

# Common mistakes

**a the –**

I love the foreign languages (wrong)

vs.

I love foreign languages

**capitalization**

english (wrong)

vs.

English

**“Unit 47”** : Verbs which are followed by other verbs belong to one of the following 4 categories:

- 1) verb + infinitive (ex. “I want to go.”)
- 2) verb + gerund (ex. “I finished working.”)
- 3) verb + infinitive or gerund and meaning doesn’t change (ex. “I like to dance. I like dancing.”)
- 4) verb + infinitive or gerund and meaning changes (ex. “I tried to open the window. I tried opening the window.”)

**use, usually, used to, etc.**

1) to use something	I use a pen to write. I use my car when it rains.	utilizzare qualcosa
2a) to be used to something 2b) get used to something	I am used to getting up at 5 a.m. I’ll never get used to this hot weather.	essere abituato a qualcosa abituarsi a qualcosa
3) to usually do something	I usually wake up at 5 a.m.	fare solitamente qualcosa essere soliti fare qualcosa solere fare qualcosa
4) used to do something	I used to suck my thumb.	avere avuto l’abitudine di fare qualcosa in passato, ma non avere più quell’abitudine nel presente

(N.B. “Si usa bussare prima di entrare” = “It’s polite to knock before entering”)

Examples of the difference between 2) and 3):

- I am used to his getting angry all the time. He usually gets angry a lot.
- I usually get up at 5 when during the grape-harvest, but I’ll never get used to it.
- I usually kiss my Italian friends on the cheeks, but I’m not really used to it yet.
- It usually rains after lunch in these latitudes, but it doesn’t bother me, I’m totally used to it.

### then, later, after, afterwards

- (*successivamente, più tardi, dopo qualcosa, dopo*)
- compare with previously, sooner/earlier, before, beforehand
- sooner (*relativamente a qualcosa*)  
vs.  
earlier (*relativamente all'ora*)
- sooner or later
- examples:  
I'll study for an hour, **then** we can go have a beer.  
I have to study now but we can have a beer **later**.  
**After** I finish studying we can go have a beer.  
I like to study until about 9 and then go for a beer **afterwards**.

### false friends

- attend – to be present at (ex. “to attend lessons”, not “to wait for”)  
vs.  
follow – to come after (ex. “to follow the leader”, not “to follow lessons”)  
vs.  
frequent – usually an adjective, sometimes a verb, but in English you do not frequent a University, you attend a University
- In English, students **take an exam**, and teachers **give an exam**, not the other way around
- subject (*materia scolastica*)  
vs.  
matter (*problema, questione*)
- country (*nazione*)  
vs.  
town (*paese, paesino*)  
vs.  
state (*stato, regione*)  
vs.  
village (villaggio medioevale o turistico)

### countable uncountable

(a piece of) fruit, (a bowl of )cereal, housework (uncountable!)

**a few** friends (*un po' di amici*)

vs.

**few** friends (*pochi amici*)

## time

- If you use “a.m.” or “p.m.”, don’t use 24 hour time.
- **7 p.m. o’clock (wrong)**  
**7:15 a.m. o’clock (wrong)**  
7 o’clock (right)  
7:00 o’clock (not beautiful, but OK)  
7:15 a.m. (right)

## expressions and things to remember

- spend time doing something (ex. “In the morning, I spend 20 minutes getting dressed.”)
- **to finish** (a person finishes)  
vs.  
**to end** (things end)  
vs.  
**to be over** (something that has a duration **is over** when it **ends**)  
Example: “When lessons are over, I go home.” or “When lessons end, I go home.”  
(not “When lessons finish...”)
- **it depends on X, depending on X**
- **How is** your typical day? (requires a short answer like “Fine.”)  
vs.  
**What is** your typical day **like**? (requires a more lengthy description)
- to get dressed (*vestirsi*)
- to wash (do) the dishes (*lavare i piatti*)
- to **know** somebody (*conoscere mentalmente*)  
vs.  
to **meet** somebody (*conoscere materialmente, fare la conoscenza di una persona nuova*)
- **infact (wrong)**  
vs.  
in fact (right)
- possibility (physical ability to do something)  
vs.  
opportunity (chance or occasion to do something)

- **A, or better B (wrong)**  
vs.  
A, or rather B (right)
- **yet** (negative, interrogative, negative interrogative)  
vs.  
**still** (affirmative)
- **I had got two good teachers. (wrong, the verb “to have got” exists only in the present simple)**  
vs.  
I had two good teachers. (right, the verb “to have” exists in all the tenses)
- **enough good (wrong)**  
vs.  
rather good (right) (*abbastanza buono, piuttosto buono*)
- **for to learn (wrong)**  
vs.  
to learn (*apprendere, per apprendere*)  
vs.  
in order to learn (*per apprendere, allo scopo di apprendere*)
- **I would want (the verb “to want” in the conditional form is not used in English)**  
vs.  
I would like (*vorrei*)
- My friend (*il mio amico*)  
vs.  
A friend of mine (*un mio amico*)  
vs.  
One of my friends (*uno dei miei amici*)  
vs.  
My one friend (*il mio unico amico*)

**Present Perfect** – Remember the following in addition to the general rules of use:

- I've been to England. (This means “I travelled to England and then I came back here.”)  
vs.  
I've been in England. (This means “I stayed in England recently.”)
- **I've time. (wrong)** (after the contraction “ ‘ve ” we expect “got” to follow or else a past participle)  
vs.  
I have time. (right)
- **It's a long time we don't write. (wrong)**  
It's been a long time since I (we) last wrote. (right: *E' molto che non ci scriviamo*)  
or We haven't written for a long time. (such a long time)  
or It's a long time that I haven't written you.  
or The last time we wrote was a long time ago.

- **My life is changed. (wrong)**  
My life has changed. (right: *La mia vita è cambiata*)

## register

Choose the correct register (formal or informal) to give your English the correct “sound” according to the situations. Compare the synonyms “to speak of”, “to speak about”, “to talk about sth”, “to talk over \*” (phrasal verb) in the following sentences and note how register moves from formal to less formal:

They **spoke of** a plan for withdrawing troops for the first time at a meeting last month.

They **spoke about** you and your dog at the meeting last night.

We **talked about** our hopes and dreams over a cup of tea.

We **talked over** our day while walking through the park.