



Past Simple v Present Perfect Use



Use

The past simple is used to talk about **a specific event in the past that has finished** whilst the present perfect tense is used to talk about **unfinished events or past events with no time.**

Use

The past simple tense can be represented like this on a timeline.



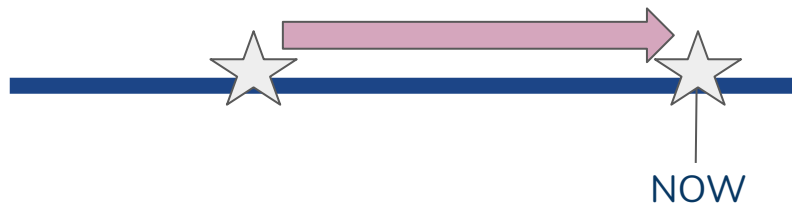
Use

The past simple tense has six main uses.

Past Simple Use	Example Sentences
One single past event	<i>I went to Germany in summer</i>
A past duration	<i>I lived in Barcelona for 3 years</i>
A repeated past event	<i>I drove to work every day</i>
A changed state	<i>She was short as a child but now she's tall</i>
A series of past events	<i>I woke up, got dressed, had breakfast then went to school</i>
Stative verbs	<i>I wanted some chocolate yesterday</i>

Use

The present perfect tense can be represented like this on a timeline.



Use

The present perfect tense has six uses.

Present Simple Use	Example Sentences
Life experience (no time)	<i>I have visited France before</i>
Recent past events	<i>We've just arrived home</i>
Change in state	<i>I have improved my English</i>
Past events impact present	<i>I've lost my wallet and I need it now</i>
Unfinished duration of time	<i>I haven't been to the cinema this year</i>
Stative verbs	<i>I have known her for a long time</i>

Use

Consider these two examples, what is the difference in meaning?

Past Simple	Present Perfect
I knew her for 5 years	I have known her for 5 years

Use

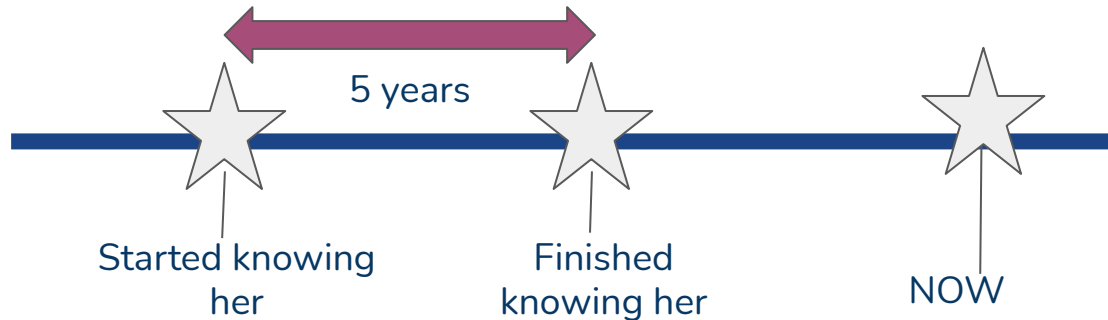
Past Simple

I knew her for 5 years

Present Perfect

I have known her for 5 years

The past simple shows this event started and finished in the past, now you don't know her.



Use

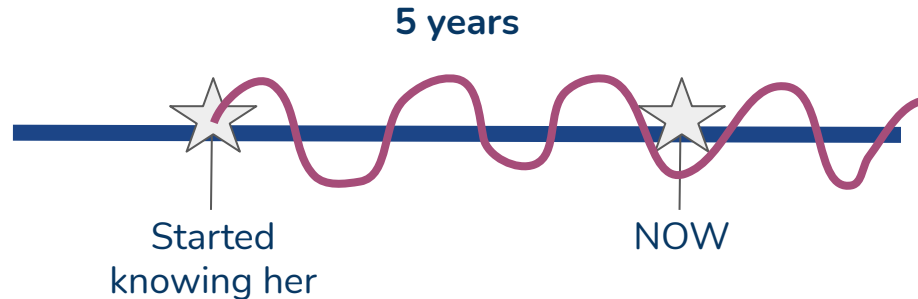
Past Simple

I knew her for 5 years

Present Perfect

I have known her for 5 years

The present perfect shows this event started 5 years ago and you still know her now. This will continue in the future.



Use

Here is an alternative example with the same difference.

Past Simple	Present Perfect
<p>I studied at school for 3 years</p> <p>A horizontal blue line represents a timeline. Three white stars are placed on the line. The first star is labeled 'Started studying' below it. The second star is labeled 'Finished studying' below it. The third star is labeled 'NOW' below it. A double-headed pink arrow is positioned above the line between the first and second stars, with the text '3 years' written in blue above the arrow.</p>	<p>I have studied at school for 3 years</p> <p>A horizontal blue line represents a timeline. Two white stars are placed on the line. The first star is labeled 'Started studying' below it. The second star is labeled 'NOW' below it. A wavy pink line is drawn above the blue line, starting from the first star and ending at the second star. The text '3 years' is written in blue above the wavy line.</p>

Use

Consider these two examples, what is the difference in meaning?

Past Simple	Present Perfect
She lived there for many years	She has lived there for many years

Use

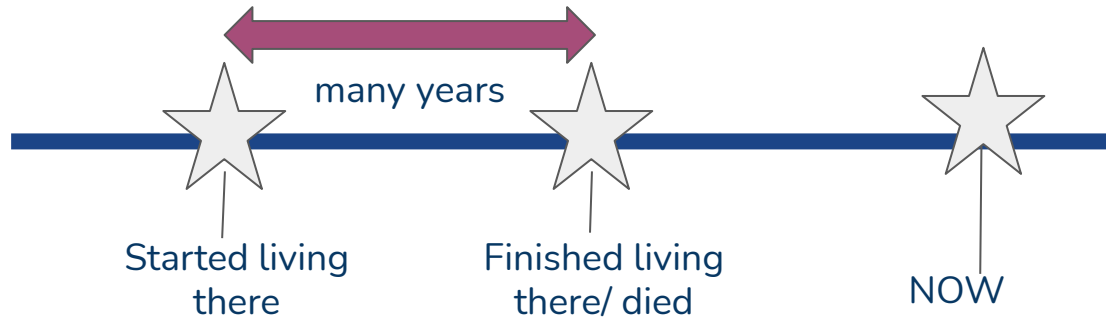
Past Simple

She lived there for many years

Present Perfect

She has lived there for many years

We must remember to use the past simple when somebody has died.



Use

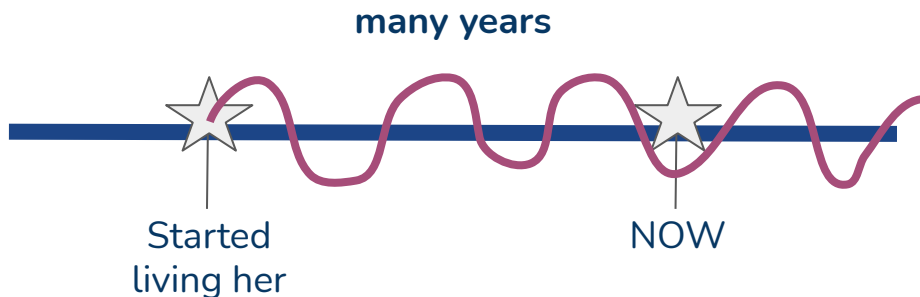
Past Simple

She lived there for many years

Present Perfect

She has lived there for many years

The present perfect expresses this event is continuing to the present (the person is still alive).



Use

Consider these two examples, what is the difference in meaning?

Past Simple	Present Perfect
I lost my wallet!	I've lost my wallet and I need it now

Use

Past Simple

I lost my wallet!

Present Perfect

I've lost my wallet and I need it now

The past simple is used to talk about a simple finished event in the past that has no impact on the present time.



Use

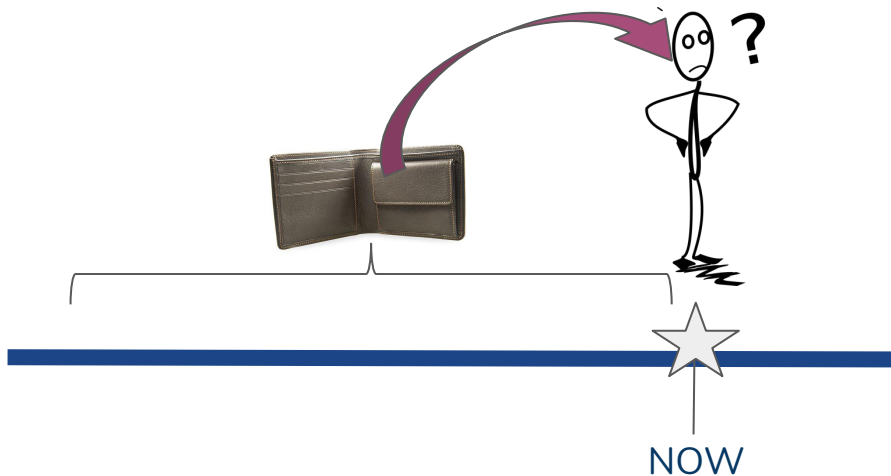
Past Simple

I lost my wallet!

Present Perfect


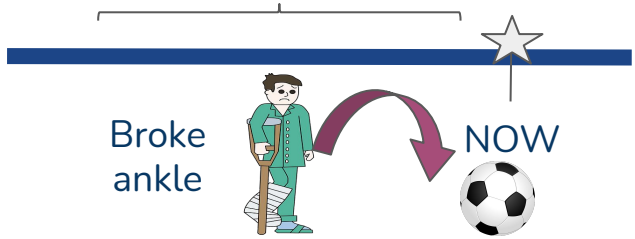
I've lost my wallet and I need it now

When a past event impacts the present time, we use the present perfect tense.



Use

Here is an alternative example with the same difference.

Past Simple	Present Perfect
<p>I broke my ankle</p> 	<p>I have broken my ankle so I can't play football</p> 

Use

Consider these two examples, what is the difference in meaning?

Past Simple	Present Perfect
I went to France in 2003	I've been to France before

Use

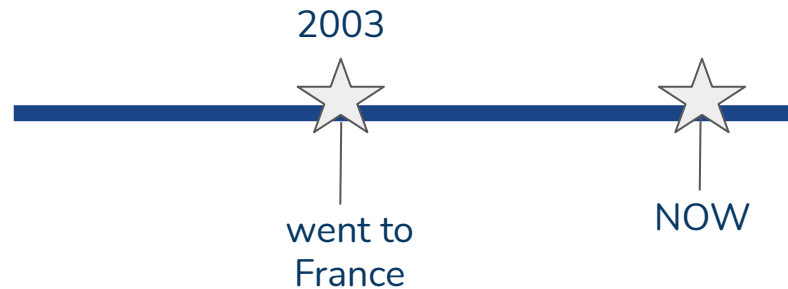
Past Simple

I went to France in 2003

Present Perfect

I've been to France before

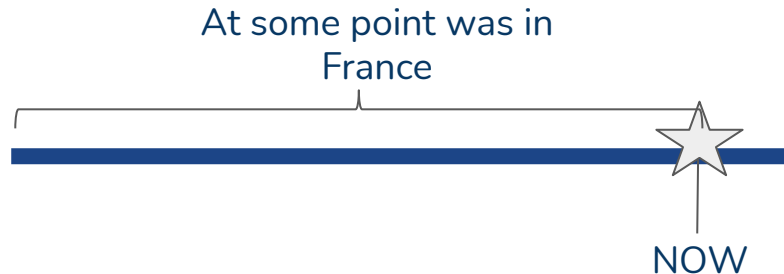
The past simple is used to talk about a simple finished event in the past, with a finished time phrase (in 2003)



Use

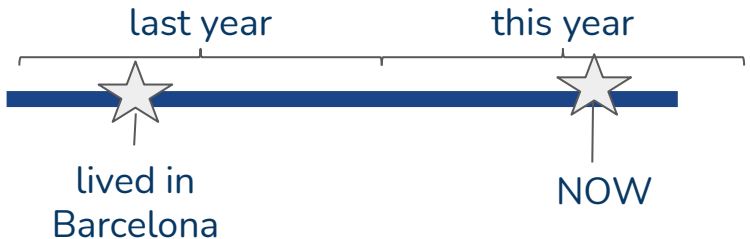

Past Simple	Present Perfect
I went to France in 2003	I've been to France before

The present perfect is used to talk about life experience (with no time phrase) or an unfinished time (such as before - possibility of changing in the future).



Use

Here is an alternative example with the same difference.

Past Simple	Present Perfect
<p>I lived in Barcelona last year</p>  <p>last year this year</p> <p>lived in Barcelona NOW</p>	<p>I have lived in Barcelona before</p>  <p>At some unknown point, lived in Barcelona NOW</p>