

Present perfect continuous and simple (I have been doing and I have done)

A

Study this example situation:



Kate's clothes are covered in paint.
She **has been painting** the ceiling.

Has been painting is the *present perfect continuous*.

We are interested in the activity. It does not matter whether something has been finished or not. In this example, the activity (painting the ceiling) has not been finished.



The ceiling was white. Now it is red.
She **has painted** the ceiling.

Has painted is the *present perfect simple*.

Here, the important thing is that something has been finished. **Has painted** is a completed action. We are interested in the result of the activity (the painted ceiling), not the activity itself.

Compare these examples:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> My hands are very dirty. I've been repairing the car. <input type="checkbox"/> Joe has been eating too much recently. He should eat less. <input type="checkbox"/> It's nice to see you again. What have you been doing since we last met? <input type="checkbox"/> Where have you been? Have you been playing tennis? | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> The car is OK again now. I've repaired it. <input type="checkbox"/> Somebody has eaten all my chocolates. The box is empty. <input type="checkbox"/> Where's the book I gave you? What have you done with it? <input type="checkbox"/> Have you ever played tennis? |
|--|---|

B

We use the continuous to say *how long* (for an activity that is still happening):

- How long **have you been reading** that book?
- Lisa is still writing letters. She's **been writing** letters all day.
- They've **been playing** tennis since 2 o'clock.
- I'm learning Spanish, but I **haven't been learning** it very long.

We use the simple to say *how much*, *how many* or *how many times* (for completed actions):

- How much of that book **have you read**?
- Lisa **has written** ten letters today.
- They've **played** tennis three times this week.
- I'm learning Spanish, but I **haven't learnt** very much yet.

C

Some verbs (for example, **know/like/believe**) are not normally used in the continuous:

- I've **known** about it for a long time. (*not* I've been knowing)

For a list of these verbs, see Unit 4A. But note that you *can* use **want** and **mean** in the present perfect continuous:

- I've **been meaning** to phone Jane, but I keep forgetting.

Present perfect simple → Units 7-8 Present perfect continuous → Unit 9
Present perfect + for/since → Units 11-12

Exercises

Unit 10

10.1 For each situation, write two sentences using the words in brackets.

- 1 Tom started reading a book two hours ago. He is still reading it and now he is on page 53.
(read / for two hours) He has been reading for two hours.
(read / 53 pages so far) He has read 53 pages so far.
- 2 Rachel is from Australia. She is travelling round Europe at the moment. She began her trip three months ago.
(travel / for three months) She
- 3 Patrick is a tennis player. He began playing tennis when he was ten years old. This year he is national champion again – for the fourth time.
(win / the national championships / four times)
- 4 When they left college, Lisa and Sue started making films together. They still make films.
(make / five films since they left college) They

10.2 For each situation, ask a question using the words in brackets.

- 1 You have a friend who is learning Arabic. You ask:
(how long / learn / Arabic?) How long have you been learning Arabic?
- 2 You have just arrived to meet a friend. She is waiting for you. You ask:
(wait / long?) Have
- 3 You see somebody fishing by the river. You ask:
(catch / any fish?)
- 4 Some friends of yours are having a party next week. You ask:
(how many people / invite?)
- 5 A friend of yours is a teacher. You ask:
(how long / teach?)
- 6 You meet somebody who is a writer. You ask:
(how many books / write?)
- 7 A friend of yours is saving money to go on holiday. You ask:
(how long / save?)

10.3 Put the verb into the more suitable form, present perfect simple (I have done) or continuous (I have been doing).

- 1 Where have you been? Have you been playing (you / play) tennis?
- 2 Look! (somebody / break) that window.
- 3 You look tired. (you / work) hard?
- 4 (you / ever / work) in a factory?' 'No, never.'
- 5 'Liz is away on holiday.' 'Is she? Where (she / go)?
- 6 My brother is an actor. (he / appear) in several films.
- 7 'Sorry I'm late.' 'That's all right. (I / not / wait) long.'
- 8 'Is it still raining?' 'No, (it / stop).'
- 9 (I / lose) my address book. (you / see) it?
- 10 (I / read) the book you lent me, but (I / not / finish) it yet. It's very interesting.
- 11 (I / read) the book you lent me, so you can have it back now.