



## Shortcuts to talk about the Past in Spanish (Part 3): Using simplified conjugations to talk about the past

In Spanish, the conjugation of verbs in the present perfect is much simpler and predictable than the conjugation of verbs in preterite, and it can be used by beginners who want to learn how to express ideas about the past without having to learn several conjugations.

Although preterite is often used in conversational Spanish to talk about things that happened before; the present perfect may also be used to express a similar idea.

Additionally, it is easily understood by native speakers and most importantly, it is much easier to learn because it follows highly predictable patterns that make things much easier for beginners.

Because of this, using conjugations in present perfect to talk about the past is an easier way for beginners who want to speak conversational Spanish quickly.

Let's see a few examples in both tenses to illustrate the difference. Pay attention to the endings and try to identify the patterns:

### **Preterite of hablar (to speak):**

Yo hablé con mi amigo ayer (I talked to my friend yesterday)

### **Present perfect of hablar (to speak):**

Yo he hablado con mi amigo ayer (I have talked to my friend yesterday)

### **Preterite of comer (to eat):**

Ella comió una hamburguesa en la cafetería (She ate a burger in the cafeteria)

### **Present perfect of comer (to eat):**

Ella ha comido una hamburguesa en la cafetería (She has eaten a burger in the cafeteria)



**Preterite of dormir (to sleep):**

Tú dormiste en el hotel (You slept at the hotel)

**Present perfect of dormir (to sleep):**

Tú has dormido en el hotel (You have slept at the hotel)

As you may have noticed, the preterite does not seem to follow a predictable pattern and the present perfect looks more consistent.

Now, let's review the full conjugation of these 3 verbs. Once again, pay attention to the endings and try to identify the patterns.

**Preterite of hablar (to speak):**

Yo hablé (I spoke)

Tú hablaste (You spoke)

Él / Ella habló (He / She spoke)

Nosotros hablamos (We spoke)

Ustedes hablaron (You spoke)

Ellos hablaron (They spoke)

**Present perfect of hablar (to speak):**

Yo he hablado (I have spoken)

Tú has hablado (You have spoken)

Él / Ella ha hablado (He / She has spoken)

Nosotros hemos hablado (We have spoken)

Ustedes han hablado (You have spoken)

Ellos han hablado (They have spoken)



**Preterite of comer (to eat):**

Yo comí (I ate)

Tú comiste (You ate)

Él / Ella comió (He / She ate)

Nosotros comimos (We ate)

Ustedes comieron (You ate)

Ellos comieron (They ate)

**Present perfect of comer (to eat):**

Yo he comido (I have eaten)

Tú has comido (You have eaten)

Él / Ella ha comido (He / She has eaten)

Nosotros hemos comido (We have eaten)

Ustedes han comido (You have eaten)

Ellos han comido (They have eaten)

**Preterite of dormir (to sleep):**

Yo dormí (I slept)

Tú dormiste (You slept)

Él / Ella durmió (He / She slept)

Nosotros dormimos (We slept)

Ustedes durmieron (You slept)

Ellos durmieron (They slept)

**Present perfect of dormir (to sleep):**

Yo he dormido (I have slept)

Tú has dormido (You have slept)

Él / Ella ha dormido (He / She has slept)

Nosotros hemos dormido (We have slept)

Ustedes han dormido (You have slept)

Ellos han dormido (They have slept)



As you may have noticed, the preterite tense does not follow a highly predictable structure when compared to the present perfect in this small sample of 3 verbs.

Although there is a logic behind the preterite conjugations, using the present perfect to talk about things that happened in the past is a much simpler and easier way for beginners to get started.

Let's take a moment to examine the present perfect in more detail.

If we look at the 50 verbs most commonly used in conversational Spanish, we will see that approximately 9 out of 10 will follow 2 simple conjugation rules:

- For verbs whose infinitive ends in "ar", remove the "ar" ending and replace it with "ado".
- For verbs whose infinitive ends in "er" and "ir", remove the "er" and "ir" endings and replace them with "ido".

Out of the 50 verbs most commonly used in conversational Spanish, only 5 have "unstructured" conjugations that must be memorized. Here are those verbs:

- Visto (ver, to see)
- Muerto (morir, to die)
- Supuesto (suponer, to suppose)
- Hecho (hacer, to do)
- Dicho (decir, to say)

In other words, by using the present perfect to talk about the past; 90% of the 50 verbs most commonly used in everyday Spanish have highly predictable conjugations that are easy to learn and there are only 5 verbs that need to be memorized.

On the other hand, if we reviewed the preterite conjugations for the 50 verbs most commonly used in conversational Spanish, most beginners would feel discouraged with the amount of work and energy memorizing them would require.

Because of this, and because our goal is to learn basic conversational Spanish quickly while making things simple and avoiding unnecessarily complex subjects that usually delay and discourage most beginners, we will focus on using the present perfect to talk about things that happened in the past from now on.



## The Present perfect Structure:

Using the present perfect is relatively easy. You only need to learn the present tense conjugation of the auxiliary verb “haber” (to have) and the endings for the verbs in past participle (they are easy, don’t worry).

In other words, this is the formula:

Present perfect = “Personal pronoun” + “haber in present tense” + “verb in past participle”

Example: “Yo he comido” (I have eaten)

In Spanish, you can form the present perfect of most verbs by dropping the “ar”, “er” and “ir” ending from their infinitive form and adding the following endings:

- Most verbs whose infinitive form ends in “ar” have the “ado” ending in present perfect
- Most verbs whose infinitive form ends in “er” and “ir” have the “ido” ending in present perfect
- and there are a few exceptions that end in “to” and “cho” which are not that common.

## The Auxiliary Verb “Haber”

Let’s take a moment to review the present tense conjugation of the auxiliary verb “haber” (to have) before moving on.

Present Tense of “Haber” (To have):

Yo he (I have)

Tú has (You have)

Él / Ella ha (He / She has)

Nosotros hemos (We have)

Ustedes han (You have)

Ellos han (They have)



## Examples of Past Participle Conjugations:

Let's begin by looking at the past participle conjugation of 5 important verbs in Spanish:

- Past Participle of "ser" (to be): sido
- Past Participle of "estar" (to be): estado
- Past Participle of "ir" (to go): ido
- Past Participle of "saber" (to know): sabido
- Past Participle of "poder" (to be able to): podido

Now, let's look at the present perfect structure in Spanish one more time:

Present perfect = "Personal pronoun" + "haber in present tense" + "verb in past participle"

Next, we will look at 7 examples that use the present perfect to talk about the past:

- I have been = Yo (personal pronoun) + he (conjugation of the auxiliary verb "haber" in present tense) + sido (verb "ser" in past participle)
- You have gone = Tú (personal pronoun) + has (haber in present tense) + ido (verb "ir" in past participle)
- He has been = Él (personal pronoun) + ha (haber in present tense) + estado (verb "estar" in past participle)
- She has talked = Ella (personal pronoun) + ha (haber in present tense) + hablado (verb "estar" in past participle)
- We have known = Nosotros (personal pronoun) + hemos (haber in present tense) + sabido (verb "saber" in past participle)
- You have been able to = Ustedes (personal pronoun) + han (haber in present tense) + podido (verb "poder" in past participle)
- They have eaten = Ellos (personal pronoun) + han (haber in present tense) + comido (verb "comer" in past participle)



In summary, in order to use the present perfect tense to talk about the past you need to know:

- 1- The present tense conjugation of the auxiliary verb “haber” (to have)
- 2- The past participle conjugation of the verb you want to use

You can get access a free guide with the past participle conjugation of the 10 verbs most commonly used in conversational Spanish at <http://spanishforyourjob.com/topverbs/>

This guide will help you learn the 10 most common verbs in spoken Spanish so you can improve your Spanish faster. Remember, you can find it at: <http://spanishforyourjob.com/topverbs/>