“QualityTime-ESL” presents...

QT-ESL Podcast No. 6

The Simple Past vs. the Present Perfect

Hi! I am Marianne Raynaud, and I am here to help you improve your level of spoken English. Today we will be working on the Simple Past versus the Present Perfect. If you don’t know the meaning of the words we use, please stop and look them up in your dictionary.

When we talk about an event in the past, the simple past is used much more often than the present perfect. Whenever there is an indication of a precise moment in the past through a time, date, place or circumstance that refers to the past, then we use the simple past. In fact if in doubt, chose the simple past.

Here are words suggesting a point in time that are usually associated with the simple past. Listen and repeat.

Yesterday
Last week
When they shouted
Last year
At 2 o’clock
When I was young

Go on repeating.

Read a book.
Think about the project.
Go on repeating.

Yesterday I read a book.
Last week I thought about the project.
Last year I went on a trip.

At 2 o’clock I waited for my friend.
When I was young, I played the piano.
When they shouted, I felt afraid

Now listen to the following examples.

I say: At this moment I am reading a book.
You say: Yesterday I read a book.
I say: At this moment I am thinking about the project.
You say: Yesterday I thought about the project.
I say: At this moment I am going on a trip.
You say: Yesterday I went on a trip.

Now you go on and do the same thing. Remember to speak BEFORE I give the right answer.
QT-ESL Podcast No. 6 “The Simple Past vs. the Present Perfect” (Cont.)

At this moment I am reading a book.  Yesterday I read a book.
At this moment I am thinking about the project.  Yesterday I thought about the project.
At this moment I am going on a trip.  Yesterday I went on a trip.
At this moment I am playing the piano.  Yesterday, I played the piano.
At this moment I feel afraid.  Yesterday I felt afraid.

Now listen to the following examples.

I say:  At this moment I am reading a book.
... Yesterday
You say:  Yesterday I read a book.
I say:  At this moment I am thinking about the project.
... Last week
You say:  Last week I thought about the project.
I say:  At this moment I am going on a trip.
... Last year
You say:  Last year I went on a trip.

Now you go on and do the same thing.  Remember to speak BEFORE I give the right answer.

Now let us work on the present perfect.  The present perfect tense links the past and the present.  It means that an action has started in the past and is continuing through the present.  That is why we say: “Something has been happening for a certain length of time.”

Now listen and repeat the following examples.

I have been reading a book for two hours.
I have been thinking about the project for two hours.
I have been on a trip for two hours.
I have been playing the piano for two hours.
I have been afraid for two hours.

Now listen to the following examples.

I say:  At this moment I am reading a book.
You say:  I have been reading a book for two hours.
I say:  At this moment I am thinking about the project.
You say:  I have been thinking about the project for two hours.
I say:  At this moment I am going on a trip.
You say:  I have been on a trip for two hours.
QT-ESL Podcast No. 6 “The Simple Past vs. the Present Perfect” (Cont.)

Now you go on and you go on. Remember to speak BEFORE I give the right answer.

At this moment I am reading a book.
I have been reading a book for two hours.
At this moment I am thinking about the project.
I have been thinking about the project for two hours.
At this moment I am on a trip.
I have been on a trip for two hours.

At this moment I am waiting for my friend.
I have been waiting for my friend for two hours.
At this moment I am playing the piano.
I have been playing the piano for two hours.
At this moment I feel afraid.
I have been feeling afraid for two hours.

The present perfect is often used in questions starting with “How long...?” Now listen and repeat the following examples.

How long have you been reading?
How long have you been thinking about the project?
How long have you been waiting?

How long have you been playing the piano?
How long have you been living here?
How long have you been feeling afraid?

Now you will ask the questions. Listen to the following examples.

I say: reading
You say: How long have you been reading?
I say: thinking about the project
You say: How long have you been thinking about the project?
I say: waiting
You say: How long have you been waiting?

Now you go on and do the same thing. Remember to speak BEFORE I give the right answer.

… reading How long have you been reading?
… thinking about the project How long have you been thinking about the project?
… waiting How long have you been waiting?
… playing the piano How long have you been playing the piano?
… living here How long have you been living here?
… feeling afraid How long have you been feeling afraid?

These sentences are a bit difficult, because we are using the continuous form. We are saying “I have been reading and not the simple form “I have read”.

The continuous form is the one used most in conversation when we want to say the action is continuing from the past into the present.

Now let us use the different persons. For example:

I say: I … You say: I have been watching a film for two hours.
I say: He … You say: He has been watching a film for two hours.
I say: We … You say: We have been watching a film for two hours.

Now you go on and do the same thing. Remember to speak BEFORE I give the right answer.
QT-ESL Podcast No. 6 “The Simple Past vs. the Present Perfect” (Cont.)

I have been watching a film for two hours. …He
He has been watching a film for two hours. …We
We have been watching a film for two hours. …She
She has been watching a film for two hours. …They
They have been watching a film for two hours. …You
You have been watching a film for two hours.

Now just listen and repeat:

How long have I been working on these exercises? I have been working for more than ten minutes. I have been repeating and transforming sentences. Before, I thought I could not learn to speak English. Now I realize that learning a language is like learning a sport. In a sport you have to practice the same movements again and again until you perform them perfectly. In language learning it is the same thing. You have to practice, repeating and transforming words and structures, until you know them perfectly. It takes time, but I know I am working hard at the present moment, and I will little by little master the English language.

That is the end of today’s podcast. We will soon be back with more exercises and short texts to repeat. Thank you all for listening. Bye for now and don't forget to keep smiling!