

8 Problem areas of English

There are many aspects of English grammar that cause problems for learners of English, and which result in a number of typical mistakes. Some common examples of these problem areas are highlighted below.

8.1 by and until

■ **By** means *no later than*:

- Please hand in your essay by Monday.
- The repairs will be finished by the end of the month.

The expression **by the time** is used in examples like these:

- By the time we got her message it was too late to meet up with her.
- They had already finished eating by the time I arrived at the restaurant.

■ **Until** means that an action continues up to a certain time (until is often shortened to till, especially in spoken English.)

- I only have to work until midday today, and then I've got the rest of the day off.
- We waited until she'd finished speaking on the phone before we knocked at her door.

Not until means *not before*:

- School doesn't start again until 9th September, so I've still got 3 weeks' holiday.
- You are not leaving this room until you tell me where you were last night!

Typical mistake:

wrong: Please let me know ~~until~~ Monday whether you can come.
right: Please let me know by Monday whether you can come.

8.2 for, during and while

■ **For** is used to talk about a period of time, to say how long something happens:

- I lived in Manchester for seven years before moving to Liverpool.

- We had to wait for nearly two hours to go on some of the rides in Disneyland.
- **During + noun** is used to say when something happens:
 - It was very noisy in the hotel, and I woke up several times during the night.
 - A lot of trees were blown down during the storm.
- *During* and *while* have a similar meaning, but *during* is followed by a noun, and *while* is followed by subject + verb:
 - The boys talked about football during the meal.
The boys talked about football while they were eating.
 - I went to Madame Tussaud's during my stay in London.
I went to Madame Tussaud's while I was in London.

Typical mistake:

during cannot be used to say how long something happens:
wrong: The weather was hot and sunny ~~during~~ three weeks.
right: The weather was hot and sunny for three weeks.

8.3 so and such

■ **So** is used to make an adjective or adverb stronger:

- I've been so busy in the last week that I haven't had time to go to the supermarket.
- Bali is famous because the beaches there are so beautiful.

■ **Such** is also used in front of an adjective or adverb, but when it is followed by a noun:

- I didn't know that Annie was such a good singer – she's got a lovely voice!
- She had such a bad headache that she had to go home early.

Typical mistake:

wrong: We've had ~~so~~ good weather this summer. It's been great!
right: We've had such good weather this summer. Or: The weather has been so good this summer.