

Common writing mistakes – part 2

UK vs. US Spelling

British and American spellings are different in many ways. It doesn't really matter which spelling you use while writing. However, you have to remain consistent throughout your writing. So for example, if you intend to use American spelling, stick to it. Do not use American spellings for some words and British spellings for other words.

Avoid excessively long sentences

In a bid to impress the examiner, students often try to write excessively long sentences that contain numerous main and subordinate clauses. Unfortunately, this is not a good practice. When your sentences are too long, your chances of making mistakes are pretty high. This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to write only simple sentences. Actually, that is not recommended either. If all of your sentences are of the same length, they will make your text boring. Therefore, it is always a good idea to strike a balance between simple and complex sentences. Use them both in your writing, but make sure that your complex sentences are of a manageable length. Although there are no hard and fast rules regarding the length of a sentence, it is always a good idea to limit the number of subordinate clauses to two or three. And at the same time, do not use more than two main clauses in a sentence. By using different sentence patterns, you can add variety and sophistication to your writing.

Bottom-line: Do not use too many conjunctions in a sentence. If you feel that your sentences are too long, re-read them to see if they can be broken up. Your readers will also like shorter

sentences because they are easier to understand.

Avoid excessively long paragraphs

Pay attention to the size of your paragraphs. They should be neither too long, nor too short. If you are writing an essay, you can try paragraphs of different lengths. For example, you can write a short paragraph after a long one or vice-versa. This will add variety. Avoid excessively long paragraphs at any cost. For one thing, they will immediately put off the reader. Studies have proved that people are more likely to read shorter pieces of text. They wouldn't mind

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reading a long essay or document if it is neatly broken into paragraphs of reasonable length.

But if your paragraphs are too long, few people will bother to read in the first place.

In general, you can include three to five paragraphs on an A4 paper. Also make sure that only one main idea or topic is discussed in each paragraph.

General writing tips for TOEFL and IELTS

While writing your TOEFL or IELTS essay, avoid using unfamiliar vocabulary. In a bid to impress the examiner with complex vocabulary, many students commit this mistake.

Instead use the vocabulary you would normally use. During the preparation stage itself try to incorporate new words into your writing. Make it a habit so that you learn their correct usage.

You can then use these words while writing your TOEFL essays. However, avoid the temptation to use unfamiliar words on the actual TOEFL test. Remember that to add variety and sophistication to your writing you don't have to use long, obscure words. In fact, most

ideas can be expressed using more common words. You must still make a conscious effort to use precise vocabulary. For example, some English words are used to express a large number of ideas. A common example is the word 'get'. It can be used to express ideas such as 'acquire', 'catch', 'earn', 'coax', 'become', 'score' and so on.

While writing your TOEFL essay, try to use words that express the idea more precisely.

Correct: While holidaying in London, Susie acquired a strong British accent.

Incorrect: While holidaying in London, Susie got a strong British accent.

If you use so many general words, the examiner will not be too happy with your essay.

Use familiar and natural sentence structures

While evaluating your essay, the examiner will pay close attention to your grammatical range and accuracy. That means you will not get a good score if you only write short and simple sentences of the same pattern. If you repeat the same sentence patterns, it will make your writing boring. To avoid this try to use different sentence structures. Also write sentences of various lengths. For example, by writing a long sentence after one or two short sentences you can add variety to your writing. However, you must not use different sentence structures just for the sake of adding variety. Avoid unfamiliar sentence patterns because you are more likely to make grammar mistakes while writing them. Also avoid extremely long sentences. Instead, keep your sentences relatively short.

TOEFL essay writing tips

There are two tasks in the TOEFL Writing section. The first writing task is an integrated task:

you will have to listen to a lecture and read a passage. You must then write a summary of both passages.

The second writing task is an independent essay. You have to write an essay of at least 300 words on a given topic. You will have to write on the topic you are given. No choice is available. TOEFL iBT is a computerized test. You have to type both essays on a computer. If you do not know typewriting well, you must practice on a keyboard before your test.

You can cut, copy and paste as you type your essays, but remember that the computer will not check your spelling or grammar. That means you have to do your homework. Learn the spellings of all words you tend to misspell.

General writing strategies

The TOEFL writing section has two tasks. It takes about 50 minutes. Here are a few tips for success on the Writing section.

Organize your thoughts first

Do not start writing as soon the section begins. Instead, use one or two minutes for organizing your ideas. This is very important, because few people are capable of organizing their thoughts in their mind as they write. As a result they will have to edit more.

By organizing your ideas in the beginning itself, you will get an outline for your essay. Once you have got the outline ready, you only need to develop the ideas into paragraphs.

However, do not spend more than 2 or 3 minutes on an outline. Remember that you will not get any marks for the outline.

Use familiar vocabulary

Some students try to impress the examiner with complex vocabulary. You must not try this

TOEFL essay writing tips

stunt if you are not familiar with these words. Of course, you have to use academic words in your essay. However, they needn't necessarily be obscure.

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