

A2 · TEENS · LESSON 20 · PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS

I've ***been studying*** for two hours.

Sometimes an action started in the past and is still happening now. You've been waiting. She's been working. We've been training. English has a special tense for this: the **present perfect continuous**. It tells you not just what someone has done, but how long they've been doing it — and that they're probably still doing it now.

**have/has been +
V-ing**

The core formula

for · since

Duration markers

**started before → still
now**

The process in progress

/

Warm-Up

Started earlier · still going on · right now

What have you *been doing*?

Think about the last hour of your life. You probably started something before now, and you're still doing it — or you just stopped. Try to complete each sentence in the **present perfect continuous**. The pattern is *have/has been + verb-ing*, usually with *for* or *since*.

1. "I _____ English **for** about forty minutes." (*studying*)
2. "She _____ on her phone **since** breakfast." (*scroll*)
3. "It _____ all morning. Look at the windows." (*rain*)
4. "They _____ for the bus **for** twenty minutes." (*wait*)

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Grammar Focus

Present Perfect Continuous: have been + -ing

The *present perfect continuous* tells us that an action **started in the past and is still happening now** (or has just stopped but we can still see its effect). It's the tense of *process*: the duration, the effort, the evidence on your hands or in your tired eyes. Where the simple present perfect tells you *what* someone has completed, the continuous form tells you *how long they've been at it*.

The form is easy: **have been** or **has been** + **verb-ing**. That's it. The auxiliaries do the work of "past to present"; the *-ing* form captures the ongoing quality. Use *for* with a length of time (*for two hours, for three weeks*) and *since* with a specific starting point (*since Monday, since I was ten, since 9 a.m.*).

THE CORE FORMULA

Subject + **have/has been** + **verb + -ing** (+ for / since...)

"I **have been waiting** for the bus *for* twenty minutes." · "She **has been studying** *since* 9 a.m."

PERFECT vs PERFECT CONTINUOUS — THE CRITICAL DIFFERENCE**Completed result, or ongoing process?**

Both tenses start in the past and reach the present. But they answer *different questions*. Simple present perfect answers: *what have you done / finished?*
Present perfect continuous answers: *what have you been doing / how long?*

PERFECT SIMPLE · RESULT

"I **have read** three books this month."

Completed — three books, finished, counted.
Focus on **how many**.

PERFECT CONTINUOUS · PROCESS

"I **have been reading** all morning."

Ongoing — still reading, or just stopped.
Focus on **how long**.

FOR · A LENGTH OF TIME

"She **has been working** for six hours."

Use **for** with a *duration*: for five minutes, for a week, for years.

SINCE · A STARTING POINT

"She **has been working** since 9 a.m."

Use **since** with a *specific point*: since Monday, since 2020, since I was ten.

Quick test: if you can count it, use perfect simple ("I've written three emails"). If it just keeps going, use perfect continuous ("I've been writing emails all morning").

USE 1 · HOW LONG · ONGOING DURATION**Started in the past, still happening now**

The most common use. Action began earlier and is *still going on* at this moment. Pair it with *for* or *since* to say how long.

"I **have been living** in this city **for** five years." (still here)

"She **has been learning** Japanese **since** January." (still learning)

"We **have been waiting for** two hours." (still waiting)

USE 2 · RECENT ACTIONS WITH VISIBLE EVIDENCE**Just stopped — but you can still see the effect**

Action may have *just ended*, but there's physical evidence *now*: tired eyes, wet clothes, flour on the hands, a messy kitchen. The continuous form links past effort to present signs.

"Your eyes are red. **Have you been crying?**"

"She's out of breath. She **has been running.**"

"The street is wet. It **has been raining.**"

USE 3 · REPEATED / EMPHATIC ACTIONS

Over and over, again and again

An action repeated regularly across a period — often with a hint of irritation, pride, or emphasis. Perfect continuous stresses the *accumulated effort* or *repetition*, not just one instance.

"He **has been calling** me all week." (*many calls, still calling*)

"She **has been training** every day for the marathon."

"They **have been arguing** about the same thing for years."

⚠ THE CLASSIC A2 TRAP

State verbs can't be continuous: use simple present perfect

Some verbs describe **states**, not actions — *know, love, hate, believe, own, understand, be, have (= possess)*. These verbs almost never appear in the continuous form, even when the meaning is "still now". For states, use the simple present perfect instead.

X WRONG

"I **have been knowing** her for ten years." (*know = state*)

✓ RIGHT

"I **have known** her for ten years." (*simple present perfect*)

X WRONG

"He **has been having** a car since 2022." (*having = owning = state*)

✓ RIGHT

"He **has had** a car since 2022." (*simple*)

**Key Vocabulary**

10 words for duration, process & effort

WORD	POS	MEANING	EXAMPLE WITH PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS
practise	(v)	do again and again to improve	<i>I have been practising the piano for three hours.</i>
train	(v)	prepare physically for a sport	<i>He has been training for the race since March.</i>
rehearse	(v)	practise for a performance	<i>They have been rehearsing the play all weekend.</i>
save up (for)	(phr. v)	gradually collect money for something	<i>She has been saving up for a guitar for months.</i>
work on	(phr. v)	gradually develop a project	<i>I have been working on this essay since Monday.</i>
exhausted	(adj)	extremely tired	<i>I'm exhausted — I have been walking all day.</i>
progress	(n)	slow, visible improvement	<i>Look at her progress! She has been improving every week.</i>
recently	(adv)	in the last days or weeks	<i>Have you been feeling tired recently?</i>
lately	(adv)	in the period just before now	<i>They have been spending a lot of time together lately.</i>
duration	(n)	how long something takes	<i>I have been building it for six months — a long duration.</i>

IV Reading

Four stories about process, effort, and time

THE I'VE BEEN... ISSUE · VOLUME 20

What they've **been doing** all this time

A young pianist in Warsaw practising for a competition, a junior cook in Lima saving up for a knife set, a cross-country runner in Nairobi training before sunrise, and a grandmother in Lisbon writing letters to a granddaughter who hasn't visited in months. Four teenagers noticing the work that's been happening quietly, hour after hour.

STORY ONE · THE FOUR-HOUR PRACTICE

Zosia, 15 · Warsaw

There is a piano competition at the Fryderyk Chopin University of Music next month. Zosia has been accepted. She is one of thirty students from all over Poland. She is also the youngest.

"I **have been practising** four hours a day **since** the letter arrived," she tells her English pen-friend. "I get up at six. I practise for two hours before school. I **have been doing** this **for**

five weeks now. My fingers hurt. My mother worries."

"The piece is the Chopin Ballade No. 1. I **have been working on** the last two pages **for** ten days. I still can't get them right. My teacher **has been telling** me to slow down."

"Yesterday I did stop. I closed the piano. I sat on the floor and cried for ten minutes. Then I opened it again. I played the last two pages slowly. They were beautiful. I **have been practising** for so long that I forgot why I started."

USE 1 · ONGOING DURATION · FOR & SINCE Zosia's story is a clinic in *for* and *since*: *practising four hours a day since the letter arrived, doing this for five weeks, working on the last two pages for ten days*. Each phrase tells us how long the work has gone on — and that it's still going on now.

STORY TWO · THE TWELVE-KNIFE SET

Rodrigo, 16 · Lima

Rodrigo wants to be a chef. Not later — *now*. He started at a small family restaurant in Miraflores as a dishwasher. Three months later, he was cutting onions. Six months after that, he was plating desserts. Today, the head chef told him to come in at four tomorrow morning, because the Sunday market is early.

Rodrigo is fifteen years old. He **has been saving up for** a proper knife set **since** February. "Japanese, not Chinese," the chef said to him once. "A real set will cost you three hundred soles. Save for it. Earn it."

"I **have been putting aside** 50 soles from every pay cheque. My sister laughs at me. 'You **have been counting** those coins every single week, Rodrigo.' She's right. I have. I **have been adding** them up in a little notebook. I'm 20 soles away."

Next Friday, he will walk into the shop on Avenida Larco. He **has been imagining** the moment for six months. He will pick up the knives. Feel the weight. Pay with a small stack of coins and bills. And then, maybe, he will cry a little — not in sadness, but because he **has been becoming** a chef, one pay cheque at a time.

USE 3 · EMPHASIS · REPEATED EFFORT The continuous form stresses accumulated work: *has been saving up since February, has been putting aside 50 soles, has been counting those coins, has been becoming a chef*. Not one action — hundreds of small ones, adding up.

STORY THREE · THE 5 A.M. RUNNER

Naliaka, 17 · Nairobi

Every morning at 4.45 a.m., Naliaka's alarm goes off. She doesn't press snooze. She has a regional cross-country race in three weeks. She **has been training for** it **since** October.

"My coach gave me a plan," she says. "Five mornings a week, ten kilometres. Track work on Saturdays. Sunday off. I **have been following** it exactly. I **have been running** before sunrise **for** six weeks now. I **have been sleeping** at 9 p.m. My friends think I've disappeared."

When her mother comes downstairs at 6.30, Naliaka is already home, washed, eating porridge. "You **have been running** again, I see," her mother says, smiling. "Your hair is wet. Your trainers are by the door. How was it?"

4. I'm so tired — I ____ all day. (*still at it, or just stopped*) **PERFECT vs CONTINUOUS**
 A *have been walking* B *have walked* C *walked*
5. We ____ each other since primary school. (*state verb: know*) **STATE VERB trap**
 A *have known* B *have been knowing* C *are knowing*
6. " ____ you ____ enough sleep lately? You look tired." **QUESTION · How long**
 A *Do / getting* B *Are / getting* C *Have / been getting*
7. He ____ saving **for** a laptop **for** six months. **FOR · duration**
 A *has saved* B *has been* C *has been saving*
8. The ground is wet. It ____ all morning. (*evidence now*) **SINCE · starting point**
 A *rains* B *has rained* C *has been raining*

VI

Speaking

Tell me what you've been doing

How long have you been at it?

ANSWER EACH PROMPT USING PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS (HAVE BEEN + -ING) WITH FOR OR SINCE

Take turns with a partner. Each answer should include *for* or *since*. Try to add evidence for your answer — "that's why my eyes are red / why my fingers hurt / why I'm covered in paint".

1. What have you *been doing* for the last hour before this class?
2. How long have you *been studying* English? (Try using *for* AND *since*.)
3. Is there something you've *been working on* lately — a project, a skill, a habit?
4. Ask your partner: "Why do you look tired / happy / excited?" They answer in perfect continuous.
5. What has someone in your family *been doing* all week? (Try to notice the effort.)

MODEL DIALOGUE — THE MATHS EXAM PANIC

A: "You look tired. What *have you been doing*?"

B: "Ugh. I *have been studying* for my maths exam *since* seven this morning. I *have been doing* practice tests *for* six hours."

A: "Six hours! Have you been eating?"

B: "No. I *haven't been eating*. I *haven't been drinking*. I *have been panicking*, that's what I *have been doing*."

A: "OK. Come. We're getting pizza. *How long have you been* like this?"

B: "Three days, probably. Maybe more."



Writing

A journal page (80-120 words)

Test your present perfect continuous — Quick Check

Choose the best answer. 8 questions.

Q1 OF 8 · CORE FORMULA**Choose the correctly-formed present perfect continuous:**

- A I have been study for two hours.
- B I have been studying for two hours.
- C I am studying for two hours.
- D I have studied for two hours now.

Q2 OF 8 · FOR VS SINCE**"She has been working here ____ 2020."**

- A for
- B since
- C from
- D by

Q3 OF 8 · FOR VS SINCE**"We have been waiting ____ three hours."**

- A for
- B since
- C from
- D by

Q4 OF 8 · PERFECT VS PERFECT CONTINUOUS**"I'm exhausted — I ____ all afternoon." (*still at it / just stopped*)**

- A am walking
- B walk
- C have walked three times
- D have been walking

Q5 OF 8 · STATE VERB TRAP**"I ____ her since primary school." (*know = state verb*)**

- A have known
- B have been knowing
- C am knowing
- D know

Q6 OF 8 · EVIDENCE**"Your eyes are red. ____ you ____?"**

- A Do / cry
- B Are / crying
- C Have / been crying
- D Did / cry

Q7 OF 8 · READING RECALL**In Story One, why is Zosia practising four hours a day?**

- A Because her parents force her.
- B Because she hates the piano.
- C Because she just started lessons.
- D Because she has a Chopin competition next month.

Q8 OF 8 · HOW LONG**Which question is correctly formed?**

- A How long you have been learning English?
- B How long have you been learning English?
- C How long are you learning English?
- D How long you been learning English?

Answer Key

PRACTICE (PART VI)

1. B 2. C 3. B 4. A 5. A 6. C 7. C 8. C

QUIZ (PART IX)

Q1. B Q2. B Q3. A Q4. D Q5. A Q6. C Q7. D Q8. B