

STOP SAYING THAT!

VERSION FOR SPANISH, PORTUGUESE, ITALIAN AND FRENCH SPEAKERS

200 LESSONS

THE MOST COMMON INCORRECT PHRASES
IN ENGLISH

Dear English Learners,

Welcome to a sample of the book: *Stop Saying That!* My goal with this book is to help you discover some incorrect phrases that you are saying and how to fix them so that you are saying them correctly. These lessons are based on the most common incorrect phrases that I often hear from students, even at an advanced level. Each lesson includes an explanation which can help you understand English more clearly.

The pages in this sample book are taken directly from the complete book. In this sample, you can find the following parts:

- The table of contents pages, which describe the contents of the book
- 5 sample lessons: “I didn’t buy something/nothing”, “Everybody didn’t do it”, “I don’t think so, too”, “You made a good job”, and “I am waiting for your reply” (these are all incorrect phrases and the lessons explain how to fix them).

Note that the complete book has a review section after every ten lessons with practice exercises for those ten lessons.

I hope you enjoy the book and feel free to contact me for any questions!

Sincerely,

Blake

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1. “I didn’t buy something/nothing”

What You Should Say: “*I didn’t buy anything” or “*I bought nothing”**

Why It’s Wrong:

The word “no” represents zero. When you attach it to the word “thing” it becomes “nothing”, which means “zero things”. If you attach it to the word “body” for people, it becomes “nobody”, which means “zero people”.

The word “no” is negative, so it cannot be used with a negative verb because it would be two negatives together (which actually makes the clause become *positive*).

In the examples below, the word “no” is incorrectly used with a negative verb:

- *I didn’t see nobody.* – incorrect; this means “I didn’t see zero people”, so it actually means that I saw people
- *I didn’t do nothing.* – incorrect; this means “I didn’t do zero things”, so I actually *did* something

In the examples below, the word “no” is used correctly with a positive verb to make a negative meaning of zero:

- *I saw nobody.* – correct; this means I saw zero people
- *I did nothing.* – correct; this means I did zero things
- *I have no money.* – correct; this means I have zero dollars

You can also use the word “any” with a noun, such as “anybody” or “anything”. It can be used with a negative verb, because “any” is a positive word and can mean one (this is different than “no”, which means zero)

In the examples below, the positive word “any” is used with a negative verb to correctly make a negative meaning:

- *I didn’t see anybody.* – this means I didn’t see even one person = I saw zero people
- *I didn’t do anything.* – I didn’t do even one thing = I did zero things
- *I don’t have any money.* – I don’t have even one dollar = I have zero

Remember that other negative forms of verbs and modals, such as “won’t”, “can’t”, and “shouldn’t”, also need to use the word “any” instead of “no”:

- *Everything is too expensive. I can’t buy anything.*
- *If you are sick you shouldn’t do anything. Just rest in your bed until you feel better.*

To learn more about the difference between “something”, “everything”, “anything” and “nothing” read lesson #4 in the book “What’s the Difference Between...?”

2. “Everybody didn’t do it”

What You Should Say: “*Nobody did it”*

Why It’s Wrong:

When the words “everybody” and “everyone” are in the subject position of a clause, the verb should only be in positive form, such as “did”, and not in negative form like “didn’t do”.

If you want to say that zero people did something, you should use “no” with the noun in the subject position instead of “every” to make this noun negative (it means “zero” quantity of this noun). Then, use a positive verb with the negative subject: “*nobody did it*”, which means “zero people did it.”

In the examples below, the word “no” is used with a noun to make the subject negative, and then a positive verb is used with it:

- *Nobody can come tomorrow.* – zero people can come
- *Nothing happened.* – zero events happened
- *No student passed the test.* – zero people passed, so all the students failed

As you learned before, the word “no” is negative, so it will make the whole clause negative. You cannot use a negative verb when the subject includes “no”, because it would be a double negative, so it’s incorrect to say: “nobody didn’t do it.”

In the examples below, the negative verb with “no” is correctly changed to a positive verb, so there is only one negative word (“no”) in the clause:

- *Nobody ~~couldn’t~~ could do it.*
- *Nobody ~~hasn’t~~ has been there before.*
- *Nothing ~~isn’t~~ is wrong.*

On the other hand, if you want to say that something is true about all people, use “every” with the noun in the subject position and use a verb in positive form:

- *Everybody can come tomorrow.* – 100% of the people can come
- *Everything is cheap here.* – 100% of the products are cheap
- *Every student passed the test.* – 100% of the students passed

Tip: as you learned, you can use a positive verb for both “every” and “no”, but the meaning is completely opposite (“all” or “zero”). Try to create a good habit of focusing on using “no + noun” only with positive verbs to express the meaning of zero.

3. “I don’t think so, too”

What You Should Say: “*I don’t think so, either*”

Why It’s Wrong:

The word “too” is only used when the verb of the clause is in positive form. When the verb is in negative form (*don’t, aren’t, can’t, won’t, haven’t, shouldn’t* etc.) you should use “either” instead of “too”.

You can use “too” when a second clause gives the same fact as the first clause, but only when the verb in both clauses is in *positive* form. For example, if you say: “*Australia is an island*”, the “be” verb is in positive form, so if you want to say that the same is true about New Zealand, use a positive verb and “too”:

- *Australia is an island. New Zealand is an island, too.*

In the examples below, the second clause uses “too” because it is saying the same fact as the first clause and the verb is in positive form:

- *I think she’s funny. → I think so, too.* – the second person agrees with the first person
- *I can speak Italian and my brother can, too.* – both of us can speak Italian
- *My father is a doctor, and my Uncle is, too.* – both of them are doctors

You can also use “either” when a second clause says the same fact as the first clause, but in this case, both verbs are in *negative* form. For example, if you say: “*Brazil isn’t an island*” and you want to say that the same negative point is true about Colombia, you need to use “either”, because the verb is in negative form:

- *Brazil isn’t an island. Colombia isn’t an island, either.*

In the examples below, the word “either” is used correctly with a negative verb to make the second clause describe the same fact as the first clause:

- *I don’t think it’s interesting. → I don’t think so, either.*
- *She isn’t going to go on the trip, and I’m not going to go, either.*
- *I won’t forget to send you the gift, and I won’t forget to call you, either.*

To learn more about the difference between “too”, “either” and “neither”, read Lesson #50 in the book “What’s the Difference Between...?”

Tip: practice getting used to saying negative verbs with the word “either” instead of “too”. For example, when you say “don’t”, “didn’t”, “won’t”, “haven’t”, or “can’t”, it means your statement is negative, so you’ll need to end your statement with “either” to agree with someone.

4. “You made a good job”

What You Should Say: “You did a good job”

Why It’s Wrong:

The verb “make” is similar to the meaning of “create”. It is used when an object is being created as something new, such as when you say “make a plan” because you are creating this plan from nothing.

On the other hand, the verb “do” is similar to the meaning of “perform”. It is used when something was already created in the past, so now the focus is on *performing/doing* the task. When you “do a job”, it’s because your job or task has already been created in the past, and now it is your responsibility to perform that task.

For example, when you decide that you want to paint your kitchen a new colour, you have created a task/job for yourself (so you already “made” the task). Then, when you are painting the house, you are performing/doing the task. If someone thinks your new kitchen looks good, they can say: “you did a good job” because it means that your *performance* of the task (painting) was good.

If you want to add the task to the expression “do a good job”, you can use the preposition “on”: “you did a good job on your kitchen!”

In the examples below, the verb “do” is correctly used with the object “job”:

- *I heard that you organized the event. You did a great job. Everyone really enjoyed it.*
- *She has been doing a good job in her role as assistant manager so she’s getting promoted to manager.*
- *I got a custom-made suit from that store, and they did a good job on it, so I want to order another one.*

Some other common objects of “do” include: “business”, “a job”, “work”, “a task”, “a test”, “an assignment”, “a project”, and “research”. These nouns are considered “tasks”, so the focus is on performing them. Therefore, we use “do” with them:

- *Our team of scientists do a lot of research to discover new cures for diseases.*
- *I need to stay late at the office because I have too much work to do.*

Many students incorrectly say the expression: “to make business (with other people/companies)”, but the verb in this case should be “do”, not “make”, because the object “business” in this expression is a shorter way of saying “business transactions”, which are considered tasks. When you sell products, provide services, manage operations, sign contracts etc., you are performing the daily tasks of “business”, so we use the verb “do” to describe this:

- *When people do business in my country, they often spend a lot of time on building a relationship first.*
- *I would like to do business with your company, because I think we can help each other.*
- *We do business with many multinational companies.*

It’s important to recognize that the word “business” in this case is an uncountable noun because it is one noun that represents all kinds of business activities. Therefore, there is no article with “business”, and it cannot be plural.

The word “business” can also be a countable noun when it means “a company”. When you use this countable meaning of “a business/company” you should use the verb “create” or “start”, not “make”:

- *I’m going to start a business with my friend after I graduate university.*
- *We created a business to help people who want to immigrate into this country.*

To learn more about the difference between “make” and “do”, read Lesson #30 in “What’s the Difference Between...?”

5. “I am waiting for your reply”

What You Should Say: “I’m looking forward to your reply” or “I look forward to your reply.”

Why It’s Wrong:

If you say that you are waiting for someone to do something, it can sound like you are putting pressure on that person to do it as soon as possible.

For example, if you write: “I’m *waiting for your reply*”, the other person might feel like you are actually saying: “*hurry up and message me soon because I’m waiting.*”

In order to prevent this misunderstanding and to *not* put pressure on the other person, it’s more polite and professional to say: “I’m *looking forward to...*”, because this means that you have a positive feeling of anticipation about something in the future, and it doesn’t mean that you are impatient or “*waiting*” for something.

For example, if you say: “I’m *looking forward to your visit next week*”, it means “*I am positively anticipating your visit next week*” which is a polite message without putting any pressure on the person who will visit you.

The phrasal verb “*look forward to*” ends with the preposition “*to*” so it needs to connect to a noun. If you want to use a verb word, such as “*attend*”, it needs to be in gerund form so that it becomes a noun: “*I look forward to attending your seminar.*”

In the examples below, the phrasal verb “*look forward to*” is used correctly, and the verbs “*meet*” and “*hear*” are in gerund form because of the preposition “*to*”:

- *I’m looking forward to meeting you next week.*
- *I’m looking forward to hearing from you.*
- *I look forward to your call.*
- *I’m looking forward to the interview.*

To learn more about using gerunds after prepositions, read Lesson #17 in the book “Grammar Essentials”