

Present perfect continuous

English B1

What this topic teaches

The **present perfect continuous** is *have/has been + verb-ing*. It describes an action that started in the past and is **still in progress** – or just stopped, with the evidence still visible.

- *I **have been studying** for three hours.* (Still going. Send snacks.)
- “*Your eyes are red.*” – “*Yes. I **have been playing** video games.*” (Just stopped; the evidence is on your face.)
- Memory hook: the present perfect is a footprint; the present perfect continuous is a **smoke trail** – the action is still smoking.
- Compare: *I have read this book* (finished – the result) vs *I have been reading this book* (still inside it – the process).

The forms

	Form	Example
statement	have/has been + -ing	She has been working all day.
negative	haven't/hasn't been + -ing	I haven't been sleeping well.
question	Have/Has + subject + been + -ing?	Have you been crying?

- *been* is the past participle of *be*, so this tense is really “the perfect of *be* plus the -ing of action”: *have been + doing*.
- △ Stative verbs still refuse to move: *I have known him for years* ✓, “*I have been knowing him*” ×. *know, want, like, believe* – the A2 rule never sleeps.

Duration or evidence: the two jobs

Job	The question	Example
duration	How long?	I have been learning English for six years .
visible evidence	Why is it like this now?	Your hands are dirty. – I**’ve been fixing** my bike.

- Duration loves *for* and *since*: *for six years, since 2019*.
- Evidence loves the present result: *tired eyes, wet clothes, empty fridge*. The action explains the now.
- *How long have you been waiting?* – the natural question for both jobs.

Collision: continuous or simple perfect?

Continuous (process, ongoing)	Simple perfect (result, finished)
I have been writing my essay. (still writing)	I have written my essay. (it’s done)
She has been cooking all afternoon. (kitchen still warm)	She has cooked dinner. (dinner exists)
I have been reading this book. (page 200 of 400)	I have read this book. (the end, twice)

- With *for/since* and no hurry, both work: *I have lived / have been living here for ten years*. The continuous just paints the picture as still moving.
- △ A count of **finished** things is a result, so the simple perfect is the default: *I have written three essays* ✓. But a number can also measure an **ongoing** activity: *I have been writing three essays at once – none of them is finished yet* ✓. Ask what the number reports: done things → simple perfect; the still-moving activity → the continuous is still possible.

Watch out: traps for Chinese speakers

- △ **Don’t drop *been***. “*I have studying for hours*” × – the chain is *have + been + -ing*, all three links.
- △ ***Yīzhí* does the duration job in Chinese; English still needs the full form.** → *I have been learning English*. The three links are the price of the smoke trail.
- △ **Present evidence usually prefers the continuous** – the activity explains the now: “*Why is the floor wet?*” – “*I have been washing it*” ✓. But the simple perfect is **not wrong** here: “*I have just washed it*” ✓ also explains the wet floor, by reporting the finished result. Choose the continuous when the **activity** is your point, the simple when the **result** is your point.
- △ **Statives stay simple even with *for/since***. *I have known her since primary school* ✓. “*I have been knowing*” ×. Knowledge doesn’t smoke.

Say it aloud

Explain the evidence of your life.

- Your hands are dirty. – I’ve been fixing my bike.
- You look tired. – I’ve been studying since seven. It is now also seven, but the other one.
- How long have you been learning English? – For six years. And English has been learning me.

Check yourself

Answer first, then read the explanation.

1. *I _____ (study) for three hours. Send snacks.* – **have been studying**. Still in progress: the smoke trail.
2. *She _____ (write) her essay. It's finished!* – **has written**. A result, not a process.
3. *They _____ (wait) since nine.* – **have been waiting**. Duration, still waiting.
4. *“I have been knowing him for years.”* – × → **have known**. Statives don't smoke.
5. *Your eyes are red.* – *I _____ (play) video games.* – **have been playing**. The evidence is on your face.