

Proofreading Skills Tutorial

Tutorial 7: Special Tenses

Reviewing the Simple Past Tense Using the Present Perfect Tense Using the Past Perfect Tense

This Tutorial includes two files:

- **Lesson (7a_Special_Tenses_Lesson)**

In order to learn the material presented in this tutorial more effectively, as you read you should take notes in a place that you can reference later. If it is convenient, you could print the tutorial and annotate it so you can keep it for future reference.

- **Exercises (7b_Special_Tenses_Exercises** – located in the same area as the lesson)

- It has highlighted areas for you to answer the exercises using an application such as Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- Download and save this file as your own; you will share it with an instructor after you complete the lesson and exercises.

Please contact the Writing Center with any questions or difficulties:

csmtwc@smccd.edu or 650-574-6436.

Special Tenses: Present Perfect and Past Perfect

This tutorial will demonstrate how to use different types of past-tense verbs correctly:

1. the simple past
2. the present perfect
3. the past perfect.

Part One: Reviewing the Simple Past Tense

All the verbs in the following sentences are underlined. Some are regular verbs, and others are irregular verbs. But all the verbs are written in simple past tense:

Yesterday I smiled at my boyfriend for the first time since our fight.

The cat licked its paws.

Tatiana had a good time at the party on Tuesday.

Liam was at work.

Susannah took her banjo to Louisiana in 1926.

You ran very quickly down the street.

Notice that some of the sentences specify when the verb (the action *or* the state of being or having) occurred. That is, the smiling at my boyfriend started and stopped yesterday. The having a good time at the party began and ended on Tuesday. And the taking of the banjo to Louisiana started and stopped in the year 1926.

But some of the sentences do not specify when the verb (the action or state of being or having) occurred. That is, these sentence don't tell us when the cat licked its paws, when Liam was at work or when you ran down the street.

Principle I: **Even if the sentence does not say *when*, the simple past tense shows that an action (or a state of being or having) began and ended at a single, specific time in the past.**

Now that it is clear that the simple past tense conveys that an action or state of being began and ended at a specific time in the past, let's discuss when to use another type of past-tense verb, the present perfect.

Part Two: Using the Present Perfect

The present perfect is formed by using *has or have* and the past participle of the verb.

Principle II. The present perfect shows that an action began at a specific time in the past and continues in the present. The present perfect is sometimes called the “past to present” verb tense.

Consider the following sentences:

The IRS **has tried** to collect Lupe and Bob’s taxes every year without success.

In addition to instilling the values of honesty and hard work in their son, Mama and Papa **have given** Tito much self-confidence and independence.

In the first sentence, the present perfect consists of “has” plus the past participle of the verb “try,” which is “tried.” The present perfect shows that the IRS began trying to collect Lupe and Bob’s taxes at a specific time in the past and that the agency is still trying to collect them in the present. In the second sentence, the present perfect consists of “have” plus the past participle of “give,” which is “given.” The present perfect shows that Mama and Papa began giving Tito self-confidence and independence at a specific time in the past and continue to give him these qualities now, in the present.

The following chart illustrates Principle II, specifically when to use the present perfect as opposed to the simple past.

Simple Past	Present Perfect
<u>I taught</u> in 1987. (The simple past tense shows that I began and stopped teaching at a single, specified time in the past, 1987.)	<u>I have taught</u> since 1987. (The present perfect shows that I began teaching at a specific time in 1987 and am still teaching now, in the present.)
Fatima <u>worked</u> as a nurse. (The simple past tense shows that Fatima began and stopped working as a nurse at a single, specific time in the past.)	Fatima <u>has worked</u> as a nurse for a year. (The present perfect shows that Fatima began working as a nurse at a specific time one year ago, and she is still working as a nurse, in the present.)
Jim and Kate <u>robbed</u> the liquor store on Thursday. (The simple past tense shows that Jim and Kate began and finished robbing the liquor store at a single specific time in the past, on Thursday.)	Jim and Kate <u>have robbed</u> the liquor store every year. (The present perfect shows that Jim and Kate started robbing the liquor store at a specific time in the past and have not stopped robbing it; they will continue to rob the store this year.)

Please open your 7b exercises file and complete **Exercise 1**.

The present perfect is not only used to show that an action began at a specific time in the past and continues in the present. It has another function, as well.

Principle III: The present perfect can also show that an action began at an unspecified time in the past.

The following chart illustrates Principle III, specifically when to use the present perfect as opposed to the simple past.

Simple Past	Present Perfect
<p>Divine Grace <u>watched</u> the latest Harry Potter movie last week.</p> <p>(The simple past tense shows that Divine Grace began and finished watching the movie at a specific time in the past, that is, last week.)</p>	<p>Divine Grace <u>has watched</u> the latest Harry Potter movie.</p> <p>(The present perfect shows that Divine Grace has watched the movie at an unspecified time in the past.)</p>
<p>On Saturday night, the dog <u>howled</u> and <u>annoyed</u> the neighbors.</p> <p>(The simple present tense shows that the dog began and finished howling and annoying the neighbors at a specific time in the past, that is, on Saturday night.)</p>	<p>Hatty Finch, the dog, <u>has howled</u> often, and she <u>has annoyed</u> the neighbors many times.</p> <p>(The present perfect shows that the dog has howled and annoyed the neighbors at many unspecified times in the past.)</p>
<p>Greg <u>laughed</u> at the police officers.</p> <p>(The simple present tense shows that Greg began and finished laughing at the police officers at a single, specific time in the past.)</p>	<p>On several occasions, Greg <u>has laughed</u> at police officers.</p> <p>(The present perfect shows that Greg has laughed at police officers at several unspecified times in the past.)</p>

Please open your 7b exercises file and complete **Exercises 2 and 3**.

Part Three: Using the Past Perfect

The past perfect is formed by using *had* and the past participle of the verb.

Principle IV. The past perfect shows that an action (or a state of being or having) took place before the past tense of the sentence. The past perfect is sometimes called the “past before the past” verb tense.

Consider the following sentences:

After he had reached the end of his patience, Yoshi yelled at the child.

In this sentence, the simple past tense (“yelled”) shows that Yoshi began and stopped yelling in the past. The past perfect tense (“had reached”) shows that Yoshi reached the end of his patience before he began yelling. The past perfect is the past before the past. That is, reaching the end of his patience occurred before the yelling took place.

All week, you had been too tired to party. But on Friday evening, you drank three double espressos, and soon you were ready for fun.

In this example, the simple past tense (“drank” and “were”) shows that you drank three double espressos and were ready for fun at a single, specific time in the past, that is, on Friday evening. The past perfect tense (“had been”) shows that you had been too tired to go to the party all week, before you drank the espressos and were ready for fun. That is, being too tired for the party occurred before drinking the espressos and being ready for fun.

The following chart illustrates Principle II, specifically when to use the past perfect as opposed to the simple past.

Simple Past	Past Perfect
<p>On our most recent hike, we <u>walked</u> all day to get to the top of Mount Diablo.</p> <p>(The simple past tense shows that we began and stopped walking at a specific time in the past, that is, on our last hike.)</p>	<p>On our most recent hike, we <u>reached</u> the top of the mountain after we <u>had walked</u> fifteen miles.</p> <p>(The past perfect is the past <i>before</i> the past. In this sentence, the past perfect shows that walking fifteen miles occurred <i>before</i> the past tense of reaching the top of the mountain.)</p>
<p>Marco <u>tried</u> to make an excuse to his mother for his late arrival on Thursday night.</p> <p>(The simple past tense shows that Marco began and stopped trying to make an excuse at a specific time in the past, that is, on Thursday night.)</p>	<p>Because his mother <u>had refused</u> to believe his excuses in the past, Marco <u>understood</u> that a punishment was inevitable when he came home so late on Thursday night.</p> <p>(The past perfect is the past <i>before</i> the past. In this sentence, the past perfect shows that his mother had repeatedly refused to believe him <i>before</i> Marco understood on Thursday night that he would be punished.)</p>
<p>Nick <u>delivered</u> his speech at the orientation for first-year students.</p> <p>(The simple past tense shows that Nick began and stopped delivering his speech at a specific time in the past—even though the sentence does not say when.)</p>	<p>Jane and Carrie <u>had left</u> before Nick <u>delivered</u> his speech at the orientation for first-year students.</p> <p>(The past perfect is the past <i>before</i> the past. In this sentence, the past perfect shows that Jane and Carrie had left <i>before</i> Nick delivered his speech.)</p>

Please open your 7b exercises file and complete Exercises 4 and 5.

Final Activity

Instructions:

1. Review a classroom essay that you are working on and be prepared to describe in your own words how to identify your verb tense errors in your own writing and how to revise them.
2. Make an appointment for a conference with an instructor working in the Writing Center. To make this appointment, sign up using the same method you use to make essay conference appointments. Be sure to include a comment or note that you are meeting about a tutorial.
3. During this appointment, the instructor will make sure you understand the concepts covered in this tutorial, answer any questions that you might have, review your answers to the exercises, and check to see if you can incorporate the skill into your writing.