

Common mistakes in ESL writing - part I

English is an international language. Even in countries where it is not the first language, it is widely taught and used for administrative purposes. For example, in India English is one of the official languages. It is estimated that the number of people for whom English is the second language is much greater than the number of people for whom English is the first language. However, many people who use English as a second language cannot write without mistakes. In this article, we will take a look at some of the most common writing mistakes of ESL students.

Change of narrative

Sometimes students often start writing in the first person and change to the third person. This can cause a lot of confusion. While writing a piece of academic text, it is always a good idea to use the third person narrative. This is an unwritten rule that exists in academia. This doesn't necessarily mean that you have to totally eliminate the pronouns I and we from your writing. Sometimes it is not possible; sometimes it just doesn't make much sense. However, as far as possible, try to use the impersonal pronoun it instead of the first person pronouns I or we. Of course, it will also mean some changes in the tense and voice. Note that if you use personal pronouns throughout your term paper or essay, it could result in poor grading.

Run-on sentences

This is a very common mistake. If a sentence contains two or more main clauses, they have to be properly connected using a coordinating conjunction. If you do not want to use a conjunction, you have to use an appropriate punctuation mark like semicolon. Alternatively you can split the two clauses using a full-stop.

Improper capitalization

Rules of capitalization are relatively easy to follow. Nonetheless, ESL students sometimes get them wrong.

Always begin a sentence with a capital letter. Capitalize the first letters of proper nouns.

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Examples are: *John, Rahul, Mary, Microsoft* etc. Do not capitalize the first letters of common nouns. Examples are: *boy, girl, computer* etc. The personal pronoun 'I' should always be capitalized.