

**NEW EDITION**

# **Common Mistakes in English**

**T.J. Fitikides**

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# Common Mistakes in English with Exercises

by T. J. Fitikides, B.A., F.I.L.

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Errors, like straws, upon the surface flow;  
He who would search for pearls must dive below.

John Dryden

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T.J.Fitikides

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## 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.

*August 1936*

## 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.

*January 1961*

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.

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**; **on 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.*

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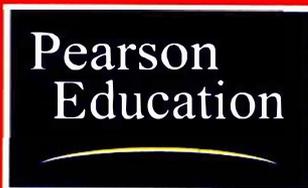
	<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>	<i>Present</i>
61	light	lit	lit	91
	lose	lost	lost	smell
	make	made	made	sow
	mean	meant	meant	speak
	meet	met	met	spell
	pay	paid	paid	spend
	put	put	put	spread
	read	read	read	spring
	ride	rode	ridden	stand
70	ring	rang	rung	steal
	rise	rose	risen	100
	run	ran	run	stick
	say	said	said	strike
	see	saw	seen	strive
	seek	sought	sought	swear
	sell	sold	sold	sweep
	send	sent	sent	swim
	set	set	set	swing
	sew	sewed	sewn	take
80	shake	shook	shaken	teach
	shed	shed	shed	tear
	shine	shone	shone	110
	shoot	shot	shot	tell
	show	showed	shown	think
	shrink	shrank	shrunk	throw
	shut	shut	shut	thrust
	sing	sang	sung	tread
	sink	sank	sunk	wake
	sit	sat	sat	wear
90	sleep	slept	slept	weep
				win
				wind
				120
				write

In everyday use

<i>iple</i>	<i>Present</i>	<i>Past</i>	<i>Past Participle</i>
91	smell	smelt	smelt
	sow	sowed	sown
	speak	spoke	spoken
	spell	spelt	spelt
	spend	spent	spent
	spread	spread	spread
	spring	sprang	sprung
	stand	stood	stood
	steal	stole	stolen
100	stick	stuck	stuck
	strike	struck	struck
	strive	strove	striven
	swear	swore	sworn
	sweep	swept	swept
	swim	swam	swum
	swing	swung	swung
	take	took	taken
	teach	taught	taught
	tear	tore	torn
110	tell	told	told
	think	thought	thought
	throw	threw	thrown
	thrust	thrust	thrust
	tread	trod	trodden
	wake	woke	woken
	wear	wore	worn
	weep	wept	wept
	win	won	won
	wind	wound	wound
120	write	wrote	written

**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!

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