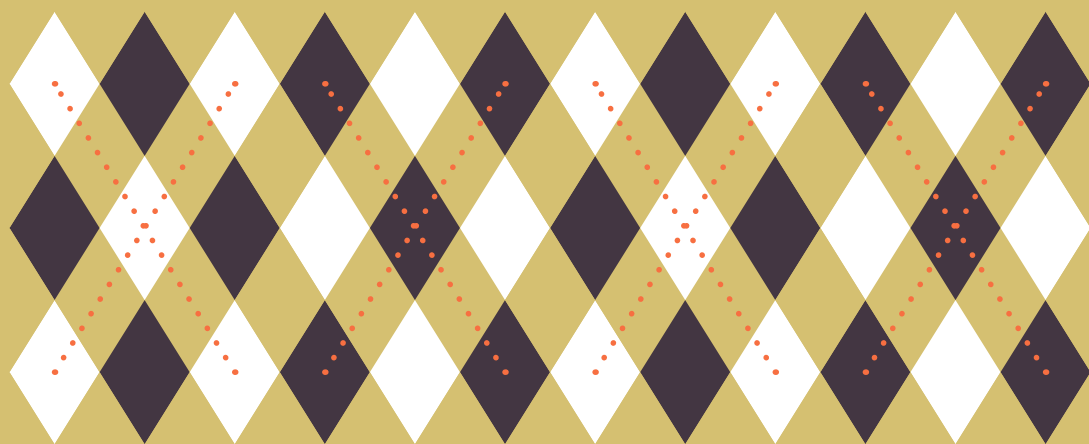


*Easy English!*  
By Adrian Wallwork

# *Top 50 Vocabulary 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>

Adrian Wallwork

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How to Avoid Them

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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 vocabulary (this book) and grammar. The grammar and vocabulary books focus on 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 the Book for? What Level Do I Need to Be?

Anyone who is interested in eliminating the typical mistakes they make when faced between choosing from a set of similar words.

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

## How Many Vocabulary Mistakes Are Dealt with?

This book is called *The Top 50 Vocabulary Mistakes*. In reality there are over 150 words dealt within the 50 sections of Part I of this book. Another 50 false friends are dealt with, in less detail, in Part III.

## 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 5 (*among, between, of, from*).

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:

*Many people can't distinguish among red and green.*

Many people can't distinguish **between** red and green.

In the above example, the writer of the first sentence has incorrectly chosen *among* instead of *between*.

Note that other typical mistakes where some languages use a different word from the key word, may also be listed in this subsection. For example,

*Illiteracy is commonest under rural women.*

Illiteracy is commonest **among** rural women.

In the above example *under* has been used instead of *among*. However, the word *under* is not dealt with in the other three subsections. This is because it is not one of the keywords (*among, between, of*) in the heading of the section. It is simply mentioned to raise your awareness that in your language you may use a completely different word. Such mistakes are tested in the Revisions Tests in Part II of this book.

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:

He was standing **between** Paul and Joseph.

She was standing **among** a crowd of hooligans.

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

- **between** = two different items or groups of distinct items
- **among** = a number of indistinct different items
- **of** = before an indeterminate number of the same item
- **from** = after a verb when making a selection (*choose from, pick from, select from*)

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. For example, in the above case the use of *of* given is just one of many possible uses of *of*. It refers only to the use of *of* in relation to the use of *among* and *between*.

If you need more detailed explanations for the words, then I suggest you use an online dictionary (e.g. *Word Reference* or *The Cambridge Online Learners Dictionary*) or view the comments on various English forums where readers explain the differences between certain words.

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 *among*, *between*, *from* and *of*. A few of the exercises are based on exercises that can be found in *English for Academic Research: Vocabulary 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. Where there is space, I have given the full sentence containing the correct answer. Where there has not been sufficient space for the full sentence, I have just listed the correct word.

## Level of English Used in the Tests

Most of the sentences used in the tests are authentic (i.e. real texts). A few come from academic tests and are thus quite formal, whereas the majority reflect the more neutral and informal aspects of English. Many of the more informal sentences are taken from movie scripts and thus reflect how English is spoken, not just written. One of my main sources was context.[reverso.net](http://reverso.net), which is one of the most useful websites on the internet for reading real examples of English in use.

The idea for choosing authentic texts is to provide an alternative to the majority of vocabulary books where sentences are written specifically for non native readers.

This may mean that you encounter some unfamiliar expressions and vocabulary. I suggest two possible solutions:

1. ideally you should use an online dictionary to help you find the meanings. Again, you might find context.[reverso.net](http://reverso.net) to be the best solutions, as on this site typical phrases are found both in their English versions and in a multitude of other languages.
2. skip the difficult sentences. You will find that the vocabulary items are tested over several sentences, so if you skip a few because you don't have time to check any unknown vocabulary, then you will still be practising using the key words in context.

## Revision Tests

In Part II of the book there is a revision test. This test deals with all the incorrect sentences given in the first subsections of each section. For example, *under*, which was not tested in the fourth subsection mentioned above, is tested here. These tests are essentially the list of the mistakes, but without the corrected version. Your job is to correct the sentences and then compare them with the relevant corrected versions in the relevant section.

## False Friends

In the final part of the book (Part III), there are a few exercises on some typical false friends, i.e. an English word that may be spelt very similarly to a word in your language (and which probably derives from Latin or Greek) but which has a different meaning.

## Where Can I Find More Grammar Explanations and Tests?

*Top 50 Vocabulary 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 vocabulary exercises and see examples of English sentences in a more technical context, then you can use this book:

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

The companion to *Top 50 vocabulary mistakes*, which is entitled *Top 50 Grammar 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 grammar 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 grammar 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 word searches and quizzes.

# Teachers Introduction

## Which Vocabulary Mistakes Were Chosen and Why?

How do you choose the top vocabulary mistakes when you're writing for an international audience?

My solution was to find 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 in the next subsection.

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 influenced 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.

What was interesting was the sheer number of mistakes that all these disparate languages share. For example, the mistake *I am in London since two weeks* is a mistake that would be made by almost any non-native English speaker in the world. Likewise, the false friend *actually* which derives from Latin and is similar in meaning to the Latin, is only used in the meaning of *in reality* in English, but not in Italian (and other Latinate languages), but not in German, Polish, Russian etc. either.

So essentially what you have is a somewhat subjective choice of words that are frequently confused by speakers of many languages. However, it would be fair to say that another author might have come up with quite a different set of words.

One thing that makes my book different from most of the others, is that it groups words together. Nearly all the others, have one word headings such as *bring*, whereas

this book lists *bring* along with the words it is frequently confused with: *take*, *carry*, *fetch* etc.

In any case, all the mistakes listed in this book and in its companion book on Grammar 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.

## 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 *say* and *tell*, 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. For example, most languages only have one word that translates both *say* and *tell*. Or there might also be confusion between *say* and *speak*
- 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 II Revision Tests.

## 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:

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The companion to *Top 50 vocabulary mistakes*, which is entitled *Top 50 Grammar Mistakes*, also contains many exercises that you might find useful. You can find the index to Grammar book on page 169.

By using all these books in combination, you should be able to create lessons that cater to all levels and needs of students.

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.

## Books Consulted

I consulted hardback copies of the following books, which are all part of my personal library.

Angielski bez błędów, George Sliwa, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 2001

Common English Errors in Hong Kong, David Bunton, Longman 1989

Diccionario de dudas, A & J Merino, Editorial Paraninfo, 1990

Engleza fara greseli / L'anglais sans fautes, Lionel Dahan, Larousse, 1995

English or Czenglish? Don Sparling, Statni pedagogicke nakladatelstvi, 1989

Il tuo inglese senza errori, Adrian Wallwork, De Agostini

Longman Dictionary of Common Errors, Heaton & Turton, Longman, 1987

Portuglish, Stephen Fordham, Platano Editora, 1997

Stop Making Mistakes, Robert Kleinschroth, Rewohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 2003

The Mistakes Clinic for German-speaking Learners of English, Geoff Parkes, Englang Books, 2001

Trudnosti anglijskogo slovoupotreblenia. (English Trouble Words for Russian Speakers). S.S. Khidekel, M.R. Kaul, and R.S. Ginsburg, Moscow: AST, Astrel', 2002

I was unable to find full details of these two books as they are written totally in Chinese and Japanese, respectively:

Contemporary English - a book of typical mistakes made by Chinese speakers, 1998

Typical mistakes made by Japanese, Tim Young, 2005

# Acknowledgements

I would like to thank above all my students from the last 25 years who provided the vast majority of the mistakes collected in this book and the companion volume on Grammar.

I would also like to thank those students and readers who gave or sent me copies of books of typical mistakes made in their English. Thanks to Mike Seymour for the books on mistakes made by Germans.

Thank you Anna Southern for trawling through this book to find my mistakes!

## **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](mailto: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](http://sefl.co.uk)



## About the Author

Since 1984 I have been teaching English as a foreign language - from General English to Business English to Scientific English. I have taught students of all nationalities, and this book is based primarily on the typical mistakes that these students make. I am the author of over 30 textbooks for Springer Science+Business Media, Cambridge University Press, Oxford University Press, the BBC, and many other publishers.