



Malcolm Shuttleworth

**AVOIDING MISTAKES**

A comprehensive guide to  
avoiding the biggest mistakes  
in written and spoken English



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Avoiding Mistakes  
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Zu erreichen ist Malcolm unter: [www.english-teacher.com](http://www.english-teacher.com).

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## Inhaltsverzeichnis

Preface .....	5
1. Using the wrong verbs .....	6
2. Negatives .....	8
3. Make & do .....	10
4. Look/watch - hear/listen to .....	12
5. Asking questions (signal words).....	14
6. The correct use of the -ing form .....	16
7. Auxiliary verbs .....	18
8. Will future & the present progressive with a future meaning .....	20
9. Mixed tenses .....	22
10. Spelling (1) - The -ies endings .....	24
11. Spelling (2) - Other general rules .....	26
12. Trying to understand the present perfect.....	28
13. Getting to grips with the past progressive.....	30
14. The past perfect.....	32
15. Using nouns and verbs in the correct way .....	34
16. Understanding the different tenses.....	36
17. Avoiding gemisch (false friends).....	38
18. A & an .....	40
19. Capital letters.....	42
20. Confusing words (1) .....	44
21. Confusing words (2) .....	46
22. Plurals.....	48
23. The .....	50
24. To/too/two .....	52
25. Say or tell.....	54
26. Adjectives and adverbs .....	56
27. Adjectives ending in -ing and -ed .....	58
28. Using adverbs with adjectives .....	60
29. Prepositions - the most misused prepositions .....	62
30. Time prepositions.....	64
31. Using the apostrophe .....	66
32. Many & much.....	68
33. Most common mistakes .....	70
34. Expressions - Don't say this! (1).....	72
35. Expressions - Don't say this! (2).....	74

36. Expressions - Don't say this! (3).....	76
37. Expressions - Don't say this! (4).....	78
38. Expressions - Don't say this! (5).....	80
39. Expressions - Don't say this! (6).....	82
40. Active & passive .....	84
41. Check list for the five main verb forms .....	86
42. The final word .....	87
Test yourself (1).....	88
Test yourself (2).....	89
Test yourself (3).....	90
Test yourself (4).....	91
Test yourself (5).....	92
Test yourself (6).....	93
Test yourself (7).....	94
Test yourself (8).....	95
Test yourself (9).....	96
Test yourself (10) .....	97
Test yourself (11) .....	98
Test yourself (12) .....	99
Test yourself (13) .....	100
Test yourself (14) .....	101
Test yourself (15) .....	102
Key to exercises.....	103

## Preface

It is almost impossible for someone who is learning the language to write a text or e-mail or hold a conversation in English without making mistakes. But it is possible to avoid the silly little mistakes. The quickest and easiest way to improve your spoken and written English is to avoid these mistakes.

This book is based on the repeated mistakes I have encountered in the classroom over the last 10 years. It is a step-by-step comprehensive guide to improving your English by avoiding the many pitfalls of the English language.

Each section is designed as follows:

- a. On the left hand page you will find examples of the mistakes, then clearly explained advice and explanations to avoid making these mistakes in future.
- b. On the right hand page you are given the chance to practice avoiding these particular kinds of mistakes.

This book can be used as *a self-help guide* for students who have a working knowledge of English or photocopied by *teachers* to use in the classroom.

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## 1. Using the wrong verbs

### 1. What's the problem? Look at the following sentences:

1. Have you reservated the room?
2. I have to presentate our new product tomorrow.
3. I always drive my bike to work.
4. I make my homework on Sunday.
5. Steve makes a great job.

All the sentences are wrong because they use the wrong verbs or verbs that simply do not exist!

### 2. Answers & explanation

1. Have you **reserved** the room?
2. I have to **present** our new product tomorrow.
3. I always **ride** my bike to work.
4. I **do** my homework on Sunday.
5. Steve **does** a great job.

The sentences above are examples of the most common misuse of verbs. Try to remember these important facts:

- Do is always used for work (I do my work, job, homework, housework, gardening, shopping)
- You *drive* anything that you have to get into (you can drive a bus, a car, a taxi, a lorry, etc.), but you *ride* anything you sit on (you can ride a horse, a pony, a motorbike, a scooter, a donkey, etc.).  
Try to remember: You don't *drive* the bus (only the bus driver is allowed to do that!), you can *take* the bus, travel by bus, etc.
- You *go on* or *take* a holiday, you don't *make* a holiday
- You *go on* a bike trip, a sight-seeing trip or a business trip
- You *do* business with someone, you don't *make* business
- You never *make* a party - you *have* a party
- You *make* a mistake, you don't *do* a mistake, and you *do* sport - you don't *make* sport
- You *make* coffee, you don't *cook* coffee
- You don't *make* a photograph, you *take* a photograph
- You don't *spend* money to a charity, you *donate* money
- You don't *spend* time hearing music - you *listen to* music (on the radio)
- You don't *look* sport or films in TV, you *watch* sport or films on TV
- You don't *stand up* in the morning, you *get up*

#### THINGS TO REMEMBER BOX



- Use **do** for all types of work
- Use **watch** for sport and TV, **listen to** for music and the radio
- Use **ride** for things you sit on

## 1. Using the wrong verbs - Exercises

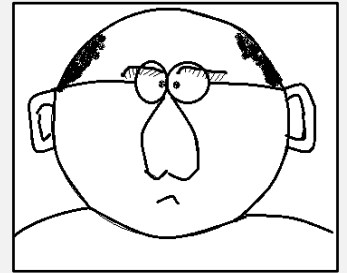
1. Cedric's life. *This is Cedric. Cedric leads a busy life. Take a verb from box 1 and an activity/word from box 2 and make sentences about him, as in the example.*

### BOX 1

do drive ride go have donate take reserve

### BOX 2

photographs a bike a small car business with Japan  
the bus money to Oxfam holidays in Japan a horse  
gardening a single room a party a good job



1. *Cedric drives a small car.*

2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_

2. **Finish the sentences. Finish these sentences using the correct words.**

1. I don't \_\_\_\_\_ horses.
2. He drives \_\_\_\_\_.
3. I take a \_\_\_\_\_ to work.
4. I \_\_\_\_\_ a party on my birthday.
5. He \_\_\_\_\_ holiday in June.
6. I \_\_\_\_\_ photos of my children.
7. My mum \_\_\_\_\_ the gardening.
8. I \_\_\_\_\_ money to good causes.

3. **Right or wrong? Decide whether these sentences are right or wrong. Correct them if necessary, as in the examples.**

*Steve makes a big party at Christmas.*

Wrong! Chris *has* a big party at Christmas.

*Susan goes on holiday twice a year.*

Correct.

1. Can you cook some coffee to wake us up? \_\_\_\_\_
2. If you do a mistake, cross it out. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Let's make a bike trip at the weekend! \_\_\_\_\_
4. I took hundreds of photos on holiday. \_\_\_\_\_
5. He spent his bonus to Save the Children. \_\_\_\_\_
6. He is not a person I can make business with. \_\_\_\_\_
7. I always stand up at six o'clock. \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you look a lot of television? \_\_\_\_\_
9. Does your husband make a lot of sport? \_\_\_\_\_
10. I'm hearing my new CD. \_\_\_\_\_

## 2. Negatives

### 1. What's the problem? Look at the following sentences:

1. I didn't went to school yesterday.
2. He don't like me.
3. My parents doesn't live in England.
4. I don't swimming.
5. I don't can swim.

All the sentences are wrong because they use **negatives** in the wrong way.

### 2. Answers & explanation

1. I **didn't go** to school yesterday.
2. He **doesn't like** me.
3. My parents **don't live** in England.
4. I **am not** swimming.
5. I **cannot** swim.

The **general rules** that you must follow to avoid mistakes when using negatives:

- Use **don't + infinitive** for yourself and more than one other person when talking about things you do all the time (**simple present**):  
I **don't play** football.  
My parents **don't like** dogs.
- Use **doesn't + infinitive** when talking about one other person or thing (**he/she/it**):  
He **doesn't like** tennis.  
She **doesn't like** football. (never use he don't!!)
- Use **didn't + infinitive** for everyone and everything connected with **a finished action in the past (simple past)**:  
He **didn't come** yesterday.  
I **didn't work** last week.  
They **didn't go** on holiday.
- Use **not + the -ing form of the verb** for things happening **now** or things **going on in your life** at the moment (**present progressive**):  
I **am having** breakfast.  
I **am reading** a great book at the moment.
- **NEVER** use the expression I don't can - the negative of can is **cannot** (or **can't**):  
I **can** swim                      I **cannot** swim                      or I **can't** swim  
He **can** speak French        he **cannot** speak French        or he **can't** speak French

#### THINGS TO REMEMBER BOX



- **Remember** - ~~he don't~~ and ~~don't can~~ **do not exist!!!**
- Use **doesn't** for one other person
- Use **don't** for yourself and more than one other person, use **didn't** for all finished actions

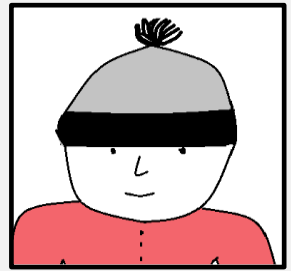


## 2. Negatives - Exercises

1. **Eric's likes & dislikes.** Eric has made a list of all the things he likes and dislikes. Look at the list, then write sentences about Eric, as in the examples.

Eric *likes* school holidays.

He *doesn't like* his history teacher.



1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_
6. \_\_\_\_\_
7. \_\_\_\_\_
8. \_\_\_\_\_
9. \_\_\_\_\_
10. \_\_\_\_\_
11. \_\_\_\_\_
12. \_\_\_\_\_

### My likes & dislikes

- football ✓
- tennis ✗
- pizza ✓
- school ✗
- Denise Tilbury ✓
- Ron Wilson ✗
- homework ✗
- history ✗
- school holidays ✓
- my brother ✗
- frogs ✗
- dogs ✓
- cats ✗
- playing Monopoly ✓
- biking ✓
- Mrs Wright (history teacher) ✗

2. **Questions & answers.** Answer the following questions about yourself, as in the examples.

Can you ride a horse?

No, I *can't* ride a horse.

Did you work yesterday?

No, I *didn't* work yesterday.

1. Can you speak a foreign language? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Do you like sport? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Do you watch TV? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Can you play a musical instrument? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Are you reading a good book at the moment? \_\_\_\_\_
6. Did you play rugby at school? \_\_\_\_\_
7. Did you meet your best friend at school? \_\_\_\_\_
8. Do you work full-time? \_\_\_\_\_