

NEW EDITION

Common Mistakes in English

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Get it right every time !



Preface

Preface to the first edition

This book has been designed to meet the requirements of students whose mother tongue is not English. Its main purpose is to help to correct the common mistakes to which foreign learners of English are liable.

The method adopted throughout this work is uniform. All the errors dealt with are singled out, for they have to be recognised before they can be corrected; then correct forms are substituted for incorrect ones; finally, simple explanations are given wherever necessary to justify particular usages. Exercises are set at the end to ensure that the principles may become firmly fixed in the students' minds.

It is not claimed that this manual is exhaustive. Nevertheless, the difficulties tackled are real, and the examples are representative of the mistakes commonly made by foreign students of English, being the result of observations made over a long period of time.

Much care has been given to the preparation of the Index, which it is hoped will make the book a useful work of reference.

My acknowledgements are due to Mr W. H. G. Popplestone, who has read my manuscript and made many valuable suggestions.

T. J. F.

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Preface to the Sixth Edition

It is now more than 60 years since this book was first published. It has gone through many revisions, and additions have been made at different times in its history. With the millennium approaching it was decided that there were some points of usage which are no longer relevant and so this new edition has been prepared. The content has been completely reviewed in the light of modern English usage, and the type-faces and design up-dated for clarity.

And yet the original concept and, indeed, most of the original mistakes listed, are still pertinent to students of English even in the year 2000. This little book has sold several hundred thousand copies all over the world and seems likely to go on doing so.

The author's note on how the book should be used is on page vii, with an addition for this edition.

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How this book should be used

This book is intended for two uses. It may be used as a reference book and as an ordinary text book.

As a book of reference it should be consulted with every composition. The teacher may refer the student to the appropriate section dealing with his mistake by a number in the margin of his exercise book. For example, a misuse of a preposition of time (*at, on or in*) is indicated by 383 in the margin to enable the student to look up his mistake and correct it. This method has been tested and found more effective than the common practice of writing the correct form for the student. It is axiomatic that the greater the student's individual effort, the more thorough will be his learning.

With regard to its second use, as an actual text book, we strongly recommend that the teacher should start off with the exercises on pages 137 to 181. These are arranged under the headings of the various parts of speech: nouns, adjectives, pronouns, etc. However, before an exercise is attempted, the teacher should make certain that the students have comprehended the particular usage involved. An occasional reference to some specific section may be made whenever this is deemed necessary, but under no circumstances is it advisable to go through the various sections of the book consecutively, or to commit to memory rules concerning usage.

Despite the fact that this book has been designed for two separate uses, the writer is of the opinion that the best results will be achieved if it is used by the student both as a text book and as a book of reference.

T.J.F.

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While the above is still true, there is also a self-study use for this little book. With more varied teaching materials available now, it can also be used as a self-study book by

How this book should be used

students of English as a foreign language who are preparing work either as part of their studies or for their occupations. With a view to this, it is suggested that, when a question of correct usage arises, the student should look first for the core word in the index and so find the section detailing the usage. For example, is it *by foot* or *on foot*? Look up *foot* in the index and you will be directed to Section 13 which will explain that *on foot* is correct.

Students and teachers will decide for themselves what is the best way to use this book. What is constant is the quality of content and how helpful it is to all those who use English as a foreign language.

Misused forms

Using the wrong preposition

Mistakes are often made by using the wrong preposition after certain words. The following list includes the words which most often give trouble:

- 1 **Absorbed** (= very much interested) **in**, not *at*.
Don't say: The man was absorbed at his work.
✓ *Say:* The man was **absorbed in** his work.

- 2 **Accuse of**, not *for*.
Don't say: She accused the man for stealing.
✓ *Say:* She **accused** the man **of** stealing.
Note: **Charge** takes **with**: *The man was **charged with** murder.*

- 3 **Accustomed to**, not *with*.
Don't say: I'm accustomed with hot weather.
✓ *Say:* I'm **accustomed to** hot weather.
Note: Also **used to**: *He is **used to** the heat.*

- 4 **Afraid of**, not *from*.
Don't say: Laura is afraid from the dog.
✓ *Say:* Laura is **afraid of** the dog.

Part 1

5 **Aim at**, not *on* or *against*.

Don't say: She aimed *on* (or *against*) the target.

✓ *Say:* She **aimed at** the target.

Note: Use the preposition **at** to denote direction: **throw at**, **shout at**, **fire at**, **shoot at**. **Shoot** (without the **at**) means to kill: *He shot a bird* (= he hit and killed it).

6 **Angry with**, not *against*.

Don't say: The teacher was angry *against* him.

✓ *Say:* The teacher was **angry with** him.

Note 1: We get **angry with** a person but **at** a thing: *He was angry at the weather* (not: **with** the weather).

Note 2: Also **annoyed with**, **vexed with**, **indignant with** a person, but **at** a thing.

7 **Anxious** (= troubled) **about**, not *for*.

Don't say: They're anxious *for* his health.

✓ *Say:* They're **anxious about** his health.

Note: **Anxious** meaning **wishing very much** takes **for**: *Parents are anxious for their children's success*

8 **Arrive at**, not *to*.

Don't say: We arrived *to* the village at night.

✓ *Say:* We **arrived at** the village at night.

Note. Use **arrive in** with countries and large cities: *Mr Smith has arrived in London* (or *New York, India, etc.*)

9 **Ashamed of**, not *from*.

Don't say: He's now ashamed *from* his conduct.

✓ *Say:* He's now **ashamed of** his conduct.

Note It isn't correct to use **ashamed of** meaning **shy**. **Ashamed** means feeling shame or guilt about something. **Shy** means feeling nervous with someone. Instead of saying: *I'm ashamed (or shamed) of my teacher*, say *I'm shy of my teacher*

Misused forms

10 **Believe in**, not *to*.

Don't say: We believe to God.

✓ *Say:* We **believe in** God.

Note: **To believe in** means to have faith in. **To believe** (without the **in**) means to regard something as true: *I believe everything he says.*

11 **Boast of or about**, not *for*.

Don't say: James boasted for his strength.

✓ *Say:* James **boasted of (or about)** his strength.

12 **Careful of, with or about**, not *for*.

Don't say: Elke's very careful for her health.

✓ *Say:* Elke's very **careful of/about** her health.

Or: You should be more **careful with** your money.

Note: **Take care of:** *He takes care of his money.*

13 **Travel by train**, etc., not *with the train*, etc.

Don't say: He travelled with the train yesterday.

✓ *Say:* He **travelled by train** yesterday.

Note: We say: **by train, by boat, by plane, by bike**; also, **by land, by sea, by air, by bus**; in a bus or on a bus; by car or in a car, **by taxi or in a taxi**; on horse-back, on a donkey, on a bicycle; on foot.

14 **Complain about**, not *for*.

Don't say: Annette complained for the weather.

✓ *Say:* Annette **complained about** the weather.

Note: When talking about illness we use **complain of**. We say: *She complained of a sore throat.*

15 **Composed of**, not *from*.

Don't say: Our class is composed from thirty students.

✓ *Say:* Our class is **composed of** thirty students.

Part 1

16 **Confidence in**, not *to*.

Don't say: I have great confidence to you.

✓ *Say:* I have great **confidence in** you.

Note: **In confidence:** *Let me tell you something in confidence* (= as a secret)

17 **Conform to**, not *with*.

Don't say: We must conform with the rules.

✓ *Say:* We must **conform to** the rules.

Note: **comply** takes **with**: *We'll comply with your request.*

18 **Congratulate on**, not *for*.

Don't say: I congratulate you for your success.

✓ *Say:* I **congratulate you on** your success.

19 **Consist of**, not *from*.

Don't say: A year consists from twelve months.

✓ *Say:* A year **consists of** twelve months.

Note: Take great care never to use **consist** in the passive form.

20 **Covered with**, not *by*.

Don't say: The mountains are covered by snow.

✓ *Say:* The mountains are **covered with/in** snow.

21 **Cure of**, not *from*.

Don't say: The man was cured from his illness.

✓ *Say:* The man was **cured of** his illness.

Note: The noun **cure** takes **for**: *There is no cure for that disease.*

22 **Depend on or upon**, not *from*.

Don't say: It depends from her.

✓ *Say:* It **depends on (or upon)** her.

Note: **Rely on or upon:** *I can't rely on (or upon) him*

Misused forms

23 Deprive of, not *from*.

Don't say: Nelson Mandela was deprived from his freedom.

✓ *Say:* Nelson Mandela was **deprived of** his freedom.

24 Die of an illness, not *from an illness*.

Don't say: Many people have died from malaria.

✓ *Say:* Many people have **died of** malaria.

Note: People **die of** illness, **of** hunger, **of** thirst, **of** or **from** wounds; **from** overwork; **by** violence, **by** the sword, **by** pestilence; **in** battle; **for** their country, **for** a cause; **through** neglect; **on** the scaffold; **at** the stake.

25 Different from, not *than*.

Don't say: My book is different than yours.

✓ *Say:* My book is **different from** yours.

26 Disappointed by, about or at, not *from*.

(a) *by/at/about:*

Don't say: Phillipa was disappointed from the low mark she got in the test.

✓ *Say:* Phillipa was **disappointed by/about/at** the low mark she got in the test.

(b) *with/in:*

Don't say: Jane was disappointed from her son.

✓ *Say:* Jane was **disappointed with/in** her son.

Note: Before a person we use **with** or **in**, before a thing we use **at**, **about** or **by** and before a gerund we use **at**: *Keith is very disappointed at not winning the prize.* We use **that** (optional before a new clause): *I was disappointed (that) I didn't get an invitation.*

27 Divide into parts, not *in parts*.

Don't say: I divided the cake in four parts.

✓ *Say:* I **divided** the cake **into** four parts.

Note: A thing may be divided **in half** or **in two**: *Paul divided the apple in half (or in two).*

Part 1

- 28 **No doubt (n) of or about, not for.**
Don't say: I've no doubt for his ability.
✓ *Say:* I've **no doubt of (or about)** his ability.
Note: **Doubtful of:** I am **doubtful of** his ability to pass.
- 29 **Dressed in, not with.**
Don't say: The woman was dressed with black.
✓ *Say:* The woman was **dressed in** black.
Note: The woman was **in** black is also correct.
- 30 **Exception to, not of.**
Don't say: This is an exception of the rule.
✓ *Say:* This is an **exception to** the rule.
Note: We say **with the exception of:** She liked all her subjects **with the exception of** physics.
- 31 **Exchange for, not by.**
Don't say: He exchanged his collection of matchboxes by some foreign stamps.
✓ *Say:* He **exchanged** his collection of matchboxes **for** some foreign stamps.
Note: **In exchange for:** He gave them his old car **in exchange for** a new one.
- 32 **Fail in, not from.**
Don't say: Steven failed from maths last year.
✓ *Say:* Steven **failed in** maths last year.
- 33 **Full of, not with or from.**
Don't say: The jar was full with (or from) oil.
✓ *Say:* The jar was **full of** oil.
Note: **Fill** takes **with:** Jane **filled** the glass **with** water.

Misused forms

- 34 **Get rid of**, not *from*.
Don't say: I'll be glad to get rid from him.
 ✓ *Say:* I'll be glad to **get rid of** him.
- 35 **Glad about**, not *from* or *with*.
Don't say: Francis was glad from (or with) receiving your letter.
 ✓ *Say:* Francis was **glad about** receiving your letter.
- 36 **Good at**, not *in*.
Don't say: My sister's good in maths.
 ✓ *Say:* My sister's **good at** maths.
- Note 1: **Bad at, clever at, quick at, slow at**, etc. However, **weak in:** *He's weak in grammar.*
 Note 2: *He's good in class* means that his conduct is good.
- 37 **Guard against**, not *from*.
Don't say: You must guard from bad habits.
 ✓ *Say:* You must **guard against** bad habits.
- 38 **Guilty of**, not *for*.
Don't say: He was found guilty for murder.
 ✓ *Say:* He was found **guilty of** murder
- 39 **Independent of**, not *from*.
Don't say: Clare's independent from her parents.
 ✓ *Say:* Clare's **independent of** her parents.
- Note: We say **dependent on:** *A child is dependent on its parents.*
- 40 **Indifferent to**, not *for*.
Don't say: They're indifferent for politics.
 ✓ *Say:* They're **indifferent to** politics.

Part 1

41 **Insist on**, not *to*.

Don't say: He always insisted to his opinion.

✓ *Say:* He always **insisted on** his opinion.

Note: **Persist** takes in: *He **persisted in** his silly ideas.*

42 **Interested in**, not *for*.

Don't say: She's not interested for her work.

✓ *Say:* She's not **interested in** her work.

Note: Also **take an interest in:** *She **takes a great interest in** music.*

43 **Jealous of**, not *from*.

Don't say: He's very jealous from his brother.

✓ *Say:* He's very **jealous of** his brother.

44 **Leave for a place**, not *to a place*.

Don't say: They're leaving to England soon.

✓ *Say:* They're **leaving for** England soon.

45 **Live on**, not *from*.

Don't say: He lives from his brother's money.

✓ *Say:* He **lives on** his brother's money.

Note: **Feed on:** *Some birds **feed on** insects.*

46 **Look at**, not *to*.

Don't say: Look to this beautiful picture.

✓ *Say:* **Look at** this beautiful picture.

Note: Also **gaze at**, **stare at**, etc. But: **look after** (= take care of); **look for** (= try to find); **look over** (= examine); **look into** (= examine closely); **look on** or **upon** (= consider); **look down on** (= have a low opinion of); **look up to** (= respect); **look out for** (= expect); **look forward to** (= expect with pleasure); **look to** (= rely on).

Common Mistakes in English takes more than 550 examples of typical errors (for example, words that are often confused, misused, or used with the wrong preposition) and offers a correct version and an explanation that will help students avoid making that mistake themselves. An invaluable book for students who are keen to 'get it right' every time!



www.longman-elt.com

