

English B1 · Present perfect vs past simple

Intermediate English for Chinese speakers; classroom examples, not official exam items.

Photograph or shadow

The past simple is a photograph — the moment is framed and over. The present perfect is a shadow — the event still touches your feet.

The time words give the answer

Closed time — past simple	Open time — present perfect
yesterday, last night	today, tonight
last week, last year	this week, this year
in 2019, at seven o'clock	since 2019, for ten years
two days ago	ever, never, just, already, yet

Use the evidence

I have had three coffees today — said at noon. I had three — said at midnight, when today closed.

Your turn: open or shut

Your turn

I ____ (see) him twice this week.

- A. saw
- B. have seen
- C. see
- D. had seen

News first, details after

- 1 **Open the topic** I have been to Chengdu. — the experience, open door.
- 2 **Carry the details** I went there in 2023. I ate hotpot every day. — closed doors.
- 3 **The news version** The head teacher has announced a holiday! — she announced it this morning.

Decision

Never I have been there in 2023 — a named time kills the perfect.

Your turn: the assassin

Your turn

"Have you ever tried hotpot?" — "Yes, I ____ it in Chengdu."

- ☐ A. have tried
- ☐ B. tried
- ☐ C. try
- ☐ D. had tried

The two questions that sound alike

How long did you live in Beijing?

The period is over.

He lives somewhere else now.

How long have you lived in Beijing?

The period is still running.

He is still there.

Your turn: where does he live

Your turn

"I lived in Beijing for five years." — where is the speaker now?

- A. Still in Beijing.
- B. Somewhere else.
- C. In two places at once.
- D. The sentence cannot say.

The yesterday assassin

The most common B1 error

can be I ate or I have eaten — the Chinese does not decide.

I have seen him yesterday — illegal: yesterday kills the perfect.

Say it aloud

Shadow then photograph: I have finished my homework. I finished it twenty minutes ago.



The interview: Have you ever eaten durian?



The confession: I tried it in Malaysia and I have never fully recovered.



The count: We have had four English lessons this week. It is only Wednesday.

Check yourself

- I saw that film yesterday — a named time, a closed door.
- I have lost my keys! — the shadow is on your feet right now.
- She has lived here since 2015 — a start line; for measures the length.
- I tried it in Chengdu — the details close the door the question opened.