

## Present Perfect v Past Simple -Selection

Selecting tenses correctly in your OET letter is important, because incorrect use can cause confusion and / or create a negative impression. The most common difficulty is deciding whether to use the present perfect or the past simple. Read the following explanation on when and how to use them, then complete the OET-related exercises:

**Past simple** is used to talk about:

- A. Single actions in the past that occurred at a specific time  
"Yesterday morning he *tripped* and *fell*" – "Did he hurt himself?"  
"Did you *take* your medication yesterday?"
- B. Multiple actions that happened sequentially  
"He *fell* off his skateboard, *hit* his head and *went* to hospital."  
"She *went* to the pharmacy and *bought* some OTC pain relief."

**Present Perfect** is used to talk about:

- C. Past events which are connected to the present, which occurred at a non-specific time in the past. The experience / event is important and not the time.  
"I *have* never *had* shingles"  
"The symptoms *have subsided*."
- D. Events which impact the present / are unresolved:  
"She *has broken* her arm in two places." / "Her arm *has been broken* in two places."  
"The rash *has spread* to her lower back" / "I've hurt my back"

**Present perfect continuous** is used to talk about:

- E. A continuous or repeated action which started in the past and continued until the time of speaking. A time is often used with it.  
"*I've been changing* the dressing every day"  
"She *has been suffering* from severe pain in the left knee for several months."

### Exercise 1:

Look at the following sentences and decide why the *past simple* or *present perfect* has been used. Write **A,B,C,D** or **E** (explanations given above) and check your answer. In some cases, more than one explanation can be given.

Example: Mr Jones discharged himself this morning. **A** (single action in the past that occurred at a specific time)

1. Mr Vishnu *has been having* trouble sleeping recently.
2. Ms Walker *burned* her wrist on the stove and *ran* it under cold water for twenty minutes.
3. Mr Davies *has made a good recovery* but requires home visits twice a week for the next six weeks.
4. Ms Knights first *presented* three weeks ago, complaining of throbbing headaches.
5. Mrs Rowe *fell* in her home whilst visiting the bathroom in the middle of the night.
6. Mr Cummins *has been using* his inhaler for two years.
7. Mr Holmes reports that his medication *has been* ineffective and he would therefore like a review.
8. Mrs Lovatt *has never taken* the contraceptive pill, follows a healthy diet and has a BMI of 22.
9. Callum's finger *has become* infected and the splinter remains intact.
10. Mrs Hollingsworth *underwent / has undergone* a total right knee replacement today. – explain how both tenses might be suitable, depending on the time of writing the letter.

## Exercise 2:

Look at the table and put a tick or a cross at the end of each line, to indicate whether the *blue* verb tense is correct or not. If incorrect, correct it.

0	Example: Mr Watson <i>has presented</i> to the Emergency Department complaining of a tightness in his chest about an hour ago.	x
1	The doctor <i>saw</i> him on arrival and nurses are observing at 5-minute intervals.	√
2	Eight-year-old Tyler Smith <i>has jumped</i> out of a tree at about 4 o'clock this	
3	afternoon. His mother believes that he <i>hit</i> the left side of his head. He <i>has briefly lost</i>	
4	consciousness. He <i>has vomited</i> twice and is currently under observation.	
5	Mrs Lawson <i>has self-admitted</i> three days ago. She was suffering from hallucinations and <i>reported</i> feeling desperate and afraid of being alone.	
6	She <i>has been diagnosed</i> with psychosis and <i>prescribed</i> clozapine (Clozaril). Please	
7	note that <i>she has revealed</i> that she <i>struggled</i> with medication compliance in the past and therefore requires monitoring.	
8	Mrs Mills <i>has presented</i> with her family, who are extremely concerned that her memory loss is now impacting her daily life and well-being.	
9	She is unable to recall whether she <i>took</i> her medication and <i>missed</i> several medical appointments.	
10	A memory assessment <i>was</i> carried out, but a more thorough investigation is required.	
11	Ms Paul presented two days ago with a rash on the palm of her hand which now <i>spread</i> to her wrist and lower arm.	
12	I <i>have initially suspected</i> a fungal infection and <i>prescribed</i> Clotrimazole but the rash did not respond.	
13	Although Ms Paul <i>has suffered</i> from eczema as a child, she is otherwise well and reports no health problems since.	
14	Mr Lewis <i>was</i> initially concerned that he would not remember to take his medication, but he <i>was</i> now issued with a Webster pack and educated on how to use it.	
15	He <i>felt</i> further reassured when advised that he would be receiving daily home visits from a nurse.	

### Exercise 3:

Read the following letters. Choose the most suitable answer A, B or C to complete each sentence with the correct verb form. An **example (0)** has been done for you:

Dear Dr Newson,

Thank you for seeing Mr Thiago Di Souza, aged 41 years, whom I **(0) consulted** today. Mr Di Souza **(1)** \_\_\_\_\_ his right hand 7 days ago and **(2)** \_\_\_\_\_ in constant pain since.

I enclose his ultrasound report, which suggests collateral ligament rupture of his Metacarpophalangeal joint – right thumb, however ultrasound and x-ray were inconclusive. The ultrasound **(3)** \_\_\_\_\_ a possible small avulsion fracture fragment, however this is not clearly identified on the x-ray. Therefore, I **(4)** \_\_\_\_\_ magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) for further assessment, which he will have done prior to seeing you. I **(5)** \_\_\_\_\_ for your information the history, examination and investigation findings together with relevant past history, allergies, current medications and investigation results.

Please do not hesitate to contact me, should you have any further question relating to Mr Di Souza.

Yours sincerely  
Dr Kenneth Smith

- |   |                    |                 |                 |
|---|--------------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| 0 | <u>A consulted</u> | B did consult   | C has consulted |
| 1 | A has injured      | B was injured   | C injured       |
| 2 | A has been         | B was in        | C had been      |
| 3 | A detects          | B detected      | C was detected  |
| 4 | A ordered          | B has ordered   | C have ordered  |
| 5 | A enclosed         | B have enclosed | C did enclose   |

Exercise 4:

Dear Dr Bruce,

Thank you for seeing Emily Pritchard, aged 9 years, for chronic abdominal pain with intermittent diarrhoea which (1) \_\_\_\_\_ ongoing since a severe episode of gastroenteritis 4-5 months ago. She (2) \_\_\_\_\_ weight but has missed a considerable amount of school this term related to fatigue, sore stomach and recurrent abdominal pain. Stool tests are enclosed with dientamoeba being the only positive consistent finding. Her condition (3) \_\_\_\_\_ but has recently plateaued. Blood tests including coeliac serology and fecal calproteïn (4) \_\_\_\_\_ yesterday. I (5) \_\_\_\_\_ for the result to be forwarded to you as soon as they become available.

Your sincerely

Dr Miriam Kulchenko

- |   |                    |                         |                |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|----------------|
| 1 | A has been         | B was                   | C had been     |
| 2 | A did not lose     | B have not lost         | C has not lost |
| 3 | A did improve      | B has improved          | C was improved |
| 4 | A were carried out | B have been carried out | C carried out  |
| 5 | A have arranged    | B did arrange           | C arranged     |

## Present Perfect v Past Simple – Answers

### Exercise 1:

- 11. E
- 12. B
- 13. D
- 14. A
- 15. A
- 16. E
- 17. D
- 18. C
- 19. D

20. underwent = finished time, so the letter is being written at the end of the day.  
has undergone = unfinished time, so the letter is being written during the day.

### Exercise 2:

0	Example: Mr Watson <del>has</del> <i>presented</i> to the Emergency Department complaining of a tightness in his chest about an hour ago.	x
1	The doctor <i>saw</i> him on arrival and nurses are observing at 5-minute intervals.	√
2	Eight-year-old Tyler Smith <i>has jumped</i> out of a tree at about 4 o'clock this	
3	afternoon. His mother believes that he <i>hit</i> the left side of his head. He <i>has briefly lost</i>	√ x
4	consciousness. He <i>has vomited</i> twice and is currently under observation.	√
5	Mrs Lawson <i>has self-admitted</i> three days ago. She was suffering from hallucinations and <i>reported</i> feeling desperate and afraid of being alone.	x √
6	She <i>has been diagnosed</i> with psychosis and <i>prescribed</i> clozapine (Clozaril). Please	√
7	note that <i>she has revealed</i> that she <i>struggled</i> with medication compliance in the past and therefore requires monitoring.	√ x
8	Mrs Mills <i>has presented</i> with her family, who are extremely concerned that her memory loss is now impacting her daily life and well-being.	x
9	She is unable to recall whether she <i>took</i> her medication and <i>missed</i> several medical appointments.	x x
10	A memory assessment <i>was</i> carried out, but a more thorough investigation is required.	
11	Ms Paul presented two days ago with a rash on the palm of her hand which now <i>spread</i> to her wrist and lower arm.	x
12	I <i>have initially suspected</i> a fungal infection and <i>prescribed</i> Clotrimazole but the rash did not respond.	x √
13	Although Ms Paul <i>has suffered</i> from eczema as a child, she is otherwise well and reports no health problems since.	x
14	Mr Lewis <i>was</i> initially concerned that he would not remember to take his medication, but he <i>was</i> now issued with a Webster pack and educated on how to use it.	√ x
15	He <i>felt</i> further reassured when advised that he would be receiving daily home visits from a nurse.	√

### Exercise 3

1. C injured
2. A has been
3. B detected
4. C have ordered
5. B have enclosed

### Exercise 4

1. A has been
2. C has not lost
3. A did improve
4. A were carried out
5. A have arranged



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