
Student Mistakes

Below are common mistakes learners make in the EFL classroom and some ideas on how to correct mistakes.

Common mistakes with examples

L1 (Mother Tongue) vocabulary or grammar patterns imitated in English. This is where students use the forms of their native language in English.

- I want to make a party for you (incorrect verb choice: "have" a party).
- I am here since Tuesday (tense: have been).
- She needs (--) book about irregular verbs (no article: a).

L1 syntax used in English.

- I him asked why he did that.
- The ball to her kicked I.

L1 pronunciation used in English.

- I'm going to heat (hit) you if you say that again (long vowel, short vowel confusion).
- Zat (that) is fine wiz (with) me (no voiced "th" sound used).
- The flame (frame) is nice with that picture (no l-r differentiation after a consonant cluster).

False cognates (false friends) cause students to choose words that are inappropriate in English based on L1 vocabulary. Below are a few examples of false Spanish/English cognates.

- "Embarazada" means "pregnant", not "embarrassed".
- "Padres" means parents, not fathers or priests.
- "Pretender" means "intend", not to "pretend".
- "Actual" means "current", not "actual".
- "Lectura" means "reading matter", not "lecture".

Students confuse forms they've studied because the forms haven't been completely internalised yet, or they try to overuse the newly learned form (over-generalisation).

- Did you went skiing last weekend?
 - Have you been run for exercise for a long time?
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- Do you know who is he?

Students are tired and just forget a form that they already know.

- It's cold outside, aren't you?

Tips for when to correct mistakes

- When working on **accuracy** it is a good idea to correct immediately upon hearing the error
- When working on **fluency** it is a good idea to correct after the student is completely done speaking. Take mental notes or write your notes down to go over after the student is done
- Don't forget to provide positive feedback and praise what the student did well! The student needs to know what they did well and is important for their self esteem. It is not always important to correct every single mistake and this can be time consuming and de-motivating for the student.
- Be sure to reflect on your own teaching. If students are making many mistakes this may indicate that the subject was not properly taught.

Suggestions for correcting mistakes

- You can simply tell the student what the mistake was.
- You can elicit the correct form from another student and then ask for the correct form again from the first student.
- You can repeat the sentence up to the error and indicate with your voice or a gesture that the student needs to complete the sentence again because something is wrong.
- You can ask a question (Was one going or were two?).
- You can show by a facial expression that something's not right.
- You can use a one-word question (time?) (future?).
- Combine a gesture with a facial expression.
- Echo the sentence with stress on the error.
- Write the sentence with the error on the board.
- Write a timeline on the board.
- Use the phonemic chart to indicate the sound.