


COMMON ERRORS
IN
ENGLISH

A Handbook for Asian Students



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COMMON ERRORS IN ENGLISH

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S. E. PACES, B.A. HONS. (OXON.)

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PREFACE

THIS book has been compiled from actual errors made by students. These errors have been selected and analysed because they are the commonest that occur in the Hong Kong School Certificate Examination. The aim has been to compile an aid to the memory for all students taking this Examination, especially for those studying by themselves. Comment and explanation has been kept to a minimum since this is not a grammar book. Rules are given when essential, but correction is chiefly by means of examples. Examples are given, as a rule, in the order of the frequency of the error they illustrate: the most common are put first. The Index gives in alphabetical order the words most commonly mis-used. This arrangement is followed so that the student may be more cautious of the more frequent pitfalls. Exercises have not been added since ample illustration of the right way of writing has been given.

The Publishers would be pleased to receive comments about how this book could be improved.

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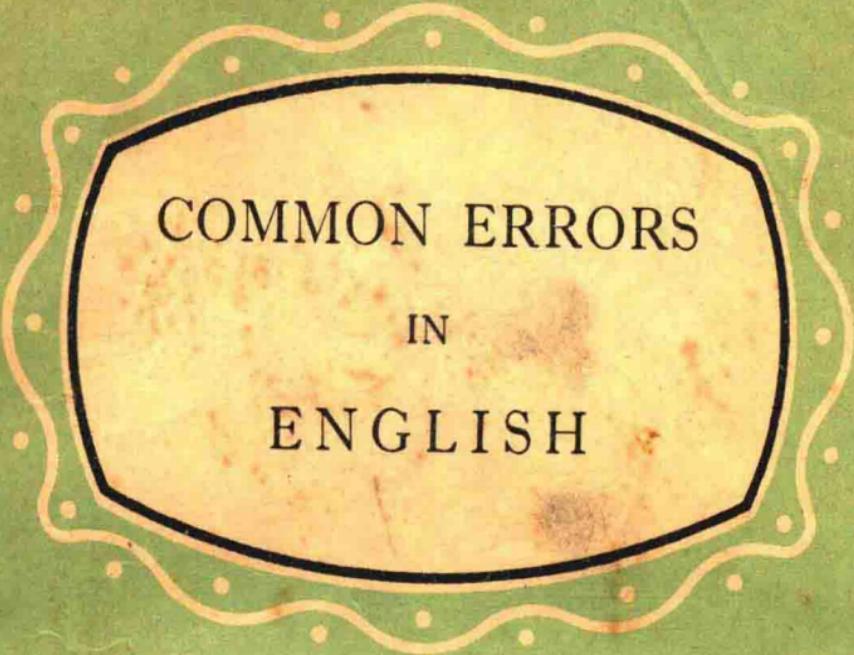
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The Index at the end of the book gives words most often misused.



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PART I—ERRORS EASILY CORRECTED

(A) NOUNS ALWAYS SINGULAR

Note: See that your verb is also singular.

1. *Wrong:* The streets are crowded with traffics.
Right: The streets are crowded with **traffic**.
2. *Wrong:* Homeworks make me tired.
Right: **Homework** makes me tired.
3. *Wrong:* My mother is always busy with her houseworks.
Right: My mother is always busy with her **housework**.
4. *Wrong:* This Association does social works.
Right: This Association does social **work**.
5. *Wrong:* The sceneries of Hong Kong are beautiful.
Right: The **scenery** of Hong Kong **is** beautiful.
6. *Wrong:* Advices are helpful to us.
Right: **Advice** **is** helpful to us.
7. *Wrong:* I went to him for informations about the journey.
Right: I went to him for **information** about the journey.
8. *Wrong:* We must all pay attentions to our health.
Right: We must all pay **attention** to our health.
9. *Wrong:* We have adequate transports in our city.
Right: We have adequate **transport** in our city.
Better: We have adequate **means of transport** in our city.
10. *Wrong:* The new furnitures in our dining room are beautiful.
Right: The new **furniture** in our dining room **is** beautiful.
11. *Wrong:* Our school laboratory has all the equipments necessary.
Right: Our school laboratory has all the **equipment** necessary.
12. *Wrong:* Her hairs are combed in the latest fashion.
Right: Her **hair** **is** combed in the latest fashion.
13. *Wrong:* Loud shoutings sound from the next flat.
Right: Loud **shouting sounds** from the next flat.
14. *Wrong:* Their laughs annoy the elderly man.
Right: Their **laughter** **annoys** the elderly man.
15. *Wrong:* Fightings break out between the two armies.
Right: **Fighting** **breaks** out between the two armies.

16. *Wrong:* When he died, he left all his properties to his widow.
Right: When he died, he left all his **property** to his widow.
17. *Wrong:* Sweats were dripping from my brow.
Right: **Sweat** was dripping from my brow.
18. *Wrong:* We had a lot of funs at the Christmas party.
Right: We had a lot of **fun** at the Christmas party.
19. *Wrong:* Merriments fill the hall.
Right: **Merriment** fills the hall.
20. *Wrong:* He played some wonderful musics on the piano.
Right: He played some wonderful **music** on the piano.
21. *Wrong:* The bus-conductor had not enough changes.
Right: The bus-conductor had not enough **change**.
22. *Wrong:* Many peoples go to the beach in summer.
Right: Many **people** go to the beach in summer.
23. *Wrong:* I read many books in order to gain more knowledges.
Right: I read many books in order to gain more **knowledge**.
24. *Wrong:* Hungry tigers eat their preys.
Right: Hungry tigers eat their **prey**.
25. *Wrong:* His overcoat was covered with dirt.
Right: His overcoat was covered with **dirt**.
26. *Wrong:* Thick smokes come out of the squatter's hut.
Right: Thick **smoke** comes out of the squatter's hut.
27. *Wrong:* My uncle is doing good businesses with America.
Right: My uncle is doing good **business** with America.
Note: When business means 'Commerce' it is always singular.
 When business means 'Company' or 'Firm' it may be plural.
28. *Wrong:* I receive trainings in the Boy Scouts.
Right: I receive **training** in the Boy Scouts.
29. *Wrong:* Fresh fishes taste good for lunch.
Right: Fresh **fish** tastes good for lunch.
Note: As food, we keep 'fish' singular.
30. *Wrong:* Young men do not drink alcohols.
Right: Young men do not drink **alcohol**.
31. *Wrong:* Hong Kong is short of building lands.
Right: Hong Kong is short of building **land**.
Note: Land is plural when it means 'countries'.

32. *Wrong:* We go to school to get our **educations**.
Right: We go to school to get our **education**.
33. *Wrong:* Many a starry nights we walked along the sea-front.
Right: Many a starry **night** we walked along the sea-front.
Note: The construction 'many a' is always followed by the singular.
34. *Wrong:* Warm **clothings** are comfortable in winter.
Right: Warm **clothing** is comfortable in winter.
35. *Wrong:* The tourist brought his **luggages** to the hotel.
Right: The tourist brought his **luggage** to the hotel.
Note: Luggage is a collective noun describing bags, cases, holdalls, etc. Baggage is a synonym, and is always singular too: e.g., This baggage is heavy.
36. *Wrong:* The Chinese eat rice; Europeans eat **bread**s.
Right: The Chinese eat rice; Europeans eat **bread**.
37. *Wrong:* We buy fruits at the greengrocers.
Right: We buy **fruit** at the greengrocers.
38. *Wrong:* More foods are necessary for an increasing population.
Right: More **food** is necessary for an increasing population.
39. *Wrong:* Last term at school I made **progresses**.
Right: Last term at school I made **progress**.
40. *Wrong:* At the basketball match there were three hundreds people.
Right: At the basketball match there were three **hundred** people.
Note: When a number is used as an adjective, it is always singular
41. *Wrong:* I want to buy three dozens fireworks for Chinese New Year.
Right: I want to buy three **dozen** fireworks for Chinese New Year.
42. *Wrong:* The accident **caused** damages to the house.
Right: The accident caused **damage** to the house.
Note: In the plural—damages—the word describes what you are given by a law-court if you have won a case.
43. *Wrong:* We sat on the **grasses** to eat our food.
Right: We sat on the **grass** to eat our food.
44. *Wrong:* Baits are necessary in order to catch fish.
Right: **Bait** is necessary in order to catch fish.
45. *Wrong:* Corns grow well in a temperate zone.
Right: **Corn** grows well in a temperate zone.
46. *Wrong:* Modern machineries are expensive.
Right: Modern **machinery** is expensive.

47. *Wrong:* He spoke many nonsenses.
Right: He spoke **much nonsense**.
48. *Wrong:* The heavy thunders frighten the boy.
Right: The heavy **thunder frightens** the boy.
49. *Wrong:* Garbages have a bad smell.
Right: **Garbage has** a bad smell.

Note: When an adjective is turned into a noun (e.g., the poor, the rich), with the definite article in front of it, and with the meaning of all of that kind or class, the noun must be kept *Singular in Form*, but *the verb must be Plural*.

50. *Wrong:* The poors lead miserable lives.
Right: The **poor** lead miserable lives.
51. *Wrong:* The sparrow's youngs are warm in their nest.
Right: The sparrow's **young** are warm in their nest.
52. *Wrong:* The clevers are at the top of the class.
Right: The **clever** are at the top of the class.

Note: Do not think that the words Police, Clergy and Cattle are singular. They are plural. Use a plural verb with them.

- E.g. The Police keep order in the city.
 A Policeman catches the thief.
- The Clergy are ministers of religion.
 A Clergyman preaches in church.
- The Cattle are grazing in the meadows.
 A Cow is standing near the gate.

(B) NOUNS ALWAYS PLURAL

Note: Remember that these nouns govern a plural verb.

1. *Wrong:* My uncle has a farm in the New Territory.
Right: My uncle has a farm in the **New Territories**.
2. *Wrong:* I lost one of my book.
Right: I lost one of my **books**.
3. *Wrong:* Hong Kong is one of the most famous city in the Far East.
Right: Hong Kong is one of the most famous **cities** in the Far East.

Note: For 4 and 5, it is *one of several or many*.

4. *Wrong:* My family sends you a hearty congratulation.
Right: My family sends you hearty **congratulations**.

5. *Wrong:* We all danced as gaily as a butterfly.
Right: We all danced as gaily as **butterflies**.

Note: A noun which complements a plural pronoun or noun must be plural.

6. *Wrong:* In ancient time men wore the skins of wild animals.
Right: In ancient **times** men wore the skins of wild animals.

7. *Wrong:* In modern time women go out to work.
Right: In modern **times** women go out to work.

Note: If 'time' is an abstract noun, it is used in the singular: e.g.,
 Time passes quickly.

8. *Wrong:* Confucius gives many lessons in manner.
Right: Confucius gives many lessons in **manners**.

Note: When manner means 'way' or 'method' it is singular: e.g.,
 Her manner of speaking was most impolite.

9. *Wrong:* The police takes him to prison.
Right: The **policeman** takes him to prison.

10. *Wrong:* That clergy preached a fine sermon last Sunday.
Right: That **clergyman** preached a fine sermon last Sunday.

11. *Wrong:* Girls are more interested in cloths than boys are.
Right: Girls are more interested in **clothes** than boys are.

Note: A cloth is a piece of material used for wiping and cleaning:
 e.g., Mother dusts the sideboard with a soft cloth.

12. *Wrong:* The customs duty on that good is very high.
Right: The customs duty on **those goods** is very high.

13. *Wrong:* The surrounding of the mansion is wild and gloomy.
Right: The **surroundings** of the mansion **are** wild and gloomy.

14. *Wrong:* Great rich comes from hard work.
Right: Great **riches** **come** from hard work.

Note: We usually refer to a pair of scissors, trousers, spectacles.
 Nouns composed of two parts are plural: e.g., shorts, compasses,
 pyjamas, pants.

15. *Wrong:* I cut my finger with the scissor.
Right: I cut my finger with the **scissors**.

16. *Wrong:* A special trouser is needed for riding a horse.
Right: **Special trousers** **are** needed for riding a horse.

17. *Wrong:* A spectacle helps short-sighted people.
Right: **Spectacles help** short-sighted people.
Note: The following nouns are plural in form but require a singular verb.
18. *Wrong:* A good new is not common.
Right: **Good news** is not common.
19. *Wrong:* Billiard is a good indoor game.
Right: **Billiards** is a good indoor game.
20. *Wrong:* Mathematic is a compulsory subject.
Right: **Mathematics** is a compulsory subject.
21. *Wrong:* Physic is most important nowadays.
Right: **Physics** is most important nowadays.
22. *Wrong:* A series of events form history.
Right: A **series** of events **forms** history.
23. *Wrong:* A means of revenge are easily found.
Right: A **means** of revenge **is** easily found.

(C) ERRORS OF WRONG HEARING

Note: These errors can be remedied only if the teacher practises regularly with the class the consonant and vowel sounds.

1. *Wrong:* Teachers collect our errors with red ink.
Right: Teachers **correct** our errors with red ink.
2. *Wrong:* He bollowed books from his friends.
Right: He **borrowed** books from his friends.
3. *Wrong:* She put on a flesh frock.
Right: She put on a **fresh** frock.
4. *Wrong:* We had flied fish for supper.
Right: We had **fried** fish for supper.
5. *Wrong:* He lay in the road, breeding terribly.
Right: He lay in the road, **bleeding** terribly.
6. *Wrong:* They walk in the streets whistling heat songs.
Right: They walk in the streets whistling **hit** songs.
7. *Wrong:* The dog beat me with its sharp teeth.
Right: The dog **bit** me with its sharp teeth.
8. *Wrong:* The countryside is quite.
Right: The countryside is **quiet**.