Malcolm Shuttleworth

AVOIDING MISTAKES

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

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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.
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.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BOX 1</th>
<th>do</th>
<th>drive</th>
<th>ride</th>
<th>go</th>
<th>have</th>
<th>donate</th>
<th>take</th>
<th>reserve</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>photographs</td>
<td>a bike</td>
<td>a small car</td>
<td>business with Japan</td>
<td>the bus</td>
<td>money to Oxfam</td>
<td>holidays in Japan</td>
<td>a horse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.


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.*
   
   *Susan goes on holiday twice a year.*
   
   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.
   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.
   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. __________________________________________

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? __________________________________________