

# 1 Pitfalls to be Taken Care of

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**T**he English language is rich, varied beautiful and enticing at the same time. The fascination of this international language knows no bounds. But it is replete with pitfalls which must be carefully avoided if one does not want to become a laughing stock either in written or spoken English. There are four basic rules in the English grammar. These rules are, in fact, the four pillars of the English grammar. If these rules are taken care of, one is sure to gain the mastery of the English language to a great extent. In fine, these rules are the tips that won't let you 'trip'.

## Rule I

Can, Could, Will, Would, Shall, Should, May, Might, Ought to, Must, Do, Did, Does, Used to, Dare, Need—all these words except 'Do', 'Did' and 'Does' are auxiliary verbs or helping verbs or subordinate verbs. They help the Principal Verbs or Main Verbs to form meaningful sentences.

**Note that the first form of the main verb is ever used after each of these helping verbs,** come what may. Let us have a look at the usage of each of these auxiliary verbs:-

### Can—

- It is used to indicate ability or physical strength:-

- (1) He can climb this mountain.
- (2) My grandpa can walk for a mile at a stretch.
- (3) She can play football.
- (4) We can solve this problem.
- (5) She can move this heavy trunk by herself.

Note carefully that the first form of the Main Verb is used after 'can' in each of the sentences. Never write or say—I can did this work. It is absolutely wrong. Always write or say—I can do this work.

- It is used to indicate acquired knowledge or skill:-

- (1) She can play on the piano.
- (2) We can dance very well.
- (3) He can sing sweetly.
- (4) She can cook food.
- (5) My father can fly a plane.

- It is used to indicate that someone is aware of something through one of his senses:-

- (1) He can see with his eyes.
- (2) She can hear with her ears.
- (3) I can feel with my skin.
- (4) You can taste with your tongue.
- (5) One can smell with one's nose.

- It is used to describe what is considered characteristic, what somebody or something is considered capable of being or doing:-

- (1) Tsunami can be lethal at times.
- (2) The elephant can be furious at any time.
- (3) It can be biting hot here in June and July.
- (4) He can be eccentric at times.
- (5) It can be windy as well as snowy on hills.

### **Could—**

- It is used to indicate the past tense of 'can':-

- (1) He ran so fast that he could catch the bus.
- (2) He told me that he could read the novel.
- (3) I could reach there on time.
- (4) I could help him in distress.
- (5) He worked so hard that he could stand first in the class.

- It is used to indicate a polite request:-

- (1) Could you tell me the way to the nearest inn?
- (2) Could you lend me your bicycle for a day?
- (3) Could you solve this sum?
- (4) Could you postpone the meeting for a few days?
- (5) Could you bring me a glass of water?

**Please be noted that this use of 'could' is employed in interrogative sentences only.**

- It is used to indicate ability in the past:-

- (1) When I was a child, I could drink a glass of milk in one draught.
- (2) I could run for miles at a stretch when I was in my teens.
- (3) When I was ten years old, I could solve crossword puzzles in the twinkling of an eye.
- (4) She could play on the mouth-organ when she was six.
- (5) My father could memorize ten new English words daily when he was in college.

### **Will—**

- It is used with the second and third persons in future tense:-

- (1) He will fly to America tomorrow.
- (2) She will be ten next year.
- (3) You will do this work in the evening.
- (4) They will leave for Agra next Monday.
- (5) Schools will reopen on Monday.

- It is used with the second person in questions, making polite requests, invitations, etc.:-

- (1) Will you please do me a favour?
- (2) Will you accompany me to the airport?
- (3) Will you lend me a hundred rupees?
- (4) Will you pass the salad?
- (5) Will you please open the windows?
- (6) Will you attend my marriage?

- It is used with the first person to indicate determination, threat, promise, intention, etc.:-

- (1) I will teach you a bitter lesson.
- (2) I will cross this river, come what may.
- (3) I will buy a good book on the English grammar.
- (4) We will stay here tonight.
- (5) I will try to do better next time.

• It is used with the third person in interrogative sentences:-

- (1) Will it rain heavily tonight?
- (2) Will he speak the truth?
- (3) Will they fight with their neighbours?
- (4) Will she go shopping in the evening?
- (5) Will they swim in the afternoon?

### **Would—**

• It is used as the past tense of 'will':-

- (1) My father told me that he would take me to the zoo next Tuesday.
- (2) He knew that he would need some money.
- (3) I asked him if he would solve the sums.
- (4) The teacher asked Mohan if he would pay the fine.
- (5) I told her that I would help her in distress.

• It is used to make polite requests and suggestions:-

- (1) What would you take?
- (2) I would take coffee with burger.
- (3) Would you lend me a thousand rupees?
- (4) Would you pay me by cheque?
- (5) Would you accompany me to the station?

• It is used to describe the consequences of an imagined event:-

- (1) If you had your hair cut short, you would look handsome.
- (2) If you behave gently, everybody would respect you.
- (3) If I won a lottery, I would set-up a school in this village.
- (4) If I owned a car, I would drive it by myself.
- (5) If I were a bird, I would fly in the sky.

• It is used to describe a condition in the past:-

- (1) If I had seen him, I would have talked to him.
- (2) If I had been there, I would have beaten him.
- (3) If I had owned a car, I would have driven it by myself.
- (4) If it had rained on time, the crops would not have been destroyed.
- (5) If he had come to me, I would have helped him.

• It is used to express preferences:-

- (1) I would like to go there alone.
- (2) I would prefer sugar to salt.
- (3) I would prefer jogging to cycling.
- (4) I would prefer coffee to tea.
- (5) I would like to eat a sandwich.

• It is used to comment on characteristic behaviour or habitual or repeated activities:-

- (1) I would drink a lot of milk when I was young.
- (2) I would go for a walk every morning.
- (3) I would fast once a month when I was in college.
- (4) I would quarrel a lot when I was a child.
- (5) I would fly kites during my childhood.

Note that 'would' is equivalent to 'used to'.

• It is used to make requests using wish:-

- (1) I wish they would behave well.
- (2) I wish he would not make a noise.
- (3) I wish you would listen to your teacher.
- (4) I wish you would be sincere.
- (5) I wish she would sing sweetly.

### **Shall—**

• It is used with the first person in future tense:-

- (1) We shall go to a grand party in the evening.
- (2) I shall give you a few tips on cooking.
- (3) I shall go to America by plane tomorrow.
- (4) I shall invite all my friends to tea.
- (5) We shall go to the club tomorrow.

• It is used with the second and third persons to indicate promise, threat, command, determination, certainty, etc.:-

- (1) Children, you shall have a holiday tomorrow.
- (2) Our soldiers shall fight to the last.
- (3) You shall speak the truth.
- (4) You shall be fired if you don't behave properly.
- (5) I shall be leaving as soon as I am called.

### **Should—**

It is used to indicate obligation or duty:-

- (1) We should obey traffic rules.
- (2) You should serve your ailing parents.
- (3) He should observe discipline in the classroom.
- (4) One should keep one's promise.
- (5) We should always speak the truth.

• It is used in indirect speech as the past form of 'shall':-

- (1) The teacher advised the students that they should brush their teeth twice a day.
- (2) The captain instructed the soldiers that they should fight to the finish.
- (3) Mother advised her son that he should always speak the truth.
- (4) My father told me that I should never tell a lie.
- (5) My parents told me that we should pray to the Almighty daily without fail.

• It is used to indicate a condition in the present tense:-

- (1) Should you lose your way, ask somebody.
- (2) Should you go out, post this letter.

- (3) Should you miss the bus, go by train.
- (4) Should you reach there safely, inform me.
- (5) Should you play well, you are sure to win.

**Note that 'should' is equivalent to 'if'.**

• It is used after conjunction 'lest':-

- (1) Work hard lest you should fail.
- (2) Work carefully lest you should stumble down.
- (3) The pickpocket ran away lest he should be caught redhanded by the policeman.
- (4) Speak softly lest you should be heard.
- (5) Speak softly lest you should be heard by others.

**Note that 'lest' is always followed by 'should' irrespective of the tense. In other words, whatever is the tense—present or past or future—'lest' is always followed by 'should'.**

**May—**

• It is used to indicate possibility:-

- (1) It may rain tonight.
- (2) It may hail today.
- (3) It may snow today.
- (4) I may come to see you in the evening.
- (5) It may sleet tomorrow.

• It is used to indicate permission:-

- (1) May I borrow your bicycle for a day?
- (2) May I go to the toilet, sir?
- (3) May I go home now?
- (4) May I wait for him?
- (5) May I come in, madam?

• It is used to indicate a purpose:-

- (1) We eat so that we may live.
- (2) We earn so that we may spend.
- (3) He works hard so that he may get through.
- (4) He runs fast so that he may catch the bus.
- (5) He speaks aloud so that he may be heard by the audience.

**Note that conjunction 'so that' is always followed by may + 1st form of verb in the present tense. Never use 'can' or any other modal verb.**

• It is used to indicate a hope or wish:-

- (1) May God grant you speedy recovery!
- (2) May God bless you!
- (3) May you scale great heights in life!
- (4) May God grant you all the riches of the world!
- (5) May you top the list of successful candidates!

**Note that the sentences expressing wish or prayer also start with 'may'. But each of these sentences ends with a mark of exclamation (!).**

**Might—**

• It is used to indicate a purpose in the past tense:-

- (1) He worked hard so that he might pass the examination.
- (2) He ran fast so that he might catch the bus.
- (3) He spoke aloud so that he might be heard by the audience.
- (4) He earned so that he might spend.
- (5) He flattered his boss so that he might be promoted.

**Note that conjunction 'so that' is always followed by might + 1st form of verb in the past tense. Never used 'could' or any other modal verb.**

• It is used to indicate a lesser possibility:-

- (1) It might sleet in the evening.
- (2) It might snow tonight.
- (3) It might rain today.
- (4) It might hail in the afternoon.
- (5) It might blow heavily tomorrow.

• It is used as the past tense of 'may':-

- (1) The teacher told the students that he might not come next day.
- (2) He said that he might come next day.
- (3) He told me that he might meet me on Tuesday.
- (4) He threatened me that he might reveal the secret to the police.
- (5) He informed me that he might give me some money next day.

• It is used to ask permission politely:-

- (1) Might I use your mobile phone?
- (2) Might I use your pen?
- (3) Might I sit down?
- (4) Might I know who you are?
- (5) Might I go home now?

**Ought to—**

• It is used to indicate moral obligation or duty:-

- (1) A soldier ought to serve his motherland.
- (2) We ought to serve our ailing parents.
- (3) We ought to obey traffic rules.
- (4) You ought to be punctual.
- (5) She ought to do this work.

**Note that both 'ought to' and 'should' can be used interchangeably. The former expresses moral obligation whereas the latter expresses obligation.**

**Must—**

• It is used to indicate necessity or compulsion:-

- (1) You must run fast to catch the bus.
- (2) You must reach school in time.
- (3) You must see the doctor at once.
- (4) You must hurry, or you will miss the train.
- (5) You must burn midnight oil if you want to secure good marks.
- (6) We must fight for liberty.

- (7) You must seek forgiveness of your teacher.
- (8) She must carry out my orders.
- (9) You must clear the dues by the 10th of July.
- (10) A servant must obey his master.

• It is used to indicate inevitability:-

- (1) All living things must eat to survive.
- (2) All living things must grow.
- (3) Everybody must die one day.
- (4) All living things must breathe.
- (5) What can't be cured, must be endured.

### **Dare—**

• It is used to mean have sufficient courage or imprudence to do something:-

- (1) He dare not stand up in public.
- (2) I dare not ask him a question.
- (3) How dare she say such nasty things about me?
- (4) How dare you touch my book?
- (5) She dare not cross this river.

• It is used to indicate supposition. But it is used with 'say':-

- (1) I dare say we shall be late for office.
- (2) I dare say they will be in trouble.
- (3) I dare say he will help me later.
- (4) I dare say you are a foolish person.
- (5) I dare say he is not a foreigner.

**Note that 'dare say' is used in this way with the first person singular only.**

### **Need—**

• It is used to indicate an obligation:-

- (1) Need I go now?
- (2) You need not complete that work today.
- (3) You need not go there to see her.
- (4) You need not worry about that.
- (5) You need not stay here any longer.

### **Used to—**

• It is used to say that something happened continuously or frequently during a period in the past:-

- (1) I used to live in London.
- (2) We used to go sailing on the lake in summer.
- (3) I didn't use to like him much when we were at school.
- (4) You used to see a lot of her.
- (5) I used to drink a lot of milk when I was young.

### **Do, Does—**

• They are used in the Simple Present Tense or Present Indefinite in affirmative sentences, negative sentences, interrogative sentences and negative-interrogative sentences:-

- (1) I do go to school daily.

- (2) She does swim in the evening.
- (3) They do not obey their elders.
- (4) You do not tell a lie.
- (5) Do you speak the truth?
- (6) Don't you play cricket?

**Note that in affirmative sentences 'Do and Does' are used to give emphasis to the main verbs.**

I go to school daily.  
I do go to school daily.

**There is a world of difference between the above two sentences. The first sentence is a general statement whereas the second sentence asserts certainty without fail.**

**Did—**

• It is used in the Simple Past Tense or Past Indefinite in affirmative sentences, negative sentences, interrogative sentences and negative-interrogative sentences:-

- (1) Did the teacher teach English yesterday?
- (2) Did I not watch a movie yesterday?
- (3) Did you not go to school yesterday?
- (4) She did play on the flute yesterday evening.
- (5) I did meet her in the street.
- (6) He did not make a noise.
- (7) They did not play well.

**Note that in affirmative sentences 'did' is used to give emphasis to the main verb:**

**I watched a movie yesterday night.**

**I did watch a movie yesterday night.**

**The first sentence is a general statement while the second statement asserts certainty without fail.**

**'Do, Does and Did' are not modal verbs; they are only auxiliary or helping verbs.**

**Rule II**

Be, Is, Am, Are, Was, Were, Has, Have, Had, Been

All the above-mentioned words are again auxiliary or helping verbs. Some of these verbs are used in both Active Voice and Passive Voice whereas some others are used in Passive Voice only. It is to be noted that the third form of the main verb is used after these helping verbs.

**Be—**

• 'Be' as an auxiliary verb is used as follows:

be + V<sub>3</sub>

Generally, it is used with 'let', i.e.

Let + object + be + V<sub>3</sub>

- (1) Be seated.
- (2) Let the food be served.



- (3) Let a letter be written.
- (4) Let the clothes be washed.
- (5) Let the match be played.
- (6) Let the over be bowled.
- (7) Let the book be read.
- (8) Let the lesson be revised.
- (9) Let TV be watched.
- (10) Let the car be driven.

### **Is, Am, Are—**

- All these three helping verbs are used while making the passive voice of Simple Present Tense. The rule is as follows:-

Sub + is/am/are + V<sub>3</sub> + Obj.

- (1) I am praised for my efforts.
- (2) She is rebuked by her teacher.
- (3) Books are written by me.
- (4) They are insulted by their relatives.
- (5) A page is torn by the child.

### **Was, Were—**

- These two helping verbs are used while making the passive voice of Simple Past Tense. The rule is as follows:-

"Sub + was/were + V<sub>3</sub> + obj.

- (1) The dog was run over by a speeding truck.
- (2) The letter was written in haste.
- (3) All the mangoes were eaten by the hungry beggar.
- (4) The road was repaired by the labourers.
- (5) The gifts were given away by the Principal.

### **Has, Have—**

- Both these helping verbs are used in Present Perfect Tense both in Active Voice and in Passive Voice. The rule for making Active Voice is as follows:-

"Sub + has/have + V<sub>3</sub> + Obj.

- (1) The child has broken the toy.
- (2) He has done his homework.
- (3) We have made all the preparations for journey.
- (4) We have won the match.
- (5) They have lost the game.

- The rule for making Passive Voice is as follows:

Sub + has been/have been + V<sub>3</sub> + Obj.

- (1) The plants have been watered by the gardener.
- (2) The cow has been milked by the milkman.
- (3) The work has been completed before time.
- (4) She has been helped by her friends.

(5) I have been adjudged 'Man of the Match'.

### **Had—**

• This helping verb is used in Past Perfect Tense both in Active Voice and in Passive Voice. The rule for making Active Voice is as follows:-

Sub + had + V<sub>3</sub> + Obj.

- (1) The students had made a lot of noise.
- (2) The teacher had taught the lesson.
- (3) The lion had killed the deer.
- (4) Mother had cooked food by then.
- (5) I had reached my destination by evening.

• The rule for making Passive Voice is as follows:-

Sub + had been + V<sub>3</sub> + Obj.

- (1) The speech had been delivered by the minister.
- (2) The letter had been written and posted.
- (3) The pencil had been mended.
- (4) The shoes had been repaired.
- (5) The house had been whitewashed.

### **Been—**

It is another helping verb which is used in Present Perfect, Past Perfect and Future Perfect in Passive Voice only.

• In Future Perfect the rule is as follows:-

Sub + will have been/shall have been + V<sub>3</sub> + Obj.

The use of 'been' in Present Perfect and Past Perfect has already been stated under the helping verbs 'has', 'have' and 'had'.

- (1) The house will have been washed by 5 o'clock in the evening.
- (2) The race will have been won by the tortoise.
- (3) The village will have been looted by the dacoits.
- (4) The project will have been completed by evening.
- (5) The cow will have been milked by seven in the morning.

### **Rule III**

Past Tense is followed by Past Tense. If the verb in the main or principal clause is in the past tense, the verb in the subordinate clause is also in the past tense. Let us have a look at the following sentences:-

- (1) Ashoka wished that he might become a king.
- (2) I knew that I could not get success.
- (3) Subash told me that he had been ill.
- (4) He hoped that his friend would help him.
- (5) Kamal worked hard so that he might pass.

**Note that in each sentence the verb in the past tense in the main clause is followed by the verb in the past tense in the subordinate clause.**

There are, however, a few exceptions to this rule. These exceptions are:

**(a) If the subordinate clause states some habit or universal truth, the verb, in that case, in the subordinate clause, is in the present tense, although the verb in the main clause is in the past tense:-**

- (1) Galileo said that the earth moves round the sun.
- (2) My father told me that the sun rises in the east.
- (3) My mother told me that two and two make four.
- (4) The teacher told the students that honesty is the best policy.
- (5) My uncle told me that the earth has only one satellite.

**(b) The verb of the subordinate Adverb clause of place, reason or comparison, may be in any tense, as the tense requires it, even though the verb in the Principal Clause is in the past tense; as,**

- (1) He did not pass the examination because he is weak.
- (2) My mother liked me more than she likes you.
- (3) He ran to the place where his friend lives.
- (4) I could not help my friend because I have no money.
- (5) The beggar could not cross the road as he is blind.

**(c) The past tense in the Principal Clause may be followed by any tense, as required by the sense, in the subordinate clause, if it is an Adjective clause; as,**

- (1) I called on the man who will take me in service.
- (2) I came across the boy who has been my next-door neighbour.
- (3) I knew the man who has killed my uncle.
- (4) She met a girl who is well versed in calligraphy.
- (5) They knew the beggar who owns a big house.

#### **Rule IV**

A verb agrees with its subject in number. In other words, we can say that a verb takes the same number as its subject; as,

- (1) The cow is a useful animal.
- (2) Cows are useful animals.
- (3) The boy reads in this class.
- (4) The boys read in this class.
- (5) The child is crying.
- (6) The children are crying.

In the first sentence, 'cow' is in the singular number, so the verb 'is' also is in the singular number. In the second sentence, the subject 'cows' is in the plural number, so the verb 'are' also is in the plural number.

The same is the case with all other sentences.

A verb agrees with its subject in person as well. In other words, we can say that a verb changes its form with a change in the person of the subject; as,

- (1) I sing a song.
- (2) He sings a song.
- (3) They go to school.
- (4) He goes to school.
- (5) She swims daily.

(6) You swim daily.

In the first two sentences, the subjects 'I' and 'She' are singular in number. The subject in the first sentence is, however, a pronoun of the first person while the subject in the second sentence is a pronoun of the third person. The verbs—singular or plural—have been used accordingly.

**Note: Rule IV is quite exhaustive; that is why we have made a separate chapter on it. Let us study it further in the second chapter.**