


Longman Dictionary of Common Errors

J. B. Heaton and N. D. Turton

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World Publishing Corp

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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.

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- 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 accommodation.
 ✓ I couldn't find the right accommodation.
accommodation (DOUBLE e, 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
 自己的事
- 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 address.

✓ 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.

- 2 × She gave me a good advice.
 ✓ She gave me some good advice.

Advice is an uncountable noun.

Note the alternative: 'She gave me a good piece of advice.'

- advise** × I asked my lawyer for her advice.
 ✓ I asked my lawyer for her advice.

Advise is a verb.

Advice is a noun.

aerial See ANTENNA

- affair** × There is a new affair in the middle of Helsinki which sells them.
 ✓ There is a new shop in the middle of Helsinki which sells them.

affair = (1) a thing, matter, or happening: 'The murder of the politician was a terrible affair.'

(2) a sexual relationship between two people not married to each other: 'She accused him of having an affair with her best friend.'

- affect** × It's a magazine about computers and their affects on our lives.
 ✓ It's a magazine about computers and their effects on our lives.

Affect (with **aff**) is a verb. To **affect** something is to have an **effect** on it: 'Smoking affects your health.'

(= Smoking has an effect on your health.)

- afford** 1 × A newspaper can be afforded by most people.
 ✓ Most people can afford a newspaper.

Afford is rarely used in the passive.

- 2 × My father couldn't afford paying for my education.
 ✓ My father couldn't afford to pay for my education.

afford (to do) something

- 3 × My father couldn't afford himself to lend me any money.

✓ **My father couldn't afford to lend me any money.**

Afford is NOT a reflexive verb.

- 4 × I want to get my coat back because I can't afford the money for a new one.

✓ **I want to get my coat back because I can't afford (to buy) a new one.**

Money is rarely used as an object of **afford**.

- afraid** × The road to the airport was very busy and we were afraid to miss the plane.

✓ **The road to the airport was very busy and we were afraid of missing the plane.**

be afraid to do something = be unwilling to do something because you are frightened: 'She was afraid to eat it in case it was poisonous.'

be afraid of doing something = be worried or anxious about something which might happen

- after 1** × The flight had been very pleasant until a man sitting after me started to shout.

✓ **The flight had been very pleasant until a man sitting behind me started to shout.**

after = following in time or order: 'I'll see you after lunch.' 'Remember to put a full stop after the last word.'

behind = at the back of

- 2 × After a week we're going to Italy.

✓ **In a week's time we're going to Italy.**

In a week OR in a week's time = after or at the end of a week

- 3 × Most of the people on the bus were after sixty.

✓ **Most of the people on the bus were over sixty.**

The preposition **over** is used with ages (and numbers) to mean 'more than'.

- 4 × I promised to meet Hitomi at the exhibition a week after.
 ✓ I promised to meet Hitomi at the exhibition a week later.

The use of **after** as an adverb (in place of **later**) is very colloquial and is likely to be regarded as non-standard by careful users.

- 5 ✓ AmE A police car arrived within minutes and soon after, an ambulance came.
 ✓ BrE A police car arrived within minutes and soon afterwards, an ambulance came.

In British English the use of **after** as an adverb (in place of **afterwards**) is common in informal usage but is regarded by careful users as non-standard.

- 6 × After you will leave, we will write to you every day.
 ✓ After you leave/have left, we will write to you every day.

After is followed by the present simple tense (or present perfect) for future reference, NOT **shall/will** + verb.

- after all** × After all, I'd like to thank you all for coming here today.
 ✓ Finally, I'd like to thank you all for coming here today.

Use **after all** when (1) you want to introduce an idea which seems to contradict something which has been said before: 'They had planned to go by train, but they went by car after all.'

(2) you want to remind someone of a fact which they should consider: 'I'm not surprised you're tired. After all, you were working all night.'

finally = to conclude

afternoon 1 × The afternoon I met them at the hotel and we went to the beach.

✓ **In the afternoon I met them at the hotel and we went to the beach.**

in the morning/afternoon/evening

Compare: 'The next afternoon I met them again.'

2 × On the afternoon we have two hours of classes.

✓ **In the afternoon we have two hours of classes.**

When talking about a particular afternoon, use **on**.

When speaking generally, use **in: on the**

afternoon/morning/evening of 3rd July **BUT in the morning/afternoon/evening**

age × I met a group of youngsters at my age in Trafalgar Square.

✓ **I met a group of youngsters (of) my own age in Trafalgar Square.**

(of) my own age, NOT at

agenda × In the left-hand pocket you will find a little red agenda that I need urgently.

✓ **In the left-hand pocket you will find a little red diary that I need urgently.**

agenda = a list of topics for discussion at a meeting

diary = a book in which a person writes appointments or things to be remembered

ages × The glasses haven't been washed since ages.

✓ **The glasses haven't been washed for ages.**

See **SINCE 2**

ago 1 × It is a month ago since I left Germany.

✓ **It is a month since I left Germany.**

Do not use **ago** before **since**.

- 2 × I'm writing in reply to your letter that I've received two days ago.
 ✓ I'm writing in reply to your letter that I received two days ago.

The present perfect tense is NOT used with words showing past time such as **yesterday, last week, a year ago.**

- 3 × The inspector asked to see his ticket, as I had done a few minutes ago.
 ✓ The inspector asked to see his ticket, as I had done a few minutes before.

Ago is used of a period in the past that is measured from the present moment.

Before is used of a period that is NOT measured from the present.

a few minutes ago = before now

a few minutes before = before then

- 4 × The accident happened at ten years ago.
 ✓ The accident happened ten years ago.

Do not use **at** to introduce a time expression with **ago.**

- agree 1** × Unfortunately not many people agreed helping us.
 ✓ Unfortunately not many people agreed to help us.

agree + to-v

- 2 × I don't agree the people who say women should stay at home.
 ✓ I don't agree with the people who say women should stay at home.

agree with someone or something = have the same opinion as

- 3 × In many ways I agree to his statement.
 ✓ **In many ways I agree with his statement.**
agree with = have the same opinion as: 'I fully agree with you/your opinion.'
agree to = be willing to accept or allow something: 'The bank manager has agreed to our request for a loan.'
- 4 × In some ways I am agree with those who want stricter punishments.
 ✓ **In some ways I agree with those who want stricter punishments.**
Agree is a verb, NOT an adjective.
- 5 × Although I didn't really like him, I agreed his invitation.
 ✓ **Although I didn't really like him, I accepted his invitation.**
accept an invitation, NOT **agree**

agreed × We were both agreed with him.
 ✓ **We both agreed with him.**
Agreed cannot be used as an adjective when it is followed by **with**. Compare: 'When it comes to the question of finance, we are all agreed.' (= have the same opinion)

aid × Many more will die unless there is an increase in foreign aids.
 ✓ **Many more will die unless there is an increase in foreign aid.**
Aid (= support or help) is an uncountable noun.

aim 1 × I started to learn English with the aim to become a teacher.
 ✓ **I started to learn English with the aim of becoming a teacher.**
with the aim of + v-ing
 Note however: 'My aim is to become a teacher.'

2 × Everybody should be given the chance to reach their aims.

✓ **Everybody should be given the chance to achieve their aims.**

achieve an aim, NOT reach

alive 1 × Every alive creature in the sea is affected by pollution.

✓ **Every living creature in the sea is affected by pollution.**

Alive is the opposite of **dead**.

Living is the opposite of **non-living**.

Alive ALWAYS follows the noun it modifies: 'Some of the fish in the boat were still alive.'

2 × Our teacher, Mr Collins, is very alive.

✓ **Our teacher, Mr Collins, is very lively.**

alive = not dead (rarely modified)

lively = full of energy and action

all 1 × I like all the kinds of music.

✓ **I like all kinds of music.**

Do not use **the** after **all** when the reference is general.

Compare: 'I like all kinds of fruit.' (general reference) 'I like all the kinds of fruit that my wife likes.' (specific reference)

2 × We all were delighted when we heard the news.

✓ **We were all delighted when we heard the news.**

× We all must try to find a solution to the problem.

✓ **We must all try to find a solution to the problem.**

All usually goes immediately after the (first) auxiliary verb: 'You should all pass the exam if you work hard.' 'They have all been working hard.' When there is no auxiliary verb, **all** is placed immediately before the main verb: 'They all passed the exam.' However, when the main verb is **be**, **all** is placed immediately after it: 'The letters are all on your desk.'