

A Point of No Return?

SHORT STORY WITH THE PRESENT AND PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS TENSES (Level B1-B2)

The shop is eerily empty. There are only three people in the queue— a lonely, chubby man sandwiched by two impatient women. We have been waiting for the cashier for almost twenty minutes. She is nowhere to be seen.

I have been fighting the urge to put back my goods on the half-empty shelves and leave. Some invisible force has been telling me to hold on. The person we are waiting for will be here soon. It is just a matter of patience. Who knows? Perhaps, this is the last time I will be able to buy something today.

The two people in front of me have been minding their own business to kill time. The man has been staring at the contents of his basket since I first set my eyes on him in the queue and the woman has been talking quietly on the phone but she looks agitated. I have not been able to get a whiff of what she is saying so I do not know if she has been talking to a friend, a boyfriend, a husband or a child.

THE PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS TENSE				INTERROGATIVE FORM (?)	
AFFIRMATIVE FORM (+)		NEGATIVE FORM (-)		YES/NO QUESTIONS	
FULL FORM	SHORT FORM	FULL FORM	SHORT FORM	Have	I you
<u>I, You, We,</u> <u>You, They</u>	<u>I, You, We,</u> <u>You, They</u>	<u>I, You, We, You,</u> <u>They</u>	<u>I, You, We, You,</u> <u>They</u>	Has	he she it
have been screaming	've been screaming	have not been screaming	haven't been screaming		been screaming?
<u>He, She, It</u>	<u>He, She, It</u>	<u>He, She, It</u>	<u>He, She, It</u>		Have
has been screaming	's been screaming	has not been screaming	hasn't been screaming	WH-QUESTIONS	
EXAMPLES OF OTHER VERBS				What have I been learning?	
Teach <i>Teaching</i>	Sing <i>Singing</i>	Take <i>Taking</i>	Pity <i>Pitying</i>	How long have you been singing?	
Call <i>Calling</i>	Cook <i>Cooking</i>	Drive <i>Driving</i>	Party <i>Partying</i>	Where has he been hiding?	
Say <i>Saying</i>	Draw <i>Drawing</i>	Bake <i>Baking</i>	Part <i>Parting</i>	Who has been talking?	
Paint <i>Painting</i>	Jump <i>Jumping!</i>	Type <i>Typing</i>	Ask <i>Asking</i>	How have we been doing?	
Fit <i>Fitting</i>	Drip <i>Dripping!</i>	Lie <i>Lying</i>	Learn <i>Learning</i>	Why have they been working with their friends?	
Carry <i>Carrying</i>	Cry <i>Crying</i>	Rule <i>Ruling</i>	Fail <i>Failing</i>		
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She has made me think of my own boyfriend, Peter. My thoughts have wandered to him. I wonder what he is doing. He must be worried. Before leaving my office, I told him that I would stop by this supermarket on my way home. He had been talking to his boss when I called so he could not tell me much about his own plans. I hope he is all right. I do not want something bad to happen to him.

The man in front of me has bought comfort food. I know it is comfort food because it does not look nourishing enough to me. What can you do with six Diet Cokes and six bars of chocolate? At least he left the cookies alone. I had been passing by the biscuit aisle when I saw him having a battle of wills with the cookies. Presently, I see that he finally won that fight because the cookies are nowhere to be seen in his basket.

I think of my own father and how he lost his own fight with alcohol when I was young. My mind dwells on the empty evenings when he was never at home, busy nurturing his relationship with his imaginary enemy who would eventually have the upper hand on him. He had been playing with fire and this very fire consumed him in the end.

I now look at the contents of the basket that the man is holding in front of me. I wonder what type of battle he is fighting now. Perhaps, he is not fighting any battles at all. Perhaps, he has got six children who are patiently waiting for him at home. Perhaps, he has only got five children and the sixth bar of chocolate will be for his wife. Perhaps, I am just being overly enthusiastic or analytical. Perhaps he is really a very lonely man as he looks and the six bars of chocolate and the six Diet Cokes are for him and HIM only.

I observe the contents of my own basket. There are two bottles of wine and two packets of crisps. They will be finished tonight. Lately, my boyfriend and I have taken to drinking to drown our sorrows and forget our anxieties. It seems as if we cannot do otherwise. When I met Peter four years ago, I had been working as a Marketing Specialist for a low-key company. My career has greatly evolved since then. I now manage a team of six people. This job is highly stressful and I have never taken any stress management courses so wine seems to be the easiest solution for me. Peter has a demanding job as well so we cannot help each other very much. Wine has become our helper and comforter.

THE PAST PERFECT CONTINUOUS TENSE

AFFIRMATIVE FORM (+)

FULL FORM

I, You, He,
She, It, We,
You, They

↓
had
been
sleeping

SHORT FORM

I, You, He,
She, It,
We, You,
They

↓
'd been
sleeping

NEGATIVE FORM (-)

FULL FORM

I, You, He, She,
It, We, You,
They

↓
had not been
sleeping

SHORT FORM

I, You, He,
She, It, We,
You, They

↓
hadn't been
sleeping

EXAMPLES OF OTHER VERBS

Arrive *Arriving*

Start *Starting*

Play *Playing*

Ban *Banning*

Stop *Stopping*

Marry *Marrying*

Slice *Slicing*

Look *Looking*

Stay *Staying*

Plan *Planning*

Skip *Skipping*

Try *Trying*

Make *Making*

Have *Having*

Bake *Baking*

Do *Doing*

Get *Getting*

Run *Running*

Sit *Sitting*

Stand *Standing*

Buy *Buying*

Teach *Teaching*

Speak *Speaking*

Write *Writing*

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INTERROGATIVE FORM (?)

YES/NO QUESTIONS

I
you
he
she
it
we
you
they

Had it **been sleeping?**

WH-QUESTIONS

What **had** I **been doing?**
How long **had** you **been sitting?**
Where **had** he **been hiding?**
Who **had** **been talking?**
How **had** we **been doing?**
Why **had** they **been working** with their friends?

I cannot see what the other woman has in her basket but a spiky head of a leek is sticking out. She looks very thin as if a gust of wind might blow her away within a few seconds. I conclude that she has her own battles with food and life.

The cashier finally comes. She tells us she cannot serve us—there is a problem with the cash machines. I become very impatient:

“What do you mean you cannot serve us?”

“I’m sorry,” she replies.

The man is on the verge of desperation.

“I can’t not buy this. I need this. I need to buy this!”

The other woman (the thin one) heaves a sigh of relief and heads back to the vegetable shelves.

I put the bottles of wine on the conveyor that is still at the moment and hope for a miracle.

“I can’t sell anything to you; I’m sorry.”

The cashier calls her boss who had been working in his office and he finds us busy arguing with his employee. The other woman has left and only the chocolate-wielding man is present with me.

I brand the wine bottles.

“We need to buy these!” My voice is unnecessarily loud.

“You need to put those goods back and leave the shop or else...”

“Or else what?” I ask.

“Or else I will call the guards.”

“Do it.”

“OK.”

He is not bluffing. Two hefty men coming from nowhere usher us out of the shop as if we were dirty flies or rodents. The fearsome guards had been standing outside, patiently waiting for nuisances like us. We protest but to no avail. Once we are out of the shop, nonsensical words rush out of our mouths.

“How dare they?” says I.

“How could they have done this to us?” says he.

“I’ll never return to this shop,” says I.

“Neither will I,” says he.

The streets are empty and we are shouting at nobody. The ridiculous nature of our protests soon becomes clear to us. We start laughing. We laugh and laugh until our bellies hurt.

“What’s your name?” the man finally asks.

“Prisca,” I say. “My name is Prisca.”

“I am Phillip. Call me Phil,” he says

“Nice to meet you Phil, “ I say.

“Nice to meet you too,” he says.

We head back home.

THE PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS TENSE

AFFIRMATIVE FORM (FULL AND SHORT FORMS)							
I	You	He	She	It	We	You	They
have been trying		has been trying			have been trying		
've been trying		's been trying			've been trying		

NEGATIVE FORM (FULL AND SHORT FORMS)							
I	You	He	She	It	We	You	They
have not been trying		has not been trying			have not been trying		
haven't been trying		hasn't been trying			haven't been trying		

INTERROGATIVE FORM							
Have		Has			Have		
I	you	he	she	it	we	you	they
been trying?							



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