

Unit 18

Present perfect (I have done / I have been doing)

with how long, for and since

a Study this example situation:



Bob and Alice are married. They got married exactly 20 years ago. So today is their 20th wedding anniversary.

They **have been married for 20 years**.

We use the present perfect to say how long something has existed or how long something has been happening.

They **are married**.

|| **How long have they been married?**

b We use the present perfect continuous (**I have been doing**) to say how long something has been happening. Note that the action is still happening now:

- **I've been learning English for a long time.**
- **Sorry I'm late. Have you been waiting long?**
- **It's been raining since I got up this morning.**

Sometimes the action is a repeated action (see also **Unit 16b**):

- **Tom has been driving for ten years.**
- **How long have you been smoking?**

The continuous (**I have been doing**) or the simple (**I have done**) can be used for actions repeated over a long period:

- **I've been collecting / I've collected stamps since I was a child.**

c We use the simple (**I have done**) for situations that exist for a long time (especially if we say **always**). Note that the situation still exists now:

- **My father has always worked hard.** (*not* 'has always been working')

We use the continuous for situations over a shorter time. Compare:

- John **has been living** in London **since January**.
- John **has always lived** in London.

d Some verbs (for example **be**, **have**, **know**) are not normally used in the continuous (see **Unit 3b** for a list and **Unit 24** for **have**):

- **How long have Bob and Alice been married?**
- **Tom has had a cold for the past week.** (*not* 'has been having')
- **Tom and I have known each other since we were at school.**

e Do not use the present simple (**I do**) or continuous (**I am doing**) to say how long something has been happening:

- **I've been waiting here for an hour.** (*not* 'I am waiting')
- **How long have you known Tom?** (*not* 'do you know')

actions repeated over a long period: