Common Errors of Expression

Avoid the following errors; in speaking and writing.

1. Avoid the unnecessary at (always with where):

   Wrong: Where is he at?

   Right: Where is he?

2. Never use them in such expressions at “them books,” “them boys,” “them apples.” Always use “those books,” “those boys,” “those apples.”

3. Never use “hisself.” The word is “himself.”

4. Never use “theirselves,” “themselves,” or “Theirselfs.” The word is “themselves.”

5. Never combine “off of.” The of is unnecessary.

   Wrong: Tom fell off of the ledge.

   Right: Tom fell off the ledge.

6. Never use “hadn’t ought to.”; The standard expression is “ought not to.”

   Wrong: Tom hadn’t ought to go.

   Right: Tom ought not to go.

7. Don’t use “try and” when you mean “try to.” “I will try and be there” means that you are planning to do two things—you’re going to try, and you’re going to be there. You probably mean “I will try to be there.”

8. Never use “don’t” for “doesn’t.” “Don’t is used with “I”, “you,” and plural subjects. Doesn’t is used with singular subject.

   Wrong: He don’t care.

   Right: He doesn’t care. I don’t care.

9. Never combine “was” with “you,” “we,” or “they.”

   Wrong: You was here. We was here. Was they here?

   Right: You were here. We were here. Were they here?
10. Don’t use “plus” when you mean “and.”

Wrong: He was hungry, plus he was penniless.

Right: He was hungry, and he was penniless.

11. Avoid using double negatives (two negatives in one clause. The negatives are: no, not, none, never, nothing, nobody, can’t, didn’t, shouldn’t, barely, scarcely, hardly.

Wrong: Fred couldn’t hardly see.

We don’t want none.

Right: Fred could hardly see.

We don’t want any.


13. Never use “nowheres.” The correct word is “nowhere.”

14. Never use “anywheres.” The correct word is “anywhere.”

15. Never use “irregardless.” The correct word is “regardless.”

16. Don’t use “while” when you mean “and,” “but,” or “although.” “While” means time, or at the same time.

Wrong: My great-grandfather was Russian, while my father was American.

Right: My great-grandfather was Russian, but my father was American.

17. Avoid mentioning yourself before others.

Wrong: I and Betty will soon be ready. Me and my friends can help you. The man gave the money to me and Fritz.

Right: Betty and I will soon be ready.

My friend and I can help.

The man gave the money to Fritz and me.

18. Don’t confuse the words “fewer” and “less.” “Fewer” refers to numbers, “less” refers to amounts. “Fewer” should be used in reference to anything you can count.

Wrong: I had to buy less books this year.
Right: I had to buy fewer books this year.

19. Don’t confuse the words “imply” and “implies” means to suggest or indicate. To “infer” means to draw a conclusion from something.

   *Right:* Are you implying that he can’t be trusted? I didn’t say that; you inferred it.

20. Don’t confuse the words “disinterested” and “uninterested.” To be disinterested is to be impartial. If you are disinterested, you are interested but your emotions are not involved. If you take no interest, you are uninterested.