

Verbs: some common mistakes

Here is a list of errors students often make in the use of verbs.

Incorrect: My father told me that honesty was the best policy.

Correct: My father told me that honesty is the best policy.

We usually use a past tense in the subordinate clause when the verb in the main clause is in the past tense. However, a past tense is unnecessary when the subordinate clause gives information that is always true.

Incorrect: The cashier-cum-accountant are on leave today.

Correct: The cashier-cum-accountant is on leave today.

Expressions like the cashier-cum-accountant refer to one person and hence a singular verb is needed.

Incorrect: The cashier and the accountant is on leave today.

Correct: The cashier and the accountant are on leave today.

Incorrect: I am so weak that I may not walk.

Correct: I am so weak that I cannot walk.

To talk about ability we use can, not may.

Incorrect: Tell me why are you beating the child.

Correct: Tell me why you are beating the child.

Incorrect: I don't know why is she late.

Correct: I don't know why she is late.

The two sentences given above are examples of indirect questions. In indirect questions, there is no inversion of subject and verb.

Incorrect: The ship was drowned.

Correct: The ship sank.

People drown. Ships and boats sink.

Incorrect: Seldom I visit my parents.

Correct: Seldom do I visit my parents.

Incorrect: This food is hard to be digested.

Correct: This food is hard to digest.

Incorrect: I never have, and I never will do it.

Correct: I have never done and I will never do it.