23 Present perfect simple

MOST OSCARS FOR ACTING

Jack Nicholson (1937 – ) has won three Oscars for Best Actor (in a lead or supporting role).

During her career Katharine Hepburn (1907 – 2003) won four Oscars for Best Actress.

1 Ongoing situations and actions

We use the present perfect simple to talk about situations that started in the past and are still continuing in the present:
The manor house has stood on this spot for over two hundred years. (It is still here.)

We often use the prepositions for and since with this use:
The centre of the island has not been inhabited for fifty years. (for + period of time)
The island has not been inhabited since the earthquake of 1952. (since + point in time)

When we use since to introduce a new clause, we usually use the past simple after it:
X You’ve been really moody ever since that letter has arrived. What’s wrong?
✓ You’ve been really moody ever since that letter arrived. What’s wrong?

⚠️ The present continuous + for expresses a present situation continuing into the future, NOT a situation that began in the past:

We’re staying here for three months. We’re going back to Chile in September.

But note the use of either the present perfect or past simple after It’s (weeks/years/ages) since ..., to express a period of time when we haven’t done something:

It’s ages since I’ve been/I went to the theatre. It’s weeks since we’ve seen/we saw each other.

2 Unfinished time periods

We can use the present perfect for completed actions in the past if they may happen again, i.e. if the time period in which the actions took place has not ended:
I’ve only been to Hong Kong once. (My life is still continuing, so I may go there again.)

NASA has sent probes to various planets. (NASA still exists so may send more.)

Sometimes we know the time is not ‘finished’ because of the time expression:
This channel has shown four wildlife documentaries this week and it’s only Thursday!

Compare these two sentences:

Jack Nicholson has won three Oscars. (He is still alive and may win some more.)
Katharine Hepburn won four Oscars during her life. (She is dead and can’t win any more.)

British English uses the present perfect after superlatives, e.g. the best/worst, the greatest, ordinal numbers, e.g. the first (second, third), the only, often followed by ever:

It’s the worst sports show I have ever seen and the first I have ever complained about!

Past simple with the superlative in American English ➤ page 368
3 Adverbs often used with the present perfect
These adverbs are very common with the present perfect use described in 23.2:

- already
- always
- ever
- never
- often
- recently
- seldom
- so far
- still
- to now
- yet

The Prime Minister has seldom been put in such a difficult position.
I have never experienced any racism in athletics.
We’ve received over 20,000 entries for the competition so far.
‘Have they decided on the wedding date yet?’ ‘No, they still haven’t made up their minds.’

We use already with the affirmative but yet with the negative and in questions:
- X We’ve yet seen the film but they haven’t seen it already.
- ✓ We’ve already seen the film but they haven’t seen it yet.

Past simple with these adverbs in American English ➤ page 368

4 Present results
We can use the present perfect simple to talk about an action completed in the past which has a present result:
The avalanche has devastated the skiing industry in the area.
(result: The skiing industry is still having big problems.)
We can start the interviews now, as all the candidates have arrived.

Common adverbs with this use of the present perfect are just, recently and lately:
Has the sports centre increased its membership fees lately?
John Barry, the composer of numerous famous film scores, has just died. (= very recently)

5 Other uses
As the present perfect simple expresses relevance to the present, news reports often start with this tense, before moving into past tenses:
The largest car plant in Detroit has shut down. It closed its doors for the last time yesterday.
Similarly, we often use it to introduce a new topic of conversation:
I’ve heard from Maurice – he’s been in Australia for the last two months.

In time clauses (e.g. beginning with after, when) we can use the present perfect with future reference (➤ Unit 28.1):
We’ll make a move as soon as the rain has stopped.

6 Present perfect and past simple: differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT PERFECT</th>
<th>PAST SIMPLE (➤ Unit 22.1)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unfinished state/action: France has governed the island of Réunion since 1642.</td>
<td>Finished state/action: France governed Ivory Coast from 1893 to 1960.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfinished time: I haven’t seen Keith this morning. (It’s still morning.)</td>
<td>Finished time: I didn’t see Keith at all this morning. (It’s now afternoon/evening.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present result/relevance: The Indian Government has imposed a ban on tiger hunting to prevent the extinction of tigers.</td>
<td>No indication of present relevance: The Indian Government imposed a ban on tiger hunting a few years ago.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indefinite time: I’ve been to South Africa twice.</td>
<td>Definite time: I went to South Africa in 2009.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We use a past or past perfect form, not the present perfect, to correct an incorrect belief or expectation, or to confirm a correct one:
- X She was just as beautiful as I have imagined.
- ✓ She was just as beautiful as I had imagined.
- X The area is wilder than I have expected.
- ✓ The area is wilder than I expected/was expecting.
Practice

1 Choose the correct option, A or B, to continue the text or dialogue.
   1 Only halfway through the football season and Manchester United yet again leads the Premier League. The situation could easily change, however, as ...
      A ... most teams played only a third of their games so far.
      B ... most teams have played only a third of their games so far.
   2 ‘I must remember to call my parents before I go away. I haven’t even told them about the trip yet.’
      A ‘Didn’t you see much of them lately, then?’
      B ‘Haven’t you seen much of them lately, then?’
   3 ‘What do you think of our new Finance Director?’
      A ‘He’s even more obnoxious than I expected.’
      B ‘He’s even more obnoxious than I’ve expected.’
   4 We won’t be able to move back into our house for a while.
      A Our tenants are living there for six months.
      B Our tenants have lived there for six months.
   5 Today we’re previewing the new album by singer-songwriter Adele, who, as I’m sure you all know, is coming to the US next month.
      A She released two albums so far.
      B She has released two albums so far.
   6 Another earthquake has hit the Fiji region, bringing further devastation to the area, which is still suffering from the August earthquake.
      A The latest tremor measured 7.2 on the Richter scale.
      B The latest tremor has measured 7.2 on the Richter scale.
   7 Pipeworks regrets the current inconvenience to residents of Kelvin Close.
      A We have lowered the water pressure to allow for essential repairs.
      B We lowered the water pressure to allow for essential repairs.
   8 Investigators into the recent air crash have released their findings, which show a fault in the engine cooling system of the aircraft. All major airlines ...
      A ... grounded aircraft of the same type for thorough checks.
      B ... have grounded aircraft of the same type for thorough checks.
   9 The seventeenth-century writer Cervantes is often considered the father of the modern novel. Most people only connect the name with Don Quixote, though Cervantes ...
      A ... was a prolific writer.
      B ... has been a prolific writer.
   10 ‘With so much money being poured into medical research every year, you’d think that more breakthroughs would be made.’ ‘But breakthroughs are being made.
      A Didn’t a Colombian scientist discover a cure for malaria last year?’
      B Hasn’t a Colombian scientist discovered a cure for malaria last year?’
   11 Most visitors to the prison are pleasantly surprised by the environment.
      A It is far more open and greener than they have imagined.
      B It is far more open and greener than they imagined.
   12 My head feels really fuzzy. Concentrating has been far more difficult since ...
      A I’ve been knocked out by that wall that has collapsed.
      B I was knocked out by that wall that collapsed.
   13 ‘Have you checked that contract again? We have to send it by lunchtime.’
      A ‘I’ve read it through twice this morning. That should be enough surely?’
      B ‘I read it through twice this morning. That should be enough, surely?’
   14 I haven’t even looked at the latest assignment for the history course yet. I’ll start it once ...
      A I finished going through the set book.
      B I’ve finished going through the set book.
2 **GRAMMAR IN USE** Complete the conversation, using the words from the box. Write the verbs in the present perfect or past simple. \[2.42\] Listen and check.

already / watch  always / want be ever / see he / make leave  never / hear of not / finish not / see see win

**ELLA** Look, a DVD of *Casablanca*. (0) I've always wanted to see that.

**KATE** What – (1) you *Casablanca* – I don't believe it!

**ELLA** No. When did you see it, then?

**KATE** (2) I've watched it several times. I think it's one of the best films (3) I've ever seen.

**ELLA** Oh, well, in that case, I'll buy it. I don't usually like old films, but (4) I've just watched, all the new films I've got on DVD so I'll watch this tonight. Who's in it?

**KATE** Humphrey Bogart and Ingrid Bergman.

**ELLA** Who are they? (5) I've never heard of them.

**KATE** You're unreal! Humphrey Bogart (6) was one of the greatest actors of the twentieth century, well, in my opinion, anyway.

**ELLA** What other films (7) are there?

**KATE** Oh, loads ... *The Big Sleep, The Maltese Falcon, The African Queen* – he (8) got an Oscar for that. He died when he was in his fifties, otherwise I'm sure he'd have won more.

**ELLA** Well, you can tell me more about it later. Right now I've got to go because (9) I've just watched, the children with my sister and have got to pick them up in a few minutes.

**KATE** You go. I'll get the bus. (10) I'm looking around here yet – there might be some more old films at good prices.

3 **Write the second sentence so it has a similar meaning to the first. Use the word in brackets, as in the example.** \[2.43\] Listen and check.

0 There's a cake in the oven. (baked) I've just baked a cake.

1 Most of the workers started here in 1996, when the factory opened. (since)...

2 The guest performers are all here now. (arrived)...

3 We visited the new theme park three times last summer and we intend to go this summer, too. (have)...

4 Kay and I met each other twenty years ago, when we were children. (for)...

5 The latest novel by Chris Cleave is stunning. It's his best to date. (ever)...

6 There is no decision from the panel yet about the technical irregularities. (made)...

7 The government last increased the rate of income tax several years ago. (recently)...)
Present perfect continuous

1 Ongoing situations and actions
We use the present perfect continuous, often with since or for, to talk about an ongoing situation or action which began in the past and is still continuing, or has just finished:

Women have been speaking out on this issue for some time, with mixed results.
I've been looking into the possibility of early retirement since the reorganisation.

⚠️ We do not usually use the present perfect continuous in the passive:
✘ The patient's heart rate has been monitored continuously.
✔ The nurses have been monitoring the patient's heart rate continuously.

The present perfect simple often (but not always) refers to a completed action, while the continuous usually refers to an action that is still ongoing:

I've read that book by Dan Brown if you want to borrow it. (I've finished reading it.)
I've been reading that book by Dan Brown – it's really exciting! (I'm still reading it.)

When we use the continuous we focus on duration, so we do not mention the number of times that we have done an action: I've been calling you all morning.

If we give a number of times, we use the present perfect simple:
✘ I've been calling you five times this morning. ✔ I've called you five times this morning.

2 Temporary situations
The present perfect continuous can suggest a temporary situation or action:

We've been subscribing to one of the satellite TV companies. (not fixed – we may change)

With lately or recently, it often refers to new developments which may be temporary:

Helen's been spending a lot of time at the club lately. (She didn't use to do this.)

⚠️ We use the present perfect continuous + for, not the present continuous, to specify the duration of an activity which started in the past and is still continuing:

✘ I am learning how to play chess for three years now.
✔ I have been learning how to play chess for three years now.

Verbs like live, work, study, teach can be used in either the simple or continuous with little difference except that the present perfect simple is seen as more permanent:

The Montague family has lived in the manor house for as long as I can remember.
Our daughter has been living with us for a few weeks as she's been ill.

3 Present result
We can use the present perfect continuous to explain a present result. The focus is on the activity rather than the result. In this case, we don't usually use time adverbs:

I'm sorry the hall is in such a mess. We've been decorating.

4 Present perfect simple and continuous: differences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PRESENT PERFECT SIMPLE</th>
<th>PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Completion:</td>
<td>Continuation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This country has welcomed several hundred refugees from Albania recently.</td>
<td>This country has been welcoming refugees for many years.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repeated action:</td>
<td>Duration of action:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She has played with the symphony orchestra three times this season.</td>
<td>She has been playing with the symphony orchestra all season.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Permanent situation:</td>
<td>Temporary situation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People have eaten a lot less meat over the last twenty years or so.</td>
<td>People have been eating less meat recently because of the health scares.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus on present result:</td>
<td>Focus on the activity:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I've done the accounts – here they are.</td>
<td>I've been doing my accounts all afternoon.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Practice

1 Match sentences 1 and 2 with their meanings, A or B, in each pair.

1 1 I've been reading the book you lent me on genetics.
   2 I've read the book you lent me on genetics.

2 1 The firm gives company cars to junior managers.
   2 The firm has been giving company cars to junior managers.

3 1 Something has been killing the rabbits in the woods.
   2 Something has killed the rabbits in the woods.

4 1 Monsanto has placed an advert in the last four Sunday Times newspapers.
   2 Monsanto has been placing adverts in the national press.

5 1 'Hi, Fiona. What a mess! Have you been decorating?'
   2 'Hi, Fiona. This room looks great! Have you decorated it?'

6 1 A group of us have learnt how to play bridge.
   2 A group of us have been learning how to play bridge.

A I've finished the book.
B I'm still reading the book.

A This is the company's usual policy.
   It's unlikely to change.
B This isn't the company's usual policy. It may change.

A There are no rabbits left in the woods.
B There are some rabbits left in the woods.

A This was a number of repeated actions.
B This is a continuing publicity campaign.

A Fiona is in the middle of decorating.
B Fiona isn't decorating any more.

A We're still learning.
B We can play it now.

2 GRAMMAR IN USE Complete the article with the present perfect simple or, if you can, the continuous form of the verbs in brackets. Listen and check.

Kathryn Bigelow (1)................................. (just / win) the Academy Award for Best Director — the first woman ever to do so. So, who is she?

Bigelow was born in California in 1951. She studied film at Columbia University and (2)................................. (work) in film since the mid-1970s. She (3)...................... (be) a female pioneer in the male-dominated world of film directing — she (4)................................. (direct) since 1978

and in that time (5)................................. (direct) eight feature films. In the last ten years, she (6)................................. (also / produce) films.

Some of her films (7)................................. (be) modest successes, but she is best known now for The Hurt Locker, the film for which she won the Oscar. Only four women (8)................................. (ever / be nominated) for Best Director, and of the others, Jane Campion and Sofia Coppola (9)................................. (have) other Oscar awards.

As well as directing, Bigelow (10)................................. (act) in one film and (11)................................. (also / appear) as a model during her career. Since her success with The Hurt Locker she (12)................................. (look) at possibilities for a new crime film set in South America.

Go online for more practice

111
State verbs

Do you like Ingmar Bergman's films?

I don't know. I've been meaning to watch one of his films for ages, but just haven't managed it.

Oh, really? They're interesting, but very strange. I don't understand what they mean at all.

1 State verbs believe, have, like, etc.

There are a number of state verbs in English; we rarely use them in a continuous tense:

× The solicitor is doubting the credibility of his client's explanation.
✓ The solicitor doubts the credibility of his client's explanation.

They often describe states of being, thinking, possessing or feeling:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>existing or being</th>
<th>be consist of contain exist</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>possessing</td>
<td>belong to have (= own) include lack own possess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling or wanting</td>
<td>adore desire despise detest dislike envy hate like love need pity prefer trust want wish</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thinking or believing</td>
<td>believe doubt expect feel (= think) forget imagine intend know realise recognise remember see (= understand) suppose think understand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appearance</td>
<td>appear resemble seem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other verbs</td>
<td>concern cost depend deserve fit matter mean measure mind weigh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2 Using these verbs in the continuous

It is possible to use many of the above verbs in the continuous, but the verb either has a different meaning or expresses a temporary action:

‘Is Maria ready yet?’ ‘No, she’s having a shower.’ (= is taking)

Santos is thinking of getting a new Internet connection. (= is considering now)

Here are some of the common differences in use:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VERB</th>
<th>USE IN SIMPLE</th>
<th>USE IN CONTINUOUS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>be</td>
<td>Your son was a very obedient child, wasn’t he?</td>
<td>Your son was being very difficult at the weekend; that wasn’t like him. (= was behaving)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>have</td>
<td>They’re very rich. They have three homes and a yacht. (= own)</td>
<td>I’m having a really good time, thanks. (= am experiencing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>think</td>
<td>I’ve always thought that we’d meet again. (= have believed)</td>
<td>I’ve been thinking of contributing to Oxfam. (= have been considering)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mean</td>
<td>The sign means ‘slow down’.</td>
<td>You’re always meaning to call, but you never do. (= are intending)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>appear</td>
<td>It appears the police haven’t started the investigation. (= seems)</td>
<td>The Philharmonic are appearing at the Palladium. (= are performing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weigh</td>
<td>She weighs 70 kilos. (= her weight is)</td>
<td>I’m weighing the ingredients for the cake. (= action of weighing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3 Sense verbs see, hear, feel, etc.

We do not usually use the continuous form with verbs which describe a sense or a form of perception, e.g. hear, notice, see, smell, taste:

\[X\] I'm noticing that your wife never comes to the matches. Doesn't she like cricket?

\[✓\] I notice that your wife never comes to the matches. Doesn't she like cricket?

\[X\] I'm hearing that you're not too happy with the management's proposal.

\[✓\] I hear that you're not too happy with the management's proposal.

We usually use the simple form or can/could + sense verb when we experience something without intentionally using the sense, i.e. the action is involuntary:

I (can) smell the fertiliser on the fields every time I open the back door!

We also use the simple form when the verb is intransitive:

The fertiliser on the fields smells really horrible!

With smell and taste, we can use the continuous for a deliberate action:

I (can) taste cream in this. (there is cream in the dish; involuntary action)

I'm tasting the cream. (the cream might be bad; intentional action of checking)

We usually use the verbs see and hear only in the involuntary sense; we use look at, watch or listen to for an intentional action:

\[X\] Can you keep the noise down? I'm hearing something on the radio.

\[✓\] Can you keep the noise down? I'm listening to something on the radio.

If they have a different meaning, we can use the continuous:

I'm seeing a new doctor now. (= visiting as a patient)

Some verbs of feeling can be used in both the simple and the continuous with no change in meaning:

My wrist hurts/is hurting again – I must go to the physiotherapist.

I think those mussels may have been bad. Do you feel/are you feeling OK today?

4 Performative verbs thank, apologise, etc.

Performative verbs are verbs which can actually perform the action they describe when they are used in the first person and the present tense; they address the listener/reader directly:

On behalf of the company, I apologise for any inconvenience caused.

Common examples are:

accept agree apologise congratulate declare deny disagree forbid forgive guarantee insist invite order predict promise recommend refuse request suggest thank warn

When we use these verbs in the present, they are usually in the simple form:

Railtrack apologise for the disruption to services this weekend.

We recommend the new tapas restaurant in the town centre.

If we use these verbs to refer to the past or future, we can use them in the continuous form.

Compare:

**PRESENT**

\[X\] I'm thanking you all for joining us today.

\[✓\] I thank you all for joining us today.

**PAST**

\[✓\] He warned the children not to swim too far from the beach.

\[✓\] When we arrived, he was warning the children not to swim too far from the beach.

**FUTURE**

\[✓\] I'm inviting about sixty people to Jenna's party – OK?
Practice

1 Match sentences 1 and 2 with the continuations A and B in each pair.

1 1 Steven's a difficult child.
  2 Steven's being difficult.

   A He's showing off because we've got visitors.
   B He's been very demanding since birth.

2 1 This salmon weighs more than six kilos.
  2 We're weighing the salmon.

   A It will be plenty for thirty people.
   B It needs to be priced per kilo.

3 1 I invite everyone present to the opening of the new superstore.
  2 I'm inviting everyone to the opening of the new superstore.

   A And I can offer you all a 10 percent discount voucher.
   B I'll put the invitation in a letter to everyone.

4 1 The poet appears to have arrived at the theatre.
  2 The poet is appearing at the theatre.

   A There are performances every evening.
   B We don't know why she was late.

5 1 Mmm. I taste cinnamon in this. Lovely.
  2 I'm tasting it to see if there's enough cinnamon in it.

   A The recipe said one teaspoon only, but I might add more.
   B I adore the taste of cinnamon.

6 1 I think house prices will rise again next year.
  2 I'm thinking of selling my house next year.

   A At least, that's my opinion.
   B At least, that's my intention.

7 1 My sister has a baby.
  2 My sister's having a baby.

   A It's due in July.
   B He'll be six months old tomorrow.

8 1 I smell lavender.
  2 I'm smelling the lavender. It's a very strong variety.

   A Is it your perfume?
   B I know quite a lot about lavender, you know.

9 1 He's having a shower.
  2 He has a fantastic power shower in the main bathroom.

   A It cost more than 400 euros.
   B Why don't you wait in the living room?

10 1 We guarantee that your child will be supervised by experienced instructors.
  2 Mrs Knight's brother and sister-in-law are guaranteeing the loan for her.

   A The company takes full responsibility for her.
   B They believe she is entirely trustworthy.

11 1 Laura's very sarcastic sometimes.
  2 She thinks she's clever, but she's just being sarcastic.

   A It's her least attractive characteristic.
   B Take no notice of her.

12 1 What are you thinking of?
  2 What do you think about the new road layout?

   A It seems an exercise in pointless bureaucracy to me.
   B You look deep in thought.
2 **GRAMMAR IN USE** Read the letter and choose the correct *italic* verb form. If both options are correct, choose both. \(2.45\) Listen and check.

**12 Sunnybank Road • Reading • Berks • RG2 4OX**

Ms Gloria Travis  
Pinetree Studios  
Loughton LG12 2CO  

12 February 2012

Dear Ms Travis,

Please forgive me for contacting you out of the blue. I am writing in connection with the film apprenticeships your studio offers. I (1) noticed / was noticing an advertisement about these in the Guardian some months ago and I have (2) meant / been meaning to write to you since then. My request (3) concerns / is concerning the film editing apprenticeship in particular.

I completed a university degree in film studies last June and I have been trying to find a position in film since then. To be honest, I (4) have / am having great difficulty and I (5) feel / am feeling rather despondent at present. My course (6) consisted / was consisting of most aspects of film and television production, and I specialised in film editing in my final year. I have always (7) wanted / been wanting to pursue a career in film and I took the degree to facilitate that, although it (8) appears / is appearing not to have been successful to date. I (9) realise / am realising that the advert for the apprenticeships was placed some months ago and you may not have any places available now. However, I am perfectly willing to work in any capacity without payment for a few weeks in order for you to see my level of commitment, in the hope that I may qualify for an apprenticeship in the future. I (10) promise / am promising that I won’t disappoint you if you decide to employ me in any capacity.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

*Celia Roberts*

Celia Roberts

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3 **Complete the sentences, using suitable verbs from the box. Choose whether to use a simple or continuous form. \(2.46\) Listen and check.**

be despise forbid hurt mean see taste watch

1 I’m really annoyed you took the car without asking me. From now on I ........................................ you to borrow the car without asking permission first!

2 That medicine ........................................ horrible! What on earth do they put in them to make them so awful?

3 Oh, Joan, can I call you back? I ........................................ the grand prix at the moment.

4 Hasn’t Mike fixed your kitchen tap yet? I know he ........................................ to do it for ages.

5 ‘What was that?’ ‘I don’t know. I just ........................................ something blue fly past. Was it a bird?’

6 I’m not coming to the class tonight. I’ve twisted my ankle and it ........................................ a lot now.

7 What do you mean, you’re leaving? Now you ........................................ over-dramatic!

8 I can’t understand why the newspapers write such awful lies about people. Everyone ........................................ that kind of gutter journalism.