

The Top 10 Common Mistakes English Learners Make & How to Fix Them

A helpful guide for English learners
Improved and formatted edition

1. Mixing Up 'Fun' and 'Funny'

One very common error among English learners is confusing the words "fun" and "funny." For example, many students might say, "The trip was so funny!" when they actually mean the experience was enjoyable.

The correct version is: **The trip was so fun!**

Tip: "Funny" refers to something that makes you laugh, such as a joke or a humorous situation (for example, "The joke was funny."). On the other hand, "fun" describes something that is enjoyable or entertaining (for example, "The party was fun!"). Understanding this difference will help you express yourself more accurately.

2. Confusing 'Borrow' and 'Lend'

Another frequent mistake involves the verbs "borrow" and "lend." Learners sometimes say, "Can you borrow me a pen?" which is not correct in English.

The right way to ask is: **Can you lend me a pen?**

Tip: "Borrow" means to take something from someone for a short time (for example, "Can I borrow your book?"). "Lend" means to give something to someone temporarily (for example, "I will lend you my book."). Remembering who is giving and who is receiving makes this much easier.

3. Saying 'Married With' Instead of 'Married To'

This is a very common mistake among English learners! Many people incorrectly say, "She is married with a doctor."

The correct sentence is: **She is married to a doctor.**

Rule: We always use "married to" when talking about someone's spouse. For example, "She is married to John."

Tip: A person is married *to* someone, but it is acceptable to say a couple is married *with* children (for example, "They are married with two kids."). Paying attention to this small preposition makes a big difference in sounding natural.

4. Wrong Word Order for Questions

In English, asking questions usually involves changing the order of words. This can sometimes confuse ESL students who are still learning the language.

For example, most commonly one uses words like who, what, where, when, why, or how when asking a question. After the question word, use an auxiliary verb such as do, does, did, is, are, was, etc. The subject of the sentence (he, she, it, they, etc.) should follow the auxiliary verb. Then, place the main verb after the subject, which is usually in its base form.

Example:

Incorrect: You are going to the store?

Correct: Are you going to the store?

Knowing the correct word order for questions is important to ensure the question makes sense and sounds natural to native speakers.

5. Incorrect Plural Nouns

Proper pluralization in English is vital for clear communication in all areas where English is spoken. It helps listeners understand whether we're discussing one item or several. Incorrect pluralization can cause confusion.

For instance, saying "I have five apple" instead of "I have five apples" can mess up the message. Moreover, in professional settings, accurate pluralization affects credibility, especially in fields where precision is crucial.

Example:

Incorrect: Oh my god! There are a lot of childs in the park.

Correct: Oh my god! There are a lot of children in the park.

Common irregular plurals:

- man → men
- woman → women
- person → people

These examples show how understanding the correct plural forms of nouns is crucial for accurate English communication, as many nouns have irregular plural forms that do not simply add "-s" or "-es."

6. Wrong Preposition

Choosing the right preposition in English is key to accurately conveying relationships between elements in a sentence, another area that ESL students often find challenging.

Prepositions like "at," "in," "on," and "by" illustrate different types of relationships, such as location, time, and method. To use them correctly, consider the context: "at" indicates specific points (at 3 PM, at the station), "in" is used for enclosed spaces or periods (in the room, in June), "on" denotes surfaces or specific days (on the table, on Monday), and "by" shows a method or proximity (by car, by the river).

Examples:

Incorrect: We will meet on 3 PM.

Correct: We will meet at 3 PM.

Incorrect: She is waiting in the bus stop.

Correct: She is waiting at the bus stop.

Understanding these nuances ensures clear and precise communication, as each preposition provides distinct information about how things are related or interact.

7. Double Negatives

The problem: Adding extra negatives makes the sentence incorrect.

Incorrect: I don't know nothing about it.

Correct: I don't know anything about it.

How to fix it: Use only one negative in a sentence: either the verb (don't, can't, isn't) or the word (nothing, nobody, never), but not both together. Double negatives can accidentally create the opposite meaning, so sticking to one negative keeps your English clear and correct.

8. Literal Translations from Your Native Language

The problem: Direct translation can lead to unnatural or incorrect English.

Incorrect: I have 25 years.

Correct: I am 25 years old.

How to fix it: Learn common expressions and pay attention to how native speakers actually phrase things instead of translating word-for-word from your native language. This will help your English sound much more natural over time.

9. Forgetting Articles (a, an, the)

The problem: Articles are often omitted or used incorrectly, especially by learners whose native language doesn't use them.

Incorrect: I went to store to buy bread.

Correct: I went to the store to buy bread.

How to fix it: Learn the basic rules: a/an for general, singular nouns; the for specific nouns. Practicing with these small but important words will greatly improve the flow of your sentences.

10. Confusing “Say” and “Tell”

The problem: Learners often use "say" and "tell" interchangeably, but they are used differently.

Incorrect: She said me she was tired.

Correct: She told me she was tired.

How to fix it: Use "say" without an object (She said she was tired) and "tell" with an object (She told me she was tired). Remember: tell + someone, say + something. Mastering this distinction will make your reported speech much more accurate.

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