

THE PRESENT PERFECT or PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS?

(I have done *or* I have been doing?)

Look at these sentences :

1. I have learned English for eight years.
2. I have been learning English for eight years.

Both sentences mean that I started learning English eight years ago, and that I am still learning English. Sentence (2), however, further suggests that I will probably continue to learn English in the future. Thus with “for” or “since” both the Present Perfect and the Present Perfect Continuous tenses denote an unfinished action — an action that started in the past and has continued up to the time of speaking. However, the Present Perfect Continuous further emphasizes the continuance of the action in the future.

Another difference between the two tenses is that we use the Present Perfect Continuous with verbs that imply duration or a prolonged action (e.g. “live,” “learn,” “study,” “work,” “wait,” etc.). With verbs that do not imply a prolonged action (e.g. “drop,” “break,” “land”) and those that are not normally used in the continuous form (e.g. “be,” “understand,” “see,” “hear,” etc.) we use only the Present Perfect.

Exercise 17

Put the verb in parentheses into the correct form, using either the Present Perfect or the Present Perfect Continuous tense.
(Note that in some of the following sentences there may be two possibilities.)

1. How long you (read) that book?
2. How many pages of that book you (read)?
3. The delegation has just left. You (see) the delegates off?
4. The car is going again now. The mechanic (repair) it.
5. Mr. X has already submitted his resignation. He (hold) the position of Manager of Personnel since 1990.
6. Mr. Y (work) as Acting Manager for the past two weeks.
7. You (be) to Britain before?
8. The businessman (travel) around Europe for three months. He (visit) six countries so far.
9. The passengers are on the ground. They (land).
10. How long you (know) Mr. X?