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T. J. FITIKIDES

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COMMON  
MISTAKES  
— IN  
ENGLISH  
with exercises

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Fifth Edition

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# COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH

with exercises

by

T. J. FITIKIDES, B.A., F.I.L.

SENIOR ENGLISH MASTER

THE PANCYPRIAN GYMNASIUM, NICOSIA

*Author of Key Words for Easy Spelling*

*Lessons in Greek-English Translation*

Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;  
He who would search for pearls must dive below.  
JOHN DRYDEN



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## PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

Nearly a quarter of a century has elapsed since *Common Mistakes in English* was first published. During this period several hundred thousand copies of the book have been disposed of, and, to quote the publishers, "it has sold practically in every country in the world, in fact everywhere English is taught as a second language." Nevertheless, the twenty-fifth anniversary is so important an occasion that it is being commemorated with the publication of this new edition, which has been thoroughly revised and considerably enlarged.

One hundred additional sections have been included, thus raising their number to six hundred, four times as many as were incorporated in the original edition. An important innovation is the inclusion of supplementary matter covering twelve self-contained pages, each one dealing concisely with some fundamental aspect of the language, such as the correct order of words, the use of the articles, words followed by prepositions, questions and negations. Another innovation is the introduction of a list of irregular verbs in everyday use. These verbs are intentionally placed as endpapers for easy reference.

Besides the main additions and innovations mentioned above, the opportunity has been taken of revising the book from cover to cover, bringing it up to date, and introducing many little improvements here and there.

The short paragraph in the preface to the first edition, suggesting a method of using this book, has been expanded into a fuller explanation under the heading "How the Book Should be Used", presented in the following pages. This, it is felt, should increase the



## PREFACE TO THE FIFTH EDITION

usefulness of the book and, at the same time, remove any fallacious conceptions concerning the way it should be used.

T. J. F.

*January 1961*

## PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

This book has been designed to meet the requirements of students whose mother tongue is not English. Its main purpose is to help to correct the common mistakes to which foreign learners of English are liable.

The method adopted throughout this work is uniform. All the errors dealt with are singled out, for they have to be recognized before they can be corrected; then correct forms are substituted for incorrect ones; finally, simple explanations are given wherever necessary to justify particular usages. Exercises are set at the end to ensure that the principles may become firmly fixed in the students' minds.

It is not claimed that this manual is exhaustive. Nevertheless, the difficulties tackled are real, and the examples are representative of the mistakes commonly made by foreign students of English, being the result of observations made over a long period of time.

Much care has been given to the preparation of the Index, which it is hoped will make the book a useful work of reference.

My acknowledgments are due to Mr. W. H. G. Popplestone, who has read my manuscript and made many valuable suggestions.

T. J. F.

*August 1936*

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## HOW THE BOOK SHOULD BE USED

This book is intended for two uses. It may be used as a reference book and as an ordinary text-book.

As a book of reference it should be consulted with every composition. The teacher may refer the student to the appropriate Section dealing with his mistake by a number in the margin of his exercise book. For example, a misuse of a preposition of time (*at, on, or in*) is indicated by "393" in the margin to enable the student to look up his mistake and correct it. This method has been tested and found more effective than the common practice of writing the correct form for the student. It is axiomatic that the greater the student's individual effort, the more thorough will be his learning.

With regard to its second use, as an actual text-book, we strongly recommend that the teacher should start off with the Exercises on pages 149 to 188. These are arranged under the headings of the various parts of speech: Nouns, Adjectives, Pronouns, etc. However, before an Exercise is attempted, the teacher should make certain that the students have comprehended the particular usage involved. An occasional reference to some specific Section may be made whenever this is deemed necessary, but under no circumstances is it advisable to go through the various Sections of the book consecutively, or to commit to memory rules concerning usage.

Despite the fact that this book has been designed for two separate uses, the writer is of the opinion that the best results will be achieved if it is used by the student both as a text-book and as a book of reference.



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# USEFUL LISTS AND SUMMARIES

## IRREGULAR VERBS IN EVERYDAY USE

*bear to lie*

front endpaper

*light to write*

back endpaper

## HAVE ANOTHER LOOK AT—

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## CHAPTER I

### MISUSED FORMS

#### USING A WRONG PREPOSITION

Mistakes are often made by using a wrong preposition after certain words. The following list includes the words which most often give trouble:

1. **Absorbed** (= very much interested) **in**, not *at*.

*Don't say:* The man was absorbed **at** his work.

*Say:* The man was **absorbed in** his work.

2. **Accuse of**, not *for*.

*Don't say:* He accused the man **for** stealing.

*Say:* He **accused** the man **of** stealing.

NOTE. But "charge" takes "with": as, "The man was **charged with** murder."

3. **Accustomed to**, not *with*.

*Don't say:* I am accustomed **with** hot weather.

*Say:* I am **accustomed to** hot weather.

NOTE. Also "used to": as, "He is **used to** the heat."

4. **Afraid of**, not *from*.

*Don't say:* The girl is afraid **from** the dog.

*Say:* The girl is **afraid of** the dog.



## COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH

### 5. Aim at, not *on* or *against*.

*Don't say:* He aimed *on* (or *against*) the bird.

*Say:* He **aimed at** the bird.

NOTE. The preposition **at** is often used to denote direction: as, "throw **at**," "shout **at**," "fire **at**," "shoot **at**." But "shoot" (without the **at**) means to kill: as, "He **shot** a bird" (= he hit and killed it).

### 6. Angry with, not *against*.

*Don't say:* The teacher was angry *against* him.

*Say:* The teacher was **angry with** him.

NOTE 1. We get angry "**with**" a person, but "**at**" a thing: as, "He was **angry at** the weather" (not: "**with the weather**").

NOTE 2. Also "**annoyed with**," "**vexed with**," "**indignant with**" a person, but "**at**" a thing.

### 7. Anxious (= troubled) about, not *for*.

*Don't say:* They are anxious *for* his health.

*Say:* They are **anxious about** his health.

NOTE. But "**anxious**" meaning "**wishing very much**" takes "**for**": as, "Parents are **anxious for** their children's success."

### 8. Arrive at, not *to*.

*Don't say:* We arrived *to* the village at night.

*Say:* We **arrived at** the village at night.

NOTE. "**Arrive in**" is used of countries and large cities: as, "Mr. Smith has **arrived in** London (New York, India, etc.)"

### 9. Ashamed of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He is now ashamed *from* his conduct.

*Say:* He is now **ashamed of** his conduct.

NOTE. It is not proper to use "**ashamed of**" in the meaning of "**shy**." Thus, instead of "I am ashamed of my teacher," you should say, "I am **shy of** my teacher."



## MISUSED FORMS

### 10. Believe in, not *to*.

*Don't say:* Christians believe *to* Jesus Christ.

*Say:* Christians **believe in** Jesus Christ.

NOTE. "To believe in" means to have faith in; while "to believe" (without the in) means to regard as true: as, "I quite believe what he says."

### 11. Benefit by, not *from*.

*Don't say:* She has benefited *from* the change.

*Say:* She has **benefited by** the change.

NOTE. But a person gets or derives benefit *from*: as, "She got (or derived) much benefit *from* the change."

### 12. Boast of or about, not *for*.

*Don't say:* He boasted *for* his riches.

*Say:* He **boasted of** (or **about**) his riches.

### 13. Careful of, not *for*.

*Don't say:* He is very careful *for* his health.

*Say:* He is very **careful of** his health.

NOTE. Also "take care of": as, "He takes care of his money."

### 14. Come or go by train, etc., not *with the train*, etc.

*Don't say:* He came *with the train* yesterday.

*Say:* He **came by train** yesterday.

NOTE. We say: "by train," "by tram," "by boat," "by aeroplane"; also, "by land," "by sea," "by air"; "by bus," "in a bus" or "on a bus"; "by motor-car" or "in a motor-car," "by taxi" or "in a taxi"; "in a cab," "in a carriage"; "on horseback," "on a donkey," "on a bicycle"; "on foot."

### 15. Complain of, not *for*.

*Don't say:* Many people complain *for* the heat.

*Say:* Many people **complain of** the heat.



## COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH

### 16. Composed of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Our class is composed from thirty boys.

*Say:* Our class is **composed of** thirty boys.

### 17. Confidence in, not *to*.

*Don't say:* I have great confidence to him.

*Say:* I have great **confidence in** him.

NOTE. Also "in confidence": as, "Let me tell you something in confidence" (= as a secret).

### 18. Conform to, not *with*.

*Don't say:* We must conform with the rules.

*Say:* We must **conform to** the rules.

NOTE. But "comply" takes "with": as, "We will comply with your request."

### 19. Congratulate on, not *for*.

*Don't say:* I congratulate you for your success.

*Say:* I **congratulate** you **on** your success.

### 20. Consist of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* A year consists from twelve months.

*Say:* A year **consists of** twelve months.

NOTE. Great care must be taken never to use "consist" in the passive voice.

### 21. Covered with, not *by*.

*Don't say:* The mountains are covered by snow.

*Say:* The mountains are **covered with** snow.

### 22. Cure of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* The man was cured from his illness.

*Say:* The man was **cured of** his illness.

NOTE. But the noun "cure" takes "for": as, "There is no cure for that disease."



## MISUSED FORMS

### 23. Depend on or upon, not *from*.

*Don't say:* It depends from himself.

*Say:* It **depends on** (or **upon**) himself.

NOTE. Also "rely on" or "upon": as, "I cannot rely on (or upon) him."

### 24. Deprive of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He was deprived from his freedom.

*Say:* He was **deprived of** his freedom.

### 25. Die of an illness, not *from an illness*.

*Don't say:* Many people have died from malaria.

*Say:* Many people have **died of** malaria.

NOTE. Men "die of illness," "of hunger," "of thirst," "of" or "from wounds"; "from overwork"; "by violence," "by the sword," "by pestilence"; "in battle," "in poverty"; "for their country," "for a cause"; "through neglect"; "on the scaffold"; "at the stake."

### 26. Different from, not *than*.

*Don't say:* My book is different than yours.

*Say:* My book is **different from** yours.

### 27. Disappointed in, not *from*.

*Don't say:* I was disappointed from his work.

*Say:* I was **disappointed in** his work.

NOTE. We are **disappointed in** a thing when we see that it is not what we expected or desired, but we are **disappointed of** a thing when we fail to get it: as, "We were **disappointed of** our hopes."

### 28. Divide into parts, not *in parts*.

*Don't say:* I divided the cake in four parts.

*Say:* I **divided** the cake **into** four parts.

NOTE. But a thing may be divided "in half" or "in two": as, "He **divided** the apple **in half** (or **in two**)."



## COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH

### 29. Doubt (n.) of or about, not *for*.

*Don't say:* I have no doubt for his ability.

*Say:* I have no **doubt of** (or **about**) his ability.

NOTE. Also "doubtful of": as, "I am doubtful of his ability to pass."

### 30. Dressed in, not *with*.

*Don't say:* The woman was dressed with black.

*Say:* The woman was **dressed in** black.

NOTE. "The woman was in black," is also correct.

### 31. Exception to, not *of*.

*Don't say:* This is an exception of the rule.

*Say:* This is an **exception to** the rule.

NOTE. But we say "with the exception of": as, "He liked all his studies with the exception of Latin."

### 32. Exchange for, not *by*.

*Don't say:* They exchanged wheat by machinery.

*Say:* They **exchanged** wheat **for** machinery

NOTE. Also "in exchange for": as, "He gave his old car in exchange for a new one."

### 33. Fail in, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He failed from mathematics last year.

*Say:* He **failed in** mathematics last year.

### 34. Full of, not *with* or *from*.

*Don't say:* The jar was full with (or from) oil.

*Say:* The jar was **full of** oil.

NOTE. But "fill" takes "with": as, "He filled the glass with water."

### 35. Get rid of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* I shall be glad to get rid from him.

*Say:* I shall be glad to **get rid of** him.



## MISUSED FORMS

### 36. Glad of or about, not *from* or *with*.

*Don't say:* I am glad from (or with) the news.

*Say:* I am **glad of** (or **about**) the news.

NOTE. But a person is "glad at" a result: as, "He is glad at having received a good mark."

### 37. Good at, not *in*.

*Don't say:* My brother is good in mathematics.

*Say:* My brother is **good at** mathematics.

NOTE 1. Also "bad at," "clever at," "quick at," "slow at," etc. But "weak in": as, "He is weak in grammar."

NOTE 2. "He is good in class" means that his conduct is good.

### 38. Guard against, not *from*.

*Don't say:* You must guard from bad habits.

*Say:* You must **guard against** bad habits.

### 39. Guilty of, not *for*.

*Don't say:* He was found guilty for murder.

*Say:* He was found **guilty of** murder.

### 40. Independent of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He is independent from his parents.

*Say:* He is **independent of** his parents.

NOTE. But we say "dependent on": as, "A child is dependent on its parents."

### 41. Indifferent to, not *for*.

*Don't say:* They are indifferent for politics.

*Say:* They are **indifferent to** politics.

### 42. Insist on, not *to*.

*Don't say:* He always insisted to his opinion.

*Say:* He always **insisted on** his opinion.

NOTE. But "persist" takes "in": as, "He persisted in his foolish ideas."



## COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH

### 43. Interested in, not *for*.

*Don't say:* She is not interested **for** her work.

*Say:* She is not **interested in** her work.

NOTE. Also "take an interest in": as, "She takes a great interest in music."

### 44. Jealous of, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He is very jealous **from** his brother.

*Say:* He is very **jealous of** his brother.

### 45. Leave for a place, not *to a place*.

*Don't say:* They are leaving **to** England soon.

*Say:* They are **leaving for** England soon.

### 46. Live on, not *from*.

*Don't say:* He lives **from** his brother's money.

*Say:* He **lives on** his brother's money.

NOTE. Also "feed on": as, "Some birds **feed on** insects."

### 47. Look at, not *to*.

*Don't say:* Look **to** this beautiful picture.

*Say:* **Look at** this beautiful picture.

NOTE. Also "gaze at," "stare at," etc. But: "look after" (= take care of); "look for" (= try to find); "look over" (= examine); "look into" (= examine closely); "look upon" (= consider); "look down upon" (= have a low opinion of); "look up to" (= respect); "look out for" (= expect); "look forward to" (= expect with pleasure); "look to" (= be careful of or rely on).

### 48. Married to, not *with*.

*Don't say:* She was married **with** a rich man.

*Say:* She was **married to** a rich man.

NOTE. Also "engaged to": as, "Miss Jones was **engaged to** Mr. Smith."



## MISUSED FORMS

### 49. Opposite to, not *from*.

*Don't say:* Their house is opposite from ours.

*Say:* Their house is **opposite to** ours.

### 50. Pass by a place, not *from a place*.

*Don't say:* Will you pass from the post-office?

*Say:* Will you **pass by** the post-office?

### 51. Play for a team, not *with a team*.

*Don't say:* He plays regularly with that team.

*Say:* He **plays** regularly **for** that team.

### 52. Pleased with, not *from*.

*Don't say:* The teacher is pleased from me.

*Say:* The teacher is **pleased with** me.

NOTE. But we may say "**pleased at**" or "**pleased with**" if an abstract noun or a clause follows: as, "They were **pleased at** (or **with**) what he said"; "They were **pleased at** (or **with**) his gentleness."

### 53. Popular with, not *among*.

*Don't say:* John is popular among his friends.

*Say:* John is **popular with** his friends.

### 54. Prefer to, not *from*.

*Don't say:* I prefer a blue pen from a red one.

*Say:* I **prefer** a blue pen **to** a red one.

NOTE. Also "**preferable to**": as, "Work is **preferable to** idleness."

### 55. Preside at or over, not *in*.

*Don't say:* Who presided in the last meeting?

*Say:* Who **presided at** (or **over**) the last meeting?