

Unit 21

Present perfect (I have done) or past simple

(I did)? (2)

a Do not use the present perfect (*I have done*) when you are talking about a finished time in the past (for example: *yesterday*, *two years ago*, *in 1979*, *when I was a child*). Use a *past tense*:

- Tom **lost** his key **yesterday**. (*not* 'has lost')
- **Did you see** the film on television **last night**? (*not* 'have you seen')
- Mr Greaves **retired** from his job **two years ago**. (*not* 'has retired')
- I **ate** a lot of sweets **when I was a child**. (*not* 'have eaten')

Use a past tense to ask when something happened:

- **What time did they arrive**? (*not* 'have they arrived')
- **When were you born**? (*not* 'have you been born')

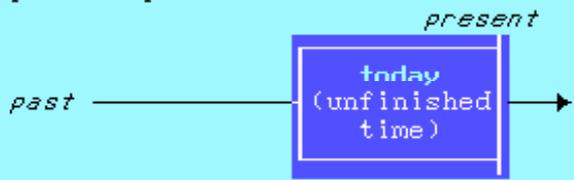
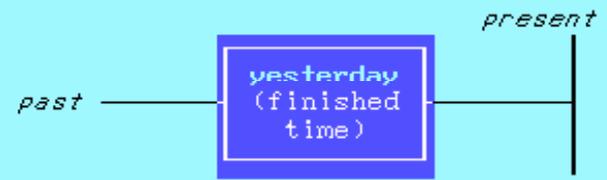
Compare:

Here we are not thinking of the past action; we are thinking of the present result of the action: he is without his key now.

- Tom **lost** his key **yesterday**. (*past simple*)

Here we are thinking of the action in the past. We don't know whether Tom is still without his key.

b Now compare these sentences:

<i>Present perfect (I have done)</i>	<i>Past simple (I did)</i>
<p>I've smoked 20 cigarettes today.</p> <p><i>Today</i> is a period of time which continues up to the present. It is not a finished time. So we use the present perfect.</p> 	<p>I smoked 20 cigarettes yesterday.</p> <p><i>Yesterday</i> is a finished time in the past. So we use the past simple.</p> 
<p>Tom hasn't been ill this year.</p> <p>Have you seen Ann this morning? (It is still morning.)</p> <p>Have you seen Ann recently?</p> <p>We've been waiting for an hour. (We are still waiting.)</p> <p>Ian has lived in London for six years. (He still lives there.)</p> <p>I have never played golf (in my life).</p> <p>The present perfect always has a connection with the present. See Units 13-20.</p>	<p>Tom wasn't ill last year.</p> <p>Did you see Ann this morning? (It is now afternoon.)</p> <p>Did you see Ann last week?</p> <p>We waited (or were waiting) for an hour. (We are no longer waiting.)</p> <p>Ian lived in Scotland for ten years. (He no longer lives there.)</p> <p>I didn't play golf when I was on holiday last summer.</p> <p>The past simple tells us only about the past. See Units 11, 12 and 20.</p>

I've smoked 20 cigarettes today.

I smoked 20 cigarettes yesterday.