

# 50 Common ESL Errors

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## Adjective agreement error

We sell t-shirts and some ~~others~~ clothes.

We sell t-shirts and some other clothes.

Adjectives and noun modifiers should not take a plural form when they modify plural nouns in English. There are, however, a few noun modifiers that end in an -s: operations, arms, sports, jobs, forensics, physics

## Adjective form error

When I heard the news, I was very ~~anger~~.

When I heard the news, I was very angry.

Use the adjective form not the noun form in this context.

## Adverb error

I trust ~~more my parents than~~ my friends.

I trust my parents more than my friends.

The adverb is in the wrong place. Do not separate *more* from *than*.

## Article and plural noun error

My sister has ~~a children~~.

My sister has a child.

Don't use indefinite articles with plural words.

## Article and uncountable noun

I have ~~a brown skin~~.

I have brown skin.

Don't use an article with uncountable nouns like "skin".

## Aspect error

Every day, I ~~am waking~~ up late.

Every day, I wake up late.

Use the Present Simple, not the Present Progressive, for normal routines.

He ~~is deserving~~ to win the award.

He deserves to win the award.

Use the simple aspect form of "deserving" in this context. When expressing a fact, these stative verbs tend not to use the progressive aspect: agree, appear, believe, belong, concern, consist, contain, deny, depend, deserve, disagree, dislike, doubt, fit, hate, hear, imagine, impress, include, involve, know,

like, love, matter, mean, mind, need, own, please, prefer, promise, realize, recognize, remember, see, seem, smell, sound, suppose, surprise, taste, think, understand, want, wish.

### Auxiliary error

We ~~don't will~~ have an exam next Tuesday.

We won't have an exam next Tuesday.

You cannot negate a modal auxiliary in this way. Use "won't" instead.

### Capitalization error

I work at ~~Bordeaux jail~~ as a prison guard.

I work at Bordeaux Jail as a prison guard.

Capitalize every word in the name of an institution.

### Collocation error

I moved here to be closer ~~from~~ school.

I moved here to be closer to school.

The usual collocation for *closer* is *to* not *from*.

Success depends ~~of~~ you.

Success depends on you.

The usual collocation for *depend* is *on* not *of*.

### Comparative adjective error

If I learn a second language, finding a job will become ~~more easy~~ for me.

If I learn a second language, finding a job will become easier for me.

Remove the word 'more' and simply write "easier." English has two comparative adjective forms.

Add -er to the end of one or two syllable adjectives. Use 'more' with longer adjectives. Here is a list of adjectives that usually take -er: *big, black, bold, brave, bright, busy, clean, clear, clever, cold, cool, dark, dear, deep, dirty, dry, easy, fair, fast, fat, fine, funny, great, green, happy, hard, healthy, heavy, high, hot, kind, large, late, lazy, light, long, low, lucky, mad, merry, narrow, naughty, near, new, noisy, old, pale, poor, pretty, proud, quick, red, rich, sad, safe, shallow, sharp, short, slow, small, smooth, strong, sweet, tall, thick, thin, tiny, ugly, warm, wealthy, wet, white, wide, wild, wise, young, angry, little, short, blue, yellow, pink, orange, simple, shy.*

So my job will be ~~more easier~~ for me if I am able to speak English as well as I can speak French.

So my job will be easier for me if I am able to speak English as well as I can speak French.

Do not use both -er and *more*. This is called a double comparative. Remove the word 'more' and simply write "easier."

### Contraction error

That's who ~~I'm~~.

That's who I am.

Do not end a sentence with a pronoun + verb contraction.

I ~~didn't~~ know the answer.

I didn't know the answer.

The apostrophe points to what is missing. In this case, it is the 'o' in 'not'. Revise: *didn't*

### Conditional error

If I ~~will get~~ a better job, I will buy a car.

If I get a better job, I will buy a car.

Do not put 'will' in 'If' clauses. Use the Present Simple instead.

### Double negative

I made her cookies but she didn't eat ~~none~~.

I made her cookies but she didn't eat any.

This is called a double-negative error since "didn't" and "none" are both negative. Use "any" instead of "none."

In my opinion, video games don't hurt ~~nobody~~.

In my opinion, video games don't hurt anybody.

This is called a double-negative error since "didn't" and "nobody" are both negative. Use "anybody" instead of "nobody."

### Double subject

~~Me~~, I like to dance.

I like to dance.

Start your sentence with "I" not "me, I."

What I'm sure about ~~it's~~ that I was the first one to arrive.

What I'm sure about is that I was the first one to arrive.

The pronoun "it" in this sentence is unnecessary since you already have a subject, "What I'm sure about."

### Future tense error

In the future, ~~we go~~ on a trip to Africa.

In the future, we will go on a trip to Africa.

Don't forget the auxiliary verb "will" for future events.

I gonna be rich one day.

I am going to be rich one day.

The word *gonna* is slang. Make sure you develop full command of *am/is/are going to* for contexts where slang would be considered inappropriate.

When I ~~will arrive~~, I will give you the money I owe you.

When I arrive, I will give you the money I owe you.

Do not use "will" in clauses that begin with *as soon as*, *the moment*, *before*, *after*, *once*, *if*, or *when*. These time clauses already have a future meaning. Use the Present Simple instead.

### Gerund error

We talked about ~~to go~~, but in the end decided to stay home.

We talked about going, but in the end decided to stay home.

You cannot use an infinitive form after a preposition. Use a gerund instead.

The first thing I do when I arrive is ~~going~~ to my locker to hang up my coat.

The first thing I do when I arrive is go to my locker to hang up my coat.

Use a bare infinitive not a gerund in this context.

### H epenthesis

He ~~his~~ my best friend.

He is my best friend.

An "h" was added to "is" by mistake. "His" is a possessive form. "Is" is a verb.

### His or her instead of its

The New Democratic Party is increasing ~~his~~ popularity.

The New Democratic Party is increasing its popularity.

A political party is not a person. Use “its” for a non-person.

### Idiomatic expression error

They jumped on the occasion.

They jumped at the chance.

This is a rather unnatural phrase in English. Try “jumped at the chance” instead.

This singer is very known.

This singer is well-known.

This is a rather unnatural phrase in English.

### Infinitive error

I would like to ~~thanks~~ all my friends for their help.

I would like to thank all my friends for their help.

Use the base form of the verb with “to”.

We were supposed to ~~went~~ early, but we woke up late.

We were supposed to go early, but we woke up late.

Use the base form of the verb with “to”.

### Intensifier error

I ~~very~~ like ice cream.

I really like ice cream.

“Very” is used with an adjective to express degree: *It is very hot; it is very cold; she is very good, etc.* “Really” can be used with a verb to express manner: *I really like it; she really hates me; we really work hard; etc.*

### Irregular verb form error

We ~~meeted~~ at a restaurant.

We met at a restaurant.

Review irregular past tense verbs. You cannot add -ed to this verb.

### Its or it is

~~Its~~ hard to remember all these rules.

It’s hard to remember all these rules.

*It’s* is *it* plus the contracted form of the verb *is*, not a possessive form. Do not forget the apostrophe in the contraction.

Look at the dog chasing ~~it’s~~ tail.

Look at the dog chasing its tail.

*Its* is a possessive form, not a contraction. Do not use the apostrophe in the possessive form of pronouns.

### Missing article

I am ~~accountant~~.

I am an accountant.

Use an indefinite article before the name of a job or profession.

### Missing auxiliary

You ~~making~~ me crazy.

You are making me crazy.

You need an auxiliary (helping) verb to go with the *-ing* form.

I ~~always be~~ there for you.

I will always be there for you.

In a promise about the future, use the future modal auxiliary verb *will* with the infinitive form of your main verb.

### Missing -s

It hurt my ~~feeling~~.

It hurt my feelings.

When we talk about emotional pain, we use the word *feeling* with an *-s* on the end. It is never singular. However, if we want to talk about a sensation, we can use *feeling* without an *-s*. For example, we say *I have a strange feeling in my stomach*.

I am wearing a ~~short~~ and a t-shirt.

I am wearing shorts and a t-shirt.

Some nouns are always plural. Here is a short list: shorts, jeans, pajamas, scissors, pliers, news, politics, sports.

### Missing word

I decided to ~~put my swimsuit~~ and go for a swim.

I decided to put my swimsuit on and go for a swim.

You are missing the word *on* after *swimsuit*. The phrasal verb *put on* means “get dressed.” The verb *put* without *on* means “to place.”

### Modal error

I ~~will like~~ to have a better job.

I would like to have a better job.

Use *would* not *will* to express a desire for a different present. Use *will* to express a prediction.

### Negation error

I ~~was not very enjoy~~ telling the bad news.

I did not really enjoy telling the bad news.

To negate a Past Simple tense verb use *did not* instead of *was not*. Use *was/were not* for adjectives and nouns instead.

We ~~did not happy~~ when she told us.

We were not happy when she told us.

Use *was not* or *were not* to negate adjectives and nouns.

I ~~don't have gone~~ there before.

I haven't gone there before.

Negate the Present Perfect by putting *not* or *n't* after the auxiliary *have* or *has*.

### Non-standard phrase

In life, you have to accept the ~~goods and the bads~~.

In life, you have to accept the ups and downs.

This is a non-standard phrase. The usual way to express this idea in English is to say *ups and downs* or *pluses and minuses*.

### One word written as two

My class is in the ~~after noon~~.

My class is in the afternoon.

This word sequence is usually spelled together as one word. Here is a short list of other combinations that should be written together: lookout, ourselves, overweight, straightjacket, workplace

### **Past tense error**

I have been living here since I ~~am~~ born.

I have been living here since I was born.

The phrase “since I am” means “because I am”. However, “since I was born” means “from the day that I was born”.

She ~~has arrived~~ yesterday.

She arrived yesterday.

You cannot use the Present Perfect with a specific time in the past. Use the Past Simple instead.

### **Perfect infinitive error**

I often wonder how many opportunities I ~~would had had~~ if I had finished university.

I often wonder how many opportunities I would have had if I had finished university.

There is a problem here with the perfect infinitive in this sentence. You cannot follow a modal with a past form. The correct form is modal + *have* + past participle.

### **Possessive form error**

The accident was no ~~one~~ fault.

The accident was no one's fault.

When the fault belongs to no one, then a possessive form is needed.

My keys are in my ~~coat's~~ pocket.

My keys are in my coat pocket. OR My keys are in the pocket of my coat.

You do not need a possessive form here. Use ‘coat’ as a noun modifier instead. To talk about parts of non-living things, use the noun + noun structure or the *of* structure.

### **Preposition error**

I live ~~at~~ Montreal.

I live in Montreal.

Use *in* for cities and towns. Use *on* for streets. Use *at* for a street address.

### **Present Perfect error**

It's been 5 years that I ~~work~~ here.

I have worked here for 5 years.

Use the Present Perfect for past events that include the present.

I ~~am living~~ here since 2012.

I have lived here since 2012.

Use the Present Perfect for past events that include the present.

### **Pronoun antecedent error**

This article is about how people learn words and remember ~~it~~.

This article is about how people learn words and remember them.

In this sentence, the singular pronoun *it* incorrectly refers to the plural antecedent *words*. Your pronoun should agree in number with its antecedent. Use *them* with a plural antecedent.

### **Punctuation error**

Education should be ~~free~~.

Education should be free.

Do not put a space before a punctuation mark. Put the space after it.

### Quantifier error

How ~~much~~ people were there at the party?

How many people were there at the party?

Use *much* with singular or uncountable nouns and *many* with plural nouns.

### Question form

~~Are~~ you work here?

Do you work here?

Use a form of the auxiliary *do* with simple aspect verbs in questions. Use *are* for adjectives and nouns.

~~Did you are~~ tired after work?

Were you tired after work?

Use a form of the auxiliary *do* with simple aspect verbs in questions. Use a form of *be* for adjectives and nouns.

### Quoted and reported speech

I said, » The test is on Tuesday. «

I said, "The test is on Tuesday."

In English, we do not use « » for quoted speech. We use " " instead. (Hint: you can find the double quote symbol on the French keyboard above the number 2 key.)

She ~~said, that~~ I was wrong.

She said that I was wrong.

Do not put a comma before reported speech (also known as an indirect quotation).

### Redundant phrase and wordiness error

I think practicing English with classmates is ~~equally as~~ effective.

I think practicing English with classmates is as effective.

Do not say *equally as*. Use either *equally* or *as* on its own.

### Slang

The college has sent everyone an ~~invite~~ to the event.

The college has sent everyone an invitation to the event.

The word *invite* used as a noun is slang. Avoid slang in formal writing. Here is a list of slang words that should be avoided in the formal register: anyways, gonna, kinda, sorta, wanna, ain't

### (Common) Spelling Errors

Come ~~whit~~ me.

Come with me.

~~Wich~~ one do you want?

Which one do you want?

I ~~tought~~ you liked that.

I thought you liked that.

I like my program even ~~tough~~ it is difficult.

I like my program even though it is difficult.

I live in Montréal, Québec.

I live in Montreal, Quebec.

Avoid using diacritics in English. They can appear (cliché, fiancé, résumé) but are never compulsory.

This is begining to make sense.

This is beginning to make sense.

Double a final single consonant before an *-ing* or *-ed* suffix when both of these conditions apply:

(a) one vowel precedes the consonant; and (b1) it is a one-syllable word or (b2) a stressed syllable.

flys, ladys, citys, enemys, puppys, armys, supplys, skys, partys, librarys, rels, marrys, theorys, studys

flies, ladies, cities, enemies, puppies, armies, supplies, skies, parties, libraries, relies, marries, theories, studies

Change the y to *-ie* before adding *-s* when preceded by a consonant.

### Verb agreement error

One of my friends are driving.

One of my friends is driving.

Make sure your verb agrees with its subject. The noun phrase *one of my friends* is singular and therefore requires the singular form *is* not *are*.

### Tense shift

At lunch, Jane pointed straight at me, and she says, “You are a liar!”

At lunch, Jane pointed straight at me, and she said, “You are a liar!”

Do not shift from a past tense verb to a present tense arbitrarily in the same sentence.

I stayed with her for a while to be sure that she will be okay.

I stayed with her for a while to be sure that she would be okay.

Use *would* not *will* in a sentence describing past events.

### Word choice error

There are less people applying to Liberal Arts programs these days.

There are fewer people applying to Liberal Arts programs these days.

*Less* is the comparative form of the adjective *little*. Use *less* with uncountable nouns like *salt* or *time*. *Fewer* is the comparative form of *few*. Use *fewer* with countable nouns like *people* and *cars*.

### Word form error

I was boring, so I thought it would be fun to go on a trip and visit the island.

I was bored, so I thought it would be fun to go on a trip and visit the island.

“Boring” is the wrong form of the verb “to bore” for this context. An easy way to remember the difference between “boring” and “bored” is anything that is “boring” is the cause of the boredom and anyone who is “bored” is affected by boredom. In this case you were affected by boredom.

### Word order error

My girlfriend has blonde straight long hair.

My girlfriend has long straight blonde hair.

Adjectives appear in a particular order:

size shape colour NOUN

I am not enough good, and there is not time enough to practice.

I am not good enough, and there is not enough time to practice.

Put the word *enough* after adjectives but before nouns.

## **Your or you're**

Everybody knows ~~you~~ crazy.

Everybody knows you're crazy.

*Your* is a possessive word. *You're* is the contracted form of *you + are*. When you want to link a pronoun to an adjective like *crazy*, use *you're* not *your*.

Is that ~~you~~'re coat?

Is that your coat?

When you want to indicate possession, use *your*. *You're* is the contracted form of *you + are*.