

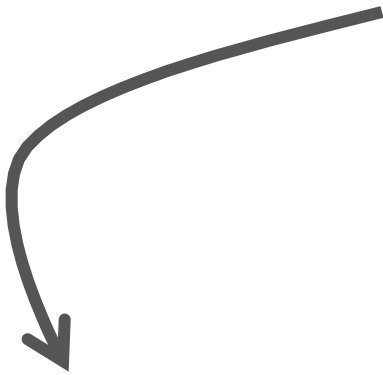
15

Quick Fixes for Your Top English Challenges



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#15 Listen vs. Hear

Listen and hear seem to mean the same thing. They can be used interchangeably and still make sense, but their meanings are slightly different.

Hear is more about your senses. It's passive and suggests your ears are working. You hear sounds even if you aren't paying attention to them.

Listen is more of an action. You are actively hearing, with intention. You are focused and trying to understand or give thought when you are listening.

Here are some examples:

“Do you like to listen to music?”

“Did you just hear that fire truck?”

“Is he still listening to the radio?”

#14 Say, Tell, Speak, Talk

Speak, Talk, Tell and Say all mean almost the same thing: to communicate verbally. But even though they seem to be interchangeable, their meanings are different. It's important to use them correctly!

To Speak: This is the most formal of these verbs. A person might say, "May I speak to you?" Often this verb talks about language, as in "Do you speak English?"

To Talk: This is less formal and usually refers to conversation, such as "Let's talk about it," or "Talk to me."

To Tell: This verb is used to inform or tell a story, but can also be used to command. A person might say "Tell me what happened," or "I told you to call me."

To Say: Usually this verb is used to quote someone or something, as in "What did she say?" or "What did the President say he would do?"

#13 Wish vs. Hope

The feeling of wish and hope is similar. However, the way we use them in English is different.

Wish is almost always used with the past tense.

Hope is for talking about the future. We use the future tense, or the present tense to talk about the future.

For example:

I wish I had been invited to the party! It sounded fun.

OR

I wish I was invited to the party.

NOT -- I wish I will go to the party. X

For example:

I hope I'll be invited to the party.

OR

I hope I'm invited to the party.

NOT – I hope I was invited to the party. X

#12 Talking About Age

Which is correct?

How many years do you have? I have 30 years old.

OR

How old are you? I am 30 years old.

This is a simple but common error that is a result of directly translating from your native language to English.

First of all, stop translating! Try to learn English by connecting the English words and phrases directly with meaning. Skip the step of translation into your native language! It may be more difficult at first, but you will develop stronger and faster English skills.

Also, #12 brings up an interesting cultural point.

Did you know that it can be considered rude to ask about an American's age?

It is OK to talk about age with your friends or with children.

However, it can be inappropriate and even offensive to talk about age in a professional, work-related situation, or with someone you don't know well.

In the United States, it is not as important to know someone's age as it may be in other countries.

#11 When I will be there, I will call you.

Are you over-using “will?”

Remember that “will” can only be used once in a sentence.

The correct expression of the idea in #11 is:
When I’m there, I’ll call you.

We use the present tense to talk about the future in the first part of this sentence.

Note: It is not correct to say “When I will be there, I call you.” X

Imagine yourself in the future thinking “I am here, so now I will call my friend.” That’s the idea behind using the present tense in the first part – you’re imagining yourself in the future.

#10 Bored or Boring?

Are you bored or boring?

Hopefully you are neither!

Being “bored” means that something outside of you like a bad movie is making you feel bored.

-ED = your feeling

Being “boring” means that you have the quality of boringness. You are a boring person.

-ING = a personal quality

Are you interested or interesting?

If you're interested, you are feeling curious and engaged.

If you're interesting, you probably have lots of friends!

#9 I thought vs. I had thought

Which is correct?

“I thought” or “I had thought”

Actually, they are both correct. You need to know when it is best to use one or the other.

“I thought” is a stand-alone expression that refers to a time in the past.

For example:

“I thought a long time about the job offer in Baghdad.” The time is over. We don’t know if I accepted or not.

“I had thought” is in the past and must be connected to another action in the past.

For example:

“I had thought a long time about the job offer in Baghdad, when I received a job offer in Tokyo.”

The job offer in Tokyo came in the past too, but is connected to the idea of a job offer in Baghdad. The implied message is that I accepted the job offer in Tokyo and not in Baghdad.

#8 Lend vs. Borrow

Lend and borrow are easily confused because they refer to the same action, but from different perspectives.

To lend is to give (for a while).

To borrow is to take (for a while).

For example:

Lindsay: "Hey Gabby, will you lend me your phone for a minute?"

Gabby: "Sure Lindsay, no problem, you can borrow it."

Also, nowadays the verb "to lend" is not used as much as other phrases. For example, native English speakers often say, "let me use," or "can use" instead.

For example:

Lindsay: "Hey Gabby, will you let me use your phone for a minute?"

Gabby: "Sure Lindsay, no problem, you can use it."

#7 I invite you

If you want to invite a friend or colleague to do something, you can say, for example:

“I’d like to invite you to coffee.”

DANGER: This wording does not say who will pay. In American culture, it is typical to split a bill, “go dutch,” or “go half-and-half.”

If you want to pay, you can say:

“It’s my treat.”

“It’s on me.”

“I’ve got this.”

Polite responses include:

“No, I wanted to get this!”

“It’s OK, we can split it!”

“Are you sure? OK, thank you so much! I’ve got the next one!”

#6 I will vs. I am going to

In English class, your teacher may have told you that “will” means the future. That’s true, but native English speakers often use “going to” to talk about the future.

What’s the difference? When do you use “will” vs. “going to?”

We use will for:

- Plans in the distance future
- In the moment we make a decision

For example:

“Do you think you’ll get married someday?” “Maybe I will.”

“Do you want to try some cake?” “Yes, I’ll try some!”

We use going to for:

- Plans in the near future
- Plans that have been established

For example:

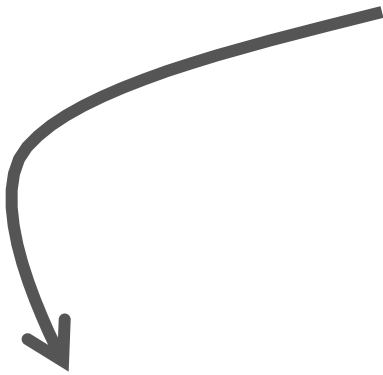
“This weekend I’m going to the beach.”

“I’m going to get married next year.”

Note: Native speakers often pronounce “going to” as “gonna.”

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#5 “People is crazy.”

“People” is the plural of “person.” Even though there is no plural “s” on the end of this noun, it means more than one.

That means the correct phrase is:

“People are crazy.”

On the other hand, “family” is a word that appears to be plural but it is actually singular:

“My family is crazy.”

We are talking about family as one unit, even though there is more than one person.

#4 Much vs. Many

Use “much” with mass nouns you can’t really count, for example:

- Food, Sugar, Milk
- Information, Homework
- Money
- Love

Use “many” with plural nouns you can count, for example:

- Desserts
- People, Children
- Cities

We often use “much” with a negative idea, for example:

“I don’t have much information.”

With a positive idea, we often use “a lot,” for example:

“I have a lot of information.”

#3 To Make vs. To Do

Make and do are tough to sort out. The good news is that yes, there are rules! The bad news is that it can be difficult to remember all of them immediately. It takes time and practice.

Here are some examples of things you do:

- Work, homework, assignments
- A presentation
- A survey
- A favor

Remember that “do” can mean produce or complete, among other things.

Here are some examples of things you make:

- Phone calls
- The bed, the table
- Food, Drinks
- Friends

Try to remember these actions together with “do” or “make.” Repeat them together to yourself.

And remember, it's OK to make mistakes! We learn through trying and correcting.

#2 By Yourself vs. On Your Own

Sometimes it's easy to confuse or mix up the words in these phrases, ending up with a strange and incorrect phrase like:

Incorrect --"I can do it by my own." X

Instead, say:

"I can do it on my own."

OR

"I can do it by myself."

Is there a difference between the two phrases?

No, there isn't! You can use either one you like.

Note: Remember to use the appropriate pronoun, for example, "you/your/yourself," "he/his/himself," "she/her/herself," "they/their/themselves," "we/our/ourselves."

#1 “I want to study in US.”

What's the problem here? There's something missing!

“The” is a small but important word in English. Knowing when to use it can be tricky, especially if it is used differently in your native language or not used at all!

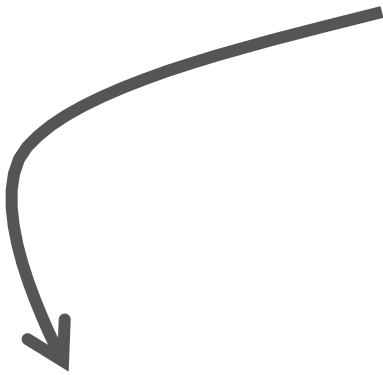
Here is a simple guide on how and when to use “the” in English.

Use “the” with:

- Some country names, such as “The United States”
- A specific noun that you already know, for example “the sugar,” “the reason,” “the restaurants,” etc.
- Places or people that everyone knows, for example “the post office,” “the doctor’s office,” “the mall,” “the President,” “The Prime Minister,” etc.
- Globally-known places such as “the sun,” “the moon,” “the Earth,” “the ocean”

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