

The most common ESL error types

1. <http://www.englishclub.com/grammar/adjectives-determiners-the-a-an.htm>
2. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_\(grammar\)#Definite_article](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Article_(grammar)#Definite_article)
3. <http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/determiners/determiners.htm>
4. http://college.cengage.com/devenglish/fawcett/evergreen/7e/students/esl_errors.html
5. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determiner_\(linguistics\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Determiner_(linguistics))
6. <http://ezinearticles.com/?Common-Errors-With-Prepositions&id=1081907>
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_prepositions
8. <http://ezinearticles.com/?Common-ESL-Errors&id=1809651>
9. <http://www.ego4u.com/en/cram-up/grammar/tenses>
10. <http://www.yourdictionary.com/grammar-rules/5-most-common.html>
11. http://www.englishpage.com/gerunds/gerund_list.htm
12. http://www.englishpage.com/gerunds/infinitive_list.htm
13. <http://www.ling.ohio-state.edu/icall/calico08/gamon-et-al.pdf>

1. Noun Related Errors

Incorrect or Missing Determiners

An article error should be identified when:

- a) an incorrect article is used (*a/an* instead of *the* or vice versa);
- b) an article is missing, but it is required;
- c) an unnecessary article appears.

Quick review: Articles *a* and *an* are used in front of nonspecific, singular count nouns (*a movie, a cat*). An article *the* is used in front of specific singular and plural nouns (*the movie, the cats*). Many uncountable nouns require no article at all *honesty, news etc.*

- a) Incorrect article

*Kyiv is *a/the capital of Ukraine.*

*I ordered *the/a cup of tea.*

Mary found the dress that she lost.

b) Missing article

*I had */a wonderful day.*
*There are six apples in */the basket.*
*John is looking in */the window now.*

c) Unnecessary article

**A/ football is very popular in Europe.*
**The/ breakfast was delicious.*
*Children like to be outside in *the/ spring.*

Other determiners including *this/that, these/those, each/every, either/neither, some/any, much/many/few/little/several/most, enough etc.* should be corrected if they used incorrectly.

Quick review of other determiners in English [3], [5]:

- Demonstratives:
this/that is used with singular count nouns (*this dog*), non-count nouns (*that coffee*);
these/those is used with plural count nouns (*these dogs, those people*).
- Distributive determiners:
each/every is used with single count nouns (*each bottle, every person*).
- Disjunctive determiners:
either/neither is used with singular count nouns (*either hat is fine*).
- Existential determiners:
some/any is used with singular and plural count nouns, noncount nouns (*some car, any new houses*).
- Degree determiners:
e.g., much is used with noncount nouns (*much wine, much furniture*);
e.g., enough is used with plural count nouns (*enough troubles*), noncount nouns (*enough furniture*).

Noun Numbers

Errors involving plural/singular confusion of a noun should be identified as shown in example sentences below:

*Vienna is one of the most romantic *city/cities in the world.*
*Learning English takes a *efforts/effort.*
*Research requires *many knowledge/much knowledge.*

Noun of Noun/Word Order

Errors involving incorrect word order in noun phrases must be identified as shown in example sentences below:

**Feedback of customers/customer feedback is vital to making a business work.*
*Marry is *a student of university/a university student.*

Pronoun Errors

Pronouns must agree in number with the noun (the antecedent) to which they refer *e.g.*, *I - me/my*, *you - yours*, *he - him/his*, *she - her*, *we - our/us*, *they - their/them*.

*Everybody must submit *their/his own code.*

*John said that *himself/he played basketball.*

*Mary ensured *myself/me that I can rely on *herself/her.*

2. Preposition Related Errors

Prepositions like [7] *about, at, by, down, for, from, in, into, of, off, on, onto, out, over, to, up, upon, with, within, etc.* are difficult ESL writers as can be seen from example sentences below. In this step you should correct any prepositions that are used incorrectly.

*We will go to the mountains *on/in March.*

*Students did not pay much attention *on/to the speaker.*

*Professor described the homework *to/for students.*

Quick review of prepositions in English [6]:

- *by, with*

by is used to refer to the doer of an action *e.g.*, *He was killed by his servant*;

with is used to refer to the instrument with which the action is done *e.g.*, *He was killed with an axe.*

- *beside vs. besides*

beside means “by the side of” *e.g.*, *The house was beside the river*;

besides means “in addition to” *e.g.*, *He plays tennis besides basketball and football.*

- *since, for*

since refers to the starting point of an action and means “from a particular point of time in the past” *e.g.*, *He has been absent since last Monday*;

for is used to talk about duration and refers to a period of time *e.g.*, *I have been waiting here for two hours.*

- *between vs. among*

between is used to say that somebody or something is between two or more clearly separate objects *e.g.*, *You have to choose between these two options*;

among is used with more than two people or things *e.g.*, *The British were able to conquer India because the Indian princes quarreled among themselves.*

- *at, in*

in is generally used to refer to large places - countries, districts, large cities *etc.* *e.g.*, *My brother lives at Mumbai*;

at is generally used to refer to small and unimportant places like villages, small towns *etc.* *e.g.*, *We shall meet them at the club this evening.*

- *on, in, at and by (time)*

while speaking about time *at* indicates an exact point of time, *on* a more general point of time and *in* a period of time *e.g.*, *We set out at dawn. I was born on May 26. The postman brought this letter in the morning.*

by is used to show the latest time at which an action will be finished *e.g.*, *I shall be leaving by 6 o' clock.*

- *on, upon*

on is generally used to talk about things at rest *e.g.*, *He sat on a chair;*

upon to talk about things in motion *e.g.*, *He jumped upon his horse.*

- *in, within (time)*

in means at the end of a certain period *e.g.*, *The spacecraft will reach the moon in three days;*

within means before the end of a certain period *e.g.*, *The spacecraft will reach the moon within three days.*

3. Verb Related Errors

Subject-Verb Agreement

Every sentence must have subjects and verbs that agree in number. If the subject is singular, the verb must be singular. If the subject is plural, the verb must be plural as well.

*One of my dreams *are/is to build something that the whole world can admire.*

*I *goes/go to school every day.*

*She *watch/watches TV every evening.*

Wrong Verb Tense

Verbs must reflect the correct tense such as:

- Present Simple: S + V/Vs, Do/Does S + V? Signal words: every day, usually, never, at first, then, after, in the morning, evening, often.
- Present Continuous: to be + Ving, are + we/you/they + Ving?, is + he/she/it + Ving? am + I + Ving? Signal words: now, at the moment.
- Present Perfect: S + have/has + Ved/3, Have + S + Ved/3? Signal words: twice, several times, lately, recently, yet, already, never, just, ever.
- Present Perfect Continuous: I/we/you/they + have been + Ving, He/she/it + has been + Ving Signal words: since, for.
- Past Simple: S + Ved/2, did + S + V1? Signal words: yesterday, last year/month/week.
- Past Continuous: S + was/were + Ving, was/were + S + Ving? Signal words: at, when, while, at 2 o'clock.

- Past Perfect: S + had + Ved/3, had + S + Ved/3? Signal words: by, before.
- Past Perfect Continuous: S + had been + Ving.
- Future Simple: S+will+V, will +S+V? Signal words: tomorrow, next week, next month, often , every day, soon.
- Future Continuous: S + will be + Ving, will + S + be + Ving? Signal words: at, when, while, tomorrow.
- Future Perfect: S + will have + Ved/3, Will + S + have + Ved/3? Signal words: by, before, tomorrow.
- Future Perfect Continuous: S + will have been + Ving, He/she/it + has been + Ving.

Example sentences where tense error should be corrected:

*Yesterday, John *runs/run two miles.*

*The customers *wait/have waited here for several hours.*

*Tomorrow, Tom *buys/will buy a laptop.*

Wrong Verb Form

Wrong verb form error should be identified and corrected when an incorrect verb form is used *e.g.*, -ed ending added to irregular verb, an incorrect verb form is used for the particular tense as shown in example sentences below:

*The girl *swimmed/swam by herself.*

*John *cutted/cut his finger.*

*My friends just *went/have gone home.*

There is a list of verbs that must be followed by the infinitive [11] or gerund [12]. The infinitive/gerund confusion error should be corrected if an incorrect form of verb is used as shown in example sentences below:

*I enjoy *to eat/eating chocolate very much.*

*I want *finishing/to finish the homework quickly.*

Other Errors

Wrong Word Form

If an incorrect form of the word is used *e.g.*, noun form is used instead of adjectival form, noun form is used instead of verb form, adjectival form is used instead of adverbial form *etc.* then it should be corrected as shown in example sentences below:

*I want to *success/succeed in life.*

*This is a *China/Chinese book.*

Adjective Related Errors

If you are using more than one adjective, they usually follow a specific order: 1) article, 2) judgment, 3) size, 4) shape, 5) age, 6) color, 7) nationality, and 8) material.

*He bought a *white new/new white bike.*

Sentence Fragment

A sentence fragment lacks a subject, a verb, or both. It cannot stand alone as a sentence.

*The dance troupe that visited our campus */was inspiring.*

*The film */was very interesting.*

Awkward Sentences in English

This error involves insertion, deletion, or replacement of a single word or a phrase which is more appropriate. Also, sentence may be too wordy or the information in the sentence may be repetitive.

*I *made my mind/decided to improve my writing skills.*

Corpora

- English Taiwan Learner Corpus - <http://www.iwillnow.org/>
- Cambridge Learner Corpus - www.cambridge.org/elt/corpus/learner_corpus2.htm
- Chinese Learners of English Corpus (CLEC)
- Chinese Learners of English in Hong Kong (HKUST)
- The International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE)
- Japanese EFL Learner Corpus (JEFLL) - <http://www.corpora.jp/~scn/information.html?page=top>
- Standard Speaking Test Corpus (SST) - www.alc.co.jp/edusys/refecorpus.htm
- Thai English Learner Corpus (TELC) - <http://iele.au.edu/corpus/>
- The Uppsala Student English Corpus (USE)
- The Polish Learner English Corpus
- Janus Pannonius University Learner Corpus (JPU)

Software

- Pearson - <http://www.pearsonkt.com/prodWTL.shtml>
- Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment - www.daedalus.com/downloads.asp
- Internet Writing Resource for the Innovative Teaching of English (iWRITE) - <http://iwrite.engl.iastate.edu> (need to write an email to obtain the link, volkerh@iastate.edu)
- CrossCheck - a grammar checker for second language writers of Swedish - <http://www.csc.kth.se/tcs/projects/xcheck/index-en.html>

- Ginger - http://www.gingersoftware.com/solutions/english_writing.html
- **ETS Tools:**
 Writing in English - http://store.ets.org/store/ets/en_US/pd/productID.202264000/categoryId.11281300
 ProofWriter - <https://proofwriter.ets.org/>

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