

Ask about English

Present Perfect / Present Perfect Continuous



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Mi Mi Khin from Myanmar asks:

Would you like to explain for me *The present perfect simple* and *The present perfect continuous*? I've a lot of problem using them. What is the rule of using them?

Catherine Walter answers:

Mimi, I'm sure that's a question that lots of listeners are going to have asked themselves.

Now I'm taking your question only to be about the difference between these two because we really don't have time in this programme or *ten* of these programmes to explain the differences between the present perfect and the past and the present perfect and the present.

So let's just look at the difference between the present perfect continuous – sometimes called the present perfect progressive – and the simple present perfect. We normally use the present perfect progressive for shorter temporary situations. So you might say, "That woman's been standing out there for ten minutes."

And we use the simple present perfect for longer or permanent situations. So for example, "That statue has stood in the square for two hundred years."

Here's another example of a contrast: "I've been living with my sister while my flat's been redecorated" but, "I've lived in England for twenty five years." Sometimes - and I hate to tell you this - either can be used. It depends on how the speaker sees the situation so you might say, "It's been raining all week." Or, "It's rained all week".

However, there are a few rules that you can apply. Some verbs are really almost never used in progressive forms even when the meaning is one where you would use a progressive. The most familiar examples of these are *be*, *have* and *know*. So we say, "She's been here for ten minutes." not "She's been being here for ten minutes." I've had a headache all day. "I've only known him since Friday."

Two other tips: One is, if you want to put the emphasis on *results*, you use the simple present perfect. So, "I've answered ten phone calls about the accident already. Whereas you would say, "I've been answering the phone all morning and I haven't been able to get anything else done."

Second tip – We use the simple present perfect to say how many times something has happened. "She's emailed me six times this morning."

I hope that's been some help.

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