


## 2 The present perfect, simple past and past progressive

### A Revision

Talking about the past is difficult for students for several reasons, as there are three basic tenses in English that are used to do so: the **present perfect**, the **simple past** and the **past perfect**. It is the different usage of the **present perfect** and the **simple past** to German that causes particular difficulties for students of English. The situation is not helped by the fact that in American English the simple past is sometimes used when the present perfect is more usual in British English. So an American might ask "Did you do it yet?", whereas British people would say "Have you done it yet?". Students also find it confusing because when using the equivalent of "for" or "since" in German, the present tense is used, whereas in English the present perfect is needed. The focus in this chapter is on getting the students to concentrate on when to use the present perfect and the simple past. The past perfect is dealt with in Chapter 4 "Sequence of tenses". The past progressive is revisited briefly, but seeing as the present perfect progressive occurs far less frequently than the other forms, it is not dealt with in detail here.

As with all grammar difficulties, but with this one in particular, it is important to draw the students' attention to correct usage in authentic materials as often as possible so that they see the tenses in action.

To help the students brush up on the differences between the two tenses, Copymaster 2.1 could be used to revise the rules.  CM 2.1

The examples in this chapter have been taken from, or are based on, *The Giver*<sup>1</sup> by Lois Lowry.

*The Giver* is set in a seemingly idyllic futuristic society without pain, fear, conflict, injustice ... or choice. The Elders control everything in the community: whom people marry, the families children live with and which job the children are assigned when they are (nearly) twelve years old. Nobody questions his or her job or how things are run. But eleven-year-old Jonas is different and at the Ceremony of Twelve he is assigned a very special role – he is to become the new Receiver (of Memory).

### I Simple past

- a) The simple past is used to describe **activities, states or events that are over and have nothing to do with the present**. The stress is on the time or period of time at which something took place.

*After their evening meal, Jonas and his family share their feelings about events during the day. His younger sister Lily begins, "I felt very angry this afternoon. My Childcare group was at the play area and we had a visiting group of Sevens, and they didn't obey the rules at all."*

→ In the evening Lily is talking about a series of events that happened in the afternoon and are now over.

*When Jonas meets the current Receiver, the old man says that when he became a Twelve, the Elders selected him to become the Receiver. He tells Jonas, "I came to this very room to begin my training. It was such a long time ago."*

→ The signal word "ago" shows why the simple past is used here.

Signal words for the simple past include: yesterday, last year/ month/week, (2 days) ago, in 2012, used to

<sup>1</sup> Lois Lowry *The Giver* ISBN 978-3-12-578140-5

① Depending on the sequence of tenses, the students might come across the **past perfect** being used with the signal words. However, the **present perfect** cannot be used with them!

**B Ideas for creative practice:**

1. Quiz: name the invention
2. Bucket list
3. What has happened?
4. I forgot my phone

- b) It is also used to describe a **sequence of events in the past**, e.g. in **reports, novels and stories**.

*The Assignments [at the Ceremony of Twelve] **continued**, and Jonas **watched** and **listened**, relieved now by the wonderful Assignment his best friend had been given. But he **was** more and more apprehensive as his own **approached**.*

## II Past progressive

- a) It is used to describe something that was **going on in the past (past progressive)** when something new **happened (past simple)**. The activity in the past progressive is a longer action, the background action against which something else happens.

*The Receiver of Memory has just given Jonas his first memory – in his mind Jonas has experienced riding a sled and snow. Once it is over, "He [Jonas] opened his ordinary eyes, and saw that he was still on the bed, that he had not moved at all. The old man, still beside the bed, **was watching** him."*

→ The old man was watching Jonas while he experienced his first memory. The progressive form shows that the Receiver of Memory was watching Jonas before he opened his eyes.

**Note:** German students might find it helpful to remember the German constructions "*dabei sein, etwas zu tun*" or "*gerade etwas tun*", which often signal the progressive in English.

- b) It is used to describe a series of actions that were all **going on in the past at the same time**.

*Lily, Jonas' younger sister, is very fond of Gabriel, a baby that spends the nights with their family: "She **was kneeling** beside the crib, **making** funny faces at the little one, who **was smiling** back at her."*

→ All of these actions are taking place simultaneously in the past.

**Note:** Some verbs are usually only used in the simple form. These are called **stative verbs** as they describe a **state** as opposed to an action:

Verbs to show emotions, including: *like – love – hate – want – wish – prefer*  
 Verbs to show opinions, including: *think – believe – know – remember – forget*  
 Verbs to do with the senses, including: *see – hear – smell – notice – realize*  
 Verbs to show possession, including: *have – own – belong to*

**B Ideas for creative practice:**

3. What has happened?
4. I forgot my phone

### III Present perfect

- a) The present perfect describes **activities, states or events that began in the past but have continued into the present**. The **result** of the past event is more important than when it took place.

*Asher apologizes when he is late for school and mistakenly says he got "distracted" ([verzweifelt] instead of distracted [abgelenkt]) when he saw some workers separating fish. His teacher thanks him for his apology, saying, "And I thank you, because once again you **have provided** an opportunity for a lesson in language."*

→ The result of the past event (i. e. Asher misusing the word) is in the present, as the teacher can now explain the correct usage to the students.

*At the Ceremony of Twelve, during which all twelve-year-olds are given their Life Assignments, the Chief Elder tells them, "You Elevens **have spent** your years **till now** learning to fit in".*

→ They started learning in the past and have continued doing so right up to this moment in time.

- b) The present perfect is also used to say whether **something has happened yet or ever**.

*When Jonas is given his Life Assignment, he is chosen to be the community's Receiver of Memory. The Chief Elder tells him that his training will involve pain. She explains, "You **have never experienced** that."*

→ Up to this point in time, he has not had any pain.

Signal words for the present perfect include: for, since, just, already, yet, so far, ever, up to now

#### B Ideas for creative practice:

1. Quiz: name the invention
2. Bucket list
3. What has happened?
4. I forgot my phone



## B Ideas for creative practice

### Overview

1. Quiz: name the invention	writing	I, III
2. Bucket list	speaking (pairs)	I, III
3. What has happened?	speaking (pairs) & writing	I, II, III
4. I forgot my phone	viewing & speaking	I, II

*As the difficulties arise when trying to decide whether to use the simple past or the present perfect, the first three exercises include both tenses.*

### 1. Quiz: name the inventions

<b>Grammar focus</b>	present perfect and simple past
<b>Topic</b>	inventions
<b>Type of exercise</b>	gap-fill activity followed by free text production
<b>Copymaster 2.3</b>	Quiz: name the invention

**Task:** The students fill in the gaps using the correct tense. At the same time they should mark the words / expressions in the sentences that helped them make their decisions. If there aren't any, they should make a note of what led them to their choice. They should then note down what each invention is.

In the second task they have to think of two other inventions and write one or two sentences of their own to describe them. They then exchange texts with their neighbour. First of all, they should check the tenses and then see whether they can guess what the inventions are.

#### Solutions:

- a) has been – signal = for; put / invented – signal = in 1759; did not become / wore / crashed – no signal, but talking about past events that are over; have continued / have tried – signal = over the years.  
Invention = **roller skates**
- b) invented – signal = over forty years ago; used, i.e. over 40 years ago; weighed / cost – no signal, but describing the original product that he invented; have become – signal = over the years; have improved / have added – no signal but no time is mentioned and the stress is on the changes.  
Invention = **mobile phone (NOT handy!)**
- c) has changed – no signal but the stress is on the effect since its invention; launched – signal = March 2004; had – signal = by the end of that year; had – signal = October 2012; has influenced – no signal but the stress is on the result.  
Invention = **Facebook**

### 2. Bucket list

<b>Grammar focus</b>	present perfect and simple past
<b>Type of exercise</b>	speaking
<b>Copymaster 2.4</b>	Bucket list



**Task:** The students should work with a partner; one of them is given a *Student A sheet* and the other a *Student B sheet*. They should alternately ask each other about the things on the sheet to find out whether the other person has ever done them, or not, e.g. *"Have you ever climbed a mountain?"* Before they start they should quickly decide which tense they will use to ask the question. If they have already done some of the things on the list (which is likely!), they should tell their partner when they did each one and explain a little, e.g. *"Yes, I have. Last year I went to Wales and we climbed Snowdon."*

**Solutions:** The questions will be asked using the **present perfect** because the students want to find out whether their partner *has done something yet or ever*.


If details are given about a past experience, the students will be using the **simple past** as they are describing a *past event* that is now over.

### 3. What has happened?

<b>Grammar focus</b>	present perfect, simple past and past progressive
<b>Type of exercise</b>	speaking followed by writing
<b>Copymaster 2.5</b>	What has happened?

**Task:** In pairs, the students look at the photo and discuss the following questions. The tense of the question will help them to decide which tense to use in their answer.

- What was the man in the water doing before the policeman stopped?
- What do you think has happened? Why?
- Why has the policeman stopped?
- Where did the photographer take the photo? Justify your answer.

 The photograph shows Fermin Pena trying to repair a broken pipe. The photo was taken in Caracas, Venezuela.

#### Possible answers:

The man was running away from the police. He jumped into the puddle to try to hide. / The man was looking for something in the puddle. / The man was trying to find his phone (he had dropped it in there).

The man was an escaped criminal and was trying to hide from the police. / The man has fallen into the puddle. / The man tried to step over the puddle and didn't realize how deep it was ...

The policeman has stopped to see what the man in the water is doing / to see if he needs help / because he is a friend ...

**Task:** After they have speculated about what has happened, the students should write a short text about the photo, in which they answer the questions. The focus should be on using the correct tenses. Once they have written their texts, they should swap with a neighbour and correct each other's work, paying attention to the tenses!

The written activity is important as a follow-up activity, so that the students are given an opportunity to reflect on their use of the tenses rather than just spontaneously using them in a spoken context.

**Additional activity:** In newspapers, on the Internet, in advertisements we often find unusual and striking photographs. The students should collect similar photos (or cut out part of a photo) and come up with questions. Each student should then pick one of the pictures and write a short text about it.

## 4. I forgot my phone

<b>Grammar focus</b>	simple past and past progressive
<b>Type of exercise</b>	speaking followed by writing

Online link: [xdkmdnm](#)

**Task:** The students watch the two-and-a-half-minute video about a girl who does not have her mobile phone with her over the course of a day. From the time she wakes up to the time she goes to bed again, she spends a day isolated from everyone around her as she is the only one without a mobile phone.

Once they have watched the film the first time, the students should watch it again and make notes about each scene. In small groups they should take it in turns to describe what happened, each concentrating on one scene. While one student is talking, the others should listen and make a note of any incorrect usage of the simple past and past progressive. After the person has finished talking, any issues with the tenses should be discussed.

The students should be encouraged to use a mixture of simple past and past progressive when talking about what happened. Again, the listeners should be reminded to “actively” listen to what the other people in their group are saying and to make a note of any incorrect tenses (it is important for the speaker not to be interrupted!).

- △ The students could be given an example before they start the task to help them to focus on why the progressive is used (in most cases they will be describing two actions that are going on at the same time in the past). The use of the word “while” also provides a clue:

**While the girl *was lying* in bed, her boyfriend *was checking* his phone.**

① In addition, the students should be reminded that in English we say “mobile (phone)” and not “handy”!

**Possible solutions:**

In bed: *While she **was lying** in bed, her boyfriend **was checking** his phone.*

Exercising: *When she **reached** the top of the hill, a man **was talking** very loudly on his mobile.*

→ In this case, it would be legitimate to use the simple past, because she has obviously just reached the top of the hill. The man seems to have been there for a while, which is why the past progressive is used.

*While she **was enjoying** the view at the top of the hill, a man **was talking** very loudly on his mobile phone.*

In the cafe: *While she **was trying** to tell her friends a story, they **were checking** their phones / **were not listening** to her / **were showing** each other things on their mobiles ...*

At the beach: *While she **was walking** along the beach, a man **was proposing** to his girlfriend / **was asking** his girlfriend something important. They **were taking** a selfie at the same time.*

On the swing: *While the girl **was** on the swing, a little girl **was sitting** on the swing next to her. She **was checking** her phone and **was not moving**.*

→ “to be” isn’t used in the progressive!

With her friend: *The girl **was celebrating** something with a friend. She **was looking** at her friend, but the other girl **was trying** to take the perfect selfie and so **was looking** into the camera on her phone, not at her friend.*

→ even though “while” is not used, the actions are still taking place at the same time.

At the theatre: *A man **was performing** on the stage at the theatre, and another person **was filming** him.*

Bowling: *The girl **was bowling** with her friends. When she **knocked** over a few pins, she **was** excited and **turned** to celebrate with her friends but nobody **was watching**. They **were all looking** at their mobile phones instead.*

→ The use of the simple past here is because these actions were not happening simultaneously but one after another. The past progressive “was watching” shows that this action is the background action and was going on while the other action happened.

At the concert: *She **couldn't** see what **was happening** on the stage because everyone **was filming** the concert.*

Birthday party: *While she **was bringing in/carrying** a birthday cake, everyone **was singing** Happy Birthday and **filming**. Only the girl **was looking** at the “birthday boy”, the other people **were watching** the event on their phones. Even the boy **was not looking** at her as he **was taking** a selfie.*

In bed: *She **was lying** in bed with her boyfriend. She **turned off** the light and then her boyfriend **turned his mobile on**.*

→ The use of the simple past here is because these actions were not happening simultaneously but one after another. The past progressive “was lying” describes the background action and was going on while the other action happened.

The students have possibly not consciously spent a day without their phones. If they have, so much the better! They should then describe what it felt like. However, most students have probably forgotten to take their phones with them at some point and they could talk about this instead.

**A follow-up activity** would be to get the students to spend a day without their phones and then in their next English lesson to discuss what this felt like and how it changed the way they did certain things.



## 2.1 The present perfect and simple past – revision<sup>1</sup>

### I Simple past

- a) The simple past is used to describe **activities, states or events that are over and have nothing to do with the present**. The stress is on the time or period of time at which something took place.

*After their evening meal, Jonas and his family share their feelings about events during the day. His younger sister Lily begins, "I **felt** very angry this afternoon. My Childcare group **was** at the play area and we **had** a visiting group of Sevens, and they **didn't obey** the rules at all."*

→ In the evening Lily is talking about a series of events that happened in the afternoon and are now over.

- b) It is also used to describe a **sequence of events in the past**, e.g. in **reports, novels and stories**.

*The Assignments [at the Ceremony of Twelve] **continued**, and Jonas **watched** and **listened**, relieved now by the wonderful Assignment his best friend had been given.*

Signal words for the simple past include:  
**yesterday, last year/month/week, (2 days) ago, in 2012, used to**

### II Past progressive

- a) It is used to describe something that was **going on in the past (past progressive)** when something new **happened (past simple)**. The activity in the past progressive is a longer action, the background action against which something else happens.

*The Receiver of Memory has just given Jonas his first memory – in his mind Jonas has experienced riding a sled and snow. Once it is over, "He [Jonas] **opened** his ordinary eyes, and saw that he was still on the bed, that he had not moved at all. The old man, still beside the bed, **was watching** him."*

- b) It is used to describe a series of actions that were all **going on in the past at the same time**.

*Lily, Jonas' younger sister, is very fond of Gabriel, a baby that spends the nights with their family: "She **was kneeling** beside the crib, **making** funny faces at the little one, who **was smiling** back at her."*

**Note:** Some verbs are usually only used in the simple form. These are called **stative verbs** as they describe a **state** as opposed to an action: e.g. *like – love – hate – want – wish – prefer – think – believe – know – remember – forget – see – hear – smell – notice – realize – have – own – belong to*

### III Present perfect

- a) The present perfect describes **activities, states or events that began in the past but have continued into the present**. The **result** of the past event is more important than when it took place.

*At the Ceremony of Twelve the Chief Elder tells all Elevens waiting to be assigned their new jobs, "You Elevens **have spent** your years **till now** learning to fit in".*

→ They started learning in the past and have continued doing so right up to this moment in time.

- b) The present perfect is also used to say whether **something has happened yet or ever**.

*When Jonas is given his Life Assignment, he is chosen to be the community's Receiver of Memory. The Chief Elder tells him that his training will involve pain. She explains, "You **have never experienced** that."*

→ Up to this point in time, he has not had any pain.

Signal words for the present perfect include:  
**for, since, just, already, yet, so far, ever, up to now**

<sup>1</sup> The examples have been taken from, or are based on, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. *The Giver* is set in a seemingly idyllic futuristic society without pain, fear, conflict, injustice ... or choice. The Elders control everything in the community: whom people marry, the families children live with and which job the children are assigned when they are (nearly) twelve years old. Nobody questions his or her job or how things are run. But eleven-year-old Jonas is different and at the Ceremony of Twelve he is assigned a very special role – he is to become the new Receiver (of Memory).

## 2.2 Noticing<sup>1</sup>

Read the following sentences. Highlight or underline the tense(s) used inside the quotation marks and write down why you think it has or they have been used. In some cases, there might be a signal word or expression. Identify it and make a note of any others that can be used with that tense. Compare your answers with those of a partner.

1. After their evening meal, Jonas and his family share their feelings about events during the day. His younger sister Lily begins, *"I felt very angry this afternoon. My Childcare group was at the play area and we had a visiting group of Sevens, and they didn't obey the rules at all."*

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2. When Jonas meets the current Receiver, the old man says that when he became a Twelve, the Elders selected him to become the Receiver. He tells Jonas, *"I came to this very room to begin my training. It was such a long time ago."*

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3. The Receiver of Memory has just given Jonas his first memory – in his mind Jonas has experienced riding a sled and snow. Once it is over, *"He [Jonas] opened his ordinary eyes, and saw that he was still on the bed [...]. The old man, still beside the bed, was watching him."*

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4. Lily, Jonas' younger sister, is very fond of Gabriel a baby that spends the nights with their family: *"She was kneeling beside the crib, making funny faces at the little one, who was smiling back at her."*

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5. At the Ceremony of Twelve the Chief Elder tells all Elevens waiting to be assigned their new jobs, *"You Elevens have spent your years till now learning to fit in."*

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6. When Jonas is given his Life Assignment, he is chosen to be the community's Receiver of Memory. The Chief Elder tells him that his training will involve pain. She explains, *"You have never experienced that."*

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<sup>1</sup> The examples have been taken from, or are based on, *The Giver* by Lois Lowry. *The Giver* is set in a seemingly idyllic futuristic society without pain, fear, conflict, injustice ... or choice. The Elders control everything in the community: whom people marry, the families children live with and which job the children are assigned when they are (nearly) twelve years old. Nobody questions his or her job or how things are run. But eleven-year-old Jonas is different and at the Ceremony of Twelve he is assigned a very special role – he is to become the new Receiver (of Memory).



## 2.3 Quiz: name the invention

1. Fill in the gaps using the correct tense. Mark the words / expressions in the sentences that helped you make your decision. If there aren't any, make note of what led you to your decision. Compare your findings with those of a partner. Can you think what each invention is?

- a) This invention (be) \_\_\_\_\_ around for over 250 years. In 1759 John Joseph Merlin (put) \_\_\_\_\_ small wheels on a pair of shoes and (invent) \_\_\_\_\_ the first pair. They (not become) \_\_\_\_\_ popular – maybe because the first time he (wear) \_\_\_\_\_ them at a party, he (crash) \_\_\_\_\_ into a mirror! Over the years many inventors (continue) \_\_\_\_\_ to make improvements and millions of people (try) \_\_\_\_\_ them out at some point.

**What is it?** \_\_\_\_\_

- b) Martin Cooper (invent) \_\_\_\_\_ the first one over forty years ago and (use) \_\_\_\_\_ it to talk to his rival at another company. It (weigh) \_\_\_\_\_ 0.5 kg and (cost) \_\_\_\_\_ about \$3,500. Over the years they (become) \_\_\_\_\_ much lighter and less expensive. Different companies (improve) \_\_\_\_\_ the design and (add) \_\_\_\_\_ many new features. Now six of the world's seven billion people have one.

**What is it?** \_\_\_\_\_

- c) It (change) \_\_\_\_\_ the lives of millions of people. Its founder (launch) \_\_\_\_\_ it in March 2004 and by the end of that year it (have) \_\_\_\_\_ one million users. In October 2012, it (have) \_\_\_\_\_ one billion users. It (influence) \_\_\_\_\_ many different areas of people's lives, both at work and privately.

**What is it?** \_\_\_\_\_

2. Think of two other inventions and describe them in one or two sentences of your own. Give your sentences to your neighbour. First they should check your tenses and then see whether they can guess the invention.



## 2.4 Bucket list: Student A

*This list shows some of the things that people include on their bucket lists<sup>1</sup>.*

a) *In pairs, ask each other about the things on your lists – you should each ask a question in turn. If the answer is “yes”, tell your partner about your experience. Think about the tense you are going to use when you ask the question. When your partner answers, listen carefully to the tenses and point out any mistakes.*

1. climb a mountain
2. run a race
3. earn your own money
4. sleep under the stars
5. join a flash mob
6. perform a random act of kindness
7. live in a different country for at least two months
8. be vegetarian for a week
9. bake a cake
10. go snowboarding
11. see a solar eclipse
12. take part in a movie marathon

b) *Once you have asked all the questions, take a few minutes to write down five of your own. Then ask your partner about these, too.*

<sup>1</sup> **bucket list** Liste von Dingen, die man vor seinem Tod gemacht haben will



## 2.4 Bucket list: Student B

*This list shows some of the things that people include on their bucket list<sup>1</sup>.*

a) *In pairs, ask each other about the things on your lists – you should each ask a question in turn. If the answer is “yes”, tell your partner about your experience. Think about the tense you are going to use when you ask the question. When your partner answers, listen carefully to the tenses and point out any mistakes.*

1. learn a new skill
2. cook an entire meal by yourself
3. do a self-portrait
4. go camping
5. make a film
6. go geocaching
7. go snorkelling
8. give someone a real surprise
9. watch a sunrise or a sunset (from start to finish)
10. go electronics-free for 24 hours
11. plant something and watch it grow
12. eat something that you can't pronounce

b) *Once you have asked all the questions, take a few minutes to write down five of your own. Then ask your partner about these, too.*

<sup>1</sup> **bucket list** Liste von Dingen, die man vor seinem Tod gemacht haben will



## 2.5 What has happened?

1. In pairs, look at the photo and discuss the following questions. The tense of the question will help you to decide which tense to use when you answer each question.

- What was the man in the water doing before the policeman stopped?
- What do you think has happened? Why?
- Why has the policeman stopped?
- Where did the photographer take the photo? Justify your answer.



*This photograph was taken on September 26, 2012 by Rodrigo Abd.*

2. Now write a short text about the photo, answering the above questions. Make sure that you choose your tenses carefully. Remember to look at the tense in each question to help you to choose the right one. Once you have written your text, swap texts with your neighbour and correct each other's work, paying attention to the tenses!

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