

THE COMMON MISTAKES

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Firstly, let me admit that my English is far from perfect. In fact, it might not even fall in the ‘good’ category although I managed to obtain 8 as my overall IELTS score. But when it comes to grave grammatical mistakes, I believe I am good enough to spot them. So here I am, daring myself to write on the oft-committed mistakes in English among Malaysians (aside from trying to fulfil my annual KPI for publication). So here goes.

Let’s begin with ‘let’s’. I often stumbled upon phrases like ‘let say’ and ‘lets say’ being written by many other people. In this context it is neither ‘let’ nor ‘lets’, it is supposed to be ‘let us (verb)’ or ‘let’s (verb)’ – both literally mean the same, but the latter is the contraction of the former, just like I’m for I am. ‘Let’ and ‘lets’ could be used in sentences like these instead: ‘we let them stay for a week’, or ‘he lets the cat in every morning’.

That’s mean – if you are trying to say that an action is considerably cruel/ungenerous, then you have nothing to worry. But in many cases, ‘that’s mean’ as well as ‘it’s mean’ are being erroneously used instead of the correct ‘that means’ and ‘it means’. So the next time you write or say it, please move the ‘s’ to the end and dump the apostrophe. Otherwise, you would inflict sufferings to the grammar Nazis, and that’s mean.

Contrary to common ungrammatical practice, the word contrary should not be preceded by

‘in’ (i.e. in contrary). If you want to use it at the beginning of a sentence, the correct form would be ‘contrary to (something)’ – as I wrote above. Alternatively, you may also begin a sentence with ‘on the contrary’ right after a sentence that states an idea/belief/practice. If you insist on using the preposition ‘in’, please substitute ‘contrary’ with ‘contrast (to)’. So, please write or say ‘in contrast to (something)’, and not ‘in contrary to (something)’.

I really am surprised that I somehow managed to get to this paragraph, despite my initial ambivalence about my persistence. Did you think I missed a preposition in the previous sentence, specifically after the word ‘despite’? Many wrongly believe ‘despite’ should be followed by ‘of’, but the fact is the one that should be followed by ‘of’ is ‘in spite’ and not ‘despite’. It is either ‘in spite of (something)’, or ‘despite (something)’, but certainly not ‘despite of (something)’.

I have also heard some other colleagues said/wrote ‘others colleagues’, ‘others students’, ‘others things’ and the like. There shouldn’t be any ‘s’ after ‘other’ if you intend to have a plural noun to appear after that word (unless you want to say other’s). Hence, the correct version is: ‘other’ colleagues’, ‘other students’, and ‘other things’. ‘Others’ is not to be followed by any noun, like ‘only three readers continued reading to this point, while others stopped right after the first paragraph’.

I believe I can stop now as I have already exceeded the minimum requirement of 300 words for this article, and I do not intend to write to the maximum limit of 1000 words. I hope I have contributed something useful and we can all stop committing these mistakes in the future, especially in our writing.