

Mistakes to Avoid in English

Peter Howard



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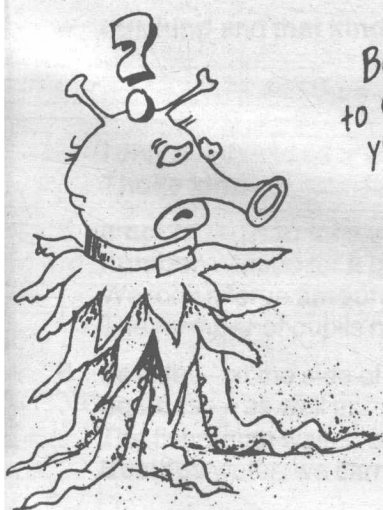
Foreword

This book has been compiled to provide examples of mistakes made when writing and speaking English. Tests and practice exercises can be done in a book or on paper. Your answers must be numbered and will consist of one or two words. Some sentences are required when testing punctuation. Answers are supplied at the back of the book.



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Before I take you
to our leader, I recommend
you brush up on your
correct English!



Mistakes to avoid in usage

- 1 **between** — used when two people are involved
among — used when more than two people are involved
 The apples were shared **between** Jack and Megan.
 She shared the chocolates **among** the four girls.
- 2 **it's** — the contraction of it is
its — shows possession. Never use an apostrophe for this possessive adjective
 The horse lost **its** bridle.
 I believe **it's** going to snow.
- 3 **farther** — relates to distance
further — means in addition
 I can swim **farther** than you.
 The judge had nothing **further** to say.
- 4 **this kind** and **that kind** — go together because "kind" is singular
these kinds and **those kinds** — go together because "kinds" is plural
 I only eat **this kind** of chocolate.
Those kinds of animals live in Africa.
- 5 **amount** — used for a volume that cannot be counted
number — used for a quantity that can be counted
 We took a large **amount** of food.
 The **number** of pupils has increased.
- 6 **beside** — at the side of
besides — as well as
 The fisherman waited **beside** the river.
Besides water, we carried some biscuits.

- 7 **past** — can be used as a noun, adjective, preposition or adverb

passed — is a verb

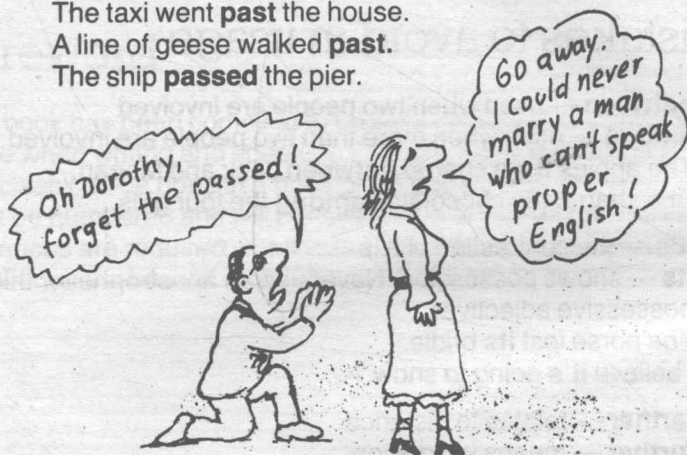
My grandmother lives in the **past**.

In **past** years there were few professional tennis players.

The taxi went **past** the house.

A line of geese walked **past**.

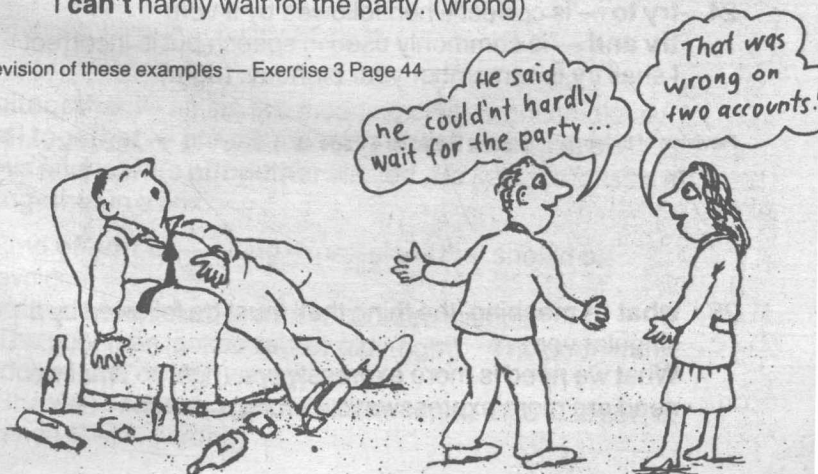
The ship **passed** the pier.



- 8 **reason** — followed by **that** (not because)
The reason was **that** I was lost. (right)
The reason was because I was lost. (wrong)
- 9 **all right** — this is correct
alright — this is a less acceptable spelling of "all right"
- 10 **comprise** — do not follow with **of**
Four countries **comprise** the United Kingdom. (right)
The guard will comprise of two armed men. (wrong)
- 11 **shall** — use **I** and **we** to express the future
will — use **you, he, she** and **they** to express the future
I **shall** be leaving tomorrow. We **shall** see you next week.
He **will** arrive in the morning. They **will** be visiting next year.
- 12 **must have** — never must of
I **must have** missed the bus. (right) I must of missed the bus. (wrong)

- 13 **stronger** — used when comparing two
strongest — used when comparing more than two
 Barry is the **stronger** of the two.
 Steven is the **strongest** of the three.
- 14 **fewer** — applied to numbers
less — applied to quantity
 We drank **less** milk this week than last.
 I used **fewer** eggs in my cake than she did.
- 15 **either ... or** and **neither ... nor** — Use these words as they are without mixing them
 Harold plays **neither** cricket **nor** football.
 Clare plays **either** tennis **or** squash.
- 16 **good** — Use only as an adjective
well — Use as an adjective or adverb
 She makes a **good** Christmas cake.
 I was not **well** yesterday.
 In the match Robert played **well**.
- 17 **all ready** — is correct when ready is an adjective or adverb
already — an adverb meaning before this time
 They are **all ready** to leave.
 They have arrived **already**.
- 18 **hardly** — Do not use with **can't**
 I **can hardly** wait for the party. (right)
 I **can't** hardly wait for the party. (wrong)

Revision of these examples — Exercise 3 Page 44



19 **either** and **neither** — take singular verbs

Neither of the sums **is** correct. (right) Neither of the boys are here. (wrong)

Either of the boys **was** available. (right) Either of the dresses were smart. (wrong)

20 **double negatives**

He didn't do anything. (right)

He didn't do nothing. (wrong)

I did not see anybody. (right)

I did not see nobody. (wrong)

She couldn't find it anywhere. (right)

She couldn't find it nowhere. (wrong)

He survived with scarcely a scratch. (right)

He survived without scarcely a scratch. (wrong)

21 **more** — used when comparing two persons or things

most — used when comparing more than two persons or things

She is the **more** talented of the two.

He is the **most** aggressive player in the competition.

22 **didn't ought** — is incorrect

You **ought not** to have agreed. (right) You didn't ought to have agreed. (wrong)

You **should not** have agreed. (right)

23 **leave go of** — is incorrect

Please **let** go of my shirt. (right) Please leave go of my shirt. (wrong)

24 **try to** — is correct when followed by a verb

try and — is commonly used in speech but is incorrect

I shall **try to** remember your birthday. (right)

Revision of these examples — Exercise 4 Page 45

25 **what** — meaning 'the thing that' must be followed by a singular verb

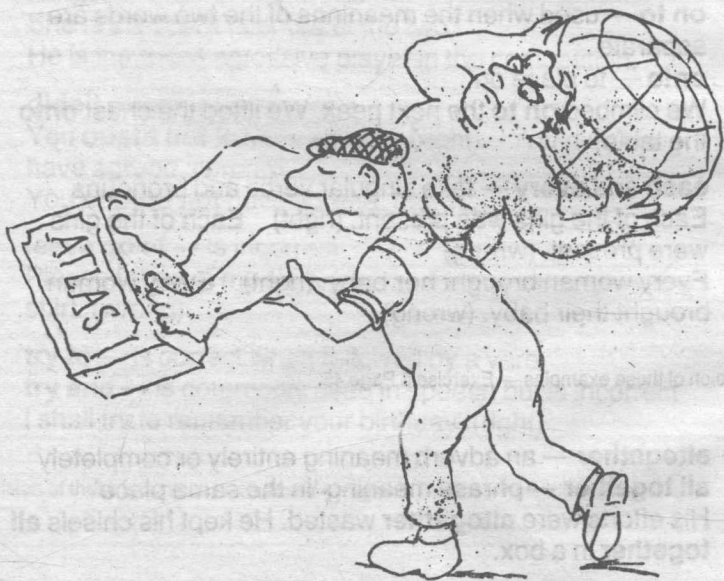
What we need is more expressways. (right) What we need are more expressways. (wrong)

- 26 **see/read** — must be followed by **that**, not **where**.
Did you see **that** the price of bread is going up? (right)
Have you read **where** many Japanese have holidays in Queensland. (wrong)
- 27 **percentage** — do not use when 'part' will do. A percentage can be larger than a whole — e.g. 150%
A large **part** of my wage is spent on groceries. (right)
A large percentage of my wage is spent on groceries. (wrong)
- 28 **other than** — is adjectival, not adverbial
He has no book **other than** that one. (right)
Bookings for the play cannot be made **other than** on the day of the show. (wrong)
- 29 **on to** — used when the meanings of the two words are separate
onto — to place on
We climbed **on to** the next peak. We lifted the chest **onto** the table.
- 30 **each** and **every** — take singular verbs and pronouns
Each of the girls **was** present. (right) Each of the girls were present. (wrong)
Every woman brought **her** baby. (right) Every woman brought their baby. (wrong)

Revision of these examples — Exercise 5 Page 45.

- 31 **altogether** — an adverb meaning entirely or completely
all together — phrase meaning 'in the same place'
His efforts were **altogether** wasted. He kept his chisels **all together** in a box.
- 32 **kind of/sort of** — slang expressions that should be avoided
rather/somewhat — should be used instead
The poor man looked **rather** old. (right) The poor man looked kind of old. (wrong)
She was **somewhat** taken aback. (right) She was sort of taken aback. (wrong)

- 33 **whether** — used to begin a noun clause
If — should not be used to begin a noun clause
 He asked her **whether** she was agreeable. (right) He asked her if she was agreeable. (wrong)
- 34 **heighth** — there is no such word
height — distance from bottom to top
 My **height** is 165 centimetres.
- 35 **tense** — keep your verbs in the same tense
 She **told** me that I **was** going. (right) She told me that I am going. (wrong)
 He **said** he **might** swim today. (right) He said he may swim today. (wrong)
 Mother **asked** me what I **was** wearing. (right) Mother asked me what I am wearing. (wrong)



- 36 **as... as** — do not drop the second 'as'
 The man is **as strong as** if not stronger than Atlas. (right)
 The man is as strong if not stronger than Atlas. (wrong)

37 **that/what**

I saw all **that** took place. (right) I saw all what took place.
(wrong)

38 **like/as if**

He plays **as if** he were a professional. (right) He plays
like he were a professional. (wrong)

39 **ago that/not ago/since**

'ago' must be followed by 'that' when a clause describes
the event

It was twenty years **ago that** he played his first tournament
at Wimbledon.

However, 'since' may be used on its own.

It is twenty years **since** he played his first tournament at
Wimbledon.

40 **also** — is not a conjunction

Give me your business address **and** home telephone
number. (right)

Give me your business address, also your home telephone
number. (wrong)

41 **yourself** — do not use instead of 'you' after a preposition

This present is for your sister **and you**. (right)

This present is for your sister and yourself. (wrong)

42 **which of the two** — must be followed by a singular verb

Which of the two dogs **is** the stronger?

Revision of these examples — Exercise 7 Page 46



- 43 **prevent** — must be followed by a pronoun and 'from'
 You cannot prevent me **from** going to the meeting. (right)
 You cannot prevent me going to the meeting. (wrong)
- 44 **as if, as though** — must be followed by the past tense
 even if the sentence commences with the present tense
 She speaks as if she **knew** it all. (right)
 She speaks as if she knows it all. (wrong)
- 45 **without** — do not use instead of 'unless'
Unless we get rain the crops will fail. (right)
 Without we get rain the crops will fail. (wrong)
- 46 **out** — do not use as a preposition
 He threw the seeds **out of** the window. (right)
 He threw the seeds out the window. (wrong)



- 47 **several** — can be followed by 'of'
various — cannot be followed by 'of'
 We noticed that **several** of the animals were hungry. (right)
 We noticed that various of the animals were hungry. (wrong)
 We noticed that **various** animals were hungry. (right)
- 48 **a preference** — is followed by 'for'
in preference — is followed by 'to'
 He has a preference **for** red shirts. (right)
 He has a preference to red shirts. (wrong)
 He chose flowers in preference **to** chocolates. (right)
 He chose flowers in preference for chocolates. (wrong)

- 49 **apart from** (not aside from)
Apart from Bradman, I have not seen a better batsman. (right)
 Aside from Bradman, I have not seen a better batsman. (wrong)
- 50 **likely** — meaning 'probably' must have 'more', 'most' or 'very' before it when used as an adverb.
 It will **very likely** rain tomorrow. (right)
 Her plane has likely been delayed. (wrong)
 It is likely to rain tomorrow. (wrong)
- 51 **majority** — used for number not mass or volume.
 The majority of the apples **were** bad. (right)
 The majority of the land was barren. (wrong)
- 52 **media** — is the plural of 'medium' so takes a plural verb
 The media often **exaggerate** stories. (right)
 The media often exaggerates stories. (wrong)
- 53 **owing to the fact** — this expression should be avoided
 The match was cancelled **owing** to rain. (right)
 The match was cancelled **because** of rain. (right)
 The match was cancelled owing to the fact it rained. (wrong)
- 54 **elder** — used with two persons
older — used with two persons or things
 He is the **elder** of the two brothers. (right)
 He is the **older** of the two brothers. (right)
 This is the **older** of the two churches. (right)
 This is the elder of the two churches. (wrong)

Revision of these examples — Exercise 9 Page 47

- 55 **prepositions ending sentences**
 Usually we must avoid ending a clause or sentence with a preposition but in many sentences the preposition cannot be placed anywhere else other than at the end:
 This book has not been written **in**.
 What a mess your hair is **in**.
 What did you say that **for**?
 He was a Japanese and difficult to talk **to**.

56 **participles**

It is incorrect to begin a sentence with a participial clause with no subject expressed, and to finish it with a main clause in which the subject is not the word which the participle qualifies.

Driving to school one day, a kangaroo stopped suddenly in the middle of the road. (wrong) Driving to school one day, we saw a kangaroo stop suddenly in the middle of the road. (right) **As we were** driving to school one day, a kangaroo stopped suddenly in the middle of the road. (right)

57 **measurement** — nouns of measurement remain singular when joined with a numeral and used before another noun
a two-metre wall (not a two-metres wall) **a five-dollar note** (not a five-dollars note) **a five-hectare farm** (not a five-hectares farm)58 **should** — is used before verbs of liking such as love, like, be glad, be inclined, care, prefer etc.

would — is used when expressing an opinion with some doubt such as guess, suppose, imagine, think, say etc.

I **should** love to meet your new friend.

I **should** be glad to be of service.

I **would** imagine that he is very old.

I **would** think it is a waste of time.

59 **subjects** — two singular subjects joined by 'and' take a plural verb.

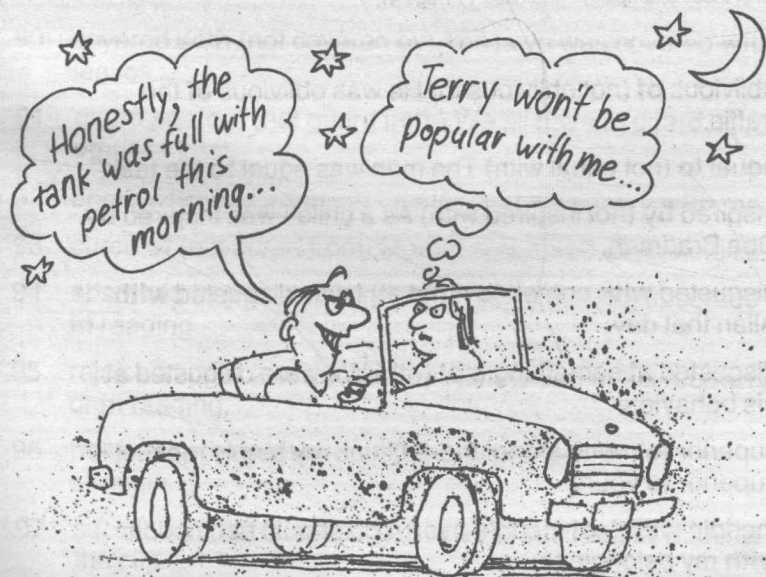
The cat and dog **have** the same basket. My cousin and I **live** together.

If a phrase containing 'and' is a single thing, it is followed by a singular verb.

The horse and cart **was** an early form of transport. The bread and butter **is** eaten first.

Using the right preposition

- 60 good **at** (not good in) The boy was good **at** mathematics.
- 61 full **of** (not full with) The tank was full **of** petrol.
- 62 congratulate **on** (not congratulate for) He was congratulated **on** his victory.
- 63 anxious **about** (not anxious for) Susanne was anxious **about** her canary.
- 64 fail **in** (not fail at) I must not fail **in** English this year.
- 65 popular **with** (not popular among) Terry is popular **with** his friends.



- 66 benefit **from** (not benefit by) Jim will benefit **from** the lesson.
- 67 related **to** (not related with) I am related **to** someone in Darwin.
- 68 deprived **of** (not deprived from) The child was deprived **of** his toys.
- 69 opposite **to** (not opposite from) She lives opposite **to** me.
- 70 conform **to** (not conform with) We must conform **to** the rules.
- 71 comply **with** (not comply to) They must comply **with** our demands.
- 72 die **of** (not die from) His grandfather died **of** cancer.
- 73 different **from** (not different to (or than)) My pen is different **from** yours.
- 74 accompanied **by** (not accompanied with) John was accompanied **by** his sister.

Revision of these examples — Exercise 11 Page 47

- 75 oblivious **of** (not oblivious to) He was oblivious **of** the traffic.
- 76 equal **to** (not equal with) The man was equal **to** the task.
- 77 inspired **by** (not inspired with) As a child I was inspired **by** Don Bradman.
- 78 disgusted **with** somebody (not at) I was disgusted **with** Allan that day.
- 79 disgusted **at** something (not with) We were disgusted **at** his behaviour.
- 80 superior **to** (not superior than) I think my tennis racquet is superior **to** yours.
- 81 meddle **with** (not meddle over) You should not meddle **with** my belongings.