

Error Type Table and Tips for Responding to Errors

Note that performance errors (typos or slips of the tongue) are not included in this table. Students can generally correct such errors without your assistance. Nevertheless, you may still find it helpful to call attention to performance errors when giving feedback on students' written work.

Interlanguage (IL) Errors (errors caused by an incomplete or idiosyncratic understanding of the way the target language works)	L1-Influence Errors (errors caused by influence/interference from the student's native language)	Is it likely that a student will be able to self-correct or to correct with the aid of a reference work, once these errors have been brought to his/her attention? See the accompanying Student Resources Sheet - which can be shared with students - for recommended reference works.
knowing how to form progressive ¹ verbs and when to use them		Probably; may need help choosing between progressive & simple
knowing how to form past tense verbs and when to use them		Yes; may need help choosing between past and present
knowing how to form present or past perfect verbs and when to use them		Maybe; will likely need help choosing between perfect and simple
incorrect subject/verb agreement		Probably; may need help identifying the subject as count or non-count
incorrect word order within a clause, especially when forming questions and negative statements (this constitutes a minor syntactical error, unlike the more substantial syntactical error represented by the "sentence structure" category below)		Probably; may need a refresher on the rules of word order in questions and negative statements
difficulties with capitalization		Probably; may need a refresher on the rules of capitalization
difficulties with punctuation (usually linked to difficulties with sentence structure)		Maybe. It's likely that punctuation errors are linked to problems with sentence structure and will be eliminated if you ask the student to reword a syntactically complicated or confusing passage
incorrect use of determiners ²		No/maybe
knowing when to use a singular noun and when to use a plural noun		No / maybe
	incorrect use of prepositions ³	Maybe, but only with the aid of a collocations dictionary
	consistent spelling errors, (possibly reflected in speech patterns)	Probably
	incorrect pronoun use	Probably
sentence structure / ability to put clauses together to form syntactically felicitous sentences		Probably, but only if you recommend that the student re-word / break into multiple sentences.

Notes on the terms used in the table above

¹The terms "progressive," "perfect," and "simple" refer to the *aspect*, not the *tense*, of a verb. Aspect refers to the *amount of time* required for completion of the activity named by the verb. Thus, aspect indicates whether the action is in progress, has a discernible end point, and/or is bounded by a definitive start- and end-point. Aspect also indicates whether or not the action described by a verb occurs habitually or once only. Meanwhile, tense indicates whether the action happened in the present or the past, regardless of the amount of time required for completion of the action. Verb tenses are indicated by changes in the form of the verb itself; thus, there is technically no future tense in English. However, we can talk about the future by using a multiword construction such as "I will go" or "I am planning to go." Tense, aspect, and the multiword constructions used to talk about the future can be combined in various ways to express both the *when* of an action and the *duration* of an action.

²Determiners are words such as "many," "none," "these," "those," "my," "your," "the," and "a/an." Such words *determine* the relationship of a noun to other words in the sentence or to extra-textual reference points. It is notoriously difficult to teach the correct use of English determiners. Researchers believe that the ability to use determiners correctly may be linked to a speaker's lexical knowledge, rather than his or her grammatical knowledge. Thus, an L2 speaker or writer (or even an L1 speaker or writer) whose mental lexicon is limited or contains incomplete or incorrect entries will likely find it difficult to use determiners correctly. Moreover, cultural conventions influence the use of determiners. Thus, any student who is unfamiliar with the cultural conventions required of writers in your discipline may find it difficult to use determiners correctly.

If your students have trouble using determiners correctly, they may also have trouble knowing when to use singular nouns and when to use plural nouns. The choice between singular and plural is, after all, a form of determination. Moreover, certain phrases, like "eating habits," use a plural noun in idiomatic ways that won't be immediately obvious to an L2 speaker.

³The use of prepositions is largely idiomatic; thus it can be difficult for L2 speakers to self correct a misused preposition. You can help students select the correct preposition by showing them how to use collocations dictionaries or corpora (see links on the Student Resources Sheet.) Collocations are groups of words that appear together so frequently that most L1 and highly proficient L2 speakers tend to think of them as a single unit. Most prepositions function as collocations. Some dictionaries will show frequently used preposition + noun or preposition + verb collocations, but you can generally obtain more detailed information from a collocations dictionary or online corpus. When using a collocations dictionary or corpus, simply look for the search box and type in the noun, verb, or adjective that requires a preposition. You'll be directed to a list - and examples - of prepositions that can be used with your search term(s).

General Tips for providing feedback on language-use errors

I find it easiest to mark language-use errors by hand on a hard copy of the paper. In general, it's a good idea to mark language-use errors on a clean copy of the student's paper after content comments have been made and a content grade has been assigned. You can set aside a portion of the grade - perhaps five percent - for "language-use corrections." Assign this portion of the grade after the student has been given a chance to correct the errors that you mark. Thus, 95% of the student's grade may focus on content, while the remaining 5% focuses on language use and the student's diligence in correcting those errors that you mark. Be prudent and compassionate in determining the weight of the language-use grade relative to the content grade. Above all, rely on your knowledge of the student's academic performance, your understanding of his or her academic and language-development goals, and the guidelines above to determine what errors he or she can realistically be expected to correct.

You may want to devise a standardized correction code to use in marking those errors that you expect students to correct. You are welcome to make copies of the attached code sheet for your own use.