

GRAMMAR · LESSON 04 · B1

# The Same Story Two Ways

Present Perfect vs Past Simple — the most-tested B1 choice

"I've broken my arm" or "I broke my arm last winter." Same event — but only one of them is correct in each situation. This lesson teaches you the single most-tested B1 grammar choice.

50 min

2 tenses compared

CEFR B1

Ages 11-16

## What you'll learn

- Decide between the two tenses using one simple question: **does it say exactly when?**
- Handle open vs finished time periods (this week vs last week).
- Use the wide-angle → close-up pattern in real speaking and writing.

1

WARM-UP · 4 MIN

## Same event, different sentences

Look at these four sentences. They describe the same events — but one pair uses Present Perfect and one pair uses Past Simple. What's the difference in meaning?

- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 1a | I <b>have been</b> to Rome three times.                |
| 1b | I <b>went</b> to Rome last summer.                     |
| 2a | She <b>has broken</b> her arm — she's at the hospital. |
| 2b | She <b>broke</b> her arm in 2023.                      |

2

GRAMMAR FOCUS · 18 MIN

## Two tenses with different jobs

Both talk about finished actions. The difference is **when** — and how much that "when" matters.

PRESENT PERFECT

PAST SIMPLE

**The connection**

Form: have/has + past participle

- **When?** Unimportant or unknown
- Focus: result / experience now
- Period still continues
- Action still relevant / visible now

She **has broken** her arm. (*it's still broken*)

**The story**

Form: verb-ed / irregular form

- **When?** Specific and finished
- Focus: event in the past
- Period is over
- Action closed — a story

She **broke** her arm in 2023. (*finished event*)

□ **The one question that always works**

**Does the sentence say exactly when it happened?**

(*yesterday, last week, ago, in 2019, at 8 p.m., when I was young...*)

**NO → PRESENT PERFECT**

**No specific time**

Life experience, recent result, unfinished period. The "when" is unimportant or unknown.

**Signals:** ever, never, already, yet, just, for, since, so far, recently, lately, this week / year, today, in my life

**YES → PAST SIMPLE**

**Specific finished time**

A moment or period in the past that is over. The "when" is clear.

**Signals:** yesterday, last X, X ago, in 2019, at 8 p.m., when I was young, that day / morning, on Monday

□ **Time periods: is it still open or closed?**

Some time expressions are tricky because the **period** matters, not just the name.

**STILL OPEN → PRESENT PERFECT**

this week / month / year, today, this morning (if it's still morning), so far this term

"**I have drunk** four coffees today." (*the day isn't over*)

**FINISHED → PAST SIMPLE**

last week / month / year, yesterday, this morning (if it's now afternoon), that day

"**I drank** four coffees this morning." (*spoken in the afternoon*)

□ **A classic B1 mistake**

Some students always use Present Perfect for recent events, and Past Simple for old events. That's not the rule. The rule is about the **time expression**, not how recent the event feels.

□ **I broke my leg ten minutes ago.** (recent, but "ten minutes ago" = specific time → PS)

□ **I have broken my leg three times.** (old events, but "three times" = no specific time → PP)

**3**

**CONVERSATION MOVE · 3 MIN**

**Wide angle → close-up**

In real conversation, people often **open** a topic with Present Perfect (the general experience) and then **zoom in** with Past Simple (what actually happened). Watch:

<b>OPEN (PP)</b>	I <b>have been</b> to a K-pop concert.
<b>ZOOM (PS)</b>	It <b>was</b> in Paris last year. I <b>went</b> with my cousin and we <b>screamed</b> for two hours.
<b>OPEN (PP)</b>	My brother <b>has broken</b> his phone twice.
<b>ZOOM (PS)</b>	The first time, he <b>dropped</b> it in a swimming pool. The second time, he <b>sat</b> on it.
<b>OPEN (PP)</b>	Have you <b>ever met</b> a famous person?
<b>ZOOM (PS)</b>	Yes — I <b>met</b> a footballer at the airport two years ago. He <b>signed</b> my bag.

That's the pattern you'll see in the reading — and it's exactly what examiners look for in your speaking and writing.

## 4

## THE FOUR CLASSIC B1 MISTAKES · 3 MIN

## Watch out for these

1.  ~~I have seen that film yesterday.~~  **I saw that film yesterday.** (*yesterday = specific time*)
2.  ~~When have you been to Paris?~~  **When did you go to Paris?** ("*When?*" asks for a specific time → PS)
3.  ~~She lives here since 2018.~~  **She has lived here since 2018.** (*since + PP, not Present Simple*)
4.  ~~I didn't eat breakfast yet.~~  **I haven't eaten breakfast yet.** (*yet + PP*)

## 5

## KEY VOCABULARY · 6 MIN

## Words for talking about past events

Word	POS	Meaning	Example
<b>recently</b>	<i>adv</i>	a short time ago — no exact date	<i>I've recently started running.</i>
<b>accident</b>	<i>n</i>	a sudden, unplanned, usually bad event	<i>There was a small accident on the bus.</i>
<b>audition</b>	<i>n / v</i>	a short performance to try for a role	<i>She auditioned for the school play.</i>
<b>competition</b>	<i>n</i>	an event where people try to win	<i>I entered a drawing competition.</i>
<b>apply (for)</b>	<i>v</i>	to officially ask for a job or place	<i>He has applied for three schools so far.</i>
<b>notice</b>	<i>v</i>	to see or become aware of something	<i>Have you noticed her new haircut?</i>
<b>disappear</b>	<i>v</i>	to go away suddenly	<i>My phone has disappeared.</i>
<b>volunteer</b>	<i>v / n</i>	to offer to do something unpaid	<i>I volunteered at the animal shelter.</i>
<b>surprisingly</b>	<i>adv</i>	in an unexpected way	<i>Surprisingly, I enjoyed the film.</i>
<b>turn out</b>	<i>phrv</i>	to happen in a particular way in the end	<i>The day turned out better than I thought.</i>

6

READING · 10 MIN

## The Same Story, Two Ways

# The Same Story, *Two Ways*

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LIFE & TIMES

Every story has two sides. First, the general — "this has happened to me". Then, the specific — "and here's exactly what happened last time". We asked five teens to tell us both halves of the same story.

P

**Priya, 15**  
Delhi · India

Auditions

### WIDE ANGLE · PRESENT PERFECT

I **have auditioned** for four school plays. I **have got** a part twice. My friends **have always told** me I'm braver than I feel.

### CLOSE-UP · PAST SIMPLE

Last September, I **auditioned** for Romeo and Juliet. I **walked** onto the stage, **forgot** my first line, and **laughed**. Surprisingly, the director **loved** it. She **cast** me as Mercutio.

R

**Ruben, 16**  
Amsterdam · Netherlands

Bike accidents

### WIDE ANGLE · PRESENT PERFECT

I **have had** three bike accidents in my life. Nothing serious. My mum **has warned** me a thousand times. Have you **ever fallen off** a bike?

### CLOSE-UP · PAST SIMPLE

The last one **was** in April. I **was** late for school and **took** a corner too fast. I **hit** a tulip stand and **fell** into the flowers. An old lady **laughed** and **helped** me up. My school shirt **smelled** like spring for a week.

Z

**Zoe, 14**  
Athens · Greece

Volunteering

### WIDE ANGLE · PRESENT PERFECT

I **have volunteered** at an animal shelter since I was twelve. I **have walked** countless dogs and **have fed** dozens of cats. It **has changed** me.

### CLOSE-UP · PAST SIMPLE

My first day **was** terrible. I **arrived** fifteen minutes late, **knocked over** a bowl of food, and **cried** a little in the bathroom. But a tiny black cat **walked** up to me and **sat** in my lap. I **decided** to come back the next day.

E

Emir, 13

Istanbul · Türkiye

Competitions

## WIDE ANGLE · PRESENT PERFECT

I **have entered** six chess competitions. I **have won** one and **have lost** five. So far, I **haven't given up**.

## CLOSE-UP · PAST SIMPLE

The one I **won was** last October in Izmir. My opponent **was** eighteen and very confident. He **made** a small mistake on move twenty-three. I **noticed** it, **took** his queen, and he **resigned** ten moves later. My dad **cried**.

M

Mia, 12

Copenhagen · Denmark

Cooking fails

## WIDE ANGLE · PRESENT PERFECT

I **have tried** cooking dinner for my family seven times this year. It **has gone** well three times. Mum **has been** very patient.

## CLOSE-UP · PAST SIMPLE

Last Sunday **was** a disaster. I **followed** a pasta recipe, **forgot** to drain the water, and **poured** the whole thing into the sink. My brother **took** a photo. It **is** now our family wallpaper on the fridge.

**Present Perfect** (general / connection to now)

**Past Simple** (specific story)

7

PRACTICE · 8 MIN

## 8 quick decisions

Choose the correct option (A, B or C) for each gap. Answers on the last page.

1	I ___ a new phone three days ago. · A) have bought B) bought C) buy
2	She ___ her keys — she can't get into the house. · A) has lost B) lost C) loses
3	When ___ you ___ your driving test? · A) have / passed B) did / pass C) do / pass
4	We ___ to Greece twice in our lives — both times were amazing. · A) have been B) went C) were going
5	He ___ in Berlin since 2019. · A) lived B) has lived C) is living
6	Last summer I ___ an amazing book by Haruki Murakami. · A) have read B) read C) was reading
7	Look! Someone ___ the window! · A) broke B) has broken C) breaks
8	I saw that film last week. It ___ really good. · A) has been B) was C) is

8

SPEAKING · 5 MIN

## Open wide, then zoom in

Work with a partner. For each topic, first say something general using **Present Perfect**. Then your partner asks "really? tell me more!" and you **zoom in** with **Past Simple** details about one specific time.

- Q 1 | Something you've done that scared you.
- Q 2 | A competition, audition, or test you've taken part in.
- Q 3 | A holiday or trip you've been on.
- Q 4 | Something kind you or someone else has done for you.
- Q 5 | A cooking, sports, or DIY fail you've experienced.

**Model dialogue**

<b>Eva:</b>	Have you ever been to a concert, Yusuf?
<b>Yusuf:</b>	Yes, I've <i>been</i> to three. Two small ones and one big one.
<b>Eva:</b>	Tell me about the big one!
<b>Yusuf:</b>	It <i>was</i> last August. We <i>travelled</i> to Istanbul, <i>waited</i> for four hours in the sun, and the concert <i>lasted</i> three hours. I <i>lost</i> my voice completely.

**9** WRITING · 10 MIN

**Write your own "two ways"**

Choose one experience you've had more than once. Write two paragraphs (total **80 to 100 words**). Paragraph 1 (wide angle, ~40 words): describe it **in general** using mostly Present Perfect. Paragraph 2 (close-up, ~50 words): describe **one specific time** in Past Simple.

**Include:**  3+ Present Perfect in P1  4+ Past Simple in P2  no mixed tenses  80-100 words total

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*Word count: \_\_\_\_\_ / 80-100*

10

COMPREHENSION QUIZ · 6 MIN

## 10 questions — let's see what stuck

Circle the best option (A, B, C or D) for each question.

1	My best friend and I ___ each other since primary school. · <b>A)</b> know <b>B)</b> knew <b>C)</b> have known <b>D)</b> are knowing
2	When I was five, I ___ my first bike from my grandfather. · <b>A)</b> have got <b>B)</b> got <b>C)</b> was getting <b>D)</b> have been getting
3	I'm sorry I'm late — I ___ the bus! · <b>A)</b> missed <b>B)</b> have missed <b>C)</b> was missing <b>D)</b> am missing
4	She ___ her homework yesterday evening, so she watched a film. · <b>A)</b> has finished <b>B)</b> finished <b>C)</b> was finishing <b>D)</b> had finished
5	'How long ___ you ___ in this city?' — 'About six months.' · <b>A)</b> did / live <b>B)</b> have / lived <b>C)</b> are / living <b>D)</b> do / live
6	I ___ chess three times this week — I love it. · <b>A)</b> played <b>B)</b> have played <b>C)</b> was playing <b>D)</b> am playing
7	The train ___ five minutes ago. We need to catch the next one. · <b>A)</b> has left <b>B)</b> left <b>C)</b> was leaving <b>D)</b> is leaving
8	My little sister ___ a tooth today! She's very proud. · <b>A)</b> lost <b>B)</b> has lost <b>C)</b> was losing <b>D)</b> is losing
9	'Have you ever been to Japan?' — 'Yes, I ___ there in 2022.' · <b>A)</b> have been <b>B)</b> went <b>C)</b> was going <b>D)</b> was
10	She ___ three languages — English, French, and Arabic. · <b>A)</b> spoke <b>B)</b> speaks <b>C)</b> has spoken <b>D)</b> is speaking



**ANSWER KEYS**

## Check your answers

### Practice · Part 7

1	<b>B — bought</b>	'Three days ago' = specific past time → Past Simple.
2	<b>A — has lost</b>	No time given, result matters now → Present Perfect.
3	<b>B — did / pass</b>	'When?' asks for a specific time → Past Simple question.
4	<b>A — have been</b>	'Twice in our lives' = no specific date → Present Perfect.
5	<b>B — has lived</b>	'Since 2019' = still continuing now → Present Perfect.
6	<b>B — read</b>	'Last summer' = specific past time → Past Simple.
7	<b>B — has broken</b>	Visible result right now → Present Perfect.
8	<b>B — was</b>	'Last week' already established Past Simple. Stay in Past Simple.

### Quiz · Part 10

1	<b>C — have known</b>	'Since primary school' = duration continuing now → Present Perfect.
2	<b>B — got</b>	'When I was five' = specific finished past → Past Simple.
3	<b>B — have missed</b>	No past time, result matters now → Present Perfect.
4	<b>B — finished</b>	'Yesterday evening' = specific past → Past Simple.
5	<b>B — have / lived</b>	'How long' with ongoing situation → Present Perfect.
6	<b>B — have played</b>	'This week' is still open → Present Perfect.
7	<b>B — left</b>	'Five minutes ago' = specific past → Past Simple (even if recent).
8	<b>B — has lost</b>	'Today' still open + present result → Present Perfect.
9	<b>B — went</b>	'In 2022' = specific date → Past Simple.
10	<b>B — speaks</b>	Permanent current ability → Present Simple — not every 'now' uses Present Perfect.

**Great work finishing Lesson 04!** You've now cracked the biggest B1 tense choice. In **Lesson 05**, we add one more layer: Present Perfect Continuous — how to show that the action is *still going on*.