Main Rules for Simple Past vs. Present Perfect

1. **Simple Past**: use for past events or actions that started & ended at a specific time / are not connected to the present.

2. **Present Perfect**: use for actions which started in the past and continue to present -or- for completed actions that are connected to the present.

*Important note*: Use Simple Past with finished time words & Present Perfect with unfinished time words. (eg. Incorrect: I've been to the museum yesterday)
Simple Past

Use the simple past for past events or actions that started & ended at a specific time / are not connected to the present.

Construction: [VERB]+ed

• Past Actions with a Specific Start/End Time:
  • Completed Action: I went grocery shopping.
  • Series of Completed Actions: I woke up, ate breakfast, went to work, and then attended English class.
  • Duration of Event (with specific start/end): I lived in Brazil for two years.

• Past Actions not connected to the present:
  • Habits / Past states that are not true now: I played the piano when I was a kid, but I don’t play anymore.
  • Past facts or generalizations not connected to present: He never went to class during high school.

• When-Clauses / Interrupted Action:
  • I was brushing my teeth when the phone rang.
Present Perfect

Use the present perfect for actions which started in the past and continue to present -or- for completed actions that are connected to the present.

Construction: Have/Had + [past participle of verb]

- Past Actions of Unspecified Time:
  - Actions that started in the past & continue to the present: I have known Katya for several years now.
  - Uncompleted Action: It has not stopped raining outside.
  - Multiple actions at different times in past: I have taken three oral exams so far.
  - Change over time: I have become more fluent in English; my English has improved a lot.

- Past completed actions that are connected to the present:
  - Emphasis on the RESULT:
    - General emphasis on Result: I have cleaned my room. (emphasizes the clean room) // I have attached my resume below for you to review. (emphasizes result of attached resume)
    - Experience: I have been to France.
    - Accomplishment: Scientists have split the atom.
## Indicator Words

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Simple Past</th>
<th>Present Perfect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>completed time words</em></td>
<td><em>uncompleted time words</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- yesterday
- [____ time] ago
- [specific date] ie, in 2012
- the other day
- last [specific time] ie, last Friday, last month

- just
- already
- up to now
- until now / till now
- ever
- (not) yet
- so far
- lately / recently
- for / since
Comparisons

- **Finished Action vs. Unfinished Action**
  - I saw John last week (complete action) vs. I have seen John around the station a lot this week (unfinished time word).

- **Finished Action vs. Action Started in Past Continues til present**
  - I knew Monica when I was in high school (does not continue to present) vs. I have known Monica since high school (you still know Monica)

- **Emphasis on Action vs. Emphasis on Result**
  - I bought a new bike (emphasis on the buying) vs. I have bought a new bike (emphasis on the result of having a new bike).

- **Action Occurred at a Certain Time vs. Action “Already” Occurred, Action “Just” Occurred or Action has “Not Yet Happened”**
  - I called you two minutes ago (occurred at a specific time in the past) vs. I have already called you // I have just called you // I have not called you yet. (trigger words just, already & not yet)

- **Action Occurred vs. Experience**
  - I went to Jamaica last year (expresses action occurred) vs. I have gone to Jamaica (experience, emphasis on result of action)