


Unit 20

Present perfect (I have done) or past simple

(I did)? (1)

a Study this example situation:

	<p>This is Tom. He is looking for his key. He can't find it.</p> <p>He has lost his key. (<i>present perfect</i>)</p> <p>This means that he hasn't got his key now</p> <p>Now Tom has found his key.</p> <p>This means that he has got his key now.</p> <p>Has he lost his key? (<i>present perfect</i>) No, he hasn't. He has found it.</p> <p>Did he lose his key? (<i>past simple</i>) Yes, he did.</p>
<p>He lost (<i>past simple</i>) his key but now he has found (<i>present perfect</i>) it.</p>	

The present perfect (**has lost**) always tells us something about the present. 'He **has lost** his key' tells us that he hasn't got it now (see **Unit 13**). The past simple (**lost**) tells us only about the past. If we say 'He **lost** his key', we don't know whether he has it now or not. We only know that he lost it at some time in the past. Here are some more examples:

- He **grew** a beard but now he **has shaved** it off. (= He hasn't got a beard now).
- Prices **fell** but now they **have risen** again (= They are high now).

b Do not use the present perfect (**I have done**) for happenings or actions which are not connected with the present (for example, historical events):

- The Chinese **invented** printing. (*not 'have invented'*)
- Shakespeare **wrote** *Hamlet*. (*not 'has written'*)
- How many symphonies **did** Beethoven **compose**? (*not 'has ... composed'*)

c We use present perfect (**I have done**) to give new information or to announce a recent happening (see **Unit 13**). But if we continue to talk about it, we normally use the past simple (**I did**):

- A: Ow! I've **burnt** myself!
B: How **did you do** that? (*not 'have you done'*)
A: I **touched** a hot dish. (*not 'have touched'*)
- A: Look! Somebody **has spilt** milk on the carpet.
B: Well, it **wasn't** me. I **didn't do** it. (*not 'hasn't been ... haven't done'*)
A: I wonder who it **was** then. (*not 'who it has been'*)

For more information about the present perfect and past simple see **Unit 21**.