

Common ESL Verb Mistakes: A Practical Guide with Examples, Series - Part 3

This **common ESL verb mistakes, series: Part 3** includes a list of errors learners make, along with explanations and examples. The guide is intended to strengthen your [English grammar](#) competence and help you start speaking English with confidence.

Visit [this page to know more](#) about this site.

1. ESL Grammar Practice: “Break” vs. “Break Down” → “Break” = Quebrar; “Break Down” = Parar de Funcionar

✓ Break = separate into pieces

- I broke my phone screen.

✓ Break down = stop working

- My car broke down.

Mistake to avoid:

✗ *My car broke yesterday.*

✓ *My car broke down yesterday.*

Practice

Write 2 sentences with **break** and 2 with **break down**.

Learn here: [Top 11 essential English verbs](#) to use in your everyday interactions.

2. ESL Grammar Practice: “Hold” vs. “Carry” → “Hold” = Segurar; “Carry” = Mover Algo de Um Lugar Para Outro

✓ Hold = keep something in your hands

- Hold my hand.

✓ Carry = move something from one place to another

- I carried the boxes upstairs.

Mistake to avoid:

- ✗ *Can you hold my bag to the car?*
- ✓ *Can you carry my bag to the car?*

Practice

Write 3 sentences using **carry**.

3. ESL grammar practice: “Move Out” vs. “Move In” → “Move Out” = Deixar a Moradia; “Move in” = Ir para Nova Moradia

These three English verbs can create confusions. Here is what they stand for:

- Move your chair.

Move out = leave a home

- I moved out last year.

move in = start living in a new home

- We moved in last week.

Mistake to avoid:

- ✗ *I moved to my new house yesterday.* (unclear)
- ✓ *I moved in yesterday.*

Practice

Write 3 sentences using these verbs.

Practice also here [8 verbs for expressing everyday life in English](#).

4. Common ESL Verb Mistakes: “Pass” vs. “Spend” –Time → “Pass” = Passar; “Spend” = Dedicar-se a Uma Actividade

Pass = time goes by

- Two hours passed quickly.

Spend = you use time

- I spent two hours studying.

Mistake to avoid:

✗ *I passed two hours studying.*

✓ *I spent two hours studying.*

Practice

Write 2 sentences with **pass** and 2 with **spend** as a way of fixing this common English verb confusions. To know about verbs visit: [Essential English verbs.](#)

5. ESL Grammar Practice: “Fix” vs. “Repair” → “Fix” = “Consertar”; “Repair” = Reparar

Both mean the same thing.

Fix = everyday English

- Can you fix my phone?

Repair = more formal

- The mechanic repaired the engine.

Mistake to avoid:

✗ *I need to repair my hair.*

✓ *I need to fix my hair.*

Practice

Write 3 sentences using **fix**.

6. ESL Grammar Practice: “Turn On” vs. “Switch On” — Same Meaning, → Mesmo Significado “Ligar” ou “Acender”

Turn on (everyday English)

- Turn on the lights.

Switch on (slightly more formal)

- Please switch on the projector.

Mistake to avoid:

✗ *Switch on the TV* (not wrong, just less common)

✓ *Turn on the TV.*

Practice

Practice using **turn on** in 2 sentences. Common English verb confusions is fixed by practicing.

Find here: [practical English practices](#) to help you build confidence in English.

7. ESL Grammar Practice: “Let” vs. “Allow” — One Is More Natural → “Let” = Deixar; “Allow” = Permitir

Let = informal, everyday

- Let me help you.

Allow (formal)

- Smoking is not allowed here.

Mistake to avoid:

✗ *Allow me go home.*

✓ *Let me go home.*

✓ *Allow me to come with you.*

Practice

Write 2 sentences with **let** and 2 with **allow**.

Check also here other [essential English verbs](#).

8. Common [English Verb](#) Confusions: “Call” vs. “Call Back” — Don’t Confuse Them → “Call” = Ligar; “Call back” = Retornar a Ligação

Call = phone someone

- I called my sister.

Call back = return a call

- I’ll call you back later.

ESL grammar Practice: Mistake to Avoid:

✗ *I will call you later back.*

✓ *I will call you back later.*

Practice

Write 2 sentences using **call back**.

9. ESL Grammar Practice: “Look After” vs. “Take Care Of” — Same Meaning, Different Style

Look after = British English

- Can you look after my dog?

Take care of = more general

- I take care of my little brother.

ESL grammar practice: Mistake to avoid:

✗ *I look after of my brother.*

✓ *I look after my brother.*

Practice

Write 2 sentences using each phrase.

For actual practicing of English vocabulary visit the article "[English Expressions for Daily Life](#)."

Most Common ESL Verb Errors Other than Already Discussed:

1. Subject–Verb Agreement → *Concordância entre sujeito e o verbo*

How to avoid subject–verb agreement mistakes in English. To avoid it you need to know that:

- Learners often forget to add -s for third person singular in present tense.
 - ✗ *He go to school every day.*
 - ✓ *He goes to school every day.*
- Overgeneralizing plural forms with verbs.

Whether you're writing or speaking, remember to add an "s" for third person singular. This fixes subject–verb agreement errors.

2. ESL grammar practice: Tense Consistency

- Switching tenses within the same sentence or paragraph.
 - ✗ *Yesterday I go to the store and buy milk.*
 - ✓ *Yesterday I went to the store and bought milk.*

3. ESL Grammar Practice: Irregular Verb Forms

- Using regular endings for irregular verbs.
 - ✗ *She goed home.*
 - ✓ *She went home.*

Avoid using regular endings for irregular verbs, Instead use simple past forms of the irregular verb. The following ESL grammar practice for regular vs. irregular verbs can help you better understand this.

Have a look on the tables below to avoid making common ESL mistakes:

ESL Grammar Practice: Regular Verbs

Simple Present	Simple Past	EG Sample Sentence	PT Sample Sentence
live	lived	I lived in Maputo last year.	Eu vivi no Maputo ano passado.
study	studied	She studied last night.	Ela estudou ontem à noite.
want	wanted	They wanted to go last year.	Eles quiseram ir no ano passado.
fix	fixed	He fixed his phone yesterday.	Ele consertou o telefone ontem.
cook	cooked	We cooked pasta last night.	Nós cozinhamos massa ontem à noite.

ESL Grammar Practice: Irregular verbs

Simple Present	Simple Past	EG Sample Sentence	PT Sample Sentence
go	went	I went to the park yesterday.	Eu fui ao parque ontem.
Write	wrote	She wrote a letter yesterday.	Ela escreveu uma carta ontem.
leave	left	They left early yesterday.	Eles saíram cedo ontem.
come	came	She came late yesterday.	Ela veio atrasada ontem.
make	made	We made a cake yesterday.	Nós fizemos um bolo ontem.

Using list of irregular verbs like this, can greatly help you fix irregular verb mistakes in English.

Find here [English vocabulary for common activities](#) to practice with the verbs above.

4. Common ESL Verb Mistakes: Gerunds vs. Infinitives

How to use gerunds and infinitives correctly in English? The gerund and infinitive errors are caused by the confusion about which verbs take **-ing** or **to + verb**.

- ✘ *I enjoy to swim.*
- ✔ *I enjoy swimming.*

To help you decide which verbs take **-ing** or **to + verb**, we've made two lists. Verbs followed by **-ing (Gerund)** and Verbs followed by **to + verb (Infinitive)** including what they are about.

Verbs Followed by -ing (Gerund)

These verbs are usually about **enjoyment, avoidance, or minding activities**.

- enjoy → *I enjoy reading books.*
- avoid → *She avoids eating junk food.*
- dislike → *He dislikes waiting in long lines.*
- finish → *We finished cleaning the house.*
- suggest → *They suggested going to the park.*
- consider → *I'm considering moving to another city.*
- admit → *She admitted cheating on the test.*
- deny → *He denied stealing the money.*
- mind → *Do you mind opening the window?*

Verbs Followed by to + verb (Infinitive)

These verbs often express **plans, decisions, or desires**.

- want → *I want to learn English.*
- need → *You need to study harder.*
- decide → *She decided to travel abroad.*
- plan → *We plan to visit Paris.*
- hope → *They hope to pass the exam.*
- agree → *He agreed to help me.*
- promise → *She promised to call back.*
- refuse → *He refused to pay the bill.*
- learn → *I'm learning to drive.*

This gerunds vs infinitives verbs examples provided can help you better understand and avoid common ESL mistakes.

See here [16 confusing English verbs](#) that you need to master to speak confidently.

5. ESL grammar practice: Conditional Sentences

- Incorrect verb forms in “if” clauses.
 - ✗ *If I will be late, I'll call you.*
 - ✓ *If I am late, I'll call you.*

In English the **if-clause expresses the condition** (present tense), and the **main clause expresses the result** (future tense)

Example of common conditional sentence errors in ESL writing:

- ✗ *If I will be late, I'll call you.*
- ✓ *If I am late, I'll call you.*

Here is how it works:

- **If-clause = Present tense**
- **Main clause = Future tense (will + verb)**
- Formula: **If + Present Simple, ... will + Verb**
- Example: *If it rains tomorrow, we will stay home.*

You can avoid conditional sentence errors in English by following these simple helpful rules.

6. ESL Grammar Practice: Passive Voice Errors

- Misplacing auxiliary verbs.
 - ✗ *The cake ate by children.*
 - ✓ *The cake was eaten by children.*

Passive Voice Formula: Subject + be (am/is/are/was/were) + Past Participle (+ by + agent)

Example:

- Active: *Children ate the cake.*
- Passive: *The cake was eaten by children.*

You can avoid passive voice mistakes even as ESL learner. Just follow the the rules

7. Auxiliary & Modal Verbs

- Forgetting to use auxiliaries in questions/negatives.
 - ✗ *She not like pizza.*
 - ✓ *She does not like pizza.*
- Misusing modals like *can, should, must*.

Rule for Auxiliaries (Do/Does/Did)

- **Present Simple (negative/question)** → use **do/does** + base verb.
- **Past Simple (negative/question)** → use **did** + base verb.

Examples:

- ✗ *She not like pizza.*
- ✓ *She does not like pizza.*
- ✗ *He not go to school yesterday.*
- ✓ *He did not go to school yesterday.*

Questions:

- ✗ *She like pizza?*
- ✓ *Does she like pizza?*

To learn English verb tenses visit: [5 most English verb tenses](#)

ESL Grammar Practice: Comparison Table

Mistake Type	Example Error	Correct Form
Subject–Verb Agreement	<i>He go to school.</i>	<i>He goes to school.</i>
Tense Consistency	<i>Yesterday I go to store.</i>	<i>Yesterday I went to store.</i>
Irregular Verbs	<i>She goed home.</i>	<i>She went home.</i>

Mistake Type	Example Error	Correct Form
Gerunds vs. Infinitives	<i>I enjoy to swim.</i>	<i>I enjoy swimming.</i>
Conditional Sentences	<i>If I will be late...</i>	<i>If I am late...</i>
Passive Voice	<i>The cake ate by children. The cake was eaten...</i>	
Auxiliary/Modal Verbs	<i>She not like pizza.</i>	<i>She does not like pizza.</i>

Consider checking "[15 common mistakes learners make and how to fix them](#)" so to help you improve your English.

Use these English grammar tips everyday whenever you feel stuck on your English journey to confidence building. And remember: the practical exercise to fix common ESL verb mistakes is by practicing and seeking for help from fluent speakers

By doing so, you'll [boost your confidence](#). Find here [mini lesson on basic grammar rules, quizzes and conversations](#), for a solid knowledge.

Access here [the archive of the site](#).