

Curious Question #8 – How have you been?

Transcript

Robin: Hello everyone. This is Robin.

Harp: And Harp.

Robin: And we're back again with our **Curious Questions** podcast that we do each and every week where we take your questions and we answer them at Culips C-U-L-I-P-S.com. Today we're going to look at a question from Jacques in Martinique and the question is:

*What is the difference between “**How are you?**” and “**How have you been?**”*

Harp: Well, these two expressions are both used in the same situations, as greetings or to find out more about the state of a person. They are often interchangeable but there is a difference.

Robin: “**How are you?**” is used when you want to know how someone feels now, at the moment you ask them. It goes well like, “How are you today, this morning, this afternoon, at this moment?”

“**How are you?**” is exactly the same as “**How are you doing? How is it going?**”

Harp: The other expression was “**How have you been?**” Like “**How are you?**” this often follows greetings, but as “**How are you?**” asks about the exact moment, “**How have you been?**” asks about recently or lately in general. We can also assume you mean “**How have you been....since the last time I saw you?**”

Robin: And because of that last part it is really important to only use “**How have you been?**” with people you already know. It is very strange to meet a new person and then ask them “**How have you been?**” In fact, it just doesn't work.

Harp: As I already mentioned, you can only ask “**How have you been?**” to people you know, your friends, your colleagues. But it is also strange to ask that question to a friend that you saw recently. If I saw my friend yesterday, and I see her again today and ask “**How have you been?**” it is strange because I saw her yesterday so I kind of know how she has been.

Robin: So, the rule is to use **“How have you been?”** with someone you know who you have not had any contact with lately. I can estimate for you. This will sound a bit like mathematics, but if it is hard to understand check out our Lipservice on our website because we will further explain it there.

Harp: OK, so I’m going to try to simplify this and I have two examples to illustrate this point. If it has been a week since I have seen a really good friend, I could ask, **“How have you been?”**

OK, but if the person is someone I know a little bit through work, then more than a week would need to have passed, maybe even months, before asking how have they been.

Robin: Another instance that I can think of when I use **“How have you been?”** is when I bump into an old friend who I have lost contact with. I unexpectedly see this person on the street and want to know how they have been, not how they are.

Harp: **“How have you been?”** is very similar to **“How has it been going?”** or **“What have you been doing?”**

Did you notice that these three expressions are all in the present perfect verb tense? I wish I could tell you more about this verb tense now, but I don’t have the time to go in depth here. You will have to check out our website Culips.com, to learn more about this verb tense.

Robin: And just to give you some ideas about how to answer the question **“How have you been?”** you could say “I’ve been good”, or “I’ve been fine”, or even “I’ve been well.”

To answer “What have you been up to?” you could say “Not much” or “Nothing special.” These are the usual responses.

Harp: If you are not sure, it is always OK to say **“How are you?”** even if you haven’t seen the person in a long time it is still perfectly acceptable to ask simply, “How’s it going?”

“How have you been?” is for closer friends who you want to know more about. Try it out with them. If you make a mistake, your close friend can help you out!

Robin: So that about wraps it up for this week’s **Curious Question** at Culips.com. I want to thank you once again on behalf of the Culips team for joining us and

encourage you to tune in again next week as we take more questions from you, our listeners, at Culips.com. For now this has been Robin...

Harp: And Harp,

Robin: With **Curious Questions** at Culips.com.

Detailed Explanation

How are you?

This is for everyone and is always OK!

Other ways we can say “How are you?” more casually and some usual responses

“**How is it going?**” or more slang: “**How’s it goin’?**”

Some possible responses: “I’m good/well/fine.” “It’s going.” “It’s going alright.”

“**How are you doing?**” or more slang: “**How’re ya doin’?**”

Some possible responses: “I’m good/well.” “I’m doing good/well/fine.”

“**What’s up?**” or more slang: “**Sup?**”

Some possible responses: “Not much.” “Nothing special.” “Nothing.”

“**What’s new?**”

Some possible responses: “Not much.”

Or, (if something exciting has happened), response: “Actually, I just won the lottery.”

*“**What’s up?**” and “**What’s new?**” have responses that are often interchangeable too.

When I was in England I heard this:

Are you all right?

And in Australia they say:

How are you going?

There are many, many variations of this greeting. Listen to what is being used in the area where you are.

How have you been?

Grammar Alert! This greeting uses the present perfect verb tense. This is used when you are talking about something that happened lately or recently. Or we can use the present

perfect when we talk about a time frame of something that started in the past until the present moment.

The example we heard in the episode was **“How have you been....since the last time I saw you?”** You are asking about the time from the last time you saw them until the present moment.

Other ways we can say “How have you been?” and some usual responses:

“How you been doing?” (we cut out the **have**) or **“How ya been doin’?”**
Some possible responses: “I’ve been good.”

“How has it been (going)?” or **“How’s it been goin’?”**
Some possible responses: “Everything’s been going well.”

“How has life been treating you?” or **“How’s life been treatin’ ya?”**
Some possible responses: “I’m good.”

“What have you been doing?”
Some possible responses: “Not much, just working.”

“What have you been up to?”
Some possible responses: “Nothing special.”

When we are asked “What is new?” or “What have you been up to?” we usually say “nothing”. If something big has happened to you, then you might say what it is when someone asks you this question. People often say “nothing” and then explain what little things are new in their lives.

The difference between **“How have you been?”** and **“How are you?”**

Like I said above, **“How are you?”** is good with everyone all the time.

Do not ask **“How have you been?”** to someone you do not know well. You ask questions like **“How have you been?”** with people you know, friends and family, and closer colleagues. You can use it with any person you are close to.

It is important to not use **“How have you been?”** with someone you do not know or only know a small bit.

If you ask a friend **“How have you been?”** some amount of time should have passed. I would not ask a good friend **“How have you been?”** if I saw them yesterday. I would

probably ask a really good friend, who I see often, “**How have you been?**” if I hadn’t seen them in a week. For other people I would wait at least two weeks.

It is hard to give you an exact timeframe for asking “**How have you been?**” It is different for every relationship. Since you are asking a good friend, it won’t matter if you make a mistake and ask them too soon!

Quiz (see the answers at the bottom of this Lipservice)**1. Which expression is the best to use with someone you just met?**

- a) How have you been?
- b) How are you?
- c) What have you been up to?
- d) What is new?

2. Which verb tense does each of these expressions use?

“How have you been?”

“How has it been going?”

“What have you been doing?”

- a) Present perfect
- b) Past
- c) Imperfect
- d) Present

3. Which expression can you use with a friend you have had for a long time?

- a) What's new?
- b) How have you been?
- c) How are you?
- d) All of the above.

4. Match the expression with the correct response.

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|-----------------------|--------|--|
| a) How are you? | —————→ | i) I'm good. OR I'm well. |
| b) What is new? | | ii) I've been well. OR I've been good. |
| c) How have you been? | | iii) Not much. |

5. When someone asks you “*How have you been?*” what are they actually asking you?

- a) How have you been...working?
- b) How have you been...since the last time I saw you?
- c) How have you been...go?
- d) How have you been...how you are?

Answers:

1.b 2.a 3.d 4.a-1, b-iii, c-ii 5.b

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