



FREE RESOURCE · GRAMMAR

Present perfect continuous

The present perfect continuous (have or has been + -ing) describes an action that began in the past and is still happening, or that has just stopped and has a visible result now. It stresses duration and activity: I have been studying English for three years.

What to know

Form of the present perfect continuous

The form is **have or has + been + the -ing form**. Use have with I, you, we and they, and has with he, she and it: I have been working, she has been studying.

- *I have been learning English since 2021. · still true now*
- *It has been raining all day. · recent and continuing*

Use 1: an action that started in the past and continues now

Use this tense when something began earlier and is still going on. It often comes with **for** (a length of time) or **since** (a starting point): I have been living here for four years. She has been working at the clinic since January.

Use 2: a recent activity with a visible result

Use the tense also for an activity that has just stopped, when you can see or feel a result. You look tired. Have you been running? The road is wet because it has been raining. The activity may be over, but its effect is here now.

Present perfect continuous or present perfect simple?

Both link the past to the present, but they stress different things. The **continuous** stresses the activity and how long it lasts: I have been writing my report all morning. The **simple** stresses the result or how many: I have written three pages.

Verbs you cannot use in the continuous

State verbs do not usually take the continuous. These include know, have (own), like, love, want, need, believe and belong. Use the present perfect simple instead: I have known him for ten years, not I have been knowing him. They have had this house since 2015.

Exercises

1. How long _____ English?
 - a. do you learn
 - b. have you been learning
 - c. did you learn
2. I am tired because I _____ for my exam since six o'clock this morning.
 - a. have been revising
 - b. am revising

c. revised

3. I _____ this laptop for two years, and it still works well.

a. am having

b. have had

c. have been having

4. Why are your hands covered in paint? _____ the walls?

a. Do you paint

b. Did you painted

c. Have you been painting

5. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) I am studying English (2) since (3) last September (4) for my IELTS test.

6. Find the mistake and write the right form: (1) They (2) have been waiting (3) since (4) two hours.

7. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): long / here? / How / you / have / living / did / been

8. Put the words in order (one or more words are not needed): developing / software / new / has / year. / company / all / is / The / been

9. Correct this: *I have been knowing my best friend for ten years.*

10. Correct this: *She has been work in this hospital since 2019.*

Practise online, free: hear every example and check your answers at www.ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/present-perfect-continuous/practice/

IELTS tip. In Speaking Part 1, questions such as How long have you lived here? and What have you been doing lately? are easy chances to show this tense. Answer with a full sentence, use for or since, and add one detail: I have been living in Leeds for two years, and I have been studying nursing there.

FOR TEACHERS · GRAMMAR

Present perfect continuous

AIM	Learners form and use the present perfect continuous for duration and visible results, and distinguish it from the present perfect simple.
TIME	30 minutes
LEVEL	B1 to B2 (IELTS 5 to 6.5)
MATERIALS	This worksheet, one copy per learner; the free online practice for the audio

Warm-up

Mime activities (typing, running, painting) and ask the class What have I been doing? Elicit sentences using the visible-result use.

Lesson steps

1. Draw a timeline from a past starting point to now, with an arrow. Show for and since on the line.
2. Learners ask each other How long have you been studying English? and report a partner's answer.
3. Compare has been writing (activity) with has written three pages (result) using short cue cards.
4. Introduce state verbs and have learners decide which of ten verbs can be used in the continuous.
5. Learners write a short paragraph about changes in their city over the last few years.

Extension

Learners prepare answers to five Speaking Part 1 questions that invite the tense and swap answers with a partner.

Answer key

1. b) have you been learning. How long up to now takes the present perfect continuous (or simple), not the present simple or past simple.
2. a) have been revising. A recent activity with a visible result now takes the present perfect continuous.
3. b) have had. Have meaning own is a state verb, so use the present perfect simple.
4. c) Have you been painting. The paint on your hands is a visible result of a recent activity.
5. Part 1: *I am studying English* → **I have been studying English**. Since a point up to now needs the present perfect continuous, not the present continuous.
6. Part 3: *since* → **for**. Use for with a length of time and since with a starting point.
7. How long have you been living here? The question form is how long + have + subject + been + -ing.
8. The company has been developing new software all year. An activity continuing up to now takes has been + -ing.
9. I have known my best friend for ten years. Know is a state verb, so use the present perfect simple.

10. She has been working in this hospital since 2019. After been, the verb needs -ing. The simple form has worked is also correct.

Questions learners often ask

When do I use the present perfect continuous? Use it for an action that began in the past and continues now, or for an activity that has just stopped with a result you can see. It stresses how long or the activity itself.

What is the difference between I have worked and I have been working? The simple stresses the result or amount; the continuous stresses the activity and its duration. For a long situation with for or since, either can be correct.

Can I use for and since with this tense? Yes. Use for with a length of time (for three years) and since with a starting point (since 2020).

Why can't I say I have been knowing? Know is a state verb, and state verbs do not normally take the continuous. Use I have known.

Sources

- Swan, M. (2016). Practical English Usage, 4th edition. Oxford University Press.
- Carter, R. and McCarthy, M. (2006). Cambridge Grammar of English. Cambridge University Press.

Written by Will Salisbury · IELTS Laboratory · ielts-laboratory.co/free-resources/present-perfect-continuous · Free to copy for classroom use.