



7 Grammar Mistakes that Cost Marks

For Primary 5 and 6 students

Common grammar errors explained clearly

From the team behind our grammar learning bot

1. Subject-Verb Agreement: Finding the Real Subject

The verb must agree with the head/main noun. Words that come between the noun and the verb often confuse students.

Example 1:

The box of books **is** heavy.

subject (head/main noun): box

prepositional phrase: of books

Remember: The verb matches the head/main noun.

Common Mistake:

✖ The box of books **are** heavy.

Quick Check:

Underline the subject. Then choose the verb.

- Those packets of flour (**is** / **are**) on the shelf.

Example 2:

The list of items for the camp **is** on the table.

subject (head/main noun): list

prepositional phrase: of items for the camp

2. Question Tags: When a Sentence Looks Positive But is Actually Negative

A negative adverb (e.g. hardly, scarcely, barely, seldom, rarely) makes a statement negative. The question tag is positive.

Example 1:

They never arrive late for training, **do** they?

negative adverb: never

Remember: The question tag is positive when the statement is negative.

Common Mistake:

✖ They never arrive late for training, **don't** they?

Quick Check:

Underline the negative adverb. Then choose the correct verb.

- He hardly goes to the park, (**does** / **doesn't**) he?

Example 2:

Jane seldom borrows books from the library, **does** she?

negative adverb: seldom

3. Indirect Questions: Changing the Word Order

In indirect questions, the word order changes to noun/pronoun + verb.

Example 1:

Tom asked Ben, "Where is the sports complex?"

Tom asked Ben **where the sports complex was.**

direct question: verb + noun (is + the sports complex)

indirect question: noun + verb (sports complex + is)

Remember: Indirect questions follow the same order of words as a statement.

Common Mistake:

✖ Tom asked Ben where was the sports complex.

Quick Check:

Complete the indirect question.

- She asked me, "Where is the nearest bus stop?"

She asked me _____.

Example 2:

The new student asked me, "What time does the lesson start?"

The new student asked me **what time the lesson started.**

direct question: verb + noun + verb (does + the lesson + start)

indirect question: noun + verb (the lesson + started)

4. Using 'Having' to Show Which Action Happened First

'Having' + ed/en participle (past participle) is used to show that one event happened **before** another.

Example 1:

Having finished his homework, he went to the playground.

-ing participle: having

ed/en participle: finished

Common Mistake:

✗ Have finished his homework, he went to the playground.

Quick Check:

Complete the sentence below.

- (Have / Had / Having) drunk the soup, he washed the bowl.

Example 2:

Having chased my puppy around the garden, I was out of breath.

-ing participle: having

ed/en participle: chased

5. Using Quantifiers with Uncountable Nouns

Uncountable nouns do not have plural forms. They must be used with the correct quantifiers

Example 1:

I did not do **much work** today.

uncountable noun: work

quantifier: much

Common Mistake:

 I did not do many work today.

Quick Check:

Circle the correct quantifier.

- The eyewitness could not give the police (many / much) information about the accident.

Example 2:

We only have **a little time** to finish our project.

uncountable noun: time

quantifier: a little

6. Using the Present Perfect Tense to Show Current Results

The present perfect tense is used to show that a past action affects the present or future.

Example:

I **have forgotten** my wallet but my classmate **will share** her food with me.

present perfect tense: has/have + ed/en participle (have + forgotten)

future event: will share

Common Mistake:

✖ I had forgotten my wallet but my classmate **will share** her food with me.

Quick Check:

Complete the sentence below.

- She (lost / has lost) her book so she cannot complete her homework.

7. Talking About the Future From a Time in the Past

Sometimes, we refer to what someone said in the past about something that happened to them later.

Example:

Last Monday, she thought she **would finish** her project by Wednesday.

modal + base form of the verb: would + finish

Common Mistake:

✖ Last Monday, she thought she **will finish** her project by Wednesday.

Quick Check:

Complete the sentence below.

- Yesterday, she said she (will / would) complete her chores by the end of the day.

Quick Check Answers

1. are
2. does
3. She asked me where the nearest bus stop was.
4. Having
5. much
6. has lost
7. would

A Final Word

Many grammar errors happen not because students do not know the rules but because they do not know when to apply them. Being aware of small details often makes the difference between a correct answer and a lost mark.

The rules in this guide focus on common patterns that appear frequently in grammar and writing questions. Once students learn to recognise these patterns, they become more confident learners and will be better able to avoid careless errors.

If your child needs more practice beyond reading explanations, we also have a separate grammar learning bot designed for guided practice and immediate feedback.

Learn more:

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For parents who are looking for more structured support, our full range of English resources builds on the same approach — clear explanations, focused examples, and careful attention to how grammar is tested.

Thank you for reading. We hope this guide has been useful in supporting your child's learning.