

Common Errors In Grammar, Homonyms



This is the year to eradicate those pesky errors that so many children (and adults) use in speaking and writing. I have, for example, a number of bright teen grandchildren who say, "Me and Mom are going to the mall" and who mix up 'there, their and they're' in writing, especially on-line where everyone can see it. When I mention it, I just get a sigh, and "Oh, Grandma..." but I notice that they are more careful after that. If teachers don't catch these mistakes early and concentrate on fixing them, they will continue to be a problem, and so will grandmothers.

We want the students to not only know the correct usage but have it become a habit, just as the incorrect usage has been. This takes some work, but it can be made fun. Daily repetition of the rules and insistence on the correct form will help to change the bad habits.

I would suggest that you review each of these every day for about a month after the lesson, and correct your students if they make errors throughout the year. Clap or cheer every time you hear the correct usage! Positive reinforcement will certainly help.

I have given you lessons on the ones that I think are the worst offenders, but feel free to add your own. Different areas of the country may have different errors, and if you have ESL students you may find common problems.

Lesson 32



Using 'I' and 'me' (subject)

Saying 'me and my friend' may be the most invasive error that children today make. Hopefully you will have a few students who say it correctly in common speech!

Draw two stick figures on a chart or whiteboard and give them names (Mike and Chris, for example), printing the names under the figures. Where might these two boys be going? Draw a large speech bubble over one figure and print in it, "I am going to play hockey (the mall, a movie, etc.)."

Print what Mike might say - "Me and Chris are going to play hockey." - below the figures. Is there something wrong with this sentence? What if Chris wasn't there? You can cover or erase 'and Chris'. What would you say then? Your students will tell you "I am" If you were alone, would you begin the sentence with 'me'? Try it! 'Me am going to the movie.' 'Me is walking to school.' It sounds like baby talk! Whether there is one or two people shouldn't make a difference!

Then talk about manners, and people who always have to be first, butting in on others. How do you feel about that? Polite people let the other person go first and do not push in! So when we talk or write, the correct way to talk about yourself and a friend is to say the other person's name first. Now what should Mike say? "Chris and I are going to play hockey", of course.

Do some role play. Ask a student to stand and pick a friend to also stand. What would you like to do together? Elicit the two sentences - "I am going to _____" and "_____ and I are going to _____." or "I like to read books" and "_____ and I like to read books", etc.

Have the students write in their journals. In at least one place use "_____ and I" at the beginning of a sentence.

Now, every time you hear or see the incorrect version you can make a sad face, cross your fingers like an X do a 'thumbs down', make a buzz noise or make another signal - until it is corrected..... and even better, cheer or thumbs up the correct usage!

Lesson 33

Using 'I' and 'me' (object)



The first rule is "Never begin a sentence with 'me'!" 'Me' goes either at the end of a sentence or the end of a sentence within a sentence - as in: 'Mary is coming with me to the mall.

'I' is a subject and 'me' is the object in a sentence. 'Me' is used after a preposition ----- with me, to me, by me, as me, from me, about me, after me, etc.

'Me' also can follow a verb: 'The cat followed me. Dad thanked me for helping.' We would not use 'I', if you are the only person being the object.

When there is only yourself in the sentence, usually we say it correctly. The problems arise when there are two or more people. What happens if the sentences were: 'The cat followed John and I. Dad thanked Emily and I for helping.?' Take out the other person and see how it sounds. "The cat followed I. Dad thanked I" both of which sound silly. This is a mistake that many well educated adults make!

Rule: Remove the other people and see if it sounds right.

If you teach the rules, put up examples of sentences on a chart to which the students can refer.

In today's journal or other writing - use both 'I' and 'me' in the story, with another person. For a follow-up, use some of the sentences that the students produce - both correct and incorrect - and do a language lesson on them.

Lesson 34

Using 'its' and 'it's'

The students have learned that the possessive needs an apostrophe, but that is not necessarily true. There are some possessive words that do not have the apostrophe. Her, his, their, your, our, my are all possessives. When you think about that, then 'its' as a possessive makes more sense.

Print these sentences on a chart:

This is her dress. His coat is blue.

Its branch is broken and its leaves are falling.

The dog lost its bone.

ALL contractions need an apostrophe. When you put two words together and leave letters out, there must be an apostrophe to show where the missing letter or letters were. 'It is' must always be 'it's'.

The students can decide, when writing this word, whether the form will be 'it's' or 'its' by seeing if it can be stretched to 'it is'.

It might help to make a small chart for the wall with the rules that the students can refer to when needed.

In today's journal or other writing - use both 'it's' and 'its' in the story. For a follow-up, use some of the sentences that the students produce and do a language lesson on them.

its and it's

Its is a possessive, meaning to own.

My, your, his, her, our, their and its
are all possessives.

It's is a contraction,
short for it is.

Lesson 35

Using 'your' and 'you're'



You're going for a walk with your dog!

Many adults still have a problem with 'your' and 'you're'. Can your students explain how each of these should be used? Go back and talk about the previous lesson, 'its and it's' - and this lesson is very similar!

'Your' is a possessive, like her, his, its, our, my and their. It means that some thing or things belong to the person to whom you are talking. 'Is that your coat?' 'Your pencil is on the floor'. The coat and pencil belong to this person;

Have the students tell you about 'you're'. What do we call words like this? Contractions, of course! What is the apostrophe for? There is an absent letter, and the apostrophe takes its place. 'You're' is the same as 'you are'.

The meanings of the two words are different, but they sound the same. These are called homonyms or homophones (one + sound).

In today's journal or other writing - use 'your' and 'you're' in the story. For a follow-up, use some of the sentences that the students produce - both correct and incorrect - and do a language lesson on them.

your and you're

Your is a possessive, meaning to own.

My, his, her, our, their, its and your
are all possessives.

You're is a contraction,
short for you are.

Lesson 36

Using 'there', 'their' and 'they're'



Many adults still have a problem with there, their and they're! Can your students explain how each of these should be used?

'There' usually means a place - here and there, and as the word here is in there, that helps. 'There' is also used with the verb 'to be', as in 'there is, there are or there will be', etc. Have the students give sentences with this form. 'There are two boys.', 'We walked there after school', etc. If the word 'here' can be substituted for 'there', you know it is right.

'Their' is a possessive, like her, his, its, your, our, my. It means that some thing or things belong to two or more people. 'The girls must hang up their coats.' Bob and Peter took off their skates.' 'Their feet were sore.' 'Their school bus came early'.

Have the students tell you about they're. What do we call words like this? Contractions, of course! What is the apostrophe for? There is an absent letter, and the apostrophe takes its place. 'They're' is the same as 'they are'.

The meanings of the three words are different, but they sound the same. These are called homonyms or homophones (one + sound).

You could put a small chart up -

there - can be changed to 'here'

its, your, their - possessives - belongs

it's, you're, they're - it is, you are, they are

In today's journal or other writing - use all three in the story. For a follow-up, use some of the sentences that the students produce - both correct and incorrect - and do a language lesson on them.

there, their and they're

There can be changed to 'here'.

Their is a possessive, meaning to own.

My, his, her, our, your, its and their
are all possessives.

They're is a contraction,
short for they are.

Lesson 37

Using to, too and two



To make this easier - begin with the simplest of the '2's' - the number word 'two'. Most of your students will write this one correctly. Ask your students for oral sentences using this word.... "I have two eyes." "Two plus two equals four."

The word 'too' can be used to indicate excess. Discuss this with your students - it means more than we need. Have them give you examples : too cold, too silly, too tall, too wet, etc. There is too much of it! You can also talk about the two 'oo's' in too - there are too many!

The trickier 'too' is used instead of the word 'also' and can be substituted for 'also'. It is usually at the end of a sentence or sentence part. 'Pete is going swimming., too.' 'I have an apple in my lunch, too.'

The simple 'to' is used as a preposition - to school, to a party, to the mall - or it is used as part of a verb, as in 'to buy', 'to run' or 'to see'.

These 'to' explanations may be difficult for some of your students, so you can leave out explanations and just teach the reasons for two and too - and then 'to' is used in all the rest. As 'two' is easy - spend time on the uses of 'too'.

In today's journal or other writing - use all three in the story. For a follow-up, use some of the sentences that the students produce - both correct and incorrect - and do a language lesson on them.