

GRAMMAR · LESSON 05 · B1

What Have You *Been* Working On?

Present Perfect Continuous — the tense for processes and effort

Some projects take months. Some dreams take years. When you want to talk about the process — the effort, the hours, the slow progress — English has a special tense. Meet the Present Perfect Continuous.

50 min

Process & duration

CEFR B1

Ages 11-16

What you'll learn

- Form Present Perfect Continuous with **have/has + been + verb-ing**.
- Use it for ongoing activities, duration, and situations with visible results.
- Choose between PP Simple (result) and PP Continuous (process) correctly.

1

WARM-UP · 4 MIN

Quick questions before we start

Read these four questions. Each asks about something that started in the past and is **still happening** or has **just finished** with a visible result. The focus is the activity itself — not the finished product.

- | | |
|----|--|
| Q1 | What have you been studying this week? |
| Q2 | How long have you been learning English? |
| Q3 | Why are your hands covered in paint? What have you been doing? |
| Q4 | Have you been sleeping well lately? |

2

GRAMMAR FOCUS · 16 MIN

The tense for the effort

Like the Present Perfect Simple, this tense connects the past to now. But it focuses on the **process** — how long an activity has been going on, how much effort, how visible the signs are.

have / has + been + verb-ing

Three main situations where it shines:

USE 1 · ONGOING	USE 2 · DURATION	USE 3 · VISIBLE
<p>Started, still happening <i>Action began in the past, continues now.</i></p> <p><i>I have been studying for my exam (and I'm still studying).</i></p>	<p>How long? (for / since) <i>Emphasizes the length of the activity.</i></p> <p><i>She has been practising piano for three hours.</i></p>	<p>Just stopped — you can see it <i>The action has effects you can observe now.</i></p> <p><i>His hands are dirty — he has been fixing the car.</i></p>

□ Present Perfect Simple vs Continuous

Here is where many B1 students get stuck. Both tenses connect past and present — but they focus on **different things**. Look at this classic pair:

SIMPLE · RESULT	CONTINUOUS · PROCESS
<p>I have written 50 pages. <i>Focus on the completed result (number, amount)</i></p> <p><i>She has read three books this month. I have painted the kitchen.</i></p> <p>Use when you want to say how many / how much, or show the thing is finished.</p>	<p>I have been writing a book. <i>Focus on the ongoing activity (effort, process)</i></p> <p><i>She has been reading all morning. I have been painting — my clothes are ruined.</i></p> <p>Use when you want to stress how long / effort or a visible after-effect.</p>

□ A question of focus

Compare two answers to "How was your morning?"

"**I have written three emails.**" → done, here's what I produced

"**I have been writing emails all morning.**" → exhausted, still going, focus on ongoing effort

Same activity. Different message. That's why this tense matters.

3

HOW LONG? · 3 MIN

The go-to question for duration

When someone asks "**How long have you been doing X?**", they usually want Present Perfect Continuous — because the activity is still happening. This is the natural tense for *since / for + ongoing activity*.

Q: How long have you been waiting?	A: For about twenty minutes.
Q: How long has she been playing chess?	A: Since she was five.
Q: How long have they been living here?	A: For two years. They love it.

Quick tip: When the answer needs to emphasize that the activity is still going on and feels continuous, Present Perfect Continuous is almost always the better choice.

4

STATIVE VERBS · 3 MIN

No -ing form with these

Stative verbs don't take -ing. This rule applies here too. You cannot use Present Perfect Continuous with verbs like:

know	believe	understand	love
hate	like	want	need
have (own)	seem	own	belong

⚠ Watch out for these

- ~~I have been knowing her for ten years.~~ **I have known her for ten years.**
 ~~She has been having a new phone since July.~~ **She has had a new phone since July.**

With stative verbs, use **Present Perfect Simple** — even when you want to express duration.

5

KEY VOCABULARY · 6 MIN

Words for process and effort

Word	POS	Meaning	Example
manuscript	<i>n</i>	written version of a book before publishing	<i>The manuscript is 200 pages long.</i>
exhausted	<i>adj</i>	extremely tired, no energy left	<i>I've been running and I'm exhausted.</i>
progress	<i>n</i>	movement towards a goal, improvement	<i>She has made great progress in Spanish.</i>
struggle	<i>v / n</i>	to try hard at something difficult	<i>I've been struggling with this chapter.</i>
determined	<i>adj</i>	firmly decided to do something	<i>He's determined to finish by Sunday.</i>
meanwhile	<i>adv</i>	at the same time; during this period	<i>Meanwhile, her brother has been cooking.</i>
worth (it)	<i>adj</i>	good enough to justify the effort	<i>The hard work has been worth it.</i>
rehearse	<i>v</i>	to practise a performance before the real event	<i>We've been rehearsing for weeks.</i>
aching	<i>adj</i>	having a continuous, dull pain	<i>My back has been aching all day.</i>
constantly	<i>adv</i>	all the time, without stopping	<i>He's been thinking about it constantly.</i>

6

READING · 12 MIN

Working on Something

THE PULSE · ISSUE 08

THE PROCESS

Working on *Something*

What are you working on? Not the thing you just posted — the thing that's taking you months. The slow, stubborn project that's been living in your head for ages. We talked to Mira, who is fifteen and almost finished with her first novel, and four other teens about what they've been building, step by step.

M

Mira, 15

Helsinki · Finland

"I have been writing my first novel"

Mira **has been writing** her first novel for eleven months now, and she is nearly finished. It is a strange feeling. When she started, she **was** fourteen and convinced that no one would ever read a word. She **had been reading** three or four fantasy books a week for most of her life, so the stories were already in her head; she just needed to put them onto the page.

Her parents *think* she **has been working** too hard. Her eyes **have been hurting** from staring at the screen. Her back **has been aching**. Last weekend she **missed** a birthday party because she **was finishing** a chapter. But here is the thing: for eleven months, something **has been pulling** her back to the desk every evening.

The manuscript is now 187 pages long. She **has been editing** it all week, and she **has almost finished** the final chapter — notice how we switch to **Present Perfect Simple** there, because the focus is the *result* (187 pages, finished chapter), not the process. Her best friend **has been reading** it as she writes, and last night she **sent** Mira a voice message at 1 a.m. — "*you need to publish this.*"

Mira **has not decided** yet. But she **has been thinking** about it constantly. "Publishing feels like showing someone your diary," she says. "It's terrifying. But I think it might be worth it."

... FOUR MORE VOICES ...

K

Kenji, 14 · Kyoto · Japan

Grade 5 Cello

Kenji **has been learning** the cello for three years. His fingers **have been hurting** more than usual this week because he **has been practising** for his grade 5 exam next Saturday. He **hasn't watched** TV, **played** video games, or **messaged** his friends for almost a month. *Meanwhile*, his little sister **has been using** his room as a reading corner. "She says my cello is relaxing. I don't believe her for a second."

E Elena, 16 · Naples · Italy

Sourdough bakery

Elena **has been volunteering** at her grandfather's bakery every weekend since last summer. She **has learnt** more about bread than most adults ever will — that's Present Perfect Simple, because the focus is *the knowledge gained*, not the process. Her hands *are* constantly covered in flour. Recently she **has been experimenting** with her own sourdough recipe, and she **has been posting** photos online. "My grandfather **has been laughing** at my first attempts. But this morning, he tried a slice and said nothing."

J Jamal, 15 · Rabat · Morocco

Competition swimmer

Jamal **has been training** for a swimming competition for six months. His hair **has turned** slightly green from the chlorine. He **has been getting up** at 5:30 every morning, and he **has been finding** it harder and harder to stay awake in his first-period classes. But his personal best **has dropped** by four seconds — result → Present Perfect Simple. He *is* determined. "Two more months. Then I sleep."

A Ayşe, 13 · Ankara · Türkiye

Self-taught coder

Ayşe **has been teaching** herself to code for eight months. She **started** because her younger brother wanted a simple game and she couldn't afford one. She **has been watching** tutorials, **building** small projects, and yesterday she **finally finished** her brother's game — finished thing → Past Simple. He **has been playing** it for six hours straight. "I *have known* he loves it for about five hours and fifty minutes now," she laughs. "He **hasn't looked up** once."

PP Continuous
(process)

PP Simple / Past Simple
(result / event)

Stative verb

7

PRACTICE · 8 MIN

8 quick decisions

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

1	Look at your clothes! What ___ you ___? · A) have / done B) have / been doing C) did / do
2	She ___ three articles for the school paper this month. · A) has been writing B) has written C) wrote
3	My feet hurt — I ___ all day. · A) have walked B) have been walking C) walked
4	How long ___ you ___ Japanese? · A) did / study B) have / been studying C) are / studying
5	I ___ him since primary school — we're best friends. · A) have been knowing B) have known C) know
6	He ___ his essay finally, after three weeks of work. · A) has been finishing B) has finished C) is finishing
7	We ___ this house since my sister was born. · A) have been having B) have had C) are having
8	Sorry I'm late. I ___ for the bus for 30 minutes! · A) have been waiting B) have waited C) waited

8

SPEAKING · 5 MIN

Process or result?

Work with a partner. For each topic, answer using **Present Perfect Continuous** to describe the activity (process, effort, time), and **Present Perfect Simple** to describe one concrete result or achievement so far.

Q 1 | What have you been working on at school this term? What have you finished so far?

Q 2 | How long have you been learning English? How many English books have you read?

Q 3 | Have you been doing anything differently in your daily routine lately? What have you noticed?

Q 4 | What sport or hobby have you been practising recently? What have you achieved?

Q 5 | What have you been watching or reading these past few weeks? Have you finished anything?

Model dialogue

Iris: You look tired, Noah. What have you been doing?

Noah: I *'ve been writing* an essay all afternoon. My eyes *are* killing me.

Iris: How much have you written?

Noah: I *'ve written* about 800 words — so roughly two pages. Two more to go.

9

WRITING · 10 MIN

Write about your own "process"

Write a short paragraph (**80 to 100 words**) about a project, hobby, or goal you've been working on. Describe (1) what you **have been doing** and for how long, (2) any **visible signs** of your effort, and (3) one **concrete result** so far using Present Perfect Simple.

Include: 3+ Present Perfect Continuous verbs for or since 1+ PP Simple result 80-100 words

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	It ___ for hours. The streets are flooded. · A) rained B) has rained C) has been raining D) is raining
2	I ___ two coffees this morning, and I need another. · A) have been drinking B) have drunk C) drank D) drink
3	She ___ the guitar for five years, but she's still not great. · A) has been playing B) has played C) played D) plays
4	They ___ me since I was a child — they're like family. · A) have been knowing B) have known C) are knowing D) know
5	My eyes are red because I ___ all afternoon. · A) studied B) have studied C) have been studying D) was studying
6	How many pages ___ you ___ so far? · A) have / been writing B) have / written C) did / write D) are / writing
7	He ___ a new bike since his birthday, and he loves it. · A) has been having B) has had C) has D) is having
8	We ___ for a table for half an hour. This place is so slow! · A) waited B) have been waiting C) have waited D) wait
9	She ___ to bed early every night this week. She has an exam. · A) has gone B) has been going C) went D) goes
10	Look! The kitchen is spotless. Someone _____. · A) has cleaned B) has been cleaning C) cleaned D) cleans



ANSWER KEYS

Check your answers

Practice · Part 7

1	B — have / been doing	<i>Visible result (dirty clothes) + ongoing activity → PP Continuous.</i>
2	B — has written	<i>Focus on number finished (three articles) → PP Simple.</i>
3	B — have been walking	<i>Visible effect (hurting feet) + ongoing process → PP Continuous.</i>
4	B — have / been studying	<i>'How long' + ongoing activity → PP Continuous.</i>
5	B — have known	<i>'Know' is stative — no -ing form. PP Simple with 'since'.</i>
6	B — has finished	<i>Completed action with result → PP Simple.</i>
7	B — have had	<i>'Have' = possess is stative → PP Simple, no -ing.</i>
8	A — have been waiting	<i>Duration + ongoing frustration → PP Continuous.</i>

Quiz · Part 10

1	C — has been raining	<i>Ongoing activity + visible result → PP Continuous.</i>
2	B — have drunk	<i>Countable result (two coffees) → PP Simple.</i>
3	A — has been playing	<i>'For five years' + ongoing emphasis → PP Continuous.</i>
4	B — have known	<i>'Know' is stative — no -ing. PP Simple required.</i>
5	C — have been studying	<i>Physical sign + ongoing → PP Continuous.</i>
6	B — have / written	<i>'How many' + countable result → PP Simple.</i>
7	B — has had	<i>'Have' = possess → stative → PP Simple, even with 'since'.</i>
8	B — have been waiting	<i>Duration + ongoing frustration → PP Continuous.</i>
9	B — has been going	<i>Repeated recent activity, still ongoing → PP Continuous.</i>
10	A — has cleaned	<i>Completed, finished result (spotless) → PP Simple.</i>

Great work finishing Lesson 05! You now know when to focus on the *result* and when to focus on the *process*. In **Lesson 06**, we go one step further back in time: the Past Perfect Simple — the tense for events that happened *before* other past events.