mime  Students show by mime that something has happened (on the lines of the pictures on page 61). Make sure they understand they are to mime the present result, not what led to the result. For example:

’I’ve got married.’ (Student mimes showing you a wedding ring.)
’I’ve had an accident.’  ’I’ve lost my glasses.’  ’I’ve had bad news.’
’I’ve bought a new coat.’  ’I’ve had a baby.’  ’I’ve eaten too much.’  ’I’ve bought a cat.’

The class try to decide what has happened. You may like to give out cards with the names of the happenings on.
Travel  Each student writes and/or says a sentence saying ‘I’ve been to …, but I’ve never been to …’.

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possible further activities

‘Never’: finished or unfinished time?  Students write sentences using the frame ‘Shakespeare never …, and I’ve never ….’. (‘Shakespeare never went to Australia, and I’ve never been to Australia.’)

Class survey  Students write questions (one each) beginning ‘Have you ever …?’ (Help with vocabulary where necessary.) Teach the short answer forms ‘Yes I have’ and ‘No I haven’t’. Then students go round asking as many people their questions as they can in three minutes, noting the number of ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ answers. Finally they report to the class. (‘Six people have been to London.’ ‘Everybody has played football.’ ‘Nobody has seen a ghost.’). Make sure students use singular verbs after everybody and nobody.

Things in common  Students work in pairs asking each other ‘Have you ever …?’. Help with vocabulary as necessary. They have to find three things in common and report. (‘We’ve both been to New Zealand.’ ‘We’ve both acted in a play.’ …)

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possible further activities

How many times?  Students work in groups. They have to find something that someone in the group has done once; something that someone has done twice; and so on up to five or more times. Then they report to the class. (‘Karl has been to Paris once; Lynne has broken her leg twice; … Oliver has been in love eight times …’)

Exercise 6 with lies  Students do Exercise 6, but include one lie in each half. They exchange lists with partners and try to decide which are the lies.

page 64

language notes

In some situations American English prefers a simple past where British has a present perfect – especially with just, already and yet (‘Did you eat yet?’), and in other cases when news is being announced (‘Oh, no, I broke my watch!’).

page 65

language notes

One use of the English present perfect is to talk about duration up to the present. In many languages this would be expressed by a present verb:

*I’m here since Tuesday.
*I’m learning English for five years.

➔ Section 5 continues
possible further activities

Clothing records  Students say how long they have had various articles of clothing. What are the records for the oldest and the newest? (‘I’ve had this belt for seven years.’ ‘I’ve only had this scarf since this morning.’)

pages 66–67

possible further activities

Mime  Students mime actions and show (by holding up fingers) how long they have been doing them (e.g. ‘waiting for a bus, 20 minutes’; ‘teaching, 30 years’; ‘playing tennis, two hours’). The class try to say what exactly is being mimed. (‘You’ve been waiting for a bus for 20 minutes.’)

pages 68–69

language notes

The past perfect generally causes students less trouble than the present perfect. Some students may not have an equivalent in their language:

*I knew that I saw her somewhere before.

and some learners may confuse auxiliary have and had:

*I knew that I have seen her somewhere before.

possible further activities

Split sentences  Write the following sentences (and/or others) on cards, cut them in half and distribute them. Students walk round saying (not showing) their half-sentences and trying to find their other halves.

She couldn’t get in | because she’d forgotten her key.
I couldn’t buy a ticket | because I’d spent all my money.
I missed the train | because I’d mistaken the time.
We couldn’t find the restaurant | because we’d lost the address.
I couldn’t phone you | because my battery had run down.
She passed her exam | because she’d studied hard.
I woke up late | because I’d forgotten to set my alarm.
He had trouble getting a job | because he’d been in prison.
She spoke good Chinese | because she’d spent a year in Beijing.
I wasn’t hungry | because I’d eaten too much breakfast.
I was tired | because I hadn’t slept very well.
I couldn’t see anything | because I’d broken my glasses.

Old home  Students write a text (similar in a very general way to the poem on page 69) starting ‘When I went back …’, to describe a visit (real or imaginary) to a place where they used to live or go on holiday.