

The Cambridge Learner Corpus: A typology of exercises



How the Cambridge Learner Corpus can be used in
Cambridge ELT materials





The Cambridge Learner Corpus

A typology of exercises based on the CLC

The Cambridge Learner Corpus (CLC) contains student answer papers from Cambridge ESOL exams. Every type of mistake that a learner makes has been given a code or tag. Once these tags are applied to the exam scripts, we can see which learners make which mistakes at which exam or CEF level. We can see the problem areas for learners from a particular first language or nationality, or at a certain age. The result is that, using the Corpus, you can make sure your books target the language your market most needs and focus on real learner errors.

The CLC shows you:

- What students can achieve at each exam or CEF level
- What students at these levels find difficult, and where they commonly make errors
- Mistakes specific to students who speak a particular L1

The CLC can be used in Cambridge publications to:

- Show real life examples of the mistakes that students actually make, in the contexts that they are made
- Highlight a particular mistake by taking a single sentence with an embedded error on its own
- Train students in identifying errors in a passage by using a longer extract or whole candidate answer, containing multiple mistakes
- Teach students to evaluate other candidates' work, and to look for similar mistakes in their own work

The following pages show a range of examples of the types of exercises that have been created using the CLC, from a variety of list areas. They give an idea of the wide use that the CLC can be put to, but they are by no means exhaustive. They can be loosely broken down into the categories:

- Correcting highlighted errors p4
- Identifying errors p6
- Spotting and correcting errors p7
- Choosing the right correction p9
- Gap-fill exercises p11
- Model answer exercises p13



Exercises in Correcting Highlighted Errors

The Cambridge Learner Corpus can easily be used to create simple exercises in correcting real student errors. Using the error-coded Learner Corpus, you can search for examples of a certain mistake. The error tags flag up the mistake in the learner's sentence and give the correction alongside it.

e.g. I was offered a part-time job as a housekeeper in a **<#S> beautiful /beautiful </#S>** house in the north of London

You can then extract the sentence from the Corpus, remove the tags and the correction, and highlight or underline the error for the student to correct.

You can also choose to expand the example, to see more of the student's answer and give more context to the error. It is possible to view a longer passage or even a whole answer to an exam question.

You can create exercises by...

1) Extracting single sentence examples from the CLC

2 CAE candidates often use the wrong verb when they should use *give*, *do* or *make*. In most of the sentences below, the underlined verb is wrong. Replace the underlined verb with either *give*, *do* or *make*, or write *correct* if you think there is no mistake.

- 1 When you print the article, we also expect you to give an apology. *make*
- 2 Carla always gives her best, even if she does not always manage to get very high marks.
- 3 Her report on the trip did not show accurate information so we were quite confused.
- 4 I have some suggestions to give before the forthcoming trip.
- 5 I hope your company will give me at least a partial refund.
- 6 I'm so grateful that you have made me the chance to attend the course.
- 7 In my boss's absence, I give telephone calls to customers, clean desks, and write emails.
- 8 Installing modern technology will give a good impression of the college.
- 9 Our evening lectures were made by 'experts' who knew nothing about the subject.
- 10 There is another recommendation I would like to give concerning the club.

Complete CAE

2) Focussing on areas of common difficulty for a particular grammar point

Here the CLC also functions as a body of texts for examples of error-avoidance. The student hasn't made a mistake as such, but has found ways around using the grammatical features they are not sure of using correctly in an exam situation.

5 Reference pronouns are used a lot in academic writing, but the *Cambridge Learner Corpus* shows that they can be problematic for IELTS candidates. In the essay extract below, replace the underlined phrases with suitable pronouns, and use a relative clause where marked.

Today's students have to deal with a number of problems. The problems include an acute shortage of affordable accommodation and rising debt. To supplement their finances, students are often forced to work long hours and working long hours will more often than not affect the quality of their college work. Even if the students manage to get a good degree, the students then face declining job prospects. <relative> Job prospects are particularly poor for the students in arts and humanities.

Objective IELTS Advanced Student's Book

3) Taking an exam answer or longer passage so that learners can study the mistakes in context

4  Read this letter written by a First Certificate candidate to a penfriend. It is well organised and there are no serious mistakes, but some of the expressions are too formal. Replace 1–8 with expressions from Exercise 2 on page 20 and Exercise 3 on this page.

Dear Emma,

(1) I am writing to you in reply to your letter. I'm very happy that you and your parents will stay in my country for a month.

(2) I believe it is a good idea that you will come to visit my city. I'm sure you will enjoy the holiday because

(3) it is an extremely interesting place to visit.

(4) In my opinion, I suggest that you go and hear music in one of the main squares in the city centre. I'm sure you will enjoy it. Moreover, there are a lot of cultural places to visit and history museums too.

(5) Next, I believe it would be better to come in the first part of the month, because that is when there are fewer tourists and fewer people visiting the monuments and the museums.

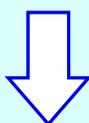
(6) To sum up, (7) I will be pleased to receive another letter from you soon, Emma.

(8) Yours sincerely,

Carlos

First Certificate Trainer

Here the student has to identify, as well as correct, errors



2 These three passages were written by IELTS candidates. Correct the errors in the phrases in bold. Four of them are already correct.

Dear Friend

This letter is to invite you to my grandmother's birthday party. It's a special occasion, because my grandmother **1 is going to be** 100 years old. I've decided to give her a big surprise, so **2 I'll make** dinner. The dinner **3 is** on 1st July at seven o'clock in the Hacienda Club, and the night **4 would begin** with a favourite song of my grandmother's.

Dear Helen

Do you remember that in my hurry to travel back home, I left a big suitcase in your basement? Would you please send it to me and tell me the cost of shipment? **5 I'm going to pay** you back as soon as possible.

There is much controversy nowadays about whether the radio **6 will continue** to exist or not. Some people claim that the radio **7 will use** for a very long time. Those who disagree argue that TV and the Internet create a lot of problems. Some people spend all their spare time watching TV or playing on the Internet, and by doing this they **8 will waste** a lot of time which they could spend with their family or friends. But I firmly believe that reasonable use of the TV and Internet and keeping the radio are very important and necessary. Decreasing the negative effects of all the media **9 will to make** our society more secure than before. Otherwise, they **10 will have** a bad impact on our way of life.

Objective IELTS Intermediate Workbook

Exercises in Identifying Errors

Exercises where the student has to pick out the error, either from a single sentence example or from a longer extract, can be created by searching the Learner Corpus for a particular error code. The text can be extracted and the error codes removed to create exercises very quickly.

Exercises may aim to:

- 1) Target one particular common error e.g. a grammatical mistake

Present simple vs. present continuous

We use the present continuous for something that is happening *now*.

It's raining. Not It rains.

We use the present simple for an action that happens *regularly*.

It snows every Christmas. Not It's snowing every Christmas.

- a** Underline four more mistakes in the text.

Maria is from Rome but she is going to London every summer to stay with her aunt and uncle. Her aunt is being English and her uncle is Italian. She studies at a language school this summer. Today she visits the British Museum for a school project and then she meets a friend from the school to show him the sights of London.

*English in Mind
Student's Bk 1*

- 2) Focus on identifying the different types of errors made e.g. punctuation, grammar or spelling.

1 In Writing Part 2 you often have to make suggestions and offers. Look at these examples of students' writing.

- a I suggest us to see *Twilight*.
- b I suggest seeing *Twilight*.
- c I suggest you this film because it's interesting.
- d What about seeing *Twilight*?
- e Let's see *Twilight*?
- f I offer you to book the tickets.
- g Shall I book the tickets?
- h I can get the tickets if you want.

Which sentence(s)

- are grammatically incorrect?
- has a punctuation mistake?
- are OK?

Complete PET Workbook

- 1** Look at the exam task and the student's answer below. Find SIX punctuation mistakes and FOUR spelling mistakes in Ricardo's email.

You recently went to your aunt's wedding but your English cousin wasn't able to go.

Write an email to your cousin. In your email you should:

- say what you enjoyed about the wedding
- describe your aunt's new husband
- ask your cousin's opinion of the photos you have sent.

Write 35–45 words.

Dear Fred

The wedding was good becausa it was in a beautifull hotel near the beach. the food was exelent. Aunt Emilias husband is quiet handsome but a little, bit bald! What do you think of these photos. I look the best, dont i?!

Take care

Ricardo

Complete PET Workbook

Exercises in Spotting and Correcting Errors

The Cambridge Learner Corpus can easily be used to create simple exercises in finding and correcting real student errors. Using the error-coded Learner Corpus, you can search for examples of a certain mistake connected to the grammar point or vocabulary that you are teaching. Or, using a Top Error List generated from the CLC, you can target the most frequent mistakes for your market, and use the CLC's error codes to pull out real-life examples.

Exercises can be organised...

1) By exam level

3 Sentences 1–12 below contain mistakes with articles made by First Certificate candidates. Correct the mistakes. Some sentences contain more than one mistake.

- 1 Have you heard a latest news about Bayern Munich in the Champions' League? *the*
- 2 I bought my first motorcycle at my age of 16.
- 3 I'm hoping to visit your town the next year.
- 4 She found a lot of useful information on internet.
- 5 You'll have difficulty parking in city centre on Saturday.

Complete First Certificate

2) By a particular common learner error

3 Correct the mistakes made in the following sentences by First Certificate candidates. Some sentences are correct. If you think a sentence is correct, write *correct*.

- 1 People who look after animals in zoos are ~~named~~ zoo keepers. *called*
- 2 We went to a bookshop in Oxford Street named Waterstones.
- 3 We named our children Kasper and Andrea.
- 4 You can get here by taking a bus with a company named ABC Coaches.

Complete First Certificate

3) To fit in with a topic or unit

Correct it!

Correct these typical learner errors from Units 1 and 2.

- 1 He is liking his job very much.
.....
- 2 I like my teacher but she don't understand Italian.
.....
- 3 He comes from London and is speaking English very well.
.....
- 4 Sometimes I use play tennis with my friends.
.....
- 5 When the film finished we goed to a café.
.....



Correct it!

Correct these typical learner errors from Units 3 and 4.

- 1 Vilnius is the biggest city in my country.
.....
- 2 The town is better place to spend your time.
.....
- 3 For desert we both ate ice cream.
.....
- 4 My English is more worse than my friend's.
.....
- 5 I went out with my umbrella because it rained.
.....
- 6 We went to the Picasso museum, which was really
.....



Interactive Student's Book 2

4) By a specific exam task

 Look at this letter written by a First Certificate candidate. Find and correct the following (1–3):

- 1 poor layout. Where should it be divided into paragraphs?
- 2 two informal expressions, four contracted forms and four uses of informal punctuation.
Change these to more formal language.
- 3 two mistakes each in verb forms, spelling and capital letters.
Correct these.

Dear sir,

I'm writing to you to complain about the musical last night. I was looking forward to seeing your show but I have to say that it was a very disapointing evening. Firstly, my favourite singer Carmen Sánchez didn't perform, without any explanation being given. In addition, the show should started at 19.30, not 20.15! I was sure that discounts were available because I have read that they were, but the tickets office didn't offer them. So I had to pay full price for the ticket. What a terrible shock! After the show I was hungry so I went upstairs to the restaurant, but it was closed!

It certainly wasn't a perfect evening out so I want to have my money back!

Yours Faithfully,

Emilio Ricci

First Certificate Trainer

Here example sentences have been taken from exam tasks that focus on interpreting and presenting data from charts and graphs.

Correct the mistakes below made by IELTS candidates.

- 1 From this charts, we can find out about the difference in spending between the UK and the USA.
- 2 The middle chart it show us the increase in money spent in developing countries.
- 3 The chart describes the amount spend.
- 4 Britain spent the highest amount in consumer goods.
- 5 The third most popular goods was toys.
- 6 Personal stereos were spent nearly the same amount as TVs.
- 7 The highest popular consumer item was the camera and the lowest was the personal stereo.
- 8 Majority of people spent most on films.
- 9 The graph show that electricity use in winter are much greater than in summer.
- 10 The use of electricity is shown at a pie chart.
- 11 The number of units decrease sharply.
- 12 Several figures is increasing.
- 13 The demand of electricity then decline until 0800.
- 14 There is a different of 5.2 between the figures.
- 15 It's clear that unemployment have decreased.

Objective IELTS Intermediate Workbook

Choosing the Right Correction

The CLC can be used to see what words or phrases learners commonly substitute incorrectly for certain words. This enables you to create exercises in which learners can choose between the correct phrase and one that it is commonly confused with.

Create exercises for....

- 1) Particular vocabulary that commonly causes confusion for your learners

Vocabulary

Prevent, avoid and protect; reach, arrive and get (to)

- 1 First Certificate candidates often confuse the words in *italics* below. Circle the correct alternative.

- The government has opened a nature reserve to *prevent / avoid / protect* people from hunting endangered species.
- We *reached / arrived / got* at the nature reserve at nightfall.

Complete First Certificate



Corpus spot Fun and funny



Match *fun* and *funny* to their meanings.

If something or someone is, it/he/she makes you laugh. [fun/funny]

If something is you enjoy doing it. [fun/funny]

Here are some sentences written by PET students. Put *fun* or *funny* in each gap.

- There were lots of things to do at the holiday camp like sailing or diving.
- The film I saw was very

Objective PET

- 2) A frequent grammar trouble spot

Unit 1

Present simple

We add *s* to the infinitive with *he, she* and *it*.

He works in a bank. Not He work in a bank.

Have and be are irregular.

I am, you are, he/she/it is, we are, they are;

I have, you have, he/she/it has, we have, they have

Circle the correct verb.

- There is / are a cat in the garden.
- She wears / wear a uniform for school.
- The boys has / have football practice every Tuesday.
- Everybody thinks / think it's a good film.

English in Mind
Student's Book 1

- 3) Vocabulary for a specific topic



Corpus spot



Describing people

Underline the correct word in these sentences by PET students.

- She is *long / tall / high* and slim.
- He's got short, fair *hair / hairs*.

Objective PET

4) A particular text type, e.g. academic English

The Academic English Corpus can be combined with the Learner Corpus to produce exercises like this, by searching the Learner Corpus for the grammar points and phrases that learners struggle with that are found in academic English. Examples of their correct usage can then be taken from the Academic English Corpus.

Style extra

8 Choose the correct time adverbial in these sentences from the Cambridge Academic Corpus.

- 1 By any stretch of the imagination, Dean Acheson was a significant figure worldwide, yet *within days / up until recently*, he did not receive the attention he deserved.
- 2 *Over the two-year period / At some point in the future* we observed students in the lab on almost 100 separate occasions.
- 3 In 1973 the rise in retail prices was under 10%; but in 1974 it was 20% and still accelerating. *At the moment / In the meantime*, the rise in wage rates was also gathering pace and had already reached 28% by the end of 1974.
- 4 It is first explicitly described as a shire in 1065. Its western boundaries at, before and *shortly after that date / eventually* are uncertain.
- 5 *Once upon a time / From time to time*, the core in the centre of the cut is struck with a hammer and broken off and removed.

Objective IELTS Advanced Student's Book

5) Commonly substituted verbs or collocation errors

5  For each of sentences 1–10, choose the correct word, A, B, C or D.

- 1 This film is ... almost entirely on events that really happened.
A set B based C rested D fixed
- 2 Eventually the rescue team ... in finding the missing walkers.
A managed B achieved C fulfilled D succeeded
- 3 You can always ... on Simon to help you. He's a good friend.
A rely B trust C bargain D believe
- 4 The police still do not know who was ... for the theft.
A guilty B probable C likely D responsible
- 5 It wasn't her turn, but Hannah ... on paying for the drinks.
A demanded B required C requested D insisted
- 6 Some people are ... of the success of others.
A angry B jealous

First Certificate Trainer

Gap-fill exercises

Gap-fill exercises can be created from examples from the CLC which either use the particular word correctly (simply search for the word in the CLC), substitute an incorrect word for the chosen word (search for the word as a correction) or misuse the word (search for the word as incorrect, along with the corresponding error tag).

Create exercises...

1) Using Top Error Lists to target the most frequent grammar errors

Here a combination of gap-fill and correction exercises has been combined. The correction exercises can be lifted straight from the CLC, and the gap-fills only need the erroneous word or phrase removing.

The *Cambridge Learner Corpus* shows that IELTS candidates make a large number of errors with articles. These sentences, written by IELTS candidates, contain errors with the article. Those in **bold** are the wrong article or are used when there shouldn't be one. The spaces show where an article is missing. Correct the errors.

- 1 I expect you to send a people to repair the power supply.
- 2 I hope you are in a good health.
- 3 Today you may buy the latest car in the market, but in few weeks' time it will be outdated.
- 4 Some people believe that traditional skills are disappearing due to development of technology.
- 5 There is a big demand for a fast food.
- 6 I do a lot of hobbies in my spare time. Generally I listen to **the** music.

Objective IELTS Intermediate

Unit 6

much and *many*

We use *much* with uncountable nouns.

Much water Not many water

We use *many* with plural countable nouns.

Many drinks Not much drinks

*English in Mind
Student's Bk 1*

Complete the sentences with *much* or *many*.

- 1 I'd like to see as many places as you can show me.
- 2 I didn't see people in town last night.
- 3 We didn't spend time together last term.
- 4 My new mobile phone's fantastic! It's got so functions!
- 5 I love Spain because there are so beautiful places to visit.

2) Selecting specific verbs or vocabulary linked to a topic

3 CAE candidates often confuse *when*, *while*, *during* and *meanwhile* in time adverbials. Write the correct word in the spaces in the sentences below. (In some cases more than one answer is possible.)

- 1 Thanks to this course, I now feel much more confident when I am speaking with our foreign customers.
- 2 It's a pity to visit the castle for only an hour the journey there takes three hours.
- 3 It's essential that you are involved in the project at every stage: negotiations, reaching agreements and signing contracts. You should also be present the equipment is delivered and installed.
- 4 Course participants will be able to get to know each other they're being given a guided tour of the town on the first day.
- 5 It's really hard to drive in a strange city. You have to find your way around in heavy traffic and find somewhere to park., you're struggling with the controls of a rented car which you've never driven before – what a nightmare!

Complete CAE

3) Integrating common errors from the Learner Corpus into new, longer texts.

Complete the text with the correct form of some of the words in the exercise on countable and uncountable nouns.

Last Thursday, Jake got home from school and listened to some ¹ *music* on the radio for a while. He didn't have any ² and so he decided to go running with his friend, Miriam. Jake put on some ³ and met Miriam in the park. They ran for an hour and then went home. When he got home, Jake watched the ⁴ on television and then helped his dad make the dinner. Jake found some ⁵ and some ⁶ in the fridge. They made a sausage omelette and opened a ⁷ of coke. What a perfect dinner!

English in Mind Student's Bk 1

4) Selecting sentences that use or confuse a specific set of words or constructions.

(This is similar to choosing the right correction, and is more structured than the other gap-fill exercises.)

Corpus spot *Do, play, go*

We say: *play* + a sport with a ball,
do + a sport that shows one person's skills,
go + a sport that ends in *-ing*.

Put the names of sports from Exercise 1 in the correct column. Add any other sports you like.

play	do	go
football	athletics	swimming

Complete these sentences by PET students with the correct verbs.

- a She's really nice and she can volleyball well.
- b In my free time I skiing in winter.
- c We often table tennis in our room.
- d You can horse riding if you want.
- e First we run, then we some gymnastics.

Objective PET

Corpus spot *Do and take*

We use *do* or *take* + a course of study.

1 These PET students have all used the wrong verb. Replace them with the correct form of *do* or *take*.

- a I want to follow a course here in England.
- b We're going to make the same course.
- c Last year I visited an English course in Bristol.

2 Now complete these sentences with the correct form of *do* or *take*.

- a Zoë's French is quite good because she a course in Paris last summer.
- b My brother failed his science exam, so he an extra course at the college this term.
- c This cake is delicious. you a cookery course?

Model answer exercises

The CLC can be used as a bank of texts to provide the basis of model answer exercises. Exam scripts can be selected from the CLC according to:

- Exam
- CEF level
- Whether the candidate passed or failed
- Year
- Age of candidate
- Question number
- Style of question
- Format of question
- Formality of question
- Gender of candidate

Using real exam answers allows students to evaluate the work of other students at a similar level, and to identify mistakes which they can correct or avoid in their own work. They can furthermore identify points of strength in others' answers and see constructions, vocabulary and stylistic points in a context parallel to that which they will be writing in.

Students can assess real answers against the exam criteria

Genuine candidate answers contain errors and stylistic issues that learners can look out for and learn from

2  Study these two articles written by First Certificate candidates (language errors have been corrected). For each question 1–12, write *Yes* or *No* under A, B or both A and B. Where possible, give a reason or example.

Which article	A	B
1 has an interesting title and introduction?	<i>No. Title too similar to task, dull introduction.</i>	<i>Yes. They catch readers' attention.</i>
2 deals with both parts of the task?
3 is well organised into paragraphs?
4 is written in an informal style?
5 makes good use of linking words?
6 uses a good range of vocabulary?
7 uses a good range of structures?
8 gives relevant examples?
9 includes the writer's opinions?
10 describes personal experiences?
11 asks the reader a question?
12 has an interesting ending?

3 Which article, A or B, got a better mark, do you think?

Article A

MY CHOICE OF SPORT

In this article I would like to explain why I decided, one day, to take up a certain sport. First of all, doing some sport is good for your health. This is obvious, but which kind of sport suits you? If you want to combine exercise with enjoyment, I can recommend volleyball.

One advantage is that you can play in a team, which can be really fantastic!

Also, volleyball is never boring, compared to endless hours in the gym.

For me, this game is an art where you have to use your skill and brain as well!

The main advice to anyone who would like to try this sport is to protect your joints! You can get high-quality equipment for this sport everywhere.

Secondly, you have to be cooperative with your teammates.

Last but not least, enjoy yourself!

Article B

DIVING DEEP

Are you too scared to try something new, something unusual which involves more risk than everyday sports? If not, go diving – you'll love it.

I am a 21-year-old girl and I've been scuba-diving for three years. It's not just a hobby for me; it's much more than that.

At first everybody is terrified of sinking into a deep, dark sea, because anything can happen, at any time. But you can't keep thinking about this, otherwise you'll miss a different, magical world down there.

Everybody says you can see all that on TV, but it's not the same. You have to see everything with your own eyes. It's wonderful when you discover something you have never seen before, such as a shark swimming. It is unbelievable.

I suggest everyone try scuba-diving at least once. It needs practice, maybe for three weeks, to be good at it, but a good instructor can help. You also have to buy your equipment. Ask somebody to help you if you don't know exactly what you need.

It's well worth it. I just know that everyone who decides to go scuba-diving will have a fantastic time!

First Certificate Trainer

Written by a non-native speaker of English so has the right level of vocabulary and structures realistically expected at this exam level, and contains mistakes or areas for improvement which can lead to discussion.

Allows annotation of real scripts to highlight strengths or teaching points

3  Study the exam instructions below and the model letter written by Felipe, a very strong First Certificate candidate.

- 1 Is Felipe's letter the right length, and written in a suitable style?
- 2 Where does he deal with the three points in the advertisement?
- 3 What else does he say about himself?
- 4 What has he sent with his letter? Why?
- 5 What does he suggest to the employer?

You have seen this advertisement in an English-language newspaper.

CHILLI PEPPER CAFÉ
Waiter/Waitress required

The person we are looking for will be:

- good with people
- prepared to work long hours
- experienced in this kind of work

Apply to the manager, Ms Harrison, saying why you are suitable for a job at our café.

Write your **letter of application**.

Correct structure for current job

Be polite to the employer

Letter begins Dear Ms ...

Dear Ms Harrison,

I wish to apply for the post of waiter at the Chilli Pepper Café, as advertised in the newspaper on October 22.

For the past two years I have been working at McDonald's and there I have gained wide experience in dealing with people. Cooking is the only hobby I have, and so I am very interested in different kinds of food. In view of the fact that I am used to working long hours, I believe I am ideally suited for this job.

Another reason for applying is that your café is only five minutes away from my home. Consequently, I would have only a short distance to travel every day.

I enclose a copy of my curriculum vitae, which will give you further details of my career to date.

I hope this information will be sufficient for you to consider my application. If you need further details, please do not hesitate to contact me. For an interview I could make myself available at any time.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,
Felipe Martin

Say where you saw the ad

Formal linking expressions

Don't use 'will' until you get the job!

Be helpful

First Certificate Trainer