

Communication Skills: Lecture No.38

Module 12

Lecture 1

Common Errors

Hello and welcome to NPTEL course on communication skills. We are now on the twelfth module of this course on *Common Errors*. What are the common errors we commit while communicating with others? Why is it important to pay attention to them? Why should we learn to avoid them? The lecture will address these issues. You need to know all of them if you wish to become a very effective communicator.

What are common errors?

- Deviations from standard English usage (grammar, spelling, punctuation, etc)
- Often the errors are glaring and unacceptable by sophisticated English users
- Teachers, professional writers, editors would recommend a standard usage for good intelligibility
- Committed mostly by those who learn English as a second language

Common Errors are deviations from Standard English usage. They are deviations because they are errors which are not acceptable in terms of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and even pronunciation. When you deviate from the normal set of rules, the accepted norms, then you might be committing Common Errors. They are common because they are so glaring, and are

frequently committed errors. They are not accepted by sophisticated speakers of English. So if you speak with these kinds of errors in day to day communication in a very informal situation, it does not make a big difference. Often errors become part of the group identity that you are related to, so it gives a communal feeling that everyone is committing errors and you are also doing it, and that is no problem. But if you are in a formal situation such as addressing a learned audience or writing for a sophisticated group of readers, these errors should be avoided. Otherwise, it gives the impression that you are a very poor communicator of English. As I said these are deviations from Standard English usage, and generally teachers would expect that you avoid committing these Common Errors. Moreover, professional writers and editors would recommend a standard usage for good intelligibility. Common Errors are committed mostly by those who learn English as their second language; most of the Indian speakers for example, who have not got an exposure to learning English in the environment of native speakers like the Americans, the British or the Australians.

What are the advantages? Communication becomes effective only if the message sent is comprehensible to the receiver.

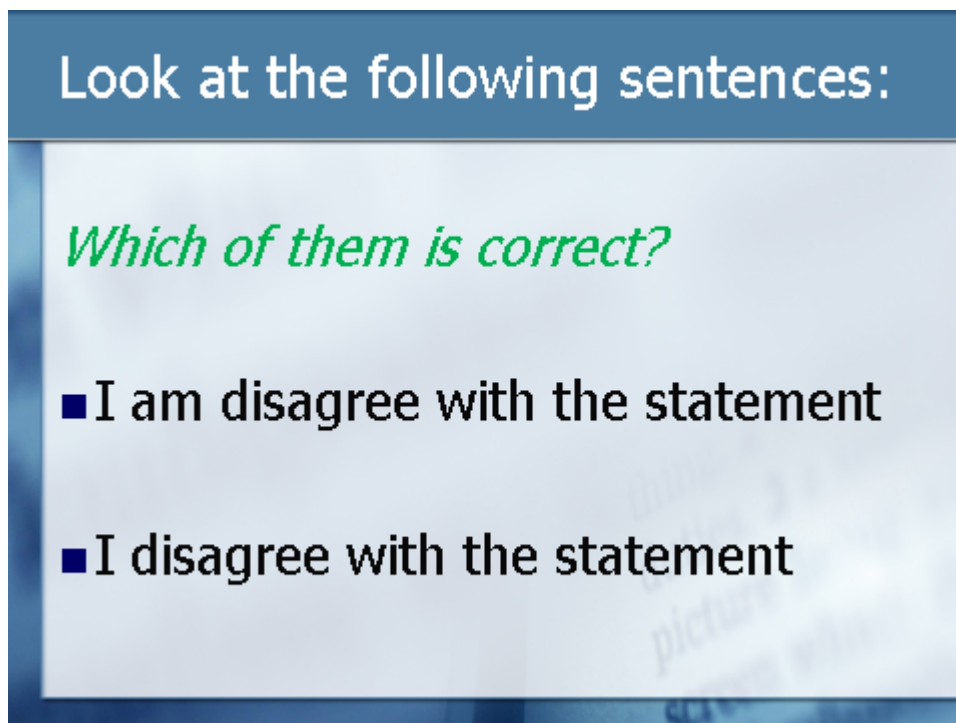
Advantages

- Communication becomes effective only if the message sent is comprehensible to the receiver
- Avoiding common errors reduces noise in communication and adds to its effectiveness
- Emulate the way native speakers speak English
- Thus, gives naturalness and spontaneity in your communication

Remember communication is a kind of dialogue between the sender and the receiver. If the sender sends the message properly and if it is received by the receiver, then communication takes place. But while sending the message, common errors cause *noise*. Then it is difficult for the receiver to receive it and communication will not take place in the desired manner. So,

avoiding common errors reduces noise in communication and adds to its effectiveness. Knowing how to avoid common errors gives you a cutting edge in your oral and written communication. An easy way to identify common errors is to emulate the way the native speakers speak English. You listen to the BBC or any TV channel in which you come across native speakers speaking English. Besides, you should read materials written by native speakers. Learning to avoid common errors will give you naturalness and spontaneity to your communication.

Now to begin with, look at the following sentences. And tell me which one of them is correct.



Look at the following sentences:

Which of them is correct?

- I am disagree with the statement
- I disagree with the statement

Honestly if you check yourself, you will know that between these two, the construction that you repeatedly use is likely to be the wrong one!

Answers & Explanations

❑ I am disagree with the statement

❑ I disagree with the statement

You cannot use disagree as an **adjective**. It can be used only as a verb.

✓ My cousin always disagrees with me.

Look at the example, *My cousin always disagrees with me*—*disagrees* is used in the verb position, not in the adjective position. Now I am going to give you some more sentences. This time there is no comparison. And look at these sentences closely, deeply, intensely, and then ask yourself honestly, “Do I speak like this or do I speak differently?” “Do I write like this or do I write differently?” If you write differently, how differently do you write? Let us go through these sentences.

Find out the errors:

1. The boy had been a blind since birth.
2. I have a good news for you.
3. She is a M. A. student.
4. Please send the letter to the address above-mentioned.
5. Shilpa wants to continue her studies in abroad.

Answers & Explanations

1. × The boy had been **a** blind since birth.
You should not use a/an before an adjective (deaf, dumb, poor, rich) unless the adjective is followed by a noun.
- ✓ The boy had been **blind** since birth.
- ✓ The girl had been **a deaf person** since birth.
- × The child had been **a rich** since birth.
1. ✓ The child had been rich since birth.
2. ✓ The child had been a rich person since birth.

The boy had been **a** blind since birth—the usage of ‘a’ is incorrect because you should not use either ‘a’ or ‘an’ before an adjective. It means that you cannot say, **a blind, a deaf, a dumb, a poor, a rich**, unless the adjective is followed by a noun. Look at the other sentence, “The girl had been **a deaf person** since birth.” Here you use ‘a’ (article) before ‘deaf’ (adjective) but ‘person’ (noun) is present. Thus, **a deaf person, a dumb person, a poor person, a rich man, a rich woman** are all acceptable. But without the qualifying noun, the adjective will not take an article. That is the rule, which you should keep in mind.

Answers & Explanations

2. × I have **a** good news for you.
News is an uncountable noun. So the correct form is—
- ✓ I have good news for you.
- You can also say—**
- ✓ **a piece of news; a bit of news**
- ✓ **The good news is you don’t have to go to school tomorrow!**
- × **The good news are you don’t have to go to school tomorrow!**

You can say, *I have a piece of news which is good for you. I have a bit of news which is not that good for you.* So try to use *a piece of news*, *a bit of news*, though it may sound a little bit uncomfortable to you initially.

Look at another common error that we keep committing when we say, M. A., M. Phil., M. L. A., M. S., etc.

Now, the confusion for most of you is that the letter “M” gives the wrong impression that it is a consonantal sound, whereas, it has the sound of a vowel. Before the vowel sound, you use *an*, as in *an apple*, *an umbrella*. Similarly, the pronunciation the letter ‘M’ is ‘em,’ which starts with a vowel sound, hence, you should use *an*.

Look at the next one—

Answers & Explanations

4. ✗ Please send the letter to the address above-mentioned.

Use "above-mentioned" before the noun.

- ✓ Please send the letter to the above-mentioned address.

Above may be used before or after the noun:

- ✓ 'the above address', 'the address above'.

Above-mentioned is used in the adjectival position. So when you say, *please send the letter to the address above-mentioned*, the noun goes before, and adjectives follow it. To avoid this, use *above-mentioned* or any adjective that will come before the noun: *Please send the letter to the above-mentioned address*. Nonetheless, you can say *the above address* or *the address mentioned above*, both are acceptable. Look at the next one:

Answers & Explanations

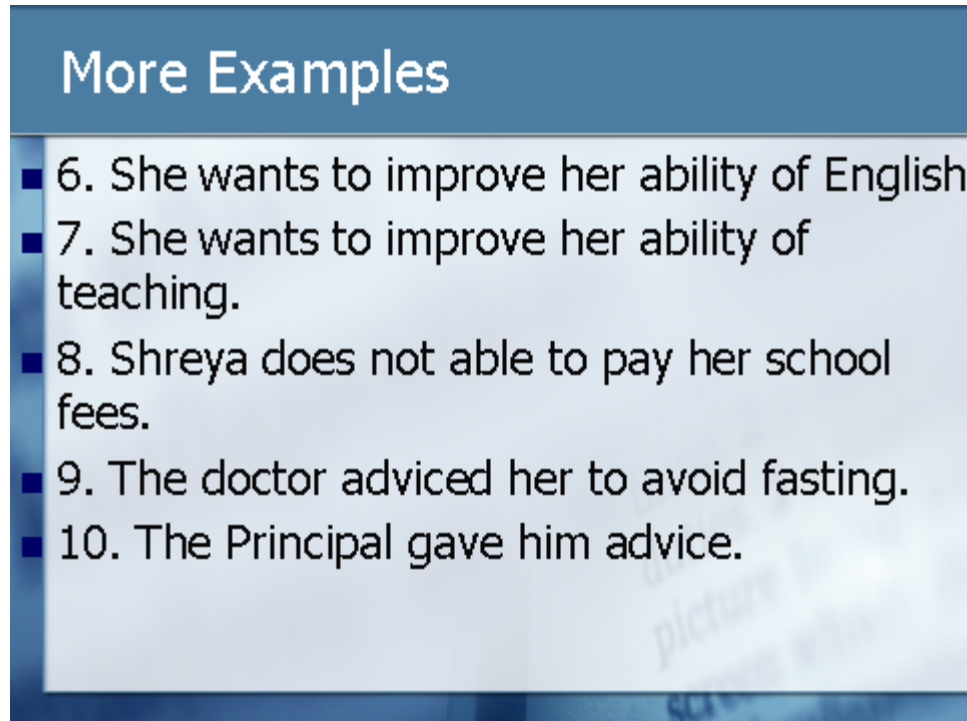
5. ✗ Shilpa wants to continue her studies in abroad.

■ (Except *from*) "abroad" is not used with other prepositions as *in*, *at*, *to*.

- ✓ Ronita came back *from* abroad with a strange English accent!
- ✓ You should *go* abroad, if you want to make good money.
- ✓ Those who *live* abroad often miss their homelands.

Here, the error is committed with regard to the wrong use of the preposition *in*. This results in *collocation clash*. Collocation refers to words that habitually appear together and thereby convey meaning by association. In this case, *in* cannot appear together with *abroad*. *Abroad* is not used with the prepositions: *in, at, to*. Thus, *I am going to abroad, I will be in abroad, I will be at abroad*, are wrong sentences.

It is time for looking at some more examples. Identify the errors in the following sentences:



More Examples

- 6. She wants to improve her ability of English
- 7. She wants to improve her ability of teaching.
- 8. Shreya does not able to pay her school fees.
- 9. The doctor adviced her to avoid fasting.
- 10. The Principal gave him advice.

You might have observed that the first two sentences are related to the use of the word *ability* and the last two are linked to the use of *advice*. But if you look at the two sentences carefully, you will note that one is used in the *verbal* position, and the other, in the *noun* form. If you have noted these differences, you can follow the explanations easily.

Answers & Explanations

- ✓ 6. She wants to improve her ability **in** English.
- ✓ 7. She wants to improve her **teaching ability**.
- ✓ **Ability in a language/subject.**
- ✓ **But, reading/writing/acting ability.**
- ✗ 8. Shreya does not **able** to pay her school fees.
 Able is an adjective and
 cannot be used as a verb
- ✓ Shreya **is** not able to pay her school fees.

Usually when a language or subject is referred to, it is **ability in English**, **ability in French**, **ability in Japanese**, **ability in German**, **ability in Chinese**, and **ability in mathematics**, **ability in physics**, and **ability in chemistry**. Similarly, the normal expression is **not ability of teaching**. The activity goes before and determines the word ability. **So you have reading ability**: Her reading ability is remarkable. **Writing ability**: So, apart from being a good speaker she also has a great amount of writing ability. Look at the next one, which reveals another common error committed by most of us: **Shreya does not able to pay her school fees**. **Able is an adjective, and cannot be used as a verb**. You can correct the sentence by using a proper verb like: **Shreya is not able to pay her school fees**.

Let us go to the ninth sentence.

Answers & Explanations

× 9. The doctor **advised** her to avoid fasting.

Advice is a noun. **Advise** is a verb.

Both are pronounced differently.

The **c** in **advice** has the sound /s/. (also, **device**)

The **s** in **advise** has the sound /z/. (also, **advise**)

- When you **advise** you give opinion or suggest a course of action.
- When you **advise** you counsel, caution, or warn somebody.
- The doctor **advised** her to avoid fasting.

Similar: **device** (*noun*)/**devise** (*verb*)

Note the difference between advice with “c”, and advise with “s”, the difference is one that of between noun and a verb. Similarly, when you use the word *device* and *devise*, you understand that there is a difference between the noun form and the verb form. In case of ‘device’, it indicates an instrument or equipment. Whereas, you ‘devise’ a crafty plan, you scheme or manipulate something.

Answers & Explanations

× 10. The Principal gave him **advice**.

- **advice** is an **uncountable** noun
- you can't use it in singular unless you say "a piece of advice".

✓ The Principal gave him **a piece of advice**.

An advice is wrong, *a piece of advice* is correct. Just like the way we discussed about news—“a piece of news”, not “a news”, and similarly “a piece of advice”, not “an advice” or “a advice”.

Now, let's look at six more examples very quickly.

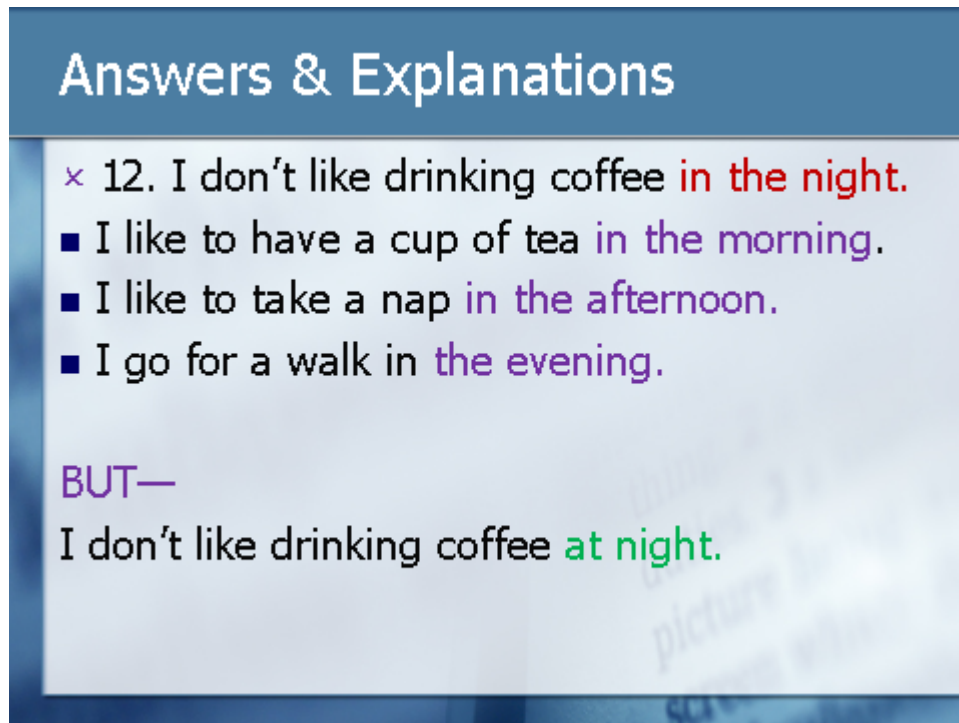
More Examples . . .

- 11. After 2004 Facebook's popularity has increased each year.
- 12. I don't like drinking coffee in the night.
- 13. Our French teacher, Miss Jaquelin, is very alive.
- 14. In the U. S. many wives and husbands stay at home alternatively to look after their children.
- 15. I almost have forgotten her birthday.
- 16. Shilpa comes always late to the bus-stop.

Answers & Explanations

- × 11. **After** 2004 Facebook's popularity has increased each year.
- **"Since"** (*NOT "after"*) is used to refer to a period of time that begins in the past and continues up to 'now' (the moment of speaking).
- ✓ **Since** 2004 Facebook's popularity has increased each year.

The error here is with regard to the use of the preposition *after*. The right word that should have been used here is *since*. *Since* is generally used in a *continuous* sense. And it is *since*, not *after*, that should be used for referring to a period of time that begins in the past and continues up to the current moment of speaking. Let's go to the next one. It is again very interesting and it is very easy for you to commit error in this case.



Answers & Explanations

- × 12. I don't like drinking coffee **in the night**.
- I like to have a cup of tea **in the morning**.
- I like to take a nap **in the afternoon**.
- I go for a walk in **the evening**.

BUT—

I don't like drinking coffee **at night**.

The error is committed in the phrase “in the night”. Why? Because the usual expression is *at night*. Whereas, all other parts of the day are referred to as: **in the morning, in the afternoon, in the evening**.

Look at the next answer, here it is an error with regard to usage of the word, “alive:”

Answers & Explanations

- × 13. Our French teacher, Miss Jaquelin, is very **alive**.

alive means *living*, not dead: "Although he lost his legs in the accident, he is still alive."

Use ***lively*** if you refer to somebody who is active, full of energy and enthusiasm.

- ✓ Our French teacher, Miss Jaquelin, is very **lively**.

Let us look at the remaining explanations and answers.

Answers & Explanations

- × 14. In the U. S. many wives and husbands stay at home **alternatively** to look after their children.

Alternatively means instead of the usual one.

Alternately means in turns, first one and then the other.

Alternatively we can buy a new Nano (instead of buying a used car).

- ✓ 14. In the U. S. many wives and husbands stay at home **alternately** to look after their children.

The error is with regard to the usage of word *alternatively* here. This word is often confused with the word *alternately*. Now look at the remaining explanations:

Answers & Explanations

- × 15. I **almost have** forgotten her birthday.
- × 16. Shilpa **comes always** late to the bus-stop.
- Adverbs such as *almost, always, scarcely, hardly, often, even* are placed before the main verb or the word it modifies.
- ✓ I have **almost forgotten** her birthday.
- ✓ Shilpa **always comes** late to the bus-stop.
- Except in "be" form: Shilpa **is always** late.

Now, look at four more examples before we wind up for this session.

More Examples . . .

- 17. Harshad goes to see his senior twice a week for help with his arithmetics.
- 18. Mathematics are not easy to learn.
- 19. The scissor is missing.
- 20. It's a long awaited for reply.

Let's look at the answers one by one. Look at the first one. *Arithmetics* is not used with "s", it is arithmetic, whereas. *Mathematics* is always used with "s."

Answers & Explanations

- × 17. Harshad goes to see his senior twice a week for help with his **arithmetics**.
- **mathematics** (with -s) but **arithmetic** (without-s)
- ✓ Harshad goes to see his senior twice a week for help with his **arithmetic**.
- × 18. Mathematics **are** not easy to learn.
- **Mathematics** (the subject) is an uncountable noun which takes a singular verb.
- ✓ Mathematics **is** not easy to learn.

Similarly, *Physics is not my favourite subject*.

Answers & Explanations

- × 19. The **scissor is** missing.
- **Scissors**, like **trousers**, **spectacles**, **shears**, **pliers**—that is—all names of things consisting of two parts, take a plural verb.
- ✓ The **scissors are** missing.
- × 20. It's a long **awaited for** reply.
The verb "await" takes a noun phrase as its object, and it doesn't require "for".
- ✓ It's a long **awaited** reply.

Similarly, the trousers are on the table, the spectacles are kept inside the cupboard, and the shears are found in the garden. In the next lecture, we will look at more examples and explanations.

REFERENCES

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Further Reference: Web Links

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- <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/>