


# Longman Dictionary of Common Errors

J. B. Heaton and N. D. Turton



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**Longman Group UK Limited,**  
*Longman House, Burnt Mill, Harlow,  
Essex CM20 2JE, England  
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First published 1987

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

Heaton, J. B.  
Longman dictionary of common errors.  
1. English Language—Errors of usage  
—Dictionaries  
I. Title II. Turton, Nigel D.  
423.1 PE1460

**ISBN 0-582-96410-5**

ISBN 7-5062-0321-9

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This edition of Longman Dictionary of Common Errors: First edition  
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## Preface

There are a number of words and phrases which regularly cause difficulty for learners of English of all nationalities. Students often spend a lot of time searching through general dictionaries and grammars for information about these difficult items. Sometimes they are unable to find the guidance they need; at other times the language in which the information is given is at a level beyond their understanding.

Intended to help solve these problems, the *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors* is a practical, easy-to-use dictionary written in simple language. It contains all the words and phrases which commonly cause errors and provides at a glance all the information needed to avoid or correct such mistakes. Since most of the errors have been taken from First Certificate in English composition scripts, the book will be particularly useful for students who are preparing for this examination. However, many of the errors still occur at higher levels of proficiency, and the *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors* is therefore also recommended as a helpful guide through the pitfalls of English for learners at the intermediate level and above. In addition, teachers of English will find the book an invaluable reference tool and marking aid.

# How to use the dictionary

This book provides learners of English with a quick and easy way of avoiding or correcting their mistakes. When writing an essay or the answers to an exercise, the learner often wishes to use a particular word or phrase but feels uncertain about its correct usage. For example, which is correct: 'succeed **to do** something' or 'succeed **in doing** something'; 'do a mistake' or 'make a mistake'; 'He has **much** money' or 'He has **a lot of** money'? Searching for this information in dictionaries and grammar books can take a great deal of time. By referring to the *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors*, the user can find the required information within seconds, and in order to ensure quick and easy reference, great care has been taken to keep the explanatory note at the end of each entry as brief and simple as possible. It must be stressed, therefore, that the *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors* is not intended as a comprehensive grammar book. It has the very practical aim of providing all the information required to avoid or correct a particular error, and no more.

## How to find an error quickly

This dictionary is arranged in alphabetical order: the entries beginning with **a** are to be found at the front of the book and the entries beginning with **z** at the back. To help you find an entry quickly, there is a word in heavy type at the top of each page. The word at the top of a left-hand page shows the first entry on that page, the word at the top of a right-hand page shows the last entry on that page.

**Where to look**

An entry that is made up of more than one word is treated as if it were a single word. For example, the entry for **go out** is placed after **goods** and before **gossip**, not at **go**.

**goods 1**

- × The goods was not delivered in time.
- ✓ **The goods were not delivered in time.**

**Goods** is a plural noun and takes a plural verb.

**2**

- × He had very little money and very few goods.
- ✓ **He had very little money and very few possessions.**

**goods** = things for sale: 'leather goods'  
**possessions** = all the things a person owns

**go out**

- × As soon as the bus stopped, he went out.
- ✓ **As soon as the bus stopped, he got off.**

**get on/off** a bus/train/plane etc.

**gossip**

- × She told me gossips about all her relations.
- ✓ **She told me a lot of gossip about all her relations.**

**gossip** (uncountable) = talk concerned with people's private lives

Note also: 'bits/pieces of gossip'

As a basic guideline, you are advised to look for information in this dictionary in the same way as in any other dictionary. For example, if you are in doubt about whether to write 'marry someone' or 'marry **with** someone', you should look for the relevant information at the entry for **marry**, not at **with**. Similarly, if you feel uncertain about which is correct - 'in guarantee' or '**under** guarantee' - you should turn to **guarantee**, not **in** or **under**.

**guarantee 2**

- × May I remind you that the cassette recorder is still in guarantee.
- ✓ **May I remind you that the cassette recorder is still under guarantee.**

(be) **under guarantee**, NOT **in**

In each of these cases, the entry is located at the **keyword**. This is the most important word in a group of words which regularly occur together. Therefore the entry for **in spite of** is to be found at **spite**, the entry for **of/on your own accord** at **accord**, and the entry for **do/make a mistake** at **mistake**.

- mistake 2** × I rarely do more than three mistakes in an essay.  
 ✓ I rarely make more than three mistakes in an essay.  
**make a mistake, NOT do**

On the other hand, if you want to know what is wrong with 'I went **out** the room' or '**at** 1984', you should turn to **out** (not **go** or **house**) or **at** (not **1984**). In these cases, there is no fixed group of words and there is therefore no keyword. Again, the user should follow standard dictionary practice.

- out 2** × I felt very cold when I went out the room.  
 ✓ I felt very cold when I went out of the room.  
**Out** is an adverb: 'Alan went out, leaving just the two of us in the room.'  
**Out of** is a preposition.  
 Note that in informal conversation, **out** is sometimes used instead of **out of**: 'I saw someone jump out the window.'

### Spelling errors

Spelling errors are treated slightly differently. In each case, the entry will be found at the correct form of the word, not at the incorrect form. For example, the entry **dinning room** is shown at **dining room, pronunciation at pronunciation**. If you are unable to find an entry involving spelling, you should refer to the checklist of common misspellings at the back of the book.



### Examining an entry

An entry usually has three parts. As an example, look at the entry for **noise**. The first part is a sentence containing the error. It is printed in ordinary type and has a cross ( × ) next to it. Beneath this, in heavy type and marked with a tick ( ✓ ), is the correct sentence. In many cases, the user will see the mistake when he or she compares the two sentences but there is also a brief explanation at the end of the entry. As already mentioned, this has been kept as short as possible and concentrates on the particular problem underlying the error.

- 
- noise** × I turned on the radio but there was no noise.  
 ✓ **I turned on the radio but there was no sound.**  
**noise** = loud unpleasant sounds: 'The noise of the traffic gave me a headache.'  
**sound** = something noticed by the ear: 'the sound of a guitar', 'the sound of a car engine'
- 

### Sub-entries

Sometimes a single word or phrase can produce two or more types of error. In these cases, the entry will be divided into several sub-entries, each dealing with a particular error, and having its own number. Grammatical errors generally come before errors involving usage or meaning, and errors which are very common are usually placed before those which occur less frequently.

- 
- no matter** 1 × No matter he tries hard, he never succeeds in passing.  
 ✓ **No matter how hard he tries, he never succeeds in passing.**  
**no matter how** much he studies/often he goes/well he plays etc - main clause
- 2 × No matter the recession, sales remained high.  
 ✓ **In spite of the recession, sales remained high.**  
**No matter** IS ALWAYS followed by a **wh-** word. No matter what they did, they couldn't put the fire out
-

When a sub-entry consists of a cross-reference, this always come last.

- according to 1**
- ✗ According to me we should spend more money on education.
  - ✓ **In my opinion, we should spend more money on education.**

**According to** cannot be followed by **me** or **us**.

**2** See OPINION

When a cross-reference is made to a particular sub-entry, the number of the sub-entry is shown.

**invitation** See AGREE 5

However, when the cross-reference is to both or all of the sub-entries at a headword, then no number is given.

**evening** See AFTERNOON

**Cross-references**

You will find a number of cross-references in the dictionary. The purpose of these cross-references is simply to help you find the information you are looking for. For example, in the case of **do/make a mistake**, if you turn to **do** instead of **mistake**, you will find a cross-reference to **mistake**. Similarly, if you want to know what is wrong with **reach an aim** and look under **reach**, you will be directed to the entry at **aim**.

**reach 2** See AIM 2

Cross-references also help to avoid a lot of repetition in the dictionary. For example, when a small group of words such as **dozen/hundred/thousand/million** or **spring/summer/autumn/winter** follow the same rule or pattern, this is explained just once – at **hundred** and **summer**. If you look up one of the other words in the group, you will find a cross-reference to the entry where the explanation is given.

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**dozen** See HUNDRED 2

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Cross-references are also used in entries dealing with British English and American English usage. The way in which this is treated in the dictionary is described below.

### **British and American differences**

Whereas speakers of British English say **aerial**, speakers of American English say **antenna**. Pairs of this type have been included in the dictionary, not because either usage is wrong or substandard but simply in order to draw attention to the differences between the two language varieties. Some students are unaware of these differences and make the stylistic mistake of switching from one variety to the other within the same piece of written work.

In these cases, the entry is placed at the American English variant, while a cross-reference is given at the British English word. Unlike the other entries in the dictionary, no mistake is involved. Both variants are simply shown one above the other with the labels *AmE* and *BrE*.

### **Glossary**

If an explanatory note contains a technical word which you do not understand, you should refer to the glossary of technical terms at the back of the book. It should be remembered, however, that the glossary is not intended to be comprehensive. It aims to provide sufficient information for the user to understand the notes, and no more.

### Use by the teacher

Although designed primarily for the needs of the learner, the *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors* can also be used by the teacher of English in a number of ways. Some of these are outlined below.

- While students are engaged in writing tasks, the teacher might walk round the classroom, briefly checking the work in progress. Instead of correcting the errors observed and explaining the reasons for their correction, the teacher could simply call students' attention to the appropriate entries in the dictionary. In this way the students become actively involved in discovering and correcting their errors themselves.
- The same technique could be used when dealing with errors after written work has been handed in. Instead of writing lengthy corrections and comments on the scripts, the teacher could simply underline the error, adding a brief reference to the appropriate dictionary entry.
- After marking a batch of written work, the teacher might wish to select certain common errors as a focus for remedial teaching. The dictionary provides easy access to clear and concise notes which can serve as a basis for such teaching.
- Familiarity with the dictionary will also enable the teacher to predict the types of error that students are likely to make when introduced to a new grammatical or lexical item. Such awareness will be of considerable help in the preparation of effective teaching materials.

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## **Acknowledgements**

The authors would like to thank the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate for allowing them access to the First Certificate in English composition scripts from which most of the errors listed in this dictionary derive. They are also indebted to Susan Maingay, Kelly Davis, and Diane Sutton for their help in preparing the manuscript. Finally, they wish to thank the many students who have taken the Cambridge First Certificate examination in recent years, without whose contributions the book could not have been written.

- a** 1 × I hope you all have a enjoyable stay.  
 ✓ **I hope you all have an enjoyable stay.**

Always use **an** (NOT **a**) before a word beginning with a vowel sound: 'an egg', 'an envelope'.

- 2 × My husband is doing a MSc in civil engineering.  
 ✓ **My husband is doing an MSc in civil engineering.**

Use **an** (NOT **a**) before an abbreviation that begins with a vowel sound: 'an MSc' /em es si:/, 'an MP' /em pi:/.

- 3 × Sometimes it is difficult to live a honest life.  
 ✓ **Sometimes it is difficult to live an honest life.**

Use **an** (NOT **a**) before words beginning with **h** when the **h** is not pronounced: 'an honour', 'an hour'.

- 4 × A bottle of milk is in the fridge.  
 ✓ **There is a bottle of milk in the fridge.**  
 × A party will be at the language school.  
 ✓ **There will be a party at the language school.**

In many sentences, the verb **be** is used to mean 'exist' or 'take place'. If the subject has not been mentioned before, it is placed immediately after the verb and the sentence begins with **there**.

**a lot of** See LOTS

- about** × I was about leaving when the telephone rang.  
 ✓ **I was about to leave when the telephone rang.**  
**be about + to-v**

- above** × There were above a hundred people in the crowd.  
 ✓ **There were over a hundred people in the crowd.**

Do not use **above** with numbers (unless referring to points on a scale): 'He is over eighty years of age,' 'I receive over twenty letters a day,' BUT 'Don't let the temperature get above thirty degrees.'

**above-mentioned** × I would be grateful if you would send it to the address above-mentioned.

✓ **I would be grateful if you would send it to the above-mentioned address.**

**Above-mentioned** ALWAYS comes before the noun it modifies: 'above-mentioned person', 'above-mentioned company'.

**absent 1** × The sales manager was absent at the meeting.

✓ **The sales manager was absent from the meeting.**

**absent from, NOT at**

**2** × I went to her house at four o'clock but she was absent.

✓ **I went to her house at four o'clock but she wasn't in.**

**absent** = not present at something that you are supposed to attend: 'absent from school'

**absolutely** See **TIRED**

**accept 1** × These people accept to take risks in order to succeed.

✓ **These people accept the need to take risks in order to succeed.**

**Accept** is NEVER followed by to-v.

**2** × The company will not accept to buy new machines.

✓ **The company will not agree to buy new machines.**

We **accept** a person's advice, opinion, or suggestion BUT **agree** to do something. Compare: 'I accepted her suggestion and agreed to see the doctor that evening.'

**3** × To tell you the truth, I can't accept people who think about money all the time.

✓ **To tell you the truth, I can't stand/bear/abide people who think about money all the time.**

**cannot stand/bear/abide** = cannot tolerate

- accommodation 1** × I couldn't find the right accomodation.  
 ✓ **I couldn't find the right accommodation.**

**accommodation** (DOUBLE c, DOUBLE m)

- 2** ✓ **AmE Accommodations in London are very expensive.**

- ✓ **BrE Accommodation in London is very expensive.**

In British English **accommodation** (= a place to live or spend the night) is ALWAYS uncountable. In American English it can be countable.

- accord** × People think he resigned on his own accord.

- ✓ **People think he resigned of his own accord.**  
**of your own accord, NOT on**

- according to 1** × According to me, we should spend more money on education.

- ✓ **In my opinion, we should spend more money on education.**

**According to** cannot be followed by **me** or **us**.

- 2** See OPINION

- accuse** × Some unemployed men accuse women for taking their jobs.

- ✓ **Some unemployed men accuse women of taking their jobs.**

**accuse** someone **of** something, **NOT for**

- accustomed 1** × Having lived in England for two years, I am now accustomed myself to the cold weather.

- ✓ **Having lived in England for two years, I am now accustomed to the cold weather.**

**be/grow accustomed to** something OR **accustom yourself to** something

Compare: 'He soon grew accustomed to the harsh working conditions.' 'He soon accustomed himself to the harsh working conditions.'

Note the more informal alternative: 'He soon got used to the harsh working conditions.'



- 2** × It took me six months to get accustomed with the climate.  
 ✓ **It took me six months to get accustomed to the climate.**

**get accustomed to something, NOT with**

- 3** × Where I come from, we are not accustomed to see so many things in the shops.  
 ✓ **Where I come from, we are not accustomed to seeing so many things in the shops.**

**be accustomed to + v-ing**

- actual** × We'd like to know more about the actual crisis, not the economic problems of the past.  
 ✓ **We'd like to know more about the present/current crisis, not the economic problems of the past.**

**actual** = real (as opposed to 'guessed', 'supposed', etc.): 'People think he is over fifty but his actual age is forty-eight.'

**present/current** = happening or existing now

- actually** × We need to produce and export more than we do actually.  
 ✓ **We need to produce and export more than we do at present.**

**actually** = strange as it may seem; in fact (despite what is said or thought): 'People think we've got lots of money, but actually we're very poor.'

**at present** = now

- address** × I'll give you my adress.  
 ✓ **I'll give you my address.**

**address** (DOUBLE d)

- advice 1** × I advised him to tell the police.  
 ✓ **I advised him to tell the police.**

**Advice**/əd'vaɪs/ is a noun.

**Advise**/əd'vaɪz/ is a verb.