

SPECIAL PERSON INTERVIEWS IN TRADITIONAL UPPER LEVEL CLASSES

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The Special Person questions are not regulated to lower level classes. They can be adapted to any level. And if you want to target a specific verb form with Special Person questions, you can. With practice you can make natural sounding questions and conversations that lean towards almost any verb form.

EXAMPLE: THE PRESENT PERFECT FORM

I wanted to model for a student teacher how students could be interviewed with questions in almost any verb form. It just takes the right set up and then following through with logical questions. The class in this example had not explicitly been taught the present perfect, but they had been exposed to it; they had heard it and read it. I picked a student to interview that I already knew something about. That way I could ask leading questions and predict the flow of the conversation towards more questions with the present perfect form.

I already knew that this student was a good sport. I knew that he caught on quickly and already understood a lot of Spanish. I knew that he would be willing to cooperate and that he would understand what we were trying to do. He would also be willing to answer with complete sentences. Answering like that is admittedly a bit odd and I do not always require students to do this, but it can help newbies to get more repetitions on a specific form, so I ask some students to do it occasionally.

I knew that the student played football and that he had lived here most of his life. I also knew that his father did too, so I could ask a few leading questions about those topics to steer the interview in the direction I wanted, which was towards questions and answers that used the present perfect verb form. I knew some answers before I started asking, but not all of them.

The idea was to get interesting repetitions naturally and in an engaging way with a real student sitting right in front of us in the classroom. Notice the number of repetitions of the present perfect form. During the interview the conversation did not feel forced or artificial. One question naturally led into another. The topic required the use of the present perfect but the focus was on real facts in the life of the student. Doing those two things at once (focusing on the real answers of the student in real time and focusing on the verb form) can be challenging at first, but with perseverance and practice it can be done.

The line of questioning seems tilted in the male direction only because I was aware of the long line of the family name of his father and grandfather in our town and I wanted to use that information to get some repetitions with the present perfect. Not every line of questioning would be like that. It would not always focus on males.

With upper levels there is often not as much need of “reporting back” to the class to get extra repetitions as with lower levels, but I sometimes do it anyway.

In this particular introductory interview, only two present participles were used (**vivido** and **jugado**), which is fine at the beginning. It allows listeners to get a feeling of the verb form without distraction. They catch on quickly once they get enough comprehensible repetitions.

Here are the main questions in the interview:

- **¿Cuántos años tienes?**
(How old are you?)
Tengo diez y siete años.
(I am 17 years old.)
- **¿Por cuántos años **has vivido** en Johnstown?**
(For how many years have you lived in Johnstown?)
He vivido en Johnstown por diecisiete años.
(I have lived in Johnstown for 17 years.)
- **Así que, **¿has vivido** aquí toda la vida?**
(So you have lived here all of your life?)
Sí, yo **he vivido en Johnstown toda mi vida.**
(Yes, I have live in Johnstown my entire life.)
- **Tu padre es de aquí también, ¿verdad?**
(Your father is from here also, right?)
Sí, él es de Johnstown también.
(Yes, he is from Johnstown too.)
- **¿Por cuántos años **ha vivido** aquí tu padre?**
(For how many years has your father lived here?)
Él **ha vivido aquí toda su vida.**
(He has lived here his entire life.)
- **¿En serio? ¿Tu padre también **ha vivido** aquí toda la vida?**
(Seriously? Your father has lived here his entire life also?)
Sí, es la verdad.
(Yes, it is the truth.)
- **¿Y tu mamá? ¿Ella **ha vivido** aquí toda la vida también?**
(And your mother? Has she lived here her entire life also?)
No, ella no **ha vivido aquí toda la vida.**
(No, she hasn't lived here her whole life.)

- **Oh, OK, ya entiendo, ¿ella no es de aquí? Por eso no ha vivido aquí en nuestro pueblo toda la vida.**
(*Oh, OK, now I get it. She isn't from here. That's why she hasn't lived here in our town her whole life.*)
Sí.
(*Yes.*)
- **¿Y tu hermana? ¿Ella ha vivido aquí toda la vida también?**
(*And your sister? Has she lived here her entire life as well?*)
Sí, es obvio. Ella es mi hermana menor.
(*Yes, it is obvious. She is my younger sister.*)
- **Sí, es obvio. Ella ha vivido aquí toda la vida también porque ella es menor.**
(*Yes, it is obvious. She has lived here her whole life too because she is younger than you.*)
Sí.
(*Yes.*)
- **¿Y tu abuelo? ¿Él ha vivido aquí toda la vida también?**
(*And your grandfather? Has he lived here his entire life too?*)
Sí, él también ha vivido aquí toda la vida.
(*Yes, he also has lived here his whole life.*)
- **¡Qué bueno!**
(*That's great!*)
- **¿Y tu bisabuelo? ¿Él todavía está vivo?**
(*And your great grandfather? Is he still alive?*)
No, él se murió hace muchos años.
(*No, he died many years ago.*)
- **¿Él vivió en Johnstown toda la vida? ¿Él había vivido aquí toda la vida también?**
(*Did he live in Johnstown his whole life? Had he lived here his whole life too?*)
No sé.
(*I don't know.*)
- **Bien, pregúntale a tu padre o a tu abuelo, y cuando tú sepas la respuesta, ¿puedes decirnos?**
(*Well, ask your dad or your grandpa, and when you find out/know the answer, can you tell us?*)
Sí.
(*Yes.*)
- **Tú juegas al fútbol americano, ¿no es cierto?**
(*You play football, right?*)

Sí.
(Yes.)

- ¿Por cuántos años **has jugado** al fútbol americano?

(For how many years have you played football?)

He jugado desde los siete años.

I have played since I was 7 years old.)

- Así que, ¿**has jugado** al fútbol americano por diez años?

(So you have played football for 10 years?)

Sí.
(Yes.)

- ¿Cuáles posiciones **has jugado**?

(Which positions have you played?)

He jugado *tight end* y *defensive end*.

(I have played tight end and defensive end.)

- ¿Solamente **has jugado** estas dos posiciones en diez años de jugar?

(You only have played those two positions in ten years of playing football?)

Yo también he jugado *linebacker* un poco, pero no mucho.

(I have also played linebacker a little bit, but not much.)

- ¿**Has jugado** otros deportes?

(Have you played any other sports?)

Sí, **he jugado** al *basquetbol* y también **he corrido** en *track*.

(yes, I have played basketball and also I have run in track.)

I have students help with necessary tasks in the classroom via “classroom jobs”. Counting the number of repetitions with a new verb structure like this one is a job for a fast processing student. The student counted during the interview and including my side comments and double-checking for verification, there were over 37 repetitions of the present perfect in this first interview. I like having students check up on me like that to hold me accountable and make sure that I am giving them enough input.

The language in this first interview is simple. There were not too many words that even level I students could not access. This was purposeful. I did not want to introduce too many new variables so that listening students could easily understand and focus on the meaning of this verb form. The content of the interview and the student himself are what made it interesting—it was like peeling back the skin of an onion as we found out more and more about this student’s deep history in our town. And we finally mined down deep enough to find there were interesting things that even he did not know about his own family. He went home and engaged with his father and grandfather and told them about Spanish class.

The family members formed deeper bonds, the kid learned something about his family history and our Spanish program got some attention. Triple play. Not bad for 20 minutes' worth of interviewing work.

Once students had heard this interview, I had them get in partners and write some questions that they would like to ask their peers.

It is important to note that we did not go into this cold. This was not the first exposure to this verb form they had heard. I sheltered vocabulary but not grammar so students had heard this verb form used many times before. It also shows up in the reading that they had done in novels.

QUESTIONS STUDENTS WANT TO ASK ONE ANOTHER IN INTERVIEWS

*These are some of the questions that students said they would like to ask one another using the present perfect. It is interesting that the hot items always cluster around the same themes. Questions about four topics are always winners, and they showed up here. These "Top Tier Topics" are: **Music, Pets, Sports, and Cars.** All are engaging subjects for questions. Kids will have an opinion about some of them or all of them. Students will always have something to say when we start asking questions like these. Other topics also showed up. These are what I consider Second Tier Topics: **Travel, School, Work and Food.** Still solid fodder for interesting classroom conversations.*

Any of these topics can be the source of compelling input in your classroom. Whether you are using the present perfect or other verb forms, if your questions include something about these subjects, students will respond.

LA MÚSICA

(MUSIC)

¿Has tocado un instrumento musical? (Have you ever played a musical instrument?)

¿Tu música preferida ha cambiado en los últimos dos o tres años?
(Has your favorite type of music changed in the last two or three years?)

¿A cuáles conciertos has ido? (What concerts have you been to?)

MASCOTAS

(PETS)

¿Nunca has tenido una mascota? (Have you ever had a pet?)

¿Cuántas mascotas has tenido? (How many pets have you had?)

¿Cuáles mascotas has tenido? (What pets have you had?)

¿Por cuántos años los has tenido? (For how many years have you had them?)

DEPORTES

(SPORTS)

¿Has jugado un deporte alguna vez? (Have you ever played a sport?)

¿Cuáles deportes has jugado? (What sports have you played?)

¿En cuántos partidos de fútbol has jugado? (How many football games have you played in?)

CARROS

(CARS)

¿Desde cuándo has tenido tu licencia?

(Since when have you had your license?)

¿Por cuánto tiempo has tenido tu licencia?

(For how long have you had your license?)

¿Qué tipo de carro siempre has querido?

(What kind of car have you always wanted?)

VIAJAR

(TRAVELING)

¿Has viajado a un país diferente?

(Have you traveled to a different country?)

¿Has viajado afuera de los Estados Unidos?

(Have you traveled outside of the US?)

¿Has viajado afuera de nuestro estado?

(Have you traveled outside of our state?)

¿Cuántos países has visitado?

(How many countries have you visited?)

¿Cuántos estados has visitado?

(How many states have you visited?)

¿Jamás has ido en un crucero?

(Have you ever been on a cruise?)

¿Has ido a la playa?

(Have you been to the beach?)

¿A cuáles playas has ido?

(Which beaches have you been to?)

¿Has visto el Gran Cañón?

(Have you seen the Grand Canyon?)

¿Qué es el lugar más interesante que jamás has visitado?

(What is the most interesting place that you have ever visited?)

¿Has leído un libro de otra cultura?

(Have you read a book from another culture?)

LA ESCUELA

(SCHOOL)

¿Nunca has ido a otra escuela?

(Have you ever attended another school?)

¿Has vivido en otro estado?

(Have you lived in another state?)

¿Por cuántos años has vivido aquí en nuestro estado?

(For how many years have you lived our state?)

EL TRABAJO

(WORK)

¿Cuántos trabajos has tenido?

(How many Jobs have you had?)

¿Dónde has trabajado?

(Where have you worked?)

LA COMIDA

(FOOD)

¿Cuántos pasteles de desayuno has comido en una semana?

(How many donuts have you eaten in one week?)

¿Qué es la comida más rara que has comido?

(What is the strangest food you have ever eaten?)

¿Has comido... ?

(Have you ever eaten... ?)

¿Has deseado comer... ?

(Have you ever wanted to eat... ?)