

7.1.4 Present perfect

Construction: The *grammatical construction* of *present perfect* tense is:

Have/has + past participle (refer to section 2.2.5 for *participles*)

For example: *has come, have done, have revealed, has studied* etc.

Present perfect tense should be used in the following scenarios:

1. **Scenario 1: An event that has happened at *some point* before current time** - This represents the most common scenario of *present perfect* tense. This is used to express the situation that an event has happened at *some point* before now. It should be noted that the exact time of occurrence of the event is not important. *Present perfect* can also be used with expressions such as *once, never, often*, since these expressions do not have a specific time associated with them.



For example:

Peter has never done river rafting.

- Before now till *any* point in Peter's lifetime, Peter has never done river rafting.

Jack has always been a great athlete.

- Jack has been a great athlete, not at a specific time, but *always*.

Jim has given his bike to Michael.

- When (at what time) did Jim give his bike to Michael? It is *not* known /expressed. In fact, the time when Jim gave his bike to Michael is *not* important to the sentence.

Note:

- a) *Present perfect* should *not* be used in scenarios that are associated with a *specific time*. For example, following would be incorrect:

Jack has met Peter yesterday.

– Since *yesterday* is a *specific time*, *present perfect* is *not* the correct tense to use. Since this is an event that occurred at a *specific time* in the past, *simple past* tense is an appropriate tense to be used for this. So, the correct sentence would be:

Jack met Peter yesterday.

- b) While this tense is called *present perfect*, it actually depicts events that have happened in the *past* (For example: *Jim has given his bike to Michael*; clearly Jim has given his bike at some time in the *past*). The reason this tense is *present perfect*, is because the time frame of occurrence of the event starts in the *present* (now) and continues infinitely into the past. In other words, starting now (*present*) till infinitely into the past, the event has occurred at *some unspecific time*.

2. **Scenario 2: An event that has happened *within some timeframe* before current time** – In scenario 1 above, we saw that an event occurred at some *unspecific* time; the time frame of reference for this unspecific time basically started in the *present*, and continued *infinitely* into the past. Scenario 2 is a slight variation of scenario 1. In scenario 2, rather than letting the time frame of reference extend *infinitely* into the past, we *restrict* the time frame that we are referring to, in the past. This restriction is imposed by using words such as *in the last year*, *in the last month*, *this week* etc. In the illustration below, the *vertical line* restricts the time frame that we are referencing, starting in present.



For example:

Peter has met with two accidents in the last one year.

- The phrase *in the last one year* restricts the time frame that we are referencing in the past (for Peter's accidents), to *one year*, starting from present (current time).

Sam has changed three jobs in six months.

- The phrase *in six months* restricts the time frame that we are referencing in the past (for Sam changing jobs), to *six months*, starting from present (current time) and going back in time six months.

3. **Scenario 3: An event started in the past and is still continuing** –Present perfect is also used to depict an event that started in the *past* and has *continued* till now.



For example:

Sam has been in a very protective environment since childhood.

- The event of Sam being in a very protective environment started in the *past* (childhood) and has *continued* till now.

Peter has been in California for past two years.

- The event of Peter being in California started in the *past* (two years back) and has *continued* till now.

Let us look at examples based on official sources.

A sentence based on official question (#71, OG-13: *Along the major rivers that traverse...*):

In western Burkina Faso and Mali, the Bobo people are known for their elaborate outfits and masks, a tradition that endured for many centuries.

Analysis: As per the sentence, the Bobo people *are* still known for their elaborate outfits and masks. This tells us that the tradition is *still* followed, and has been so for many centuries. Hence, *simple past* (*endured*) is not appropriate usage, since simple past is used for events that have *finished* in the past. So, the correct sentence would be in *present perfect* (*scenario 3*):

In western Burkina Faso and Mali, the Bobo people are known for their elaborate outfits and masks, a tradition that has endured for many centuries.

Another sentence based on GMATPrep question (*Since the start of space age...*):

Since the advent of nuclear energy, nuclear weapons proliferated exponentially; according to latest estimates, there are currently 17,000 nuclear warheads in the world.

Analysis: The sentence starts with *since* and then suggests a *time* since when, the nuclear weapons have proliferated exponentially. The timeline here is indicative of an event (proliferation of nuclear weapons) that started in the *past* and has *continued* till now. Hence, *present perfect* (*have proliferated*) is the correct choice of tense; not *simple past* (*proliferated*). So, the correct sentence is:

Since the advent of nuclear energy, nuclear weapons have proliferated exponentially; according to latest estimates, there are currently 17,000 nuclear warheads in the world.

Another sentence based on official question (#96, OG-13: *Even though Clovis points...*), where the use of *present perfect* is *incorrect*:

While Madagascar alone now accounts for 36 percent of all primate families, the first lemur-like primates on the fossil record have appeared 60 million years ago in mainland Africa and crossed over to Madagascar shortly thereafter.

Analysis: The above sentence is in *present perfect* (*have appeared 60 million years ago*). However, as we noted earlier, present perfect should *not* be used in scenarios that are associated with a *specific time* (in this case, *60 million years ago*). Hence, the correct sentence would be in *simple past* (*appeared*):

While Madagascar alone now accounts for 36 percent of all primate families, the first lemur-like primates on the fossil record appeared 60 million years ago in mainland Africa and crossed over to Madagascar shortly thereafter.