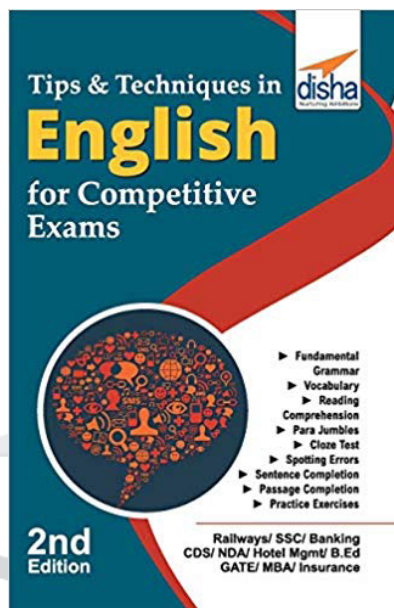


Shortcuts, Tips & Techniques - English Language

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Chapter

15

COMMON ERRORS

English grammar is a majorly important part of English section in almost all entrance examinations. A number of students face lot of problems while solving the questions based on common errors because most of the time, they are unaware of the rules of grammar which leads to committing very common mistakes.

To enhance your grammar knowledge and help you overcome committing common mistakes, below are given some examples along with explanations that will be very helpful and handy to you.

- Only I and my friend were at the concert. (WRONG)
Only my friend and I were at the concert. (RIGHT)
(Pronouns order – **I** and **me** come last when more than one pronoun is used in a phrase, **you** comes next to last, and **third-person** pronoun comes first.)
- Everybody will get their share. (WRONG)
Everybody will get **his** share. (RIGHT)
(‘Everybody’ may sound like ‘a lot of people’, but it is a singular noun and takes a singular verb.)
- Most of the students found difficult to comprehend his speech. (WRONG)
Most of the students found **it** difficult to comprehend his speech. (RIGHT)
- Don’t pride on your victory. (WRONG)
Don’t pride **yourself** on your victory. (RIGHT)
(Without the reflexive pronoun ‘yourself’, it would be impossible for the reader to know who you pride on.)
- I have a good news for you. (WRONG)
I have good news for you. (RIGHT)
(‘News’ is uncountable, which means that not only it is followed by a singular verb, but you also cannot say ‘a news’).
- The boys leave the school at five o’clock. (WRONG)
The boys leave school at five o’clock. (RIGHT)
(Daily routine, not leaving for any specific purpose)

- They realized where their weak points were and how to get rid of them. (WRONG)
They realized where their weak points were and how **they could** get rid of them (RIGHT)
(A fragment with a missing subject; hence, an appropriate subject to form an independent clause should be included.)
- While doing the work, there are obstacles ahead. (WRONG)
While doing the work, **they met with** obstacles. (RIGHT)
(Needs to revise a dangling modifier by naming the appropriate doer of the action as the subject of the main clause.)
- He cannot set a foot in my house. (WRONG)
He cannot **set foot in** my house. (RIGHT)
(The idiom is 'set foot in' and not 'set a foot in')
- Andamans are a group of islands. (WRONG)
The Andamans are a group of islands. (RIGHT)
(‘The’ is used with the places consisting many islands; for example – The Bahamas, The Maldives, The Philippines and The West Indies etc.)
- She pretended to not recognize the man in the market. (WRONG)
She pretended not to recognize the man in the market. (RIGHT)
- She neither speaks English nor French. (WRONG)
She speaks neither English nor French. (RIGHT)
(Here, ‘neither’ modifies the verb ‘speak’ whereas, it should modify the language ‘English’.)
- Fire broke out in our neighbourhood. (WRONG)
A fire broke out in our neighbourhood. (RIGHT)
(While fire, as a substance, is uncountable, but ‘a fire broke out’ gives a mental image of a single fire.)
- His heart sank and could hardly stand. (WRONG)
His heart sank and **he** could hardly stand. (RIGHT)
(A fragment with a missing subject; hence, an appropriate subject to form an independent clause should be included.)

- All I know is my friend is right. (WRONG)
All I know is that my friend is right. (RIGHT)
(Here, the verb 'is' connected with reporting can be followed by a that-clause acting as the direct object.)
- He has not yet gone to the bed. (WRONG)
He has not yet gone **to bed**. (RIGHT)
(‘Go to bed’ means to lie down to sleep, to put oneself in one’s bed while ‘go to the bed’ means not necessarily preparing for sleep.)
- I saw him to play. (WRONG)
I saw **him play**. (RIGHT)
(Here, use of the preposition ‘to’ is inappropriate. There are two patterns of this kind of sentences: 1) I saw him play = I saw him play throughout the game. 2) I saw him playing = I saw him on the field but I don’t know whether he actually finished the action.)
- The answer of this question is not so easy. (WRONG)
The answer to this question is not so easy. (RIGHT)
(The answer to the question is the normal grammatical form like key to the problem.)
- Water composes of hydrogen and oxygen. (WRONG)
Water **is composed** of hydrogen and oxygen. (RIGHT)
(‘Be composed’ of something means to be formed from various things like, air is composed mainly of nitrogen and oxygen.)
- I didn’t see him too. (WRONG)
I didn’t see him either. (RIGHT)
(‘Either’ is used in negative sentences to add an agreeing thought: Tom doesn’t speak French. Sam doesn’t speak French either.)
- The polar bear is not used to live in hot places. (WRONG)
The polar bear is not **used to living** in hot places. (RIGHT)
(‘Be used to’ is followed by a noun (or pronoun) or the gerund – the ‘ing’ form of a verb like, I can’t get used to getting up early.)
- Nobody is bound to suffering. (WRONG)
Nobody is **bound to suffer**. (RIGHT)
(‘Bound’ after verb + ‘to’ infinitive means certain or extremely likely to happen like, you’re bound to forget people’s name often.)

- Have you read the Shakespeare's Macbeth? (WRONG)
Have you read Shakespeare's Macbeth? (RIGHT)
- She rarely goes to theatre. (WRONG)
She rarely goes **to the theatre**. (RIGHT)
(‘The’, the definite article is used because you’re talking about something ‘definite’.)
- Adams invited me to a party. (WRONG)
The Adams invited me to a party. (RIGHT)
(If you are referring some members of a family, you make it plural by adding ‘the’ in the beginning.)
- Shiela felt sorry about the street children but she did not voice. (WRONG)
Shiela felt sorry about the street children but she did not voice it. (RIGHT)
(The sentence is incomplete without the objective case ‘it’.)
- He was astonished by her sudden resignation. (WRONG)
He was astonished **at** her sudden resignation. (RIGHT)
(If you are astonished by something, you are very surprised about it: I was astonished by his stupidity. Here, contextual use is ‘at’.)
- The judge has decided the case. (WRONG)
The judge has decided **upon the case**. (RIGHT)
(To make a judgement about some aspect of someone or something; ‘Upon’ is formal and less commonly used than on.)
- Do you want to try these new skates? (WRONG)
Do you want to try out these new skates? (RIGHT)
(‘Try out’ means ‘to undergo a competitive qualifying test; to test or use something experimentally’).
- Tom's project is more perfect than Sam's. (WRONG)
Tom's project is **better than/superior to** Sam's. (RIGHT)
(There are words like ‘square’ and not ‘more square’ or round and not ‘more round’ similarly, it is perfect, unique or not unique etc.)
- This machine cost me hundred dollars. (WRONG)
This machine cost me **a hundred dollars**. (RIGHT)
(If you spell out dollars, it would be usual to also spell out a hundred or one hundred: You owe me a hundred dollars or you owe me \$100.)

- He has good knowledge of Zoology. (WRONG)
He has **a good knowledge** of Zoology. (RIGHT)
- French are industrious and frugal. (WRONG)
The French are industrious and frugal. (RIGHT)
(French means of, relating to, or characteristic of France or its people or culture; The French denotes people of France or the natives/inhabitants of France collectively.)
- David has just been commissioned as the captain. (WRONG)
David has just been commissioned **as captain**. (RIGHT)
- He will be great help for you. (WRONG)
He will be of great help to you. (RIGHT)
(‘Of great help to you should be used as it is grammatically correct.)
- Both of them did not win the election. (WRONG)
Neither of them won the election. (RIGHT)
(Additive phrases (both, also, too, etc.) are not used when overall meaning of them is to negate.)
- He told that he would be visiting Father on weekend. (WRONG)
He said that he would be visiting Father on weekend. (RIGHT)
(Use ‘tell’ with a personal object and ‘said’ when there is no personal object.)
- Hardly the sun had risen when we set out. (WRONG)
Hardly had the sun risen when we set out. (RIGHT) or
The sun had **hardly** risen **when** we set out. (RIGHT)
(If hardly, scarcely, barely and no sooner are in the initial position, the subject and auxiliary are inverted: Hardly had we arrived home when the doorbell rang or we had hardly arrived home when the doorbell rang.)
- Not only she speaks English but also Chinese. (WRONG)
She speaks **not only English** but also Chinese. (RIGHT)
(For proper parallel structure, the verb following the subject must precede ‘not only’ so that it applies to both parallel phrases – English and Chinese.)
- Suppose, if she arrives late, you will miss the train. (WRONG)
Suppose she arrives late, you will miss the train. (RIGHT)
(Use suppose, supposing and what if + present verb form to make suggestions about what might happen. **Suppose and if do not come together.**)

- He did good in the exams. (WRONG)
He did well in the exams. (RIGHT)
(Good is an adjective and a verb cannot be modified by an adjective. Well is an adverb and it goes after the verb or verb + object.)
- It was bitter cold that night. (WRONG)
It was bitterly cold that night. (RIGHT)
(‘Cold’ itself is an adjective; hence, can be modified by an adverb ‘bitterly’ and not by adjective i.e. ‘bitter’)
- The movie is too interesting. (WRONG)
The movie is very interesting. (RIGHT)
(‘Too’ means more than enough; do not use in the sense of very or much.)
- No one writes as neat as Susan does. (WRONG)
No one writes as neatly as Susan does. (RIGHT)
(‘Neat’ is an adjective which can’t modify a verb i.e. ‘write’; ‘neatly’ meaning ‘with neatness’ is an adverb which correctly modifies the verb ‘write’.)
- The grandmother is living miserly. (WRONG)
The grandmother is living in a miserly way. (RIGHT)
(Not all words ending in -ly are adverbs like miserly is an adjective.)
- The receptionist sat on her desk. (WRONG)
The receptionist sat **at** her desk. (RIGHT)
- Everybody must conform with the rules. (WRONG)
Everybody must **conform to** the rules. (RIGHT)
(‘Conform’ means to comply with rules, standards, or laws’; conform to hygiene regulations; in some special usages ‘conform with’ is used: changes have to conform with international classifications.)
- The Himalayas are covered by snow. (WRONG)
The Himalayas are covered **with/in** snow. (RIGHT)
(‘Covered by’ usually means that the covering actually hides the thing that is covered)
- Divide the apple in four parts. (WRONG)
Divide the apple **into** four parts. (RIGHT)
(To or cause to separate into parts or groups: divide students into small discussion groups; Book divided into various chapters etc.)

- This is an exception of the rule. (WRONG)
This is an **exception to** the rule. (RIGHT)
- My leg is paining. (WRONG)
There's/I've got a pain in my leg. (RIGHT)
(Use pain as noun and precede it by have or feel.)
- They behaved cowardly. (WRONG)
They behaved **in a cowardly manner**. (RIGHT)
(Cowardly, silly and miserly are all adjectives which can't modify verbs)
- A 80% majority agree to the decision made by the principal. (WRONG)
A 80% majority **agrees** to the decision made by the principal. (RIGHT)
(Here, the word 'majority' is used for a collective group, hence, it should be treated as singular.)
- She does not know swimming. (WRONG)
She does not know to swim. (RIGHT)
- Open your book on page 15. (WRONG)
Open your book **at** page 15. (RIGHT)
- She died from Cancer. (WRONG)
She died **of** Cancer. (RIGHT)
- He lives besides my house. (WRONG)
He lives **beside** my house. (RIGHT)
(Besides and beside have different meanings. Beside shows position whereas besides means 'in addition'.)
- I have lost my patience. (WRONG)
I have lost patience. (RIGHT)
- You have no influence on him. (WRONG)
You have no influence **over** him. (RIGHT)
- He insisted to go there. (WRONG)
He insisted **on** going there. (RIGHT)
- We reached safely. (WRONG)
We reached safe. (RIGHT)

- There were less people. (WRONG)
There were fewer people. (RIGHT)
- He had no other alternative. (WRONG)
He had no alternative. (RIGHT)
- He shouted not as loud as the rest of the people. (WRONG)
He shouted not as loudly as the rest of the people. (RIGHT)
(The adverb 'loudly' should be used.)
- Verbal orders shall not be obeyed. (WRONG)
Oral orders shall not be obeyed. (RIGHT)
(Use of the adjective verbal is inappropriate in the context of the sentence.)
- You have paid the bill, isn't it? (WRONG)
You have paid the bill, haven't you? (RIGHT)
- Varun threatened to divorce her often. (WRONG)
Varun often threatened to divorce her. (RIGHT)
(If you put a modifier in a different place in the sentence, it means something different.)
- You should learn how to cope up. (WRONG)
You should learn how to cope. (RIGHT)
- There is nothing such as luck. (WRONG)
There is no such thing as luck. (RIGHT)
- The maid almost washed all of the utensils. (WRONG)
The maid washed almost all of the utensils. (RIGHT)
(You should be very careful in placing the adverb in the sentence as it has a different meaning.)
- After the party, I will return to my quarter. (WRONG)
After the party, I will return to my **quarters**. (RIGHT)
- It is more cold now. (WRONG)
It is **colder** now. (RIGHT)
(The comparative adjective 'colder' should be used.)
- He was late for office and fired by his boss. (WRONG)
He was late for office and was fired by his boss. (RIGHT)
(Parallel verb phrase 'was' should be used)

TIPS AND TECHNIQUES IN COMMON ERRORS

- Read the sentence all the way through. Even if you think the error is in part B, make sure to read the entire sentence as this will help prevent you from falling into traps.
- Always check for subject-verb agreement. The verb needs to take a form that matches the subject.
- You are not done only by picking the error because it sounds weird or because it's not the word you would use. You should be able to explain to yourself what error the answer you picked contains. If you can't do so, it's probably not the right choice.
- Lastly, read English newspapers and articles etc. as much as you can so that you get accustomed to English language. Reading habits, many times, help you pick the errors just by having a glance over the sentence.