

An information gap and the present perfect

Teaching tips

Although some concepts can be successfully explained, many other things are best taught, not so much by explaining the idea, as by illustrating it. It is usually only the beginning teacher that places a great deal of faith in explanations. The rest of us have learned from the puzzled expressions on our students' faces that explanations — even clear explanations — are often not as effective for learning as clear examples are.

Of all the English tenses, the present perfect is undoubtedly the most difficult one for students to learn and, for that reason, the most difficult one to teach. The trouble does not come from teaching the form. The form by itself is quite straightforward. The present perfect consists of *have* or *has* plus a past participle, that is, *How long **have** you **lived** in Kota Baru? How long **has** Nora **been** a news reader?*

Normally, it is not the form that causes the problem. Students do not have much trouble with how to form the present perfect. Instead, they have trouble understanding how to use the present perfect.

One of the clearest and easiest ways of illustrating the present perfect is given in today's lesson. This lesson is designed to graphically illustrate the most obvious use of the present perfect — when something started in the past and is still happening in the present. Before students are ready for this lesson they need to already be familiar with the present tense, with the past tense, and with the form of the present perfect.

To begin the lesson, hand out a copy of the completed chart to the students. Have them write out ten true sentences about the chart. They can do this individually or in pairs. Although an advanced class might not need the help, for a less advanced class the model sentences given at the bottom of the students' completed chart might be quite useful.

While the class is writing out their sentences, copy the teacher's blank chart on the board. When the students have finished writing out their ten sentences, have them help you fill in your blank chart by reading their sentences to you.

If a student gives you an incorrect sentence, try to write what the student said on the chart. If there is a mistake, the rest of the class will catch it and correct it.

To fill in the remaining gaps in your chart, it will also probably be necessary to ask them specific questions, such as 'What is Yahya doing now?', 'How long has Yahya been a news reader?', 'What did Yahya do before?', and 'When was Yahya a doctor?'

As you fill in the chart, point out that, as the chart shows, the present perfect is used for things that started in the past and are still true now. Using the tense chart, you can literally show the students that something started in the past and is still happening now!

By the time the whole chart has been filled in, the students will have practised three different tenses: the present tense - for discussing what the people in the chart are doing now, the past tense for discussing what was done in the past, and the present perfect for discussing what was began in the past and is still happening now.

Of course, this task, like most tasks, is even more effective if it is tailored to your specific class. Instead, of the names that we have used, use the names of your own students. Simply substitute a name of one of your students for one of the names in our chart. Also, depending upon the level and sophistication of your class, feel free to use other occupations than the ones we have picked, for example, stewardess, gossip columnist, movie star, policeman, famous writer, or even Prime Minister. That is, match the occupations to your students' own backgrounds and interests.

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
university student					
news reader					
motor bike racer					
doctor					
shop keeper					
newspaper reporter					

Teacher's Chart: A blank present perfect chart

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
university student	Azlina Nora Chua	Azlina Chua	Azlina		
news reader		Nora	Nora Roslan Yahya	Nora Roslan Yahya	Nora Roslan Yahya
motor bike racer		Ali	Chua Ali	Chua Ali Lisa	Chua Ali Lisa
doctor	Lisa Yahya	Lisa Yahya	Lisa	Azlina	Azlina
shop keeper	Roslan Zain Zarina	Roslan Zain Zarina	Zarina		
newspaper reporter	Ali		Zain	Zain Zarina	Zain Zarina

Students' Chart: A filled-in present perfect chart

Instructions: Using the sample sentences below as models, make up true sentences using the information in this chart.

Abdul is a reporter now.

Abdul has been a reporter since 1992.

Abdul has been a reporter for three years.

Abdul has been a reporter from 1994 to 1998.