How to differentiate simple past from present perfect from present perfect progressive?

Here are some helpful links if you are still confused:

**Simple past**

**Present perfect**

**Simple past vs. Present perfect**

**Present perfect progressive**

**Simple Past:**

The simple past expresses an action in the past taking place once, never, several times. It can also be used for actions taking place one after another or in the middle of another action.

For regular verbs, simply add “ed” to the end of the verb. However, there are irregular verbs, which have different endings depending on the verb.

To begin, let’s compare the simple past with the simple...
present with examples:

**Simple present:** I work on a farm.

**Simple past (regular):** Last year, I worked on a farm.

**Simple present:** I play soccer with my friends.

**Simple past (regular):** Two weeks ago, I played soccer with my friends.

**Simple present:** I only speak the truth.

**Simple past (irregular):** A month ago, I spoke about equality in front of the class.

**Simple present:** I love to play soccer with my friends.

**Simple past (irregular):** I loved to play soccer with my friends, until I hurt my knee two years ago.

In Spanish, it is the same as:

**Presente:** Hablo con la gente.

**Pasado:** Hablé con la gente la semana pasada.
*Presente:* Hago cosas para la tarea.

*Pasado:* Hice cosas para la tarea ayer.

Now that you have an idea about the differences between simple present and simple past, let’s define that present perfect tense.

**Present Perfect:**

The present perfect simple expresses an action that is still going on or that stopped recently, but has an influence on the present. It puts emphasis on the result.

Again, for regular verbs, simply add “ed” to the end of the verb. However, there are irregular verbs, which have different endings depending on the verb.

Here is the basic structure of the present perfect tense:

I / you / we / they + have + verb (ending in “ed” for regular, and varied for irregular)

He / she / it + has + verb (ending in “ed” for regular, and varied for irregular)

In Spanish, it is the same as:

a. He trabajado...

b. Hemos visto...

c. Has leído...

d. Han hecho...
Let’s look at some examples:

a. *Have* you *played* soccer before? (regular)
b. *We have* traveled all around the country! (regular)
c. *Your sister* has *cooked* dinner tonight. (regular)
d. *I had thought* that he was correct, but he was wrong. (irregular)
e. *You have never been* to another country? (irregular)
f. *What have we done* today? (irregular)

So, how is this different from simple past? It’s easiest to see with examples:

*Simple past:* Last year, I worked on the farm.

*Present Perfect:* I have worked on the farm before, but I did not like it.

In this case, the speaker is placing emphasis on the result by using the present perfect.

*Simple past:* She started school last week.

*Present perfect:* She has not started school yet.

In this case, the speaker is describing an action that is still going on by using the present perfect.

*Simple past:* Yesterday, I lost my keys.

*Present perfect:* I have lost my keys!

In this case, the speaker describes a finished action that has
an influence on the present with the present perfect.

*Present perfect:* I still have not seen that movie yet.

In this case, the speaker is describing an action that has never taken place (you would never say “I never seen that movie”).

Great, now we know the difference between simple past and present perfect. So, what is the present perfect progressive?

*Present perfect progressive:*

The present perfect progressive tense indicates a continuous action that has been finished at some point in the past or that was initiated in the past and continues to happen. The action is usually of limited duration and has some current relevance.

In other words, the present perfect progressive just adds “been” to the present perfect tense and a verb with an “ing” ending. Here is the basic structure:

I / you / we / they + have + been + verb (ending in “ing”)

He / she / it + has + been + verb (ending in “ing”)

Here are some examples:

a. I have been doing homework for five hours!
b. He had been walking to school, but forgot his homework and had to turn around.
c. You have been sleeping in that tent for three weeks!
d. They had been practicing piano before their father interrupted.

In Spanish, it is the same as:

a. Ha estado aprendiendo muchas cosas en su clase.
b. Hemos estado haciendo toda la tarea para el grupo.
c. Han estado dibujando para la exposición por tres horas.
d. He estado trabajando para la compañía para muchos años.