

English for Communications and Customer Care  
How to Avoid 10 Common Grammar Mistakes RP Units 5 and 6

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**How to Avoid 10 Common Grammar Mistakes**  
**Student's Handout (Teacher Version)**

**To watch and download the video:**

<http://englishforcommunicationsandcustomercare.wordpress.com/2012/02/01/writing-skills-how-to-avoid-10-common-grammar-mistakes/>

**Original Video Source: How Cast**

<http://www.howcast.com/videos/346237-How-To-Avoid-10-Common-Grammar-Mistakes>

**Also on Youtube:** [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCkRW5\\_ZINI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dCkRW5_ZINI)

**How to Avoid 10 Common Grammar Mistakes**

- Do you want to learn how to avoid 10 common grammar mistakes?
- Are you ready to learn about grammar and impress expert grammarians with your knowledge of English grammar?
- Achieve those goals by just watching the video *How to avoid 10 common grammar mistakes*.

**Step 1:** This sentence has a mistake. Can you correct it?

Andrew went to the party and there he meet Sally Bullock. (met)

Step 1.a. Now watch section 1 of the video, from **beginning to minute 00:30**. Check your answer to the previous question. **Note that the example provided by the video is not the same as the one that appears on the video.**

Step 1.b. Can you describe the mistake? **Verb tenses need to match/agree.**

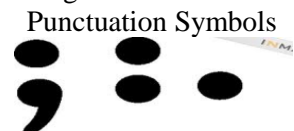
**Step 2:** Correct the mistake in the following sentence.

People who attended the trade fair were very happy with the service. He valued the expertise and the “savoir faire” of the organizers. (~~He~~, they)

Step 2.a. Now watch section 2 of the video, from **minute 00:30 to minute 00:51** and check your answer to the previous questions. **Note that the example provided by the video is not the same as the one that appears on the video.**

Step 2.b. Can you describe the mistake? **The pronoun needs to agree in number (and gender but the video does not mention it) with the previous noun subject.**

Tip: Study the names of these punctuation symbols before continuing:



Semicolon, colon and period

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**Step 3:** Read the sentence in the speech bubble in fig.1. Is it correct? **No, it isn't**

Step 3.a. Check your prediction by listening to **minute 00:51 to minute 1:15** of the video.

The sentence is incorrect. Two independent clauses cannot be separated by a comma. You need to use a period (.) , semicolon (;) or a conjunction



Step 3.b. What is the correct way of joining the two clauses in the sentence?

There are several possibilities:

Jane ate dinner. I enjoyed the chicken / Jane ate dinner while I enjoyed the chicken/  
/Jane ate dinner and I enjoyed the chicken/ Jane ate dinner; I enjoyed the chicken

#### **Note for the teacher:**

**A Clause** is a grammatical unit that includes, at minimum, a predicate and an explicit or implied subject, and it expresses a proposition (it has a meaning) .

The sentence "I need you to go" has two clauses (I need +you to go).

The sentence "The girl who bought the book was Martha's sister" has two clauses (The girl was Martha's sister + the girl bought the book)

**Conjunction:** a part of speech that connects two words, sentences, phrases or clauses together (and, when, while, not only... but also etc.)

#### **Step 4:** The uses of comma

Step 4.a. A complex sentence includes an introductory clause and a dependent clause.

The following sentence is **incorrect**. A comma needs to separate the introductory clause from the dependent clause. Can you place the comma? The introductory clause is "When I was studying for my exams" and the dependent clause is "it was terribly noisy". There should be a comma between exam and it (...exam, it was...). Don't tell the students the answer. They will check their answers when they watch the video.

When I was studying for my exam it was terribly noisy

Step 4. b. Commas should surround "non-restrictive relative clauses"

If you don't know what a "non restrictive clause is, read the following explanation.

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**A non- restrictive clause** tells you something about a preceding subject without limiting (or restricting ) the meaning of that subject.

Compare the following examples.

Restrictive clause or defining

*The store manager congratulated all the workers that (who) had been in the company over 10 years.*

The manager only congratulated the senior workers. Junior workers were not congratulated. This is a restrictive clause because it limits the amount of workers that were congratulated.

Non-restrictive or non-defining

*The store manager congratulated all the workers, who ~~that~~ had been in the company over 10 years.*

The manager congratulated everybody as everybody had been in the company for at least the last ten years.

A non-restrictive sentence is an explanation that can be omitted without the meaning of the sentence suffering greatly.

Decide if the following sentence contains a restrictive or non-restrictive clause and punctuate it accordingly. **The correct sentence is: Mr Harlin, who is a teacher at my school, recommended the library. Do not provide students with the solution. They will see the solutions on the video.**

Mr. Harlin who is a teacher at my school recommended the library

**Note for the teacher.** If students ask about the change of “that” to “who” in the defining and non defining clause, you can explain to them that they can use “ that” or “who” for people with restrictive or defining clauses. “That” cannot be used for people in non-restrictive clauses. In step 7, they will see how these changes affect objects.

4.c. Use commas to set off geographical names. Where would you place the comma in this sentence? **I am from South Bend, Indiana. Don’t provide the solution. Students will see it on the video. Note that in the solution you see on the video there should be a comma after Indiana.**

I am from South Bend Indiana.

4.d. Use commas when you change from an explanation (main discourse), to what a person actually said, which should be introduced by quotation marks. You can also use colon in this case.

**Mr. Harling said, “ Go to the Harold Washington Library”Mr. Harling said: “ Go to the Harold Washington Library”. Answers provided on video.**

Can you punctuate the following sentence?

Mr. Harling said Go to the Harold Washington Library

“ ”

Quotation marks

Now watch the video from **minute 1:15 to 1:34** and check your answers to 4.a., 4.b., 4.c., and 4.d.

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**Steps 5 and 6.** Apostrophes and incomplete sentences.

**Step 5:** Apostrophes are used to:

- Indicate possession.
- Signify that a letter was omitted.

Place the apostrophes in the correct place. [These answers are not provided on the video. The teacher needs to provide the student with the correct answer.](#)



- Youre very good at your job.
- Its leg is broken. Its impossible to repair it.
- The clerks notebook got wet in the stormy weather (There is only one clerk)
- The students book was properly taken care of (There are several students).
- These systems dont work and wont work unless were really ready to put money into the project.

- [You 're](#) very good at your job.
- Its leg is broken. [It's](#) impossible to repair it.
- The [clerk's](#) note book got wet in the stormy weather (There is only one clerk) [El cuaderno del administrativo](#)
- The students' book was properly taken care of (There are several students). [El libro delos estudiantes. The word ends in -s so no other -s is added.](#)
- These systems [don't](#) work and [won't](#) work unless [we're](#) really ready to put money into the project.

**Step 6:** Incomplete sentences.

A sentence should contain at least a conjugated verb and its corresponding subject. One of the sentences below is incomplete. Rewrite the sentences using the correct punctuation symbols. [The answer is provided on the video.](#)

I am good at several things. Such as painting and cooking.

Now watch **minute 1:34 to 2:04** and correct your answer to step 6.

[I am good at several things, such as painting and cooking. Remind the students that the capital letter in "such", needs to be lower case \(minúscula\).](#)

**Step 7:** This step takes us back to **step 4.b.**

Relative pronouns join clauses to create complex sentences, such as the ones we saw in section 4.b.

Step 7 a. Can you remember some relative pronouns? [These are the pronouns that students will see on the video:](#)

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That (“que” for things and people)

Who (“que” and “quien”, only for people. Remember that “who” and not “that” is used for people in non-defining clauses, as seen in example in question 4.b. )

Whom<sup>1</sup> (“a quien/es, al cual, a los cuales),

Whose<sup>2</sup> (cuyo/a/os/as),

Which<sup>3</sup> (“que” and “lo cual”)

Where (donde),

When (cuando)

Why<sup>4</sup> (por lo que)

Step 7 b. Compare these sentences to understand the most common misuse of a relative pronoun and answer this question:

What is the difference between using “that” and “which” in a relative clause?

“That” can be used for people or objects in defining clauses. In non-defining clauses, students should use “who” for people, as in step 4b, and “which” for objects.

You can summarize this rule by saying that you cannot have the relative “that” after a comma. Only a wh- relative can be placed after the comma.

#### Restrictive clause or defining

*The store manager took all the boxes that had a label on them*

#### Non-restrictive or non-defining

*The store manager took all the boxes, which ~~that~~ had the label on them .*

Now watch **minute 2:04 to 2:30** and check your answers to exercises 7.a and 7. b

#### **Step 8:** Don’t let your modifiers dangle (**colgar**)

Modifiers are groups of words that give information about part of the speech. The incorrect position of modifiers may change the meaning of your sentence.

Look at these examples:

8.a. Imagine I was looking through the window and I saw Jenny. Is this a correct way of expressing this idea?



I saw Jenny looking through the window

8.b. I was camping in Sri Lanka and when I woke up I had to shoot an elephant. Is this the correct way of expressing this idea?

One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas

The video does not provide you with these examples. Therefore be ready to explain.

<sup>1</sup> The girl whom I saw

<sup>2</sup> He’s the colleague whose children go to my children’s class

<sup>3</sup> They said he is guilty, which is not true (lo cual).

<sup>4</sup> This is the reason why I love you

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8.a. This is not correct. The modifier “through the window” is next to Jenny and therefore this sentences means that “Jenny was looking through the window” when I saw her. The correct way to express this idea is:

I was looking through the window when I saw Jenny.

8. b. This sentence is a silly sentence. The speaker wants to say that “he was in pajamas” when he shot the elephant. What he is really saying is that “there was an elephant in his pajamas”. The correct idea would be:

One morning, when I was in my pajamas, I shot an elephant.

This is really a very famous quotation of a silly sentence by Groucho Marx. The full sentence is:

“One morning I shot an elephant in my pajamas”. How he got into my pajamas I'll never know. –Groucho Marx

You may want to write the full quotation of Groucho Marx on the board.

8.c. In pairs decide what this sentence means:

*At two my sister taught me Spanish*

Now watch the corresponding section **minute 2:30 to 2:52** and see If your guess was correct.

A) In this sentence it is not clear who is two years old, the speaker or the sister

Meaning 1: when I was two (years old) my sister taught me Spanish.

Meaning 2: When my sister was two (years old), she taught me Spanish.

This sentences does not make much sense as the existence of a two year old teacher of Spanish is a bit far-fetched. (far-fetched = poco plausible)

B) Students may also think that “at two” refers to the time.

Meaning 3: My sister taught me Spanish at two (o'clock)

According to the video, this is what the writer of the sentence meant to say : *When I was two, my sister taught me Spanish.*

**Steps 9 and 10:** Pronouns and proofreading.

**Step 9:** A pronoun is a word that substitutes a noun.

9.a. What do you think the prefix “pro-” mean?      a. next to   b. instead of   c. before   En lugar de

9.b. Read this short text. Although it is grammatically correct it sounds strange. Can you decide why?

Ms. Lewis is the new girl at the office. Everybody is looking forward to meeting Ms. Lewis. Ms. Frank has already met Ms. Lewis. When Ms. Frank saw Ms. Lewis for the first time , Ms. Frank was positively impressed by Ms. Lewis good manners and willingness to learn.

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Answer: There is an overuse of the proper names. Different pronouns should substitute the nouns. If students cannot spot the mistake, wait until they see the section of the video that corresponds to step 9.

Now watch the video from **minute 2:52 to 2:59** and check your answer. Now, correct the text in section 9b.

Ms. Lewis is the new girl at the office. Everybody is looking forward to meeting ~~her~~ (direct object pronoun) ~~Ms. Lewis~~. Ms. Frank has already met ~~her~~ (direct object pronoun) ~~Ms. Lewis~~. When ~~she~~ (subject pronoun) ~~Ms. Frank~~ saw ~~her~~ (direct object pronoun) ~~M. Lewis~~ for the first time-, ~~she~~ ~~Ms. Frank~~ was positively impressed by Ms. Lewis' good manners and willingness to learn.

**Step 10:** The video ends with a final recommendation. See **minute 2:59 to 03:11**. What is it? ~~That you should proofread your documents/ That you need to check and double check your work~~

**English trivia.** Nobody knows the exact number of words that English has. English is spoken in many countries, which means that there is a wide variety of “Englishes” (see teachers note below). The Global Language Monitor is an institution that publishes a list of words that have appeared in print and electronic media more than 25,000 times. There is a consensus that if a word appears so many times, it is an English word.

a. According to the Global Language Monitor, how many words does English have? ~~One million (don't tell students the answer. They will see it in the corresponding section of the video)~~

Listen to the last section of the video **minute 03: 11 till the end** and check your answer.

b. What was the last word that was officially added to the English language?

~~Web 2.0 (pronounced 2 point OU) . Web 2.0 is a platform that contains chats, forums and other tools that facilitate on-line participation. It is similar to the platforms Moodle, UOC or Online UNED.~~

**Teacher's note for English Trivia:** Most students will know that English is spoken in USA, Ireland, England, Canada (together with French) and Australia. Here there are other countries where English is the language spoken in government institutions (the list is not complete).

In Africa: Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria (no Niger), Sierra Leone, Sudan, South Sudan, South Africa, Botswana...

In Asia: India, Pakistan, Singapore

In the Caribbean: Grenada, Jamaica, Trinidad and Tobago...

In Oceania: Samoa, Vanuatu...

Note that many countries don't use the term **official language**. They use the term “government language” instead. If students are curious you can tell them this.

There are many countries that don't have an official language. In Australia, for example, English is not the “official language”. English is the language used by government officials. Australia does not have an official language although English is the language of communication. This is also the case of India where you need English to communicate with the government but the constitution recognizes 21 other languages.