

16 The present perfect continuous

A Introduction

We use the present perfect continuous for an action (*waiting*). The action happens over a period of time (*for twenty minutes*). Here the period lasts up to the present - they are still waiting now.



B Form

The present perfect continuous is the present tense of **have + been + an ing-form**.

I/you/we/they have been waiting OR I/you/we/they've been waiting
he/she/it has been waiting OR he/she/it's been waiting

NEGATIVE

I/you/we/they haven't been waiting
he/she/it hasn't been waiting

QUESTION

have I/you/we/they been waiting?
has he/she/it been waiting?

We've been standing here for ages. It has been raining all day.
Have you been waiting long? Our team hasn't been doing very well lately.

C Use

We use the present perfect continuous for an action over a period of time leading up to the present (see A). In these examples the action is still going on.

We've been waiting here for twenty minutes. (We're waiting now.)

Listen. That burglar alarm has been ringing since eight o'clock this morning.

We must use the perfect in these situations.

NOT ~~*We wait here for twenty minutes*~~ OR ~~*We're waiting here for twenty minutes.*~~

We can use the present perfect continuous to talk about repeated actions up to now.

Natasha has been playing the piano since she was four. We can also use it to talk about an action which ends just before the present.

I've been swimming. That's why my hair is wet.

D For, since, how long and recently

We can use the present perfect continuous with **for** and **since** (see Unit 121).

My sister has been staying with me for three weeks now.

You've been playing on that computer since seven o'clock.

We use **how long** in questions.

How long have you been waiting?

Note also **recently** and **lately**. These both mean 'in the last few days or weeks'. *I haven't been feeling very well recently. What have you been doing lately?*

16 Exercises

1 Form (B)

Put in the verbs. Use the present perfect continuous.

Ilona: Sorry I'm late.

Emma: It's OK. (►) / *haven't been waiting* (I / not / wait) long.

What(1)..... (you/do)?

Ilona: I've been with Mrs King. (2) (she / help) me with my English.

Emma: Your English is very good. You don't need lessons, surely.

How long (3)..... (you / study) English?

Ilona: Er, eight years now. But my accent wasn't so good before I came to England.

(4) (I / try) to improve it.

I think (5)..... (it / get) better lately.

Emma: Your accent is fine, Ilona. Honestly.

2 Use(C)

Say what these people have been doing. Use these verbs: *argue, cook, drive, wait, work*



► Andrew is tired because *he's been working* all day.

1 Trevor and Laura are upset because

2 David is hot because

3 Mark feels very stiff because

all day.

4 Henry is annoyed a long time for Claire.

3 Use(C-D)

What could you say in these situations? Write sentences with the present perfect continuous and a phrase with *for*. Use these verbs: *play, read, swim, talk, travel, work*

► A video is on. It began two hours ago, and it hasn't finished yet.

The video has been playing for two hours.

1 Matthew went into the water an hour ago. He doesn't want to come out yet.

2 Your friends started their journey around the world three months ago. They've gone about halfway now.

3 Mark got to the office early this morning. Ten hours later he's still there.

4 Melanie rang Rita forty minutes ago, and they're still on the phone.

5 Trevor has got an interesting book. He started it quite a long time ago. Ask him how long.

17 Present perfect continuous or simple?

A I have been doing or I have done?



Mike has been repairing the car.

We use the present perfect continuous for an action happening over a period of time (see Unit 16). We are thinking of Mike doing the repair and getting oil on his hands.



Mike has repaired the car.

We use the present perfect simple for a complete action (see Unit 11). We are thinking of the finished repair and the result of the repair - that the car is all right now.

Here are some more examples.

OVER A PERIOD (have been doing)

We've been touring Scotland. A strong wind has been blowing all day. Vicky is out of breath. She's been running. I've been writing an essay. I'm tired now.

We normally use the continuous form when we say how long.

*Rachel has been playing music all day.
I've been ironing shirts since ten o'clock.
How long have you been learning to drive?*

COMPLETE (have done)

We've finished our tour of Scotland. The wind has blown a tree over. Vicky is here at last. She's run all the way. I've written an essay. I can hand it in now

We normally use the simple form when we say how much/many.

*Rachel has played at least twenty CDs.
I've ironed eight shirts.
How many driving lessons have you had?*

B States and actions

We cannot normally use the continuous form with a state verb (see Unit 7).

I've known the secret for a long time, NOT ~~I've been knowing the secret~~. My parents have had this car for about ten years. We've never been very happy here, I'm afraid.

Live and work (= have a job) can be continuous or simple, with no difference in meaning.

We've been living here since 1992. OR We've lived here since 1992.

Sarah has been working for the company for three years now. OR Sarah has worked for the company for three years now.

17 Exercises

1 I have been doing or I have done? (A)

Look at these conversations and put in the correct form of the verb. Use the present perfect continuous or simple.

- Sarah: I feel really tired.
Mark: It's because *you've been doing* (you / do) too much.
Sarah: Well, at least *I've finished* (I / finish) that report now, and I can relax.
- 1 David: Someone (leave) the ladder outside, look.
Harriet: I expect that's Mike. (he / clean) the windows. I don't think (he / finish) yet.
- 2 Laura: You've got mud on your shoes.
Trevor: It's all right, I'll take them off. (I / work) in the garden.
Laura: Yes, it looks a lot tidier. Well done (you / do) a good job.
- 3 Tom: (I / hear) that you and Harriet are building a garage.
How long (you / do) that?
Mike: Oh, for about a month now. (we / do) about half of it.

2 I have been doing or I have done? (A)

What would you ask in these situations? Use the present perfect continuous or simple.

- ? Your friend is wearing glasses. You've never seen him with glasses on before. Ask him how long ...
How long have you been wearing glasses ?
- ? Nick is playing computer games. Ask him how many ...
How many computer games have you played ?
- 1 You meet a group of people walking across country. Ask them how many miles ...
- 2 Some workmen are digging up the road outside Sarah's house. Ask her how long ...
- 3 Laura is taking lots of photos of you and your friends. Ask her how many ...
- 4 You have just woken up from an afternoon sleep and seen that it is raining. Ask your friend how long ...

3 I have been doing or I have done? (A-B)

Complete the conversation. Put the verbs in the present perfect continuous or simple.

- Laura: What are you doing, Trevor? (►) *You've been* (you / be) in here for ages. You're making an awful mess.
- Trevor: (1) (I / clear) out this cupboard most of the afternoon. There's a lot of old stuff in here. (2) (I / find) these, look.
- Laura: (3) (you / sit) there staring at those old boots for the last five minutes. (4) (I / watch) you.
- (5) (you / be) in a dream.
- Trevor: They're football boots. (6) (I / have) them since I was about sixteen. (7) (they / be) in here for years.
- Laura: Well, throw them away. And what about that tennis racket? Is that yours?
- Trevor: No, it must be yours. (8) (I / never / have) a tennis racket.

18 The past perfect

A Introduction

IN THE CANTEEN AT WORK, MARK IS TELLING A COLLEAGUE ABOUT THE DREADFUL DAY HE HAD YESTERDAY.



*I felt really tired when I took the train to work yesterday because Sarah and I **had been** to a party the evening before. We **hadn't gone** to bed until after one. I **hadn't been** on the train long when I had a bit of a shock. I suddenly realized that **I'd left** my wallet at home. Then I began to wonder. **Had I left** it in the office the day before? I just couldn't remember. I wanted to go back to bed. I felt awful.*

The situation is in the past (I **took** the train ... I **felt** tired ...). When we talk about things before this past time, we use the past perfect.

*Sarah and I **had been** to a party the evening before.*

***I'd left** my wallet at home.*

We are looking back from the situation of the train journey to the earlier actions - going to a party and leaving home without the wallet.

Here are some more examples of the past perfect. *It was twenty to six. Most of the shops **had just closed**.*

*I went to the box office at lunch-time, but they **had** already **sold** all the tickets. By 1960 most of Britain's old colonies **had become** independent.*

As well as actions, we can use the past perfect to talk about states.

*I felt better by the summer, but the doctor warned me not to do too much. **I'd been** very ill. The news came as no surprise to me. **I'd known** for some time that the factory was likely to close.*

B Form

The past perfect is **had** + a past participle.

*He **had enjoyed** the party, OR He'd **enjoyed** the party.*

*They **hadn't gone** to bed until late. Where **had he put** his wallet? For irregular past participles see page 383.*

C Present perfect and past perfect

Compare these examples.

PRESENT PERFECT (before now)

*My wallet isn't here. **I've left** it behind.*

*The match is over. United **have won**.*

*That man looks familiar. **I've seen** him somewhere before.*

PAST PERFECT (before then)

*My wallet wasn't there. **I'd left** it behind.*

*The match was over. United **had won**.*

*The man looked familiar. **I'd seen** him somewhere before.*

18 Exercises

1 The past perfect (A)

Read about each situation and then tick the right answer.

- ▶ Two men delivered the sofa. I had already paid for it.
Which came first, a) the delivery, or b) ✓ the payment?
- 1 The waiter brought our drinks. We'd already had our soup.
Which came first, a) the drinks, or b) the soup?
- 2 I'd seen the film, so I read the book.
Did I first a) see the film, or b) read the book?
- 3 The programme had ended, so I rewound the cassette.
Did I rewind the cassette a) after, or b) before the programme ended?
- 4 I had an invitation to the party, but I'd arranged a trip to London.
Which came first, a) the invitation, or b) the arrangements for the trip?

2 The past perfect (A-B)

Add a sentence with the past perfect using the notes.

- ▶ Claire looked very suntanned when I saw her last week.
She'd just been on holiday. (just / be on holiday)
- 1 We rushed to the station, but we were too late.
..... (the train / just / go)
- 2 I didn't have an umbrella, but that didn't matter.
..... (the rain / stop)
- 3 When I got to the concert hall, they wouldn't let me in.
..... (forget / my ticket)
- 4 Someone got the number of the car the raiders used.
..... (steal / it / a week before)
- 5 I was really pleased to see Rachel again yesterday.
..... (not see / her / for ages)
- 6 Luckily the flat didn't look too bad when my parents called in.
..... (just / clean / it)
- 7 The boss invited me to lunch yesterday, but I had to refuse the invitation.
..... (already / eat / my sandwiches)

3 Present perfect and past perfect (C)

Put the verbs in the present perfect (*have done*) or past perfect (*had done*).

- ? It isn't raining now. It's *stopped* (stop) at last.
- ? We had no car at that time. *We'd sold* (sell) our old one.
- 1 The park looked awful. People..... (leave) litter everywhere.
- 2 You can have that newspaper. I(finish) with it.
- 3 There's no more cheese. We(eat) it all, I'm afraid.
- 4 There was no sign of a taxi, although I..... (order) one half an hour before.
- 5 This bill isn't right. They(make) a mistake.
- 6 I spoke to Melanie at lunch-time. Someone (tell) her the news earlier.
- 7 I was really tired last night. I..... (have) a hard day.
- 8 Don't you want to see this programme? It (start).
- 9 It'll soon get warm in here. I..... (turn) the heating on.
- 10 At last the committee were ready to announce their decision.
They..... (make) up their minds.

19 Review of the past simple, continuous and perfect

A Introduction

Read this true story. It happened some years ago.

*A young man **walked** into a supermarket in Southampton and **put** a few items of food in a basket. He had **chosen** a time when not many people **were shopping** in the store. He **found** a checkout where no one else **was waiting**. When the cashier **had checked** the goods, the man **gave** her a £10 note. When she opened the till, the man quickly **snatched** all the money from it and **ran** out of the store before she **realized** what was **happening**. At the time the security guard **was standing** at the other end of the store. When staff **checked** the records in the till, they **found** that the thief **had taken** only £4.37. As he **had left** the £10 note behind, the operation **had cost** him £5.63.*

B Comparison of tenses

We use the past simple to talk about the past (see Unit 8).

*He **snatched** the money and **ran** away.* The past simple is used for the actions in the story, to tell us what happened next.

We use the past continuous (see Unit 9) for something around a past time or a past action.

*At the time of the incident, not many people **were shopping** in the store.*
The few customers were in the middle of doing their shopping.

We use the past perfect (see Unit 18) for things before a past situation.

*Staff found that the thief **had taken** only £4.37.* The theft of the money happened before they found out how much.

C Past simple and past continuous

We often use these two forms together when a shorter action comes in the middle of a longer one (see Unit 10B).

*I **was waiting** at the checkout when I **noticed** a strange-looking man.*
Seeing the man came in the middle of the wait.

D Past simple and past perfect

When we use these two forms together, we use the past perfect for what happened earlier.

*A man **walked** into a supermarket. He **had chosen** a quiet time.* The choice of the time came before the arrival in the supermarket.

In this example, one past action followed another.

*He **filled** the basket and **went** to the checkout.* We can also use either **when ... had done**, or **after ... did/had done**.

***When** he **had filled** the basket, he **went** to the checkout.*

***After** he **had filled** (OR **After** he **filled**) the basket, he **went** to the checkout.* But when one short action comes straight after another, we use the past simple for both.

***When** she **opened** the till, he **snatched** all the money out of it.*

Note the different meanings.

*When I switched the TV on, the programme **started**.* I was just in time.

*When I switched the TV on, the programme **had started**.* I missed the beginning. We can use the past perfect or the past simple with **before** or **until**. There is no difference in meaning.

*The man arrived at the store before it **had** opened/before it **opened**.*

*The chairman didn't speak until he **had** heard/until he **heard** all the arguments.*

19 Exercises

1 Past simple, continuous and perfect (A-D)

Look at these sentences and then tick the right answer.

- ▶ David and Tom were talking together when a young woman spoke to them.
Which took more time, a) what David and Tom said, or b) what the woman said?
- 1 Mike had put up the tent, but Harriet was still unloading things from the car.
Which finished first, a) putting up the tent, or b) unloading?
- 2 Mark went home and switched off the computer.
What did he do first, a) go home, or b) switch off the computer?
- 3 When Claire arrived, Henry was walking up and down.
Which started earlier, a) Claire's arrival, or b) Henry's walking?
- 4 When Sarah had phoned the office, she drove to the hotel.
Did she phone the office a) before, or b) after driving to the hotel?

2 Past simple and past perfect (D)

Write the two sentences as one. Use *when* and the past perfect in either the first or the second part of the sentence.

- ▶ I took the book back to the library. I read it.
I took the book back to the library when I'd read it.
- ▶ The students did the experiment. They wrote a report on it.
When the students had done the experiment, they wrote a report on it.
- 1 Nick saved enough money. He bought a motor bike.
- 2 Mark put all the dishes away. He dried them.
- 3 I looked both ways. I pulled out into the road.
- 4 The golfers went into the clubhouse. They played the last hole.

3 Past simple, continuous and perfect (A-D)

Daniel is telling the story of how he forgot his passport. Put the verbs into the correct form.

- ▶ *(happened)* (it / happen) last August at the airport. A few weeks before, a group of us
- (1)..... (decide) to go to Greece together for a holiday.
- (2)..... (we / wait) in the queue at passport control when suddenly
- (3).....(I / realize) that (4)..... (I / forget) my passport.
- (5)..... (it / be) quite a shock. (6)..... (I / hurry) to a phone and
- (7) (ring) my parents. (8)..... (they / work) in the garden,
- but luckily my mother (9)..... (hear) the phone.
- (10)(they / find) the passport and immediately
- (11).....(drive) to the airport with it. (12) (I / meet) them at
- the information desk. (13).....(we / have) no time to talk, but
- (14).....(I / say) goodbye to them earlier that morning.
- (15)..... (I / run) all the way to the plane. I was just in time. When
- (16).....(I / get) there, the passengers (17).....(sit) in their seats
- ready for take-off. When (18) (they / see) me, everyone
- (19)..... (start) clapping.

20 The past perfect continuous

A Introduction



David is talking about a situation in the past (***Ifell and broke my leg***). When we look back to something before this past time, we use the past perfect simple (see Unit 18) or the past perfect continuous.

Past perfect simple: *I had taken a bus into town.*

Past perfect continuous: *I had been swimming in the pool*

We use the past perfect continuous for an action which happened over a period of time. The swimming went on for some time before David broke his leg.

B Form

The past perfect continuous is **had been** + an ing-form. / *had been waiting ages*, OR *I'd been waiting ages*. *I had not been paying attention*, OR *I hadn't been paying attention*. *Was the ground wet?* *Had it been raining?*

C I had been doing or I had done?

Compare the past perfect continuous and simple.

OVER A PERIOD (**had been doing**)

I found the calculator. I'd been looking for it for ages. Vicky felt tired because she'd been working all day.

We are thinking of Vicky's work going on as she got tired.

We normally use the continuous with a phrase saying how long.

When the company went bankrupt, it had been losing money for months.

We do not normally use the past perfect continuous for states (see Unit 7). NOT ~~He had been seeming unwell~~

COMPLETE (**had done**)

I finally bought a new calculator. I'd looked everywhere for the old one. Vicky felt pleased because she'd done so much work. We are thinking of Vicky's work as complete.

We normally use the simple form with a phrase saying how much/many.

When the company went bankrupt, it had lost over a million pounds.

We also use the past perfect simple for states (see Unit 7).

The old man had seemed unwell for some time before he died.

D Comparison with other continuous forms

Compare the present perfect continuous (**has/have been doing**) and the past perfect continuous.

Vicky looks very upset. I think she's been crying.

Vicky looked very upset. I thought she'd been crying. Compare the past continuous (**was doing**) and the past perfect continuous.

When I phoned, Natasha was having a piano lesson. (I phoned during the lesson.)

When I phoned, Natasha had been having a piano lesson. (I phoned after the lesson.)

20 Exercises

1 Form (B)

Complete the conversation. Put in the past perfect continuous of the verbs.

Rachel: How was your job interview?

Vicky: Awful. I felt terribly nervous. (►) *I'd been worrying* (I / worry) about it all week. And I was tired because (1)..... (I / work) on my project the night before.
(2) (I / not look) forward to the interview at all.

Rachel: So what happened?

Vicky: The woman interviewing me was half an hour late because

(3).....(she / deal) with an unexpected problem, she said.

(4) (I / wait) ages, and I'd got even more nervous.

Rachel: How did the interview go?

Vicky: Well, I tried to sound confident. (5) (I / read) a book that said that's what you have to do in job interviews. But I don't know if I gave the right answers.

2 Form and use (A-B)

Add a sentence with the past perfect continuous to explain why. Look at the pictures to find the reasons.



► Claire got burnt. *She'd been lying in the sun.*

- 1 Vicky looked upset.....
- 2 Henry was stopped by the police.....
- 3 The children started a fire.....
- 4 A young man was struck by lightning.....

Comparison with other tenses (C-D)

Put in the correct form of the verbs.

► Tom could hear shouts from the flat next door. His neighbours *were arguing* (argue) again.

- 1 Emma went into the sitting-room. It was empty, but the television was still on. Someone.....(watch) it.
- 2 I (play) tennis, so I had a shower. I was annoyed because I (not win) a single game.
- 3 The walkers finally arrived at their destination. They..... (walk) all day, and they certainly needed a rest. They (walk) thirty miles.
- 4 When I saw Nick last week, he said he (stop) smoking. But when I saw him two days later, he..... (smoke) a cigarette. He looked rather ashamed.
- 5 I really must go and see the dentist. One of my teeth (ache) for weeks.
- 6 When Melanie arrived at David's place, he..... (lie) on the sofa reading a detective novel. He.....(buy) it at the second-hand bookshop, and he(read) it for most of the afternoon.