

Easy English!
By Adrian Wallwork

Top 50 Grammar Mistakes



How to Avoid Them

 Springer

Easy English!

Series Editor

Adrian Wallwork

English for Academics SAS

Pisa, Italy

Easy English is a series of books intended for students and teachers of English as a foreign language.

More information about this series at <http://www.springer.com/series/15586>

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Student's Introduction

What Is Easy English?

Easy English is a series of books to help you learn and revise your English with minimal effort.

There are two main strands of the series. You can improve your English by

1. doing short exercises to improve specific areas of grammar (this book) and vocabulary. The grammar and vocabulary books on focus the areas that tend to lead to the most mistakes. The aim is just to highlight what you really need rather than overwhelming you with a mass of rules, many of which may have no practical daily value
2. reading texts in English that you might well normally read in your own language (e.g. personality tests, jokes, lateral thinking games, word searches).

Who Is this Book for? What Level Do I Need to Be?

Anyone who is interested in eliminating the typical mistakes they make as a result of not being able to easily distinguish between similar grammatical items (e.g. the difference between the present perfect and the simple past, or between that and which).

You need to have reached a mid-intermediate level of English to benefit from this book.

Which Is the Best Format to Buy this Book in?

Paper, without any doubt. The exercises involve you writing or underlining directly onto the page. With an e-reader this would be much more difficult. However, an e-book provides a dictionary which will occasionally be useful for you.

How Many Grammar Mistakes Are Dealt with?

This book is called *The Top 50 Grammar Mistakes*. In reality there are several hundred mistakes dealt within the 50 chapters of Part 1 of this book. The 50 chapters are grouped by type of mistake, rather than individual mistakes.

In What Sense Is this Book an Example of 'Easy English'?

Many books on grammar try to cover too much and appear to give equal coverage to grammatical rules irrespectively of whether these rules:

- are common
- frequently give rise to mistakes

This means that you can end up doing many exercises that will not really be of much benefit to you. This is because they practise rules and examples that you are unlikely to meet in real life.

This book thus focuses on the areas of English grammar that tend to give rise to the most mistakes.

It is 'easy' because

- the typical mistakes are clearly laid out and easy to read
- example sentences contain examples using common English vocabulary
- the exercises are quick to do (they just involve underlining the correct answer) and they are quick to check

Of course, English can be much more complex. The good news is that the complex areas of English grammar are also those that tend to be used the least.

How Is the Book Organized?

Each chapter has a **HEADING** which gives the key words dealt with in the section. In the explanations below I will be referring to Chapter 32 (*Much, Many, A Lot of, Lots of*).

Each chapter is made up of five subsections.

1) **THE FIRST SUBSECTION** shows some typical mistakes. All sentences in *italics* are mistakes. Each mistake is then followed in the line below with the correct version (in normal script). The key point is highlighted in bold in the correct version. Here is an example:

Was there much people?

Were there **many** people?

2) In the SECOND SUBSECTION correct examples are given of the key words used in typical situations. These correct examples are shown in a box with a grey background. Here is an example:

We have **a lot of** information.
 We **do not** have **much** information.

3) In the THIRD SUBSECTION, very simple guidelines are given of the key words. For example:

Guidelines

- **much** - used with **UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS**, generally in negative and interrogative.
- **many** - used with plural nouns, generally in negative and interrogative
- **a lot of** - used with all nouns, typically in the affirmative but also in the interrogative
- **lots of** - can replace *a lot of* in affirmative, but is not suitable for formal situations. **lots of** is very rarely used in negative phrases, and is also quite rare in questions.

These guidelines are not comprehensive, they are designed to give you a quick easy-to-remember guideline to the most common uses of the particular word in question.

4) In the FOURTH SUBSECTION, there is an exercise which tests the key words given in the heading of the chapter, so in this case **much, many, a lot of, lots of**.

The exercise simply consists in underlining the correct form. In some cases, more than one form may be correct. Here is an example:

1. I have **a lot of / lots of / many / much** books on this subject.
2. We have **a lot of homework / much homework / many homeworks** to do tonight.

In question 1) *a lot of, lots of* and *many* are all possible answers, so you should underline all three. In question 2) only *a lot of homework* is possible.

A few of the exercises are based on exercises that can be found in *English for Academic Research: Grammar Exercises* (Springer), which is part of a series of books on academic English, whereas the book you are reading now is focused on general English.

5) The FINAL SUBSECTION is the key. If a form is written in brackets, this means that this form is possible but that the form not in brackets is more common. For example:

- 18) a lot of advice 19) much (a lot of) 20) much feedback

The best answer to question 19) is *much* but *a lot of* would also be possible.

Revision Tests

In Part 2 of the book there are two sets of revision test. Revision Tests 1 deals all the incorrect sentences given in the first subsection of each chapter. Correct the sentences, then go to the first subsection of the relevant chapter to see the answer. Revision Tests 2 is based on the second subsection of each chapter. Again, go to the second subsection of the relevant chapter to see the answer.

For example:

The test on page 152 looks like this.

1. I have much work at the moment.
2. How much times have you been there?
3. Was there much people?
4. You don't need many money to do this.

In the above case, you correct the sentences. Then to check your answers, turn to page 87, where you will see the same sentences (this time in *italics*) but with the correct answers below (in normal script).

I have much work at the moment.

I have **a lot of** work at the moment.

How much times have you been there?

How **many** times have you been there?

Was there much people?

Were there **many** people?

You don't need many money to do this.

You don't need **much / a lot of** money to do this.

Where Can I Find More Grammar Explanations and Tests?

Top 50 grammar mistakes is aimed at students studying general English. I have also written a series of books on academic English.

If you want more detailed grammar explanations, then you can find them in this book:

English for Research: Grammar, Usage and Style <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-4614-1593-0>

If you would like to do extra grammar exercises and see examples of English sentences in a more technical context, then you can use this book:

English for Academic Research: Grammar Exercises <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-1-4614-1593-0>

The companion to *Top 50 grammar mistakes* which is entitled *Top 50 vocabulary mistakes* also contains many exercises that you might find useful.

By using all these books in combination, your level of English should improve considerably.

In the appendix, you can find the index to the *Grammar Exercises* and the Table of Contents of the *Vocabulary Exercises* book. This will help you to find additional grammar explanations or exercises.

What Are the Other Books in this Series? Which One Should I Read Next?

Currently there are five other books in the series.

Top 50 vocabulary mistakes - how to avoid them

Wordsearches - widen your vocabulary in English

Test your personality - quizzes that are fun and improve your English

Word games, riddles and logic tests - boost your English and have fun

Jokes - have a laugh and improve your English

Apart from the vocabulary book, the other four books are designed to be dipped into rather than being read from the first page to the last. 'Dipped into' means that you can pick up the book and read any page you like, and for as long as you like.

You are likely to have more fun with the books if you read two or three at the same time. So rather than spending the next month concentrating exclusively on vocabulary or grammar, you might find it more fun and stimulating to read a few jokes from the Jokes book, and do a few wordsearches and quizzes.

Teachers Introduction

Which Grammar Mistakes Were Chosen and Why?

You might expect learners of English whose native languages are different (e.g. Arabic, Japanese, Polish, Spanish) to make very different mistakes when writing and reading in English. In reality, while there are some mistakes that are unique to a particular language speaker, there is a core of mistakes that ALL non-native speakers make. For example, speakers of virtually all the world's main languages will say something similar to *I am here since a week* instead of *I have been here (for) a week*.

The aim of this book and its companion book on vocabulary (Top 50 vocabulary mistakes - how to avoid them) is to focus on the most commonly made mistakes. This means that readers can set themselves a reasonable target. So rather than trying to learn all English grammar and learning interminably long lists of words, students (and you the teacher) can just focus on those areas / words that tend to be used the most frequently and / or tend to create the most misunderstandings.

This approach (focus on key issues only) immediately differentiates the two books from already existing books on the market (grammars, and grammar / vocabulary exercise books) whose coverage is far too wide or whose aim is simply for reference.

I consulted books of typical mistakes made by speakers of some of the most important languages in the world: Chinese, French, Italian, German, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish. I also had access to mistakes made by Czechs, Poles, and Romanians. I then looked to see what mistakes in English were common to the majority of these languages. You can find a list of these books on page xi of the companion volume *Top 50 vocabulary mistakes*.

I was somewhat hampered by the fact that one of the two books I had on Chinese mistakes and the only book I could find on Japanese mistakes were in the native languages, and I was thus only able to read the sentences in English. I am also influ-

enced by the fact that I live and teach in Italy, and therefore have a natural tendency towards noticing and recording mistakes by speakers of Latinate languages - French, Portuguese, Romanian and Spanish. Thus I would say that my book suffers from a bias of containing more ‘European’ mistakes than any other.

In any case, all the mistakes listed in this book and in its companion book on Vocabulary mistakes are extremely common. If your students manage to master the differences between the various words and constructions, then their English will improve massively - much more so than trying to learn all English vocabulary or all grammar items.

What Is the Main Focus and Rationale?

I have tried to focus on those grammar mistakes that non-native English speakers of all languages tend to make, i.e. those mistakes that are common to speakers of all language groups, whether they be, for instance, French, Russian, or Chinese.

Clearly, mistakes tend to vary from language speaker to language speaker, but there does seem to be a core of typical mistakes as I discovered by researching the books on typical mistakes.

However, there are some areas of grammar that tend to be more idiosyncratic and these are:

- word order - i.e. the position of the main parts of the sentence: subject, verb, object; and also the position of adverbs
- prepositions

Word order and the use of preposition tends to vary massively from language to language, even languages within the same language group, and of course some languages don’t even have prepositions.

I have not gone into massive detail about the differences between the various tenses, as in any case this would have required a lot of space.

Instead I have tried to only focus on those errors that cause the most mistakes. This means that within a certain category, e.g. the definite article or the present perfect, I have not covered every single possible rule and mistake. The idea is to promote ‘easy English’ which means ignoring anything too complex, unless it is a frequent source of error.

I have also avoided areas that tend to lead to confusing explanations (*be used to vs get used to*; some uses of the present continuous and present perfect continuous; anomalous uses of *some* and *any*) or are only useful in the written form (*which vs that*). Some of these more complex items can be found in the books listed below in the section entitled: *Where can I find more grammar explanations and tests?*

How Should I Use this book?

The exercises in this book can be used to test student's proficiency with particular sets of words with similar meanings.

They are best used after a specific mistake has been made by a student. For example, if a student misuses *make* and *let*, and you believe that this is a recurrent mistake or is likely to be made by others in the class, then you can:

- write the mistake on the whiteboard
- refer students to the explanation of the differences - example sentences are highlighted in a grey background in each section, and are followed by guidelines to usage
- check your students' understanding - in a monolingual class, you can give them a few examples in their own language for them to translate.
- give them the exercise

A few lessons later you can then revise the point, by giving students the relevant exercise from the exercise contained in Part 2 Revision Tests.

Where Can I Find More Grammar Explanations and Tests?

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Author's Request to Teachers

It would be great if you could contribute to future editions. Please send me examples or explanations that you would like me to include. Please be as specific as possible, provide clear examples, and highlight to me why you think the 'mistake' should be included.

Please also let me know if you find any typos or explanations and keys to exercises that you don't agree with.

Finally, feel free to contact me (adrian.wallwork@gmail.com) if you have ideas for other books that could be part of this Easy English series.

Please also check out our self published books at: sefl.co.uk