

## Using the Wrong Word

### 9. Irregardless

Wrong: **Irregardless** of the amount of time it takes, I still want to do the project correctly.

Right: **Regardless** of the amount of time it takes, I still want to do the project correctly.

Explanation: *Irregardless* is considered a double negative because it has both “ir” and “less.” Do not use double negatives since two negatives cancel each other out; “I do not want none” would mean “I do want some.”

### 10. Could care less

Wrong: Since we lost, I **could care less** who wins the tournament.

Right: Since we lost, I **could not care less** who wins the tournament.

Explanation: One is trying to get across that one is at the lowest level of caring, but if one could care less, one would not yet be at the lowest level of caring.

### 11. Better/best

Wrong: When comparing the Bluebirds and the Robins, I think the Robins are the **best** team.

Right: When comparing the Bluebirds and the Robins, I think the Robins are the **better** team.

Explanation: If one is comparing two things, use *better* (younger, older, dumber, or more intelligent); if comparing three things use *best* (youngest, oldest, dumbest, or most intelligent).

### 12. Then/than

Wrong: This past year, he has grown a lot taller **then** his older brother.

Right: This past year, he has grown a lot taller **than** his older brother.

Explanation: Use *than* when one is comparing; use *then* when talking about time: “If I had a dollar for every time I coughed, then I would be a rich man.”

## English Grammar



Grammar mistakes are a double threat because they can be *seen* when we write, and they can be *heard* when we speak. Since we all speak more often than we write, the chances of making a grammar mistake during speech are even greater than in writing. A spoken grammatical mistake can be damaging to one’s reputation since it signals to the listener that the speaker doesn’t know the correct way to speak.

Perhaps the phrase “the correct way to speak” is misleading because different regions of the nation or even separate parts of a state may have their own unique way of speaking. There is one way to spell words and one way to punctuate sentences, which we start learning in elementary school. However, we begin to learn spoken language from the day we are born, and our teachers are our family members and neighbors. Depending on where we were raised, we may have learned spoken language a little differently from other Americans.

Even though this is true, there is still one way that educated people speak and write. If one uses this “correct” or “standard” grammar, it will make one appear to be an educated person. This is a tremendous advantage when applying for a job or making a public presentation.

This booklet will cover the most common grammatical mistakes that people make in word choice, noun/pronoun agreement, and subject/verb agreement. We will show the wrong way, show the right way, and explain the difference. Speaking and writing the “standard” way is important in professional life, but “down home” grammar is still fine for informal conversation.

## Noun and Pronoun Agreement

### 1. I/Me

*Wrong:* If you need help, ask Jack and **I** to do the job, and we will do it well.

*Right:* If you need help, ask Jack and **me** to do the job, and we will do it well.

*Explanation:* One wouldn't say, "If you need help, ask *I* to do the job," so don't say, "ask Jack and *I*." If one gets confused, remove the other person from the sentence, and it will become clearer.

### 2. Everyone/Their

*Wrong:* When looking over the first research papers, I see that **everyone** got **their** works cited page wrong.

*Right:* When looking over the first research papers, I see that **everyone** got **his or her** works cited page wrong.

*Explanation:* By definition, *everyone* means *one*, and *their* means more than *one*. Therefore, everyone cannot be their; everyone must be either *his*, *her*, or *his or her*.

### 3. You

*Wrong:* When **you** are pregnant, **you** sometimes experience strange food cravings.

*Right:* When **women** are pregnant, **they** sometimes experience strange food cravings.

*Explanation:* Remember that when the reader sees *you*, the reader thinks it refers to the reader. Don't assume that the reader is a pregnant woman. It is better not to use *you* in formal writing or speaking.

### 4. Themselves/themselves

*Wrong:* Bob and Mary believed they could change the tire **themselves**.

*Right:* Bob and Mary believed they could change the tire **themselves**.

*Explanation:*

*Theirselves* is considered incorrect or "non-standard," though *myself* is right, and *meself* is definitely wrong.

## Subject and Verb Agreement

### 5. Have went

*Wrong:* John and Mary **have went** to that library since they were in kindergarten.

*Right:* John and Mary **have gone** to that library since they were in kindergarten.

*Explanation:* Although it is correct to say "John and Mary went," when we add the helper verb *have*, the verb changes to *gone*.

### 6. Split infinitive

*Wrong:* After waking up an hour late, I needed **to quickly eat** my breakfast.

*Right:* After waking up an hour late, I needed **to eat** my breakfast **quickly**.

*Explanation:* In Latin, the infinitive (to + verb) is a single word, and it is thus impossible to split; it is therefore bad form to split an infinitive in English by putting another word between *to* and the verb.

### 7. Both walks

*Wrong:* **Both** Mary, who is only eleven months old, and Fred, who is a month older, **walks** without any help.

*Right:* **Both** Mary, who is only eleven months old, and Fred, who is a month older, **walk** without any help.

*Explanation:* The subject "Both Mary and Fred" is a plural and requires a plural verb.

### 8. Have either

*Wrong:* **Have either** of the Johnson twins graduated from high school yet?

*Right:* **Has either** of the Johnson twins graduated from high school yet?

*Explanation:* The word *either* implies *either one*, and *one* takes the singular verb *has* rather than the plural verb *have*.