When...? and How long...? For and since

A Compare **When...?** (+ *past simple*) and **How long...?** (+ *present perfect*):

| A: When **did** it **start** raining? |
| B: It **started** raining   an hour ago / at 1 o'clock. |

| A: **How long has** it **been** raining? |
| B: It's **been** raining   for an hour / since 1 o'clock. |

JOE   CAROL
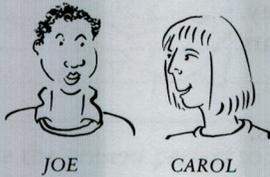
| A: When **did** Joe and Carol first **meet**? |
| B: They first **met**   a long time ago / when they were at school. |

| A: **How long have** Joe and Carol **known** each other? |
| B: They've **known** each other { for a long time. / since they were at school. |

B We use both **for** and **since** to say how long something has been happening.

| We use **for** when we say a period of time (**two hours, six weeks** etc.):	We use **since** when we say the *start* of a period (**8 o'clock, Monday, 1985** etc.):
● I've been waiting **for two hours**.	● I've been waiting **since 8 o'clock**.

| for two hours → |
| two hours ago ------------------> now |

| since 8 o'clock → |
| 8 o'clock ------------------> now |
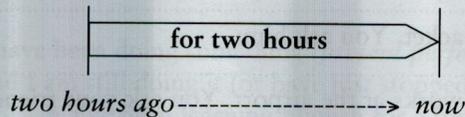
for	
two hours	a week
20 minutes	50 years
five days	a long time
six months	ages
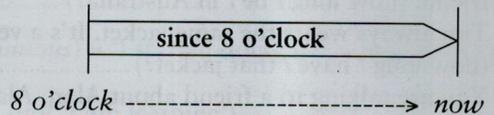
since	
8 o'clock	1977
Monday	Christmas
12 May	lunchtime
April	they were at school

● Sally's been working here **for six months**. (*not* 'since six months')
● I haven't seen Tom **for three days**. (*not* 'since three days')

● Sally's been working here **since April**. (= from April until now)
● I haven't seen Tom **since Monday**. (= from Monday until now)

It is possible to leave out **for** (but not usually in negative sentences):
● They've been married (**for**) **ten years**. (with or without **for**)
● They **haven't had** a holiday **for ten years**. (you must use **for**)

We do *not* use **for** + all... (**all day / all my life** etc.):
● I've lived here **all my life**. (*not* 'for all my life')

C We say 'It's (a long time / two years etc.) **since** something happened':
● It's **two years since** I last saw Joe. (= I **haven't** seen Joe **for two years** / the last time I saw Joe was two years ago)
● It's **ages since** we went to the cinema. (= We **haven't been** to the cinema for ages)

The question is **How long is it since...?**
● **How long is it since** you last saw Joe? (= When did you last see Joe?)
● **How long is it since** Mrs Hill died? (= When did Mrs Hill die?)