



IIT Madras
ONLINE DEGREE

COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH - PART 1

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- In earlier units of this module, we have seen some aspects of English grammar.
- In this unit, we will look at some instances of some errors frequently made by students learning English; we will correct these mistakes, see why these mistakes occurred and ensure that they do not recur.

- The following, for example, is ungrammatical.

We got some informations.

So, you can say:

- a. I want some information
- b. I can give some information

information

noun [U]

UK  / ˌɪn.fəˈmeɪ.ʃən/ US  / ˌɪn.fəˈmeɪ.ʃən/

(informal **info**)



A2

facts about a situation, person, event, etc.:

- *Do you have any information **about/on** train times?*
- *I read an interesting **bit/piece** of information in the newspaper.*
- ***For further** information (= if you want to know more), please contact your local library.*
- [+ that] *We have reliable information **that** a strike is planned next month.*

– **Thesaurus: synonyms, antonyms, and examples**

information

- Some nouns have no plural; you use them only in the singular number as given in the dictionary.
- So, for instance, words like **equipment, meat, oil, rice, wheat, milk, information, fish, furniture** do not have a singular or plural form.
- They are uncountable, and are shown in the dictionary with a “U”. So, for instance, for “milk”, the dictionary cites milk as follows: “Milk (Noun) U”, meaning uncountable.

- Uncountable nouns do not take a/an, neither do they have a plural form. When milk is used as a noun, you cannot say “milk+s”.

You cannot, for instance say,

**I like cow and buffalo milks.*

You can only say

“I like both cow milk and buffalo milk.”

ACTIVITY 1

Which of the following words can go with an article “a/an”, or can be made plural?

apple, bread, call, egg, meat, petrol, rice,
school, sugar, tea, tiger, umbrella, water,
wheat, year, zebra.

ANSWERS

| | A/An | Plurals |
|----------|-------------|----------------|
| Apple | An apple | Apples |
| Call | A call | Calls |
| Egg | An egg | Eggs |
| School | A school | Schools |
| Tiger | A tiger | Tigers |
| Umbrella | An umbrella | Umbrellas |
| Year | A year | Years |
| Zebra | A zebra | Zebras |

ANSWERS

| Words with no plural form/ a or an | |
|---|--------|
| | Bread |
| | Petrol |
| | Rice |
| | Sugar |
| | Tea |
| | Water |
| | Wheat |
| | Meat |

- You can ask why “bread” cannot be counted. In Hindi, it is a countable noun. These things are not always logical, nor are they alike in all languages.
- We must learn that some nouns cannot be used in English with an “a/an” or “-s/es”.

How do you then talk about small and large quantities of them?

So, for instance, you can say as follows:

- some information,
- a little knowledge,
- a news item / all the news
- a loaf/slice/morsel of bread,
- a head of fish,
- a portion of meat,
- a gallon of petrol,
- a grain of rice/wheat,
- a litre of water

ACTIVITY 2

You can look up your dictionary and

- a. Find at least a dozen other nouns that are uncountable, and, therefore, they do not take “a/an” or “s/es”.
- b. You can also note how their small or large quantities are mentioned.

- Some verbs, such as the following, are not used in progressive mode, with + ing.

appear, feel, have, look, seem, stand, etc.

- You can use this verb in the simple present or past tense form, but not in the progressive present or past tense form, as indicated below.

| Cannot say | Can say |
|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| You are appearing to be tired. | You appear to be tired. |
| I am feeling all right. | I feel all right. |
| I am having a car/meeting case. | I have a car/meeting already. |
| You are looking angry. | You look angry. |
| It is seeming correct. | It seems correct. |
| A policemen is standing at the post. | A policemen stands at the post. |

- But “have” in the sense of “eat” can be used in the progressive mode. You can, for instance say, “I am having breakfast”.
- Similarly, in the sense of “contest”, “stand” can be used in the progressive mode. You can say, “Gopal is standing for election to the parliament”.
- “Feel” can also be used in the progressive mode, when a doctor, for instance, says, “I am feeling the patient’s pulse”.

ACTIVITY 3

Check your dictionary and make a list of verbs that cannot be used in the progressive mode. You can also check for exceptions. Are there any specific situations when these verbs can be used with an +ing?

- Similarly, some verbs, such as the following, for example, have the same form in all tenses.

cast, cost, cut, put

- You can use these verbs only in the given form in all situations, because they have no other form. So you can say:

Votes have been cast, result is awaited.

- But you cannot say,

**Votes have been casted, result is awaited.*

ACTIVITY 4

- Check with a dictionary if there are other verbs that are used in the same form in all tenses.
- The best thing to do, therefore, is to pay some attention to the form of words in use when reading or listening to anything.
- In every language only a few words have exceptional forms and they are used frequently.

Thank You!