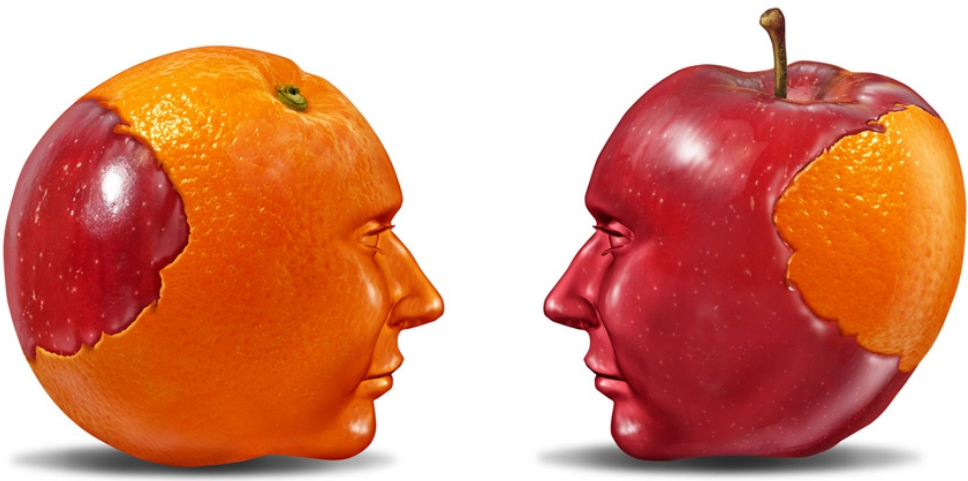
MOST COMMON MISTAKES IN ENGLISH

An English learner's guide



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Most Common Mistakes in English

An English learner's guide

by

Jakub Marian

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Before you start reading

You are reading the sample of this book, which contains only a few sections from the book. In order to get the full book, go to:

http://jakubmarian.com/english-mistakes/

Note that the **Table of Contents corresponds to the full book**, not just to the sample, so that you can see which topics you will learn from the full book.

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Foreword

Unlike French with its *Académie française* or Russian with the *Russian Language Institute*, English has no central regulatory body. There is no single "standard English". "Standard" English grammar, spelling, and pronunciation are governed by influential dictionaries, grammar books, style guides, and by recommended standards used in schools in various English-speaking countries.

Nevertheless, there are many rules you should follow if you want to sound natural; for example, if you say "he taked" instead of "he took", you are guaranteed to be perceived as not using proper English by virtually all native speakers. In this book, we shall explore common mistakes English learners make which break such essential rules, i.e. which truly make you sound non-native or which can cause misunderstanding.

Since the whole book is written in English, I assume the reader is already an intermediate or advanced English learner (otherwise he or she wouldn't be able to read it), and the mistakes mentioned in the book were selected accordingly.

I believe any intermediate or advanced English learner can profit from reading this book. Of course, it is impossible to include *all mistakes* English learners make in a single book, but if you know the basics and learn all the topics presented in this book, you should be able to express yourself (in terms of grammar and syntax) like a native speaker most of the time.

It should be also noted that American and British English are given a completely equal treatment, and whenever there are important differences between the two variants, the book explains them appropriately.

Introduction

Before we move on to the mistakes, there's one important thing you should realize: Each language is different, and what may be readily expressible in your mother tongue may be hard to express in English and vice versa. When you read about the mistakes, do not try to understand the English construction through translation into your mother tongue. If you make a mistake subconsciously, the corresponding construction in your mother tongue probably doesn't agree with the English one, and trying to understand it using translation may only confuse you further.

You should develop an intuition for what sounds natural, and what does not. For example, as we will see later in the book, we never use the present perfect with a specific time in the past (e.g. "I have done it yesterday"), which may be surprising because such usage would be correct in most European languages. You should just try to remember that "I have done it yesterday" does not sound natural in English, while "I did it yesterday" does, without any need for translation.

A little note about the order of the mistakes in the book: Topics are divided into five categories, which could be summarized as *things*, *verbs*, *adjectives*, *prepositions*, and *commas*. Within each category, topics are ordered so that the whole book is logically coherent; if one topic follows logically after another, it comes after it in the book as well.

However, apart from that, the ordering doesn't follow any particular scheme. I tried to make the topics varied enough to make reading of the book enjoyable (without having to read about similar topics over and over again). If you need to find a particular topic, you should be able to do so using the table of contents at the beginning of the book.

Mistakes with articles, nouns, and pronouns

Nouns with identical singular and plural forms

When we mention irregular plural forms in English, "children", "men", and "women" are three examples that spring to mind, but there are many more nouns whose plural is not formed by adding -s or -es. Among these, some of the most perplexing are those that do not change at all to form the plural.

Let's go through some of the most important ones (a few more will be treated later when we speak about nouns that end in -s in their singular form), always with an example sentence to help you remember the correct form:

- **aircraft**, **hovercraft**, **spacecraft**, and other "-craft" vehicles
  There are two aircraft prepared for landing.
- **bison**: *The bison were grazing in the distance.*
- **cod**: *The cod are known to migrate in large numbers.*
- **deer**: *Deer are easy prey for wolves.*
- **fish**: *Three fish swim in the fish tank.*
- **moose**: *Moose actually belong to the deer family.*
- **offspring**: *The fox gave birth to five offspring.*
- **pike**: *The pike are big freshwater predatory fish.*
- **salmon**: *Salmon are often seen jumping over dangerous waterfalls.*

- **sheep**: *One sheep, two sheep, three sheep...*
- **shrimp**: *Shrimp are among the most commonly eaten animals.*
- **swine**: *Swine are reared extensively in Europe.*
- **trout**: *The trout are fish related to the salmon.*

Note that many species of fish were left out from the list. Referring to fish using the same singular and plural form is extremely common, but actual usage varies somewhat among different regions, so it is advisable to consult a dictionary when writing about a particular species.

Also note that the names of animals mentioned above are sometimes used in the plural to refer to several species bearing the same name, for example:

> *The diversity of the reef's fishes [fish species] is threatened by human activity.*

Furthermore, there are a few nouns that can take either regular or irregular plural forms:

- **boar**: *He saw several boar(s) in the woods.*
- **buffalo**: *I hope there aren't too many buffalo(e)(s) outside.*

Additionally, many adjectives used to describe a nation or an ethnic group can be used as plural nouns (often with "the"), e.g.

> The British are notorious in Europe for their terrible cuisine.
> They could learn a lot from the French.
> Nevertheless, most Chinese enjoy a different kind of cuisine.

Singular nouns ending in 's'

Many English nouns end with an "s" in their singular form. Most of these don't pose any problem; few people would say "these kiss were beautiful" instead of "these kisses". However, there are a few that are commonly misunderstood as being plural by learners:

news

Although the equivalent expression in many languages would be in the plural, "news" is a singular noun, so you would say:

> *The news is being broadcast by all major TV stations. (correct)*
> *The news are being broadcast by all major TV stations. (wrong)*

Oddly enough, "news" is uncountable, which means that not only do we use a singular verb after it, but you can't say "a news":

> *I've got good news. (correct)*
> *I've got a good news. (wrong)*

lens

Unlike "news", "lens" is countable, so you can try to remember that if there can be "two lenses", there must also be "one lens":

> *His new lens is big. (correct)*
> *His new lens are big. (wrong)*

series

To make things even more confusing, the plural of "series" is also series. You should therefore use a singular verb if you speak about one particular series, e.g.

> *My favourite TV series has been cancelled.*

and a plural verb if you speak about several series at a time, e.g.

> *All the series on the Unknown Channel are good.*

means

Just like "series", "means" is already both the singular and the plural form of the noun. For example:

> *Railway is a means [singular] of transportation, but there are also several other good means [plural] of transportation.*

bellows

Bellows is an instrument used for blowing air. Like "series", the plural of "bellows" is also "bellows", so you have to use a singular verb when speaking about one bellows and a plural verb when speaking about more than one.

measles

Measles is a disease, and as you have probably noticed from the previous sentence, the word is in the singular:

> *Measles is especially common among children. (correct)*
> *Measles are especially common among children. (wrong)*

Quite naturally, it is uncountable, i.e. you cannot have "two measles".

species

Species (pronounced /ˈspiːʃiːz/, sometimes also /ˈspiːsiːz/) is defined in biology as the largest group of organisms capable of interbreeding and producing a fertile offspring (although there are also exceptions to this definition). The plural is also "species", e.g.

> *The domestic cat is a species [singular] of the Felidae family. The lion and the jaguar are two other species [plural] belonging to the same family.*

Christmas

Christmas is a singular noun, and as such it takes a singular verb:

> *Christmas is a great time of year. (correct)*
> *Christmas are a great time of year. (wrong)*

chess

The game of chess is singular in English:

> *Chess is an intellectually demanding game. (correct)*
> *Chess are an intellectually demanding game. (wrong)*

End of the sample of this section

This is the end of the sample of this section. The full book contains **95 topics overall**, 28 of which are additional topics about articles, nouns, and pronouns. You can get it as a PDF file, for Kindle, and as a paperback at:

http://jakubmarian.com/english-mistakes/

(Note: The full book is 124 pages long.)

Mistakes with verbs and tenses

Present perfect with specific time

The present perfect expresses the idea of "an action that was finished at some unspecified point in the past". Saying "I have done it yesterday" is basically the same as saying "I finished doing it yesterday at some unspecified point in the past". It doesn't really work, does it; it's either "at some point" or "yesterday", not both. If you want to include the time when the action took place, you must use the simple past tense (the "-ed" form), e.g.

> *I did it yesterday. (correct)*
> *I have done it yesterday. (wrong)*
>
> *I visited my grandmother last weekend. (correct)*
> *I have visited my grandmother last weekend. (wrong)*

However, the simple past is ambiguous. "I did it yesterday" can be used to express that you finished it yesterday as well as that you left the work unfinished and will continue doing it later, e.g. "I did it yesterday, and I am also going to do it tomorrow". If you want to express that the action is already completed, you can use verbs like "finish" or "complete" in the simple past:

> *I finished my homework yesterday. (correct)*
> *I have finished my homework yesterday. (wrong)*

A strong indicator that you shouldn't use the present perfect is the presence of "when" in the sentence, since "when" always refers to a specific point in time:

> *When did you write the book? (correct)*
> *When did you finish writing the book? (correct)*
> *When have you written the book? (wrong)*
>
> *I don't know when she did her homework. (correct)*
> *I don't know when she finished her homework. (correct)*
> *I don't know when she has done her homework. (wrong)*

Note that there is one case when "when + present perfect" can be used: to express surprise or mistrust. Say, a friend of yours told you how he enjoyed the view from the Eiffel Tower, and you weren't aware of the fact that he had ever been to Paris. You could ask

> *When have you been to Paris?*

It is an expression of surprise. You aren't really asking when he visited Paris; you express that the fact he did surprised you.

There is another common situation in which the rule can be (seemingly) broken. For example, it is perfectly fine to say:

> *How many films have you seen this week?*

The reason is that "this week" is not a point in the past (even though it *includes* days which are in the past); it is a point (a period) in the present. The present perfect in such a situation implies "so far": "How many films have you seen *so far* (*up until now*) this week?"

The present perfect can be used with any period which includes the present with the implied meaning of "so far". This includes the common adverbs students learn to use with the present perfect, e.g. "ever" ("from the beginning of the universe until now"), "never" ("not ever"), "already"/"yet" ("from some implied point in the past until now"), for example:

> *Have you done it yet?*
> *I have never been there.*

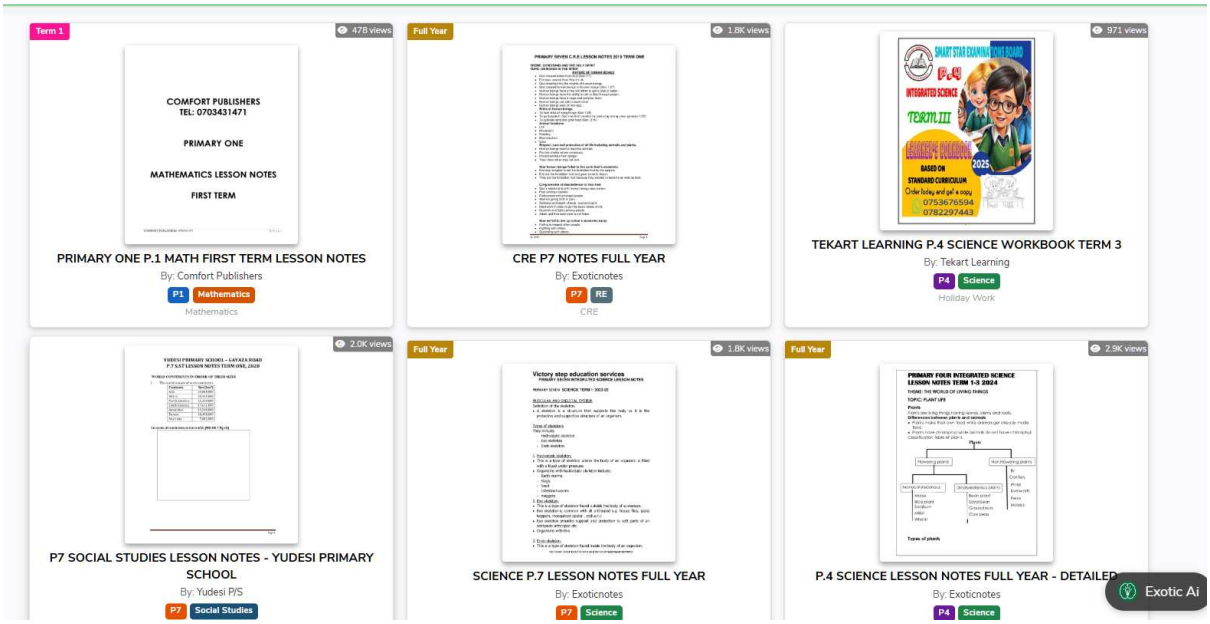
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