

Guide for Multilingual Student Writing
Common English- Spanish Errors
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Introduction

This guide categorizes and explains ten of the most common errors that Spanish speakers make when writing in English. The goal is for instructors to help their Spanish-speaking students with their composition in English. With this tool, instructors can give them both an early diagnostic and more personalized assistance.

This guide assumes that instructors have no knowledge of Spanish and that students are native Spanish speakers (referred to in this document as “speakers”). An asterisk (*) before a word or fragment indicates an error; slashes (/) indicate sounds; italics indicate the Spanish translation.

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punctuation, and capitalization	government	*gobierno
2. Word Choice	“Out of sight, out of mind.”	*“Eyes that don’t see, heart that doesn’t regret.”
3. Prepositions	She is very good at tennis.	She is very good *in tennis.
4. Phrasal Verbs	My dog broke out of his kennel.	My dog broke *his kennel.
5. Pronouns	Mary said that she would not go	Mary said that *he would not go
6. Reflexivity	That day, he stayed at home.	That day, he stayed *himself at home.
7. Articles	Patience is a virtue.	*The patience is a virtue.
8. Plurals	Bear Lake has that name because there are many bears.	*Bears Lake has that name because there are many bears.
9. Gerunds and Infinitives	I’m looking forward to seeing you.	I’m looking forward to *see you.
10. Word Order	Not only was he my doctor, but my best friend.	Not only *he was my doctor, but my best friend.

1. Mechanics

Type	Example	Error
Mechanics (spelling, punctuation, and capitalization)	government	*gobovernment

1.1. Many Latin-root English words have a Spanish counterpart that is close but differs in spelling.

Spanish applies the same sound /b/ to the symbols “b” and “v.”

Example: government

Error: *gobovernment (gobierno)

3. Prepositions

Type	Example	Error
Prepositions		

5. Pronouns



6. Reflexivity

Type	Example	Error
Reflexivity	That day, he stayed at home.	That day, he stayed himself* at home.

6.1. Spanish uses the reflexive pronouns “myself,” “yourself,” “himself,” ~~etc.~~ (te, se, etc.) to alter the meaning of the verb.

Example: That day, he stayed at home.

Error: That day, he stayed *himself at home. (Ese día, se quedó en casa.)

6.2. Spanish reflexive pronouns are also reciprocal pronouns.

Example: Romeo and Juliet love each other.

Error: Romeo and Juliet love *themselves. (Romeo y Julieta se aman.)

6.3. Spanish uses reflexive pronouns or the verb “poner

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7. Articles

Type	Example	Error
Articles	Patience is a virtue.	The* patience is a virtue.

10. Word Order

Type	Example	Error
Word Order	Not only was he my doctor, but my best friend.	Not only *he was my doctor, but my best friend.

10.1. In Spanish, the subject-verb order does not change in questions, negations, or conditions.

Example: Not only was he my doctor, but my best friend.

Error: Not only *he was my doctor, but my best friend.
(No solo era mi doctor, sino mi mejor amigo.)

Example: When did he come?

Error: When *he came? (¿Cuándo vino?)

Example: Should you have any questions, let me know.

Error: *You should have any questions, let me know.
(Si tuvieras cualquier pregunta, déjame saber)

10.2. Spanish is very flexible and admits many changes in the order of the elements within a sentence.

Example: I mean that.

Error: *To that, I mean. (A eso me refiero./Me refiero a eso.)

10.3. Spanish doesn't have phrasal verbs (as explained in section four), and consequently speakers may misplace the preposition.

Example: He tried to cheer me up.

Error: He tried to cheer *up me. (Intentó animarme)

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