Grammar Lesson Plan: Simple Past vs. Present Perfect

Summary: Students may have difficulty knowing when to use the simple past versus the present perfect as both are used to talk about events in the past. This lesson helps students understand the difference by asking them to analyze the speaker’s current perspective on the events rather than the actual time it took place. Additional sentence level strategies are also introduced.

Target Audience: Intermediate level adult ESL learners

Learner Objectives: By the end of this lesson students will be able to...
1. Recognize the basic form of past perfect (have + past participle)
2. Determine when to use simple past and present perfect appropriately

Time: 1 hour

1. Warm-up: (3 min)
Very short activity designed to help students activate their language, just like stretching before exercise or tuning an instrument before a performance. The goal is to have students begin class ready to practice and actively participate, not wait for the instructor to tell them what to do.

On screen directions: Complete the sentences with your own words

1. I got up at ______ today. (time)
2. I have been awake since ______. (time)
3. I have come to this class ______ times so far this month. (number)
4. I took my first English class in ______. (year)

In which sentences does the action start and end in the past?
Which sentences have an action that starts in the past and continues until now?
What do you notice about the verb tenses?

2. Review: Simple Past (2 min)
We use simple past to talk about actions that begin and end in the past

I bought a new pair of shoes on Saturday.

Pair Activity (5 min) Student directions: Work in pairs to write down 3-4 complete sentences describing what you did over the weekend. Work with your partner to identify all of the past tense verbs. I walked to the café yesterday.

Pairs read examples to class. Ask students to identify verb and say if it is regular (-ed ending) or irregular

3. Discussion Questions (3 min)
Solicit answers from students, refer to warm-up sentences if needed

1. What are the differences between the simple past and present perfect?
2. How can you recognize present perfect?
3. When do you use present perfect?

4. Introducing: Present Perfect (3 min)
Present Perfect is used to talk about an action that began in the past and continues up to now

Affirmative: Subject + Have / Has + Past Participle
Negative: Subject + Haven’t / Hasn’t + Past Participle
Question: Have / Has + Subject + Past Participle

Pair Activity (5 min) In pairs have students complete sample sentences using forms.

Think, Write, Share (5-8 min)
Think of some interesting and unusual things you have done in the past.
Write 4-6 sentences, some of them true some of them false.
Share your sentences with a partner.
Guess if your partner’s sentences are true or false.

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5. **Direct Instruction: When do we use the Present Perfect Tense?** (10 min)
   1. An action that occurred sometime in the past, but has a result in the present (now)
      
      *We can’t find our luggage. Have you seen it?*
   2. To talk about an action that began sometime in the past and have not changed up to now.
      a. *since + a specific point in time*
      b. *for + a length of time*
      
      *Alice has worked at Emirates for 3 years.*
      *Bob has worked as a Flight officer since September of last year.*
   3. To talk about general experiences (ever/never) or events that have or haven’t happened.
      a. The exact time may be unstated.
      b. *ever, never, yet, still, already are often used with present perfect.
      
      *Has she ever traveled alone before?*  
      *Are Carlos and Rodrigo here? No, they haven’t arrived yet.*
   4. To talk about an action that occurring over a period of time or multiple times in the past.
      
      *We have had three tests so far this term.*  
      *The value of the stock has doubled in the last year.*

6. **Simple Past vs. Present Perfect** (5min)
   Review examples of simple past and present perfect usage. Have students come up with their own examples based on each.
   1. The simple past may be used with specific time references: yesterday, last year, 2011. While Past Perfect will often use more general time adverbs: already, since, yet, etc.
      a. Exceptions include negative forms: *I haven’t seen her/I haven’t seen her since yesterday.*
         i. Refer students to item #2 above
   2. The simple past is used for a completed time period. Use present perfect to talk about a time period that has not ended.
      
      *My grandfather loved to travel. My grandfather loves to travel.*
   3. Present perfect is used for an indefinites versus a definite question.
      
      *Have you ever visited Toronto? Did you visit Toronto? (You said you went to Canada last year)*

7. **Verb Conjugation** (2 min) It may be helpful to provide students a list of verb forms

8. **Worksheet** (10 min)
   Students complete worksheet individually or in pairs. Review answers as a class

9. **Wrap-up** (3min)
   Refer to discussion questions and warm-up sentences

10. **Additional Resources** (3min)
    Refer students to these opportunities for more practice

References:

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1. Fatima is from a hot, arid part of the region. She (see, never) _________________________ snow.

2. Last January I traveled to Switzerland. I (see) _________________________ for the first time in my life.

3. Yesterday my team and I (start) _________________________ a new project, so we (go)
   _________________________ to the training center for orientation.

4. Since classes began, I (have, not) _________________________ much free time. My classes keep me
   really busy.

5. Abed (be) _________________________ in the class for three months. His English is getting better and
   better. He plans to take this class until the end of May.

6. Mrs. Perez (be) _________________________ in our class for three months, but then she left for a new
   job.

7. A major earthquake (occur, just) _________________________ in southern California. It (occur)
   _________________________ at 9:25 a.m. Pacific Standard Time.

8. A: Are you taking simulation training this month?

   B: No, I (take, already) _________________________ it.


10. Joe North passed away? I’m sorry to hear that. I (know) _________________________ him well when
    we were in college together.