

## Grammar Tip #5: How to help your students toss out their mistakes

### SNOWBALL ACTIVITY (All levels)

As experienced teachers, we're able to anticipate typical mistakes our students make at certain proficiency levels, like subject-verb agreement, irregular plural nouns, and prepositions. How do you go about correcting these mistakes and involving your students in the process? Here's a fun "snowball" activity that gets your students moving AND gets them to find and correct their mistakes.

**Note:** The list below includes corpus research-based examples of typical student mistakes at different levels to get you started.

### Common student mistakes

#### Beginner to Low Intermediate

Does your brothers stay up late?  
I born in 2006.  
It's mine jacket.  
I don't want to drink nothing.  
I amn'I at home right now.  
Fred is study.  
The staff were the helpfulest.

#### Low Intermediate to Intermediate

Exercise is improve my health.  
They worked hard for to help their family.  
Is important read carefully.  
Running was him biggest challenge.  
I work wellest in the morning.  
The website has advices for students.  
I should done my homework.

#### Intermediate to Advanced

He might hungry.  
I have alot of friends.  
The man who's talking is my brother.  
I saw much interesting movies.  
My teacher wants that me do well.  
The TV show what I am talking about was last night.  
I am first year student.

[Click here to download the list of common student mistakes.](#)

**MATERIALS:** In addition to the typical mistakes in the list above, use mistakes that several of your students make, but be careful that students can't easily be identified from the mistakes or sentences you choose. Write or print out each mistake that you want your students to fix on a piece of paper that's large enough to be balled up. These will be the "snowballs." Make enough so that each student can have a snowball. If necessary, you can use the same mistake a few times or you can make versions of the same mistake by modifying the words in the mistake. (E.g. "I am first year student." → "I am new student.")

**STEP 1:** As students enter the classroom, give each one a piece of paper with a mistake.

**STEP 2:** Tell students to look at the paper. Let them know each paper has a mistake, but tell them not to correct it. Instead, have them ball up their piece of paper like a snowball and throw it somewhere in the classroom. Say: “We’re getting rid of our mistakes!”

**STEP 3:** Once everyone has done that, ask each student to get out of their chair, pick up a snowball (but not the one they threw), go back to their seat, and fix the mistake.

**STEP 4:** When everyone is finished, have students share the mistakes they found and fixed.

**Note:** Sometimes there is more than one way to fix a mistake. For example: “*I should done my homework.*” can be fixed either by adding have (“*I should have done my homework.*”), or by changing done to do (“*I should do my homework.*”). This provides a great springboard to talk about how these choices change meaning.