

## Communication Skills: Lecture No.40

### Module 12

#### Lecture 3

### Common Errors

Hello and welcome to the final lecture on the module on Common Errors. Before we actually get into the examples, let us recall the definition and need to overcome Common Errors.

#### Common Errors

- Inappropriate and incorrect use of grammar, spelling, punctuation, and pronunciation cause common errors.
- A knowledge of common errors in English combined with a will to avoid them in practice adds to effectiveness in communication.
- Success in personal, professional and academic lives depend on effective communication.

Try to spot the common errors in these sentences:

## Spot the common errors:

1. My niece is good in computers.
2. She is weak at grammar.
3. I did not went to office yesterday.
4. Does she likes the gift?
5. She asked me what I am doing?
6. Do not make noise!
7. Its going to rain today.
8. Nano cars are economic.
9. The front side of the building.

Now, let's look at the answers and explanations:

## Answers & Explanations

1. My niece is **good at** computers. [**not in**]  
Also 'bad at,' 'clever at,' 'quick at,' 'slow at,' etc.
2. She is **weak in** grammar. [**not at**]
- × 3. I did not **went** to office yesterday.  
After **did** (the auxiliary) use **go** (the present infinitive without **to**);  
NOT **went** (the past tense of the indicative)  
I **did** not **go** to office yesterday.

*My niece is good at computers*, is the correct answer, not ‘in’.” “**Good in some subjects**”— is a Common Error. Also, you can say, **bad at computers**, **bad at mathematics**, **clever at mathematics**, **quick at mathematics**, **quick at computers**, **slow at mathematics**, etc., but when you refer to somebody’s weakness, in terms of subject, look at the next example, the correct form is: **She is weak in grammar**, it is not “**at**”. In the sentence, **I did not went to office yesterday**, the error is with reference to the usage of the past form of the verb **go**. Here **went** is wrongly used. Why? After **did**, which is the auxiliary of the verb, you have to use **go** that is in the present infinitive form without “to.” You don’t have to put another past form, when one is already there, and create the mistake of **double past**.

Let us go to the next set of errors—

## Answers & Explanations

× 4. **Does she likes** the gift?  
 After **does** the present infinitive without ‘to’ must be used. Hence—  
**Does she like** the gift?

× 5. She asked me what I **am** doing.  
 {error in the sequence of tenses}  
 Use past tense in the subordinate clause, if the verb in the main clause is in past tense.  
 ✓ She asked me what I **was** doing.

**Does she likes the gift?** After “does” the present infinitive without “to” must be used, that is, you can use only “like”, hence, the correct form is: **Does she like the gift?** Look at the next one: **She asked me what I am doing**. In the first part of the sentence, it is in the past tense form, whereas, in the second part, it is in the present tense form—which is an error unless you are quoting directly from somebody’s speech. **Use past tense in the subordinate clause, if the verb in the main clause is in past tense**. So, the correct form will be: **She asked me what I was doing**, because this “was” in past form agrees with the past tense form “asked” in the main clause.

Shall we go to the next example? Look at the next one, and this is again an interesting one: **Do not make noise**, so commonly used?!

## Answers & Explanations

× 6. Do not **make noise**!

Do not omit 'a/an' from **make a mistake**, **make a fortune**, **make an attempt**, etc.

✓ Do not **make a noise**!

× 7. **Its** going to rain today.

*Its* is the possessive form of it.

*It's* is the contraction of *it is* or *it has*.

Move the gate on **its** side. [**not it's**]

**It's** going to rain today.

**Don't make noise**—what is missing here is the use of the article, “a.” You should not omit “a” or “an”, depending on the sound, from phrases like **make a mistake**, **make a fortune**, **make an attempt**, etc. So the correct form here is: **Do not make a noise**. “Its”, is the possessive form of “it,” but what you want to say here is “it’s,” –the contracted form of “it is” or “it has”. So either say: **It is going to rain today** or **it’s going to rain today**. Also: Move the gate on **its** side.

## Answers & Explanations

× 8. Nano cars are **economic**.

*Economic* is connected with the economy of a country. But if something saves you money, then it is *economical*.

**Nano cars are economical**.

× 9. The front **side** of the building.

*Side* is redundant here because *Front* itself means the *side* of something that faces forward.

**The front of the building.**

Remember the difference between *economic* and *economical*. Do not say *economic* when you actually want to say *economical*. Sentence 9 is redundant because the word *side* is unnecessarily repeated. When you avoid redundant expressions, your language becomes tight, you minimize the number of words and maximize the effectiveness of your communication.

## More Errors . . .

10. She is in class eighth.
11. The PM has constituted a five-men committee to look into that matter.
12. Yours affectionate friend, Gita.
13. She has accepted to give a lecture.
14. Though she is fasting, yet she can deliver the lecture.
15. I have decided to let my hair grow up.

## Answers & Explanations

- × 10. She is in class eighth.  
Use ordinal numbers (fifth, eighth) before "class" "standard". Use a simple number (five, ten) after "class" "standard", etc.
- ✓ She is in the eighth class/ She is in class eight.
- × 11. The PM has constituted a five-men committee to look into that matter.  
Plural form cannot be used in the adjectival position.

Note that the plural form cannot be used in the adjectival position. The plural form here is **five-men**, the correct form will be, **five-man committee**. Similar examples: **It is a match lasting for five days**, or, **a five-day match**, not **five days match**, which is incorrect.

## Answers & Explanations

11. The PM has constituted a **five-man** committee to look into that matter.

It is a match lasting for five days  
but *five-day match*.

In expressions like *a five-man committee*, *a three-mile walk*, *a six-hour journey* and *a four-day conference* the noun occurring after the hyphen is always singular in spite of the fact that the preceding word indicates plurality.

The next one is very interesting—

Often you use this as a complimentary close at the end of your letter: **Yours affectionate friend**.

## Answers & Explanations

× 12. **Yours** affectionate friend, Gita.

■ **affectionate** is *adjective*, **affectionately** is *adverb*.

✓ Your affectionate friend, Gita

✓ Yours affectionately, Gita.

× 13. She has **accepted** to give a lecture.

When you *agree*, you commit to do something.

When you *accept*, you receive something.

She has **agreed** to give a lecture.

Note that when you accept, you receive something. Do not confuse the usage with *agree*, that is, when you commit to do something. Hence, the right form here is: **She has agreed to give a lecture.** Let us go to further examples.

## Answers & Explanations

× 14. **Though** she is fasting, **yet** she can deliver the lecture.

There is no need for an additional *conjunction yet* when **though** is already doing its function.

**Though she is fasting, she can deliver the lecture.**

× 15. I have decided to let my hair **grow up**.

*Grow*: become bigger, increase in size. *Grow up*: become adult or mature.(only animate)

I have decided to let my hair **grow**.

*grow*, it means to become bigger, increase in size. Whereas, *grow up*, actually refers to a child. When “though” is doing the function, don’t add another conjunction and make the sentence redundant. You simply say: **Though she is fasting, she can deliver the lecture.** Similarly, when you say growing up as an adult, or an adult growing up as a mature man. Further, use *grow up* to animate beings (like human beings and animals), and *grow* to inanimate things (like hair and nail).

Let us go to the next set of examples.



## Some More Errors . . .

- 16. My tooth is paining.
- 17. She did not allow me to cut jokes in the class.
- 18. This book comprises of six chapters.
- 19. The baby had temperature yesterday.
- 20. He returned back home from his office.
- 21. She and myself went to the seashore.
- 22. You are more beautiful than her.

Let's look at the answers and explanations.

## Answers & Explanations

- × 16. My tooth is **paining**.
- **Ache** is usually used either as a verb or in compounds with **tooth, ear, head, back, stomach**: 'I did some weight training on Sunday and my shoulders have been aching every since.' 'Watching that boring movie is giving me a headache.'
- But: 'After jogging, I had pains in my knees.'
- ✓ My tooth is **aching**.

Shall we go to the next one?



## Answers & Explanations

× 17. She did not allow me **to cut jokes** in the class.

You tell/make/crack jokes but you *cut jokes* only in *Indian English*!

She did not allow me **to make jokes** in the class.

× 18. This book comprises **of** six chapters.

Comprises **will not take the preposition “of”**.

**This book consists of six chapters.**

**This book comprises six chapters.**

In the Standard accepted English usage, you tell a joke, you make a joke, or you crack jokes, or you tell jokes, make jokes, crack jokes, but only in Indian English form, you cut jokes. Also, note the difference between the usage of ‘comprise’ and ‘consist’, where ‘consist’ will take the preposition “of” comprises will not take the preposition “of”. Both mean one and the same, they are synonymous with each other. So when you use it, use it very carefully.

Look at the next example.

## Answers & Explanations

× 19. The baby had **temperature** yesterday.

✓ The baby had **a temperature** yesterday.

**Temperature** is both a countable and uncountable noun. When it is used in countable sense, or referring to a person's body temperature **a** precedes it.

E.g., 'He is in bed with a temperature of 90°.'

× 20. He returned **back** home from his office.

Back is redundant here.

✓ He returned home from his office.

Remember that 'to have **temperature**' actually goes with, in counting sense, the article "a".

## Answers & Explanations

× 21. She and **myself** went to the seashore.

**Myself** is the reflexive form of **I**. It is used when the speaker or writer is also the person affected by an action.

e. g., "I cut myself on the knife."

**She and I** went to the seashore.

× 22. You are more beautiful than **her**.

✓ You are more beautiful than **she**.

**She** is used as the **subject** of a verb. **Her** is used as the **object** of a verb.

Now let us look for more errors in these sentences:

## Look for More Errors . . .

- 23. Her voice is as sweet as the nightingale.
- 24. He thinks highly of you.
- 25. The eyes of the girl are like a deer.
- 26. He is an alumni of IIT Kanpur.
- 27. His father has bought him a new dress.
- 28. I am senior than you.
- 29. Her continual talking prevented me from concentrating.

Let us look at the answers and explanations.

## Answers & Explanations

- × 23. Her voice is as sweet as the nightingale.
  - **that of** should be added to indicate that the comparison is between the voices but not between the voice and the bird.
- ✓ Her voice is as sweet as **that of** the nightingale.
- × 24. He thinks highly of you.
  - **high** is adjective, **highly** is adverb.
  - He thinks **high** of you.

## Answers & Explanations

- × 25. The eyes of the girl are like a deer.
- those of** should be added to indicate that the comparison is between the eyes but not between the eyes and the animal.
- ✓ The eyes of the girl are like **those of** a deer.

Look at the next one:

## Answers & Explanations

- × 26. He is an alumni of IIT Kanpur.
- ✓ He is an **alumnus** of IIT Kanpur.
- Alumni** (plural) refers to the former **male and female students** of an institution; **alumnus** indicates the singular and male form. Compare: **alumna** (singular form of a former female student) and **alumnae** (plural form of former female students).

Note that 'alumnus' indicates the singular and male form, hence, if you want to refer to the person in the singular sense then 'alumnus' should be used. This is also comparable to the usage of alumna, which is singular form of a former female student. So it is wrong to say: **She**

is an alumni of IIT Kanpur; it should be corrected as: She is an alumna of IIT Kanpur. The next one is quite interesting:

## Answers & Explanations

- × 27. His father has bought him a new dress.
  - Men and boys wear **suits**. Only women and girls wear **dresses**. As an uncountable noun *dress* can, however, be used in the case of both men and women,
  - e.g. 1. His father doesn't care much about *dress*. 2. Girls usually pay more attention to *dress* than boys.
- His father has bought him a new **suit/some new clothes**.

Look at the next sentence, again used commonly, but incorrect:

## Answers & Explanations

- × 28. I am senior than you.  
*Older than* but *senior to somebody*.  
I am **senior to** you.
  - × 29. Her **continual** talking prevented me from concentrating.
- Her **continuous** talking prevented me from concentrating.

## Answers & Explanations

- **Continual and Continuous**
- They're similar, but there's a difference.  
"Continual" means something that's always occurring, with obvious lapses in time.  
"Continuous" means something continues without any stops or gaps in between.
- e.g., *The continual music next door made it the worst night of studying ever.*
- Her **continuous** talking prevented me from concentrating.

This means she was talking without any gap, continuously talking so she was not allowing me to concentrate on my studies or the work at hand.

I hope these representative examples of *common errors* have given you fairly good knowledge of the kinds of errors that you should be avoiding. Make it a habit to note down new expressions when you read good books. While writing, try to make use of some of the forms that you must have imbibed in your reading. Also, you should also listen to radio programmes, especially the one that is shown on standard television channels where you get an exposure to the English spoken by native speakers. Listen to the way they use words. Internalize the correct usage and try to practice. Meanwhile, find some regular time to go through the books given under reference:



## REFERENCE

### Further Reference: Books

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- Fitikides, T. J. *Common Mistakes in English*. London: Orient Longman, 1984.
- Turton, N. D. & J. B. Heaton. *Longman Dictionary of Common Errors*. Essex: Longman, 1987. First Indian Edn. 1998.
- Wood, Frederick T. *Remedial English for Foreign Students*. London: Macmillan, 1974.

### Further Reference: Web Links

- <http://www.englishdaily626.com/c-errors.php>
- <https://public.wsu.edu/~brians/errors/>  
(Paul Brians *Common Errors in English Usage*)
- <http://www.onlineschools.org/library/grammar/>
- [http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1535\\_questionanswer/page15.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1535_questionanswer/page15.shtml)
- <http://www.dailywritingtips.com/>