

# CORRECT YOUR ENGLISH



LEARN TO SPEAK  
MORE LIKE A NATIVE

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## **Correct your English**

Learn to Speak English More Like a Native

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# What is this book about?

This book is a collection of 101 typical mistakes that intermediate and more advanced learners of English make during speaking. These mistakes are very common, even among higher level learners, and many of them are not corrected during traditional English language courses.

If you are a learner and you use English every day as a foreign or second language, you might not even realise that you are making these errors in your speaking. I will explain different areas of confusion in clear English, and help you to speak English more like a native.

## **HOW ARE MISTAKES PRESENTED?**

Language problems are presented in alphabetical order and typical examples of mistakes are indicated \*in asterisks\*. Both vocabulary and grammar problems are included

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according to

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*According to the traffic, Mark was late for work.\*

We cannot use the phrase **according to** in this context. If you are trying to explain the reason for something, the following structures are more natural:



**because of something**  
**as a result of something**

**Because of** the traffic, Mark was late for work.

**As a result of** the traffic, Mark was late for work.

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*According to me, nurses are not paid enough.\*

We cannot use **according to** in this context either. If you make this mistake, you are trying to say **I think** or **In my opinion**:

**In my opinion**, nurses are not paid enough.

**I think** nurses are not paid enough.

We only use **according to** when we refer to the author of something or a person who claims that something is true:



**According to Abdul**, the film starts at 3 pm.

**According to the president**, the war will be over soon.

---

after

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I'm after my dinner.\*

This is a common mistake for speakers of certain languages. If you want to say that something has (just) been done or finished, then use the present perfect with 'just':

**I've just had** dinner.

**I've just finished** my homework. (NOT \*I'm after my homework.\*)

In English, the expression **be after something/somebody** really means to chase something/somebody:

The police **are after** the criminal.

Everyone **is after** his wife.

---

all

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*All enjoyed the film. \*

Many languages use only one word to mean **all**, **everybody** and **everyone**. In English we use **everybody** or **everyone** when there is no following noun (**everybody** likes him) and **all** with a noun or pronoun:



**Everybody** enjoyed the film.

**All the people** enjoyed the film

**We all** enjoyed the film.

Another common area of confusion is understanding the difference between **all the boys** (a specific group of boys) and **all boys** (boys in general).

**All the boys** in his class were very young.

**Not all boys** are naughty.

---

amount

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I have a large amount of books.\*

Many learners of English confuse the words **amount** and **number**. In English, we say **amount** before uncountable nouns and **number** before countable nouns.

I have a large **number** of books.

He has a large **amount** of money.

---

appointment

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Can we have an appointment for tomorrow?\*

We generally use the word **appointment** in formal situations and we use the following structure:

**make an appointment (with somebody/to see somebody)**

Can we **make an appointment** for tomorrow?

For more informal situations (for example with friends), it is more natural to say:



**Let's meet** tomorrow.

**Can we meet** tomorrow?

**Can you meet me** tomorrow?

---

as far as ... is considered

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*As far as transport is considered, ...\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*As concerns transport, ...\*

If you want to introduce a new subtopic in a discussion, the following structures are correct:

**as far as X is concerned**

**as for X**

**regarding X**

**if we're talking X**

**As far as transport is concerned**, London has many options.

**As for** transport, London has many options.

**As regards** transport, London has many options.

**If we're talking** transport, London has many options.

---

as for me

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*As for me, the film was boring\*

We only use the expression **as for me** when a second person's opinion is given in contrast to the first person's opinion. For example:

Jackie thought the film was boring, **but as for me** I loved it.

If you just want to give your opinion without comparing to another person's opinion, say something like:

**I thought** the film was boring.

**I found** the film boring.

---

been in / been to

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I've been in Italy three times.\*

When we talk about places we have visited, we say **I've been to**, not 'I've been in':



**I've been to** Italy three times.

We say **I've been in** when we are talking about staying or living somewhere for a period of time from the past up to the present moment:

Julia is tourist. **She's been in** Paris for 5 days.

---

being

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*Being in China, I met a lot of interesting people.\*

In English, we don't normally use the present participle **being** in this way. We usually use **when** or **while** followed by the verb 'be' in the appropriate tense:

**While I was** in China, I met a lot of interesting people.

**When I was** a student, I went out a lot.

The word **being** is also used incorrectly in the following way:

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*Being a manager, I have a lot of responsibility.\*

Instead, we usually say **As a ...** :

**As a manager**, I have a lot of responsibility.

We normally use **being** after a verb, such as 'enjoy', or in noun expressions:

**I enjoyed being** a student.

**Being an astronaut was** something I had always dreamed of.

---

belong to

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*She belongs to the most talented actresses.\*

In English, the phrase **belong to** can only be used in the context of ownership or membership of an organisation, as in the following examples:

This book **belongs to** my father.

My colleague **belongs to** an exclusive sports club.

When followed by a superlative adjective + plural noun, we usually say **one of the ...**

She is **one of the** most talented actresses.

---

besides

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Athens has many cafes. Besides, there are many restaurants.\*

In English, we normally use the word **besides** on its own to justify what was just said, often when we give an (additional) excuse for something:

I'd like to go out tonight, but I've got too much work to do.  
**Besides**, I need an early night.

When giving additional information, we cannot use **besides** on its own. However, we can say **besides that, apart from that, what's more, on top of that, in addition**:

Athens has many cafes. **Besides that**, there are many restaurants.

Athens has many cafes. **Apart from that**, there are many restaurants.

Athens has many cafes. **In addition**, there are many restaurants.  
(*formal*)

**Besides** (+ noun) has the same meaning as **in addition to**:

**Besides his desktop computer**, he has a laptop.

---

Can I have a question?

This structure is unnatural in English. It is better to say:

**Can I ask you a question?**  
**I have a question.**

---

cause that

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*The traffic caused that I was late.\*

In English, we cannot use 'that' after **cause**. We can only say:

**X causes Y**

The storm **caused a power cut**.

When you want to give a reason for something, use any of the following structures:

**as a result of ...**

**because of ...**

**make somebody + adjective**

**make somebody + verb**



**Because of** the traffic, I was late.

**As a result of** the traffic, I was late.

The traffic **made me late**.

The traffic **made me arrive late**.



---

bored/boring

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I was boring during the film.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*The film was bored.\*

These two words are very often confused. They are both used as adjectives, but **boring** describes the quality of something and **bored** describes a feeling.



The film was **boring**. (the quality of the film)

I was **bored** during the film. (= the film cause me to feel bored)

There are other similar pairs of adjectives, for example:

**interesting / interested**

**frightening / frightened**

**tiring / tired**

---

come to

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Can you come to me tomorrow? \*

If you are talking about somebody visiting you at your home, it is more natural to say **come to my place**:

Can you **come to my place** tomorrow?

The phrasal verbs **come round** and **drop by** are also possible in informal English.

Can you **come round** tomorrow?

Can you **drop by** tomorrow?

---

concentrated

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*You must be very concentrated \*

In English, you cannot 'be concentrated'. You can only **concentrate**:

You must **concentrate** very hard.

We can say that something **is concentrated** when it is made stronger because water or other elements have been removed, for example:



This orange juice **is concentrated**.

---

## Countable/uncountable noun errors

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*My money are in the bank.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*My monies are in the bank.\*

A number of nouns that are countable in other languages are uncountable in English. These include **money**, **danger**, **damage**, **information**, **exercise**, **advice**, etc.

My **money is** in the bank.

Julie's **advice is** very helpful.

Some English nouns that are normally uncountable can be used in the plural form, but with a difference in meaning. **Damages**, for example, refers to an amount of money that is paid to someone by the person/company etc. that has caused them harm or injury.

He was paid \$10,000 **in damages**.

---

## Double negatives

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I haven't spoken to nobody.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*I haven't never seen him.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 3: \*Nobody can't see me.\*

Although these double negative grammatical constructions are correct in many languages, they are not correct in English. With negative words like **nobody**, **none**, **never** and **no one**, we use positive verbs.

**I've spoken to nobody.** (= I haven't spoken to anybody.)

**I have never** seen him.

**Nobody can see me.**

---

Doubling the subject

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Japanese people, they are very polite.\*

This is a typical error caused by trying to translate a double subject from your native language. In English, we don't usually repeat the subject:

**Japanese people are** very polite.

---

enough

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I'm not enough patient. \*

In English, the word **enough** goes before nouns and after adjectives:

I'm not **patient enough**.  
I don't have **enough patience**.

---

even

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I even don't know him.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*I don't know him even.\*

In English, the word **even** (and other adverbs like **ever**, **never**, **usually**, **often**, **also**, etc.) goes before the verb:

He **even speaks** Chinese!  
I **often go** to the cinema

After the verb 'be':

He **isn't even** Russian.

Or after the first verb in multi-word verb structures:

I **don't even know** him.  
I've **never been** to Italy.

---

even though / even if

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*Even if it was raining, I went for a walk.\*  
TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*Even it was raining, I went for a walk.\*

Learners often confuse **even though**, **even if** and **even**. The expression **even though** can be used with various verb tenses and has the same meaning as the word 'although'.

**Even though** it was raining, I went for a walk.  
**Even though** he invited to the party, I didn't go.  
**Even though** I hardly every exercise, I'm very fit.

**Even if** is used with a possible future situation or a hypothetical situation in the present or past. It is used in conditional structures instead of 'if'.

**Even if** Joe comes to the party, I'm still not going.  
**Even if** my boss offered me a promotion, I wouldn't take it.

---

## except

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*Except Peter, everyone passed the exam.\*

In English, if you use the word 'except' at the beginning of the sentence, you must say **except for**:

**Except for** Peter, everyone passed the exam.

If you use the word somewhere else in the sentence, the preposition 'for' can be omitted:

Everyone **except** (for) Peter passed the exam.  
Everyone passed the exam **except** (for) Peter.

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*Except for Paul, five people came to the dinner party.\*

In English, **except for** cannot mean 'in addition to'. Instead, use **apart from somebody/something, in addition to somebody/something** or **besides somebody/something**:

**Apart from** Paul, five people came to the dinner party.

**In addition to** Paul, five people came to the dinner party.

**Besides** Paul, five people came to the dinner party.

---

feel badly/well etc.

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I feel very badly.\*

In English, the sense verbs **feel**, **smell**, **look**, **sound**, **taste**, **appear**, **seem** are usually followed by an adjective, not an adverb:

I **feel** very **bad**.

It **tastes** **great**.

It **smells** **disgusting**.

However, an adverb can be used after some of the above verbs, in answer to the question 'How....?':

A: How did he look at you?

B: He looked at me **angrily**.

The word **well** can be used after **look**, **sound**, **feel**, **appear**, but the meaning is 'healthy', 'normal':

He **looks well** after the operation.

The opposite is **unwell**:

He **seems unwell** today.

---

finish school

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Tony finished school last year.\*

In English, when we talk about the end of our secondary/high school education, we normally say **leave school**:

Tony **left school** last year.

To **finish school** is normally used to talk about the end of the school day:

What time do you **finish school every day**?

In British English, when we talk about finishing university education, we can use the verb **graduate**:

I **graduated** in 1990.

When referring to the degree and place of study, we say **graduate in .... from ...**:

I **graduated in** Physics **from** Oxford University.

---

for sure

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*For sure she will listen.\*

This is not a serious error, but many learners overuse the expression **for sure** -- and often incorrectly. For native speakers of English it is often more natural to use the words **definitely** and **certainly**:

She will **definitely** listen.

If **for sure** is used, it is often more natural to put it at the end of the sentence:

She will listen **for sure**.



---

from my point of view

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*From my point of view, football is boring.\*

The expression **from my point of view** actually means ‘from my perspective (for example as a teacher, lawyer, etc.)’:

**From my point of view** (as a teacher), Julia’s English has really improved.

When giving a general opinion, use an expression such as **in my opinion** or **I think**.

**In my opinion**, football is boring.

**I think** football is boring.

---

from the one side

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*From the one side, I think it’s a good idea.\*

In English, we use the expression **from one side** in a literal sense:

**From one side**, his face look fine. **From the other side** it looks dirty.

In the figurative sense, we say **on the one hand**:

**One the one hand**, I think it’s a good idea. However, ....

---

hard/hardly

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I work very hardly.\*

In English, the adverb of the adjective 'hard' is **hard**:

I work very **hard**.

The adverb **hardly** means 'only just' or 'certainly not'.

He spoke so quietly. I could **hardly** hear what he was saying.

---

holiday/vacation

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I'm going for holidays to Italy.\*

In correct English, we say:

**go on holiday** (UK) / **go on vacation** (US)



**I'm going on holiday** to Italy.

**I'm going on vacation** to Italy.

**I'm going** to Italy **on holiday**.

**I'm going** to Italy **on vacation**.

We can also say **go for a holiday** (UK) or **go for a vacation** (US).  
This usually refers to a shorter break:

**I'm going** to Italy **for a** (two-week) **holiday**.

**I'm going** to Italy **for a** (two-week) **vacation**.

We can also talk about somebody's holiday:

Where are you **going for your holiday** this year?

Where are you **going for your vacation** this year?

---

How does she look like?

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*How does she look like?\*

In correct English, we say:

**What** does she look **like**?

We usually say **How does somebody/something look?** when we are talking about appearance after an event, for example, an illness, operation, fight earthquake, etc.

A: Peter is out of hospital.

B: Really? **How does he look?**

---

How to ....?

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*How to say 'dobrou noc' in English?\*

In English, questions usually need a subject noun or pronoun. If we want to express impersonal meaning in everyday speech and writing, we use the pronoun 'you':

**How do you say 'dobrou noc' in English?**

**How do you get** to your office? (NOT \*How to get to your office?\*)

**How do you spell** it? (NOT \*How to spell it?\*)

**How do you do business** in England? (NOT \*How to do business in England?\*)

Remember that if somebody asks you a question with the impersonal 'you', the response is **You ...** (NOT 'I ...')

A: **How do you say** 'goodbye' in Japanese?

B: **You say** 'sayonara'. (NOT \*I say 'sayonara'\*)

Another alternative to the impersonal 'you' is the passive structure

**How is something done?**

**How is it spelt?**

However, \*how is it said?\* is not possible.

Other alternatives are:

**What's 'sayonara' in English?**

**What's the English for 'sayonara'?**

---

How do you call ...?

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*How do you call 'sayonara' in English?\*

Do not confuse **call** with **say**. The above example in correct English is:

**How do you say 'sayonara' in English?**

**Call** is used in the following question:

**What do you call this in English?**

We use this question when we want to know the English word for a particular object. Correct responses to the above question are:

**You call it a/an ...**

**It's called a/an ...**

---

however it is

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*However it is an expensive phone, I'll buy it.\*

In English, you cannot use **however** in this kind of structure. Use **although**:

**Although** it is an expensive phone, I'll buy it.

We can use **however** in the following type of sentence:

**However you look at it**, it was a bad result.

This means 'it doesn't matter how you look at it'.

---

How long are you ...?

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*How long are you in London?\*

This question is very often used in the wrong context. In English, if you want to ask someone about a period of time that started in the past and continued to the present, you say:

**How long have you been** in London?

In spoken English, the question **How long are you in London?** actually means ‘How long are you staying in London?’

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*How long do you wait here?\*

In natural English, we would use the present perfect continuous tense because we are asking about an activity which started in the past and continues to the present:

How long **have you been waiting?**

However, verbs which are *states*, not *actions*, are not normally used in the continuous form:

**I’ve loved** her for ages. (NOT: \*I have been loving her for ages.\*)

---

I am to ...

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I am to pick up my children today.\*

If you want to talk about an obligation, you cannot say **I am to ...** in English. Use the following structures:

**I have to ...**

**I'm supposed to ...**

**I have to** pick up my children today.

**I'm supposed to** pick up my children today.

In English, the structure 'somebody is to do something' is only used in contexts where someone is given an order, for example at school or in the army:



**You are to stand up** when the sergeant enters the room.

---

if + will/would

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*If it will rain, I will not go out.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*If I would be rich, I would buy myself a big house.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 3: \*If I would got up early, I wouldn't be late for work.\*

In English conditional sentences, we do not use **will** or **would** in the if-part of the sentence.

The three main types of conditional need to be studied.

First conditional (possible situations in the future)

If + present, will/won't + infinitive

**If it rains, I won't** go out.

Second conditional (hypothetical situations in the present or future)

If + past, would/wouldn't + infinitive

**If I was** rich, **I'd** (= I would) **buy** myself a big house.

Third conditional (hypothetical situations in the past)

If + past perfect, would/wouldn't have + past participle

**If I had got up** early, **I wouldn't have been** late for work.

There are, however, a few situations in which we say **If you will** or **If you would**, for example in polite requests:

**If you will take** a seat, the doctor will see you shortly.

**If you would take** a seat, the doctor will see you shortly.  
(The most important is ...)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*The most important is to stay calm.\*

In English, an adjective must describe a noun or pronoun. In the above sentence, it is necessary to add the word **thing**:

**The most important thing is** to stay calm.

---

important (An important problem)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Alcohol abuse is an important problem in Russia.\*



The adjective **important** does not naturally collocate with the noun **problem**. Instead, we say:

Alcohol abuse is **a serious problem** in Russia.

---

impression

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I am under the impression.\*

In English, this expression can only be used in the following way:

**I was under the impression that** you were not coming today.

However, if you just want to say that something impressed you, then say:

**I am impressed.**

---

in future

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*In future, robots will be as intelligent as people \*

In English, we can say **in future** and **in the future**, with a difference in meaning. When making predictions we usually say **in the future**:



**In the future**, robots will be as intelligent as people.

The expression **in future** is normally used when you would like someone to change their behaviour:

**In future**, try to be more careful.

---

I think so ...

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I think so that he is a good person\*

In English, we cannot say 'that' after **I think so**. We can only say **I think so**.

A: Is he a good person?    B: **I think so**.

If you want to express an opinion with **think**, you can only say **I think ...** or **I think that ...**

**I think (that) he** is a good person.

---

English language

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I don't speak English language.\*

In English, the names of languages are usually used without the word **language**:

**I don't speak English.** (NOT \*the English language\*)

We do sometimes add the word **language**, but only in academic or formal contexts, and usually with the article 'the':

**The English language** has become the international tool for communication.

---

learn (I have to learn)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I can't go out tonight because I have to learn.\*

In English, 'learn' means to gain knowledge or skill. For example, if you are gaining or improving your knowledge of German, then you can say that you are **learning German**.

If you want to talk about the activity of gaining knowledge or skill (e.g. a student or preparing for an exam or test), use the verb **study**.

I can't go out tonight because **I have to study**.

In order to learn German, you have to **study hard**.

(BUT: Your German is much better. **You learn fast!**)

When we talk about the process of acquiring a practical skill (e.g. riding a bike or baking a cake) we use **learn**, NOT study.



**I'm learning to ride** a bike.

---

learn (learn somebody)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*She is learning him how to speak English.\*

In English, you cannot \*learn somebody\*. If you give somebody new knowledge or skills, then you **teach somebody**.

**She is teaching him** how to speak English.

If you acquire knowledge or skills from another person, then you **learn from somebody**.

**He is learning** English **from** her.

---

like (the same like)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*He looks the same like his father.\*

In many comparative sentences, we use the word **like**:

He looks **like** me.

She plays tennis **like** a professional.

However, after **the same**, we say **as**:

He looks **the same as** his father.

---

look/watch

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Watch the camera.\*

In English, we normally use the verb **watch** when an object is moving. For example, we can **watch children playing** or **watch television**. When the object is not moving, we use **look at**:



**Look at** the camera.

---

May I ask ....?

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*May I ask you a question?\*

In English, both **may** and **can** be used to ask for permission, but **may** is generally used in more formal contexts. In everyday speech, we prefer to use **Can I ...?**

**Can I** ask you a question?

---

meet something

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I met this website in Google.\*

In English it is more natural to use the verb **come across** when we talk about chance meetings (and usually about things).



I **came across** this website in Google.

When we talk about people, we usually say **meet somebody**:

I **met my girlfriend** in Rome.

---

Modal verbs + infinitive

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I can to dance.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*You should to come.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 3: \*I must to go now.\*

**Modal verbs** such are normally followed by an infinitive without 'to':

**I can dance.**

**You should come.**

**I must go** now.

---

most of people

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Most of people eat three times a day.\*

In English we say **most + plural noun** (without 'of') when we are talking in general:

**Most people** eat three times a day.

When we are talking about a specific group of people or things, we say **most of the ...**

**Most of the people** in this building own cars.

**Most of my friends** are nice.

Note that in English, **most** requires a verb in the plural:

**Most of** Tarantino's films **are** interesting.

---

neither

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*Neither my father, neither my mother has a smartphone.\*

In English, we do not repeat the word **neither**. We say **neither... nor**.

**Neither** my sister **nor** my brother has a car.

Similarly, we do not double the word **either**. We say **either...or**.

**Either** you know him, **or** you don't.

Take care not to use a double negative:

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*Neither my sister nor my brother doesn't have a car.\*

With a **neither...nor** sequence, the verb is positive, not negative:

Neither my sister nor my brother **has** a car

---

nervous

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I always get nervous when there is traffic.\*

Many languages use a word that sounds like **nervous**, but in English it actually translates as 'angry', 'annoyed' or 'irritated':

I always get **angry** when there is traffic.

In English, **nervous** means that you are not relaxed because you are worried about something that is going to happen in the future, and you don't know what will happen.



I always get **nervous** before exams.



---

no/not

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: Do you like this soup? \*Not.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: Is it going to rain tonight? \*I hope no.\*

In English, **no** and **not** have similar meanings, but they are used in different ways. It is very easy to be confused about these words.

The word **no** is used as an exclamation:

A: Do you like this soup?

B: **No**.

The word **not** is used after verbs in a number of short replies:

A: Was the party good?

B: I'm afraid **not**.

A: Is it going to rain tomorrow?

B: I hope **not**.

A: Are you going out tonight?

B: I think **not**.

---

objects

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*They do not allow to park here.\*

A number of verbs that do not require a direct object in other languages require an object in English. This leads to typical errors such as the mistake above. The verb **allow**, for example, must be followed by a direct object in English:



They **do not allow you to park** here.

They **do not allow parking** here.

The following verbs must also be followed by a direct object:

**discuss          enable          forbid          like          dislike          permit**

We **discussed the problem** all afternoon.

This tool **enables you** to send text messages from your computer.

The new law **forbids people** to smoke in public places.

---

occur (It occurred that ...)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*It occurred that he was on holiday.\*

In English, it is unnatural to use the verb **occur** in this way. When we want to say that we found out about a particular situation, it is more common in everyday spoken English to use **It turned out that ...**

**It turned out that** he was on holiday.

The verb **occur** is normally used in the following way:

Mistakes **occur** all the time.

The event **occurred** at 5pm.

However, the verb **happen** is more common in spoken English:

Mistakes **happen** all the time.

---

on the contrary

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*On the contrary to John, I like football.\*

**On the contrary** may feel similar to an expression your language, but in fact it means something else in English and it can never precede the preposition 'to'. The above sentence in correct English is:

**Unlike John**, I like football.

**In contrast to John**, I like football. (formal)

When we want to contradict what someone else has said or clarify why something isn't true, then we can say **on the contrary**:

A: You won't like this film.

B: **On the contrary**, I think I'll love it.

I'm not against smoking. **On the contrary**, I think people should have freedom of choice.

---

opposite to ...

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Opposite to John, I like football.\*

When we want to say that our opinion is the opposite of somebody else's opinion, we usually say **Unlike ...** or **In contrast to ...**

**Unlike John**, I like football.

**In contrast to John**, I like football. (*formal*)

Native speakers use the expressions **the opposite to** and **the opposite of** in the following types of sentence:

It's just **the opposite to** what I meant.

'Small' is **the opposite of** 'big'.

---

opened

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Is the museum opened today?\*

In English, the past participle (third form) of 'open' refers only to the *action* of opening something:

A new theatre **was opened** in my town today.

When we refer to the *state* of not being closed, we say **open**:

**Is** the museum **open** today?

---

opinion (a good opinion)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*The company has a very good opinion.\*

In English, the word **opinion** refers to somebody's point of view, for example:

John **has a good opinion of** his boss.

**In my opinion**, the film was awful.

However, when we talk about the general opinions that people have about a person or group, we often use the word **reputation**:

The company **has a very good reputation**.

---

out of the question

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*It's out of the question that German cars are more reliable than French cars \*

The expression **out of the question** is used in the wrong context here. If we want to say that something is so true and therefore nobody can disagree with it, we say **It is indisputable that...**

**It is indisputable that** German cars are more reliable than French cars.

**Out of the question** is used to strongly reject a suggestion or request.



A: Can I drive?

B: **Out of the question.** You've had too much to drink.

---

phone/telephone (get a phone)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I got a telephone from my boss.\*

In English, **phone** or **telephone** can only refer to the device used for making calls, or in expressions such as **on the telephone**, **by phone**, **telephone network**, etc.

If somebody calls you, you can say:

<b>I got/ received</b>	<b>a call a phone call a telephone call</b>	<b>from somebody</b>
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please

TYPICAL MISTAKE:

A: Could you pass the salt? B: \*Please.\*

In many languages, the word for 'please' can be used in different ways, for example when giving something to someone. In English, however, you must use another expression, such as **Here you are**, **Here you go** or **Sure**:



A: Can you pass me the pen?

B: **Here you are.**

---

politics/politician/political/policy

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*My uncle is a politic.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*The president proposed an unpopular politic.\*

Take care when using words connected with politics:

**politician** (noun, person)

**politics** (noun, topic or area of work or study)

**political** (adjective)

**policy** (= a plan of action)

My uncle is a **politician**.

I'm not very interested in **politics**.

He has **political** ambitions.

The president proposed an unpopular **policy**.

---

## possibility/opportunity/chance

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*In Canada, I will have many possibilities.\*

The words **possibility** and **chance** refer to that fact that something might exist or happen but is not certain.

There is a **possibility** that it will rain tonight.

There is a **chance** that it will rain tonight.

But if you want to say that there will be a chance that something will improve in your life, use the word **opportunity**:

In Canada, I will have many **opportunities**.

---

## practise sport

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Do you practise any sports?\*

In English, the verb **practise** (American English: **practice**) means to train in order to improve your skill at something.

If you want to be a successful musician, you must **practise** every day.

With the noun 'sport', we usually use the verb **do**:



Do you **do** any **sports**?



---

## prepositional errors

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I'll phone to you tomorrow.\*

In English, there is no preposition after the verbs **call**, **phone** and **ring**:

**I'll call you** tomorrow.

**I'll phone you** tomorrow.

**I'll ring you** tomorrow. (*British English*)

The following common English verbs are normally followed by a direct object without a preposition:

**answer somebody** (NOT \*answer to somebody\*)

**contact somebody** (NOT \*contact with somebody\*)

**discuss something** (NOT \*discuss about something\*)

**divorce somebody** (NOT \*divorce with somebody\*)

**meet somebody** (NOT \*meet with somebody\*)

Some verbs require a preposition in English:

**I apologised to him.** (NOT \*I apologised him\*)

**I explained to him that ...** (NOT \*I explained him that ...\*)

**I said to him that ...** (NOT \*I said him that ...\*)

Finally, be careful to use the correct preposition in a number of common English phrases:

**except for** (NOT \*except of\*)

**in the photo** (NOT \*on the photo\*)

**it depends on** (NOT \*it depends of\*)

**on Monday** (NOT \*in Monday\*)

**on the Internet** (NOT \*in the Internet\*)

**the reason for** (NOT \*the reason of\*)

---

## Present continuous mistakes

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I'm going to school every day.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*I'm working as a doctor.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 3: \*I'm living in Barcelona.\*

We use the present continuous (**I'm going**) to talk about a present activity in progress. This means an activity that is taking place now (**you are reading** this book at the moment) or around the present time (**you are learning** English today).

When we talk about a regular or long-term activity or situation in the present, we use the present simple:

I **go** to school every day.

I **work** as a doctor.

I **live** in Barcelona.

However, we can use the present continuous if we are talking about a temporary activity in the present:

I'm a student in Spain. **I'm living** in Barcelona. (for a temporary period e.g. 1 year)

---

## problem/trouble with

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I had a problem with finding your office.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*I had trouble with finding your office.\*

The words **problem** and **trouble** are usually used with the preposition 'with':

I have a **problem with** you.

However, when we use **problem** or **trouble** followed by a verb in the gerund (-ing) form, we do not say 'with':

I had a **problem finding** your office.

I had **trouble finding** your office.

---

propose/suggest

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I propose we go shopping.\*

In English, the verb **propose** is usually used in formal contexts, for example making a suggestion at a business meeting. In informal contexts, it is usually more natural to use the verb **suggest**:

I **suggest** we go shopping.

In informal situations, the following ways of making suggestions are even more natural:

**Let's go** shopping.

**Why don't we** go shopping?

**How about** doing some shopping?

---

quarter

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I waited for Daniel for a quarter.\*

In English, we say **a quarter of** something:

I waited for Mark for **a quarter of** an hour.

We also say **a quarter past** and **a quarter to** when talking about the time:

It's **a quarter to** three (2:45)

We usually only say **a quarter** (without a following preposition) when we refer to a number, for example:

3  $\frac{1}{4}$  = three and **a quarter**

---

quite

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*There were quite many people at the party.\*

In English, we do not use **quite** before **many**. We can only say **quite a lot of** or **quite a few**:



There were **quite a lot of** people at the party.

There were **quite a few** people at the party.

---

rather

TYPICAL MISTAKE: Do you like the song? \*Rather no.\*

This is a typical mistake among speakers of Slavic languages, for example Polish. The correct English expression is:

**Not really.**

Similarly, in English we do not say \*rather yes\*. Instead, we say:

**On the whole, yes.**

**Generally (speaking), yes.**

A: Do you like cats?

B: **On the whole, yes.**

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*George isn't hard-working. Rather he is extremely lazy.\*

In natural English, we would say **actually** or **in fact**:

George isn't very hard-working. **In fact**, he's extremely lazy.

---

realise/realize

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*His plan was difficult to realise.\*

In English, when we talk about a plan or project, we do not normally use the verb **realise** (American English: **realize**). The following verbs and phrases are possible:

**carry out**  
**put into effect**  
**implement**  
**execute**

**His plan** was difficult **to carry out**.

However, when we talk about achieving a hope, desire or ambition, we can say:

He finally **realised his ambition**.

---

recommend/suggest/propose somebody to

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I recommend you to visit this museum.\*

In natural English, it is not natural to say **recommend** (or **suggest**) someone to do something in this context. Instead, we say:

**recommend/suggest (that) somebody do something**  
**recommend/suggest doing something**

**I recommend you visit** the museum.

**I recommend visiting** the museum.

**I suggest you visit** the museum.

**I suggest visiting** the museum.

However, if you are recommending somebody for a position or role, we can use the structure **recommend/propose somebody to + verb**:

**I recommend Mr. Green to be** our new manager.

**I propose Sarah to play** the role of Alice in Wonderland.

---

remember/remind

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Remind to call me.\*

In English, the verb 'remind' must be followed by an object. We say:

**remind somebody that...**

**remind somebody of somebody/something**

**remind somebody to do something**

**remind somebody about something**

The verb **remember**, however, can be used without an object. Therefore, we say:

**Remember to call** me.

---

repeat

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I have to repeat a lot of material.\*

We do not use the verb **repeat** to mean 'study something again'.

We use other verbs such as **review**, **revise** (*British English*) or **go over**:

I have to **review** a lot of material.

In the context of preparing for an exam or test, we can also say:  
I have to **do a lot of revision**.

---

resign

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I had to resign from the course\*

In English, the verb **resign** is usually only connected with work:

**I resigned from** my job.

In the context of an educational course, we say:

**withdraw from** a course

**quit** a course (*more informal*)

I had to **withdraw from** the course.

The phrasal verb **drop out** can also be used in the context of leaving school, college etc. without finishing one's studies:

He **dropped out of** university.

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*I resigned from going to Greece.\*

If we want to express a decision not to do something, we cannot use **resign**. Instead, we can say:

**I decided not to go** to Greece.

---

say/tell

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*She told that she won't come\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*Can you say me what happened?\*



Confusing **say** and **tell** is a big problem for many learners of English.

However, the difference in structure is quite simple:

You can **tell somebody something**.

You can **say something (to somebody)**.



She **told me** that she won't come

Can you **say** what happened?

TYPICAL MISTAKE 3: \*We have to say about this picture\*

In English, we cannot 'say about' something. We can only **tell somebody about** something, **talk about** something or **speak about** something.

We have to **talk about** this picture.

I'm going to **tell you about** this picture.

---

since/for

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I've been living here since five years\*

The word **since**, when used with a **perfect tense**, means from a particular time in the past until a later past time or until now. The

preposition **for** refers to the length of a period of time. Five years is a period of time, not a particular point in time, so we say:

I've been living here **for five years**.

If this year is 2015, then we could also say:

I've been living here **since 2010**.

---

SO

TYPICAL MISTAKE:

A: How was your day?

B: \*So, it was a very long day. Firstly, I ...\*

In English, we don't use **so** as a conversation filler to give us time to think. We usually say something like **well, hmm, basically**.

**Well**, it was a very long day. Firstly, I ...

---

something like this/that

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Can I say something like that in English: 'to be bald'?\*

The expressions **something like this** and **something like that** are often confusing for learners. We normally use **that** to refer to what we said before and **this** to refer to what we will say:

Can I say **something like this** in English: 'to be bald'?  
'To be bald'. Can I say **something like that**?

However, if the expression is quite short, it is more natural to say:

### **Can I say 'to be bald' in English?**

---

spend time on

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I spend all of my free time on studying.\*

In English, the expression **spend time on** is only used before nouns. When followed by a verb in the -ing form, the preposition 'on' is omitted:

**spend/money time on something**

**spend time/money doing something**



I **spend** all of my free time **studying**.

---

studies/study

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I completed my study two years ago.\*

In English, we refer to higher education as **studies**, not 'study':

I completed **my studies** two years ago.

The noun **study** is actually connected with research:

A recent **study** has shown that more than 50% of smartphone users are afraid to leave home without their mobile devices.

---

suppose

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I'm not sure but I suppose he's an actor.\*

It is not natural to use the verb **suppose** in the above context. It would be more correct to use **imagine** or **guess**:

I'm not sure but **I imagine** he's a doctor.

In natural English, **suppose** is usually used when we want to give the impression of indifference or give a weak sign of agreement:

**I suppose** you're right. But I'll still need to check your facts.

---

take care of/about

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I have to take care about my child.\*

In English, the word **care** is used in three common expressions:

**take care of somebody/something**

**care about somebody/something**

**care for somebody/something**

We use **take care of** and **care for** (also **look after**) to say that we are responsible for and we protect someone or something:

I have to **take care of** my child.

I have to **care for** my child.

We can also use **care for something** when offering someone something. However, this is quite formal:

**Would you care for** some more cake?

We say **care about** when we feel that something is important to us and worth worrying about:

People need to **care about** the environment more.

---

take/pass an exam

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I'm passing the IELTS exam in June.\*

In English, **pass an exam** means to take an exam and receive a positive grade or mark (for example, above 50%).

If you simple want to state your exam date, you say:

**I'm taking** the IELTS **exam** in June.

We can also use the verb **sit**, which is slightly more formal:

**I'm sitting** the IELTS **exam** in June.

---

there is/it is

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*There is hot in this room.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*In my town, is a big church.\*

In English, we use **it is** when we describe the state of something with an adjective (e.g. 'hot'), and **there is** when we want to say that someone or something exists. Therefore, we say:

**It is** hot in this room.

In my town, **there is** a big church.

We never use a verb without a subject. In other words, we can never use 'is' on its own. We must use a subject, for example 'it is', 'she is', etc.

---

this/it

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Is it yours?\*

In natural English, we say **this** (or **that**, **these**, **those**) to refer or point to an object (or objects) for the first time. Having identified the object(s), we can use the pronoun **it** (or **they**).

A: Is **that** yours?

B: No, I think **it** belongs to Mike.

---

travel/trip/journey

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I had a very good travel.\*

In English, the word **travel** refers to travelling in a general sense:

**Travel** broadens the mind.

Paul is a **travel** agent.

When we want to talk about travelling to a certain place and coming back again, we usually say **trip**:



I had a very good **trip**.

We can also use **journey** when we talk about travelling from one place to another:

The **journey** to Paris took five hours.

---

welcome

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Welcome in Singapore!\*

In correct English, we say **welcome to**:

**Welcome to** Singapore.

There is one exception:

**Welcome home!** (NOT \*Welcome to home!\*)

---

We'll see us

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*We'll see us next week.\*

This is a very common mistake among intermediate learners, caused by mistranslating a reflexive verb into English. In correct English, we say:

We'll **see each other** next week.

---

We went with

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*We went with Mary to the concert.\*

This sentence is correct if you are a group of people and Mary is a additional person outside the group. However, in the case of two people (for example, the speaker and Mary), we say:

**I went** to the concert **with** Mary.

---

what (relative pronoun)

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*John smokes 30 cigarettes a day, what is unhealthy.\*

In English, we cannot use **what** in relative clauses like the sentence above. We normally use **which**:

John smokes 30 cigarettes a day, **which** is unhealthy.



We use **what** in the following types of sentences:

I don't know **what to do**.

**What is unhealthy** is smoking 30 cigarettes a day.

---

What do you think about it?

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*Let's go to a restaurant tonight. What do you think about it?\*

In natural English, when we ask someone for their opinion on a particular subject, we do not say 'What do you think about 'it'?' but rather **What do you think?**

Let's go to a restaurant tonight. **What do you think?**

---

which/who/that

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*This is the man which taught me how to play tennis.\*

In English, we usually say **who** (or **that**) when referring to people:

This is the man **who** taught me how to play tennis.

This is the man **that** taught me how to play tennis.

We use **which** (or **that**) when we talk about things:

The smartphone **which** I bought is really useful.

The smartphone **that** I bought is really useful.

In natural English, we also tend to leave out the relative pronoun if the subject of the relative clause is the different to that of the main clause:

**The smartphone I bought** is really useful.

(the subject of the relative clause is 'I'; the subject of the main clause is 'the smartphone'.)

In *attributive clauses*, which provide additional information about something and are separated by commas, we cannot use that. We can only use **which**:

Smartphones, **which** have become very popular, are extremely useful.

---

which/whose

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I've never met the boy which name is Jack.\*

When we talk about something 'belonging to' somebody, we cannot use the relative pronoun **which**. Instead, we use **whose**.  
I've never met the boy **whose** name is Jack.

We use **which** to give additional information about something:

The smartphone **which I bought** is really useful.

---

whole/whole of

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*I've lived in Russia the whole my life.\*

In English, if the word **whole** is followed by pronoun + noun (e.g. 'my life'), we say **the whole of**:

I've lived in Russia **the whole of** my life.

We can also say: I've lived in Russia **my whole life**.

---

workplaces

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*This company wants to create 100 new workplaces.\*

To a native speaker, this sentence means that the company wants to build 100 new offices, factories or other physical places of work. However, many learners of English really mean to say:

This company wants to create 100 **new jobs**.

---

worth

TYPICAL MISTAKE: \*The book is worth to read.\*

In English, if the verb worth is followed by a verb, we say **worth + -ing**:



The book is **worth reading**.

---

year

TYPICAL MISTAKE 1: \*I was born in the year 1990.\*

TYPICAL MISTAKE 2: \*I was born in 1990 year.\*

In everyday spoken English, we usually state years without the word **year**:

I was born **in 1990**.

When referring to the first year of this century, however, it is common to say:

I came to Canada **in the year 2000**.

With other years, we use the phrase **in the year ...** (e.g. **in the year 1990**) is used in slightly more formal contexts.

The company was established **in the year 1961**.