

How long have you (been)...?

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 say:

They **are** married. (*present*)

but How long have they **been** married? (*present perfect*)
(not 'How long are they married?')

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

(not 'They are married for 20 years')

We use the *present perfect* to talk about something that began in the past and still continues now. Compare the *present* and the *present perfect*:

- Amy is in hospital.
- but She **has been** in hospital since Monday. (not 'Amy is in hospital since Monday')
- We know each other very well.
- but We **have known** each other for a long time. (not 'we know')
- Are you waiting for somebody?
- but How long have you **been** waiting?

B

I **have been doing** something (*present perfect continuous*) = 'I started doing something in the past and I am still doing it (or have just stopped)':

- I've **been learning** English for a long time. (not 'I am learning')
- Sorry I'm late. **Have you been waiting** long?
- It's **been raining** since I got up this morning.

The action can be a repeated action:

- 'How long have you **been driving**?' 'Since I was 17.'

C

I **have done** (*simple*) or I **have been doing** (*continuous*)

The continuous is more usual with **how long**, **since** and **for** (see also Unit 10B):

- I've **been learning** English for a long time. (not usually 'I've learnt')

You can normally use either the continuous or simple with **live** and **work**:

- John **has been living** / **has lived** in London for a long time.
- How long have you **been working** / **have you worked** here?

But we use the *simple* with **always**:

- John **has always lived** in London. (not 'has always been living')

You can use the continuous or the simple for actions repeated over a long period:

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

Some verbs (for example, **know**/**like**/**believe**) are not normally used in the continuous:

- How long **have you known** Jane? (not 'have you been knowing')
- I've **had** a pain in my stomach since I got up this morning.

For a list of these verbs, see Unit 4A. For **have** see Unit 17.

D

We use the present perfect *simple* in negative sentences like these:

- I **haven't seen** Tom since Monday. (= Monday was the last time I saw him)
- Jane **hasn't phoned** me for two weeks. (= the last time she phoned was two weeks ago)