Spotting the Errors

Spotting the errors is a very important area in General English. This section basically aims to test your awareness of the basic rules of grammar – parts of speech, tenses, subject – verb agreement, general usage, word order and certain exceptional usages.

SOME GOLDEN RULES FOR ERROR HUNTING

1. Normally a past tense in the principal clause is followed by a past tense in the subordinate clause.
   e.g. He said that the cricket match is postponed. (Wrong)
       He said that the cricket match was postponed. (Right)

2. If two actions in a sentence are shown happening in the past, one after the other, the first act should be in past perfect and the second in simple past.
   e.g. The train left before I reached the station. (Wrong)
        The train had left before I reached the station. (Right)

3. If, in a sentence, two actions are mentioned and both are going to take place in future, the sequence of the tenses will be as follows:
   e.g. If he will pay me, I shall do the work. (Wrong)
        If he pays me, I shall do the work. (Right)

4. Any tense can be used in the subordinate clause if it gives the comparison by using the word ‘than’.
   e.g. He respected you more than he respects his uncle. (Right)
        The teacher liked Amit better than he liked me. (Right)

5. When there is a word or expression which shows past time, use simple past tense.
   e.g. She has taken the exam yesterday. (Wrong)
        She took the exam yesterday. (Right)

6. There are three kinds of conditional clauses: study their structure well. The clause with ‘If’ or ‘Unless’ is called conditional clause.
   Type I: If he comes, I shall welcome him. [Present tense is used in the conditional clause]
   Type II: If he came, I would welcome him. [Past tense is used in the conditional clause]
   Type III: If he had come, I would have welcomed him. [Past perfect tense is used in the conditional clause]
   Type I means that it is likely that he will come. Type II means it is unlikely. Type III is a past condition that can never be realized.

7. When an action that has taken place in the two clauses of a sentence are different, the verb is used in both the clauses according to the requirement.
   e.g. My mother has done and is still doing good work for charity. (Wrong)
       My mother has done and is still doing good work for charity. (Right)

8. When an action has taken place in the past and still continues in the present, the perfect continuous tense form of the verb should be used.
   e.g. We are studying English for the last two years. (Wrong)
        We have been studying English for the last two years. (Right)
   e.g. It is high time that you went home. (Right)

8. Some nouns are used only in singular forms and they always take a singular verb.
   e.g. The sceneries here are breathtaking. (Wrong)
        The scenery here is breathtaking. (Right)
Most common singular nouns are:

9. If you want to indicate that the number of news items, advice, information or furniture is more than one, you can use the expressions - a lot of information, many pieces of furniture etc.

10. Some nouns are singular in form, but they are used as plural nouns and always take a plural verb.
   e.g. The police have arrested the thief (not has)
       The scissors are on the table (not is)

Most common plural nouns are:
Trousers, Scissors, Spectacles, Measles, Goods, Alms, Premises, Thanks, Cattle, Gentry, Peasantry, Artillery, People, Clergy, Company, Police etc.

11. When nouns indicating length, measure, money, weight, or number are used after numerals, they retain the same form in the plural.
   e.g. Dozen, Score, Gross, Hundred, Thousand etc.
   1. He has bought two dozen eggs.
   2. This shirt costs two hundred rupees.

12. Collective nouns like jury, public, team, committee, government etc. can be used both as singular and plural depending on the meaning. When they indicate a unit it is singular, and if it refers to the members it is plural,
   e.g. A committee was appointed to study the matter.
       The committee were divided on the question of increased D.A. for the employees.

13. Certain verbs when used as intransitive verbs always take a reflexive pronoun after them.

   The most common verbs which take reflexive pronoun are:
apply, resign, enjoy, drive, avail, pride, absent etc.

   e.g. He enjoyed very much during the holidays. (Wrong)
       He enjoyed himself very much during the holidays. (Right)
       She availed herself of three days leave. (Right)

14. ‘Who’ denotes the subject and ‘Whom’ denotes the object.
   e.g. 1. Who am I speaking to? (Wrong)
        To whom am I speaking? (Right)
        Who does he think won the prize? (Wrong)
        Who does he think won the prize? (Right)

15. The noun following ‘one of’, ‘some of’, ‘none of’ and similar expressions must be plural, but the verb agrees in number with the subject of the sentence.
   e.g. One of my friend is coming to dinner. (Wrong)
       One of my friends is coming to dinner. (Right)

16. The pronoun must agree with its antecedent in person, number and gender.
Note that ‘every’, ‘none’, ‘much’, are singular words; ‘all’, ‘some’, ‘most’, ‘many’, and people are plural.
   e.g. 1. Everyone must pay their fees. (Wrong)
       Everyone must pay his fees. (Right)
       All students must pay his fees. (Wrong)
       All students must pay their fees. (Right)
17. When two singular nouns are joined by 'either .......... or', 'neither ............ nor', the sentence is treated as singular.
e.g. Neither Ashok nor George were late. (Wrong)
    Neither Ashok nor George was late. (Right)
But if one of the nouns is plural then the verb should agree with the noun close to it.
e.g. Neither Priya nor her friends has finished. (Wrong)
    Neither Priya nor her friends have finished. (Right)
18. ‘Few’ means not many. It is the opposite of ‘many’. ‘A few’ is positive, it means ‘some at least’. It is the opposite
    of ‘none’. ‘The few’ means ‘whatever there is’. All denote numbers.
19. ‘Little’ means hardly any. ‘A little’ means some, though not much. ‘The little’ means not much but all there is.
20. Normally ‘than’ is used for the comparative degree, but with words like prefer, superior, inferior, senior, junior, prior
    etc., ‘to’ is used instead of ‘than’.
e.g. I prefer coffee than tea. (Wrong)
    I prefer coffee to tea. (Right)
21. When expressions like ‘along with’, ‘as well as’, ‘together with’, ‘no less than’, ‘in addition to’, ‘accompanied by’
    are used to join two subjects, the verb must agree with the first subject.
e.g. John, as well as his brothers, are coming to dinner. (Wrong)
    John, as well as his brothers, is coming to dinner. (Right)
    The children along with their teacher has gone to Chennai (Wrong)
    The children along with their teacher have gone to Chennai (Wrong)
22. ‘Scarcely’ and ‘hardly’ are followed by ‘when’ and not by ‘than’.
e.g. Hardly had I entered the house when the electricity went off. (Right)
23. ‘No sooner’ is followed by ‘than’.
e.g. No sooner had I entered the house than the electricity went off. (Right)
24. ‘Lest’ is followed by ‘should’. ‘Not’ is never used with lest.
e.g. Study carefully lest you should fail. (Right)
25. ‘Unless’ has a negative sense and it expresses a condition. So ‘not’ is never used with it.
e.g. Unless you do not play well, you will not win. (Wrong)
    Unless you play well, you will not win. (Right)
26. ‘Since’ indicates a point of time and ‘for’ stands for a period of time.
e.g. 1. He has been studying since midday. (Right)
    2. He has been studying for three hours. (Right)
27. If pronouns of different persons are to be used together in a sentence, the order of persons should be as follows:
    Third person + Second person + First person.
e.g. He, you and I have finished the work. (Right)
28. ‘Some’ is used in affirmative sentences to express quantity or degree.
e.g. The boy has some homework. (Right)
    ‘Any’ is used in negative or interrogative sentences.
e.g. Does the boy have any homework? (Right)
29. ‘Many a’ is always followed by a singular verb.
e.g. Many a man has drowned in the sea. (Right)
30. ‘A number of’ takes a plural verb and ‘the number of’ takes a singular verb.
e.g. The number of students is very small. (Right)
    A number of boys were late for school. (Right)
31. ‘Not’ is never used with ‘until’.
e.g. Wait here until I do not return. (Wrong)
    Wait here until I return. (Right)
32. ‘As if’ is always followed by ‘were’ even with the third person singular - when it shows pretension.
   e.g. He spends as if he was a rich man. (Wrong)
       He spends as if he were a rich man. (Right)
33. ‘Each other’ is used for ‘two’ and ‘one another’ is used to refer to more than two.
   e.g. 1. John and Joseph hate each other. (Right)
         2. John, Joseph and James love one another. (Right)
34. ‘These’ and ‘those’ are plural and cannot properly qualify ‘sort’ and ‘kind’ which are singular nouns.
   e.g. These sort of houses. (Wrong)
       This sort of houses or houses of this sort. (Right)
35. Two subjects joined by ‘and’ will always take a plural verb, but when it is considered as a single unit the verb will
    be singular.
   e.g. 1. Oil and water do not mix together.
        2. Bread and butter were bought separately.
        3. Slow and steady wins the race.
        4. Bread and butter is my breakfast
   If the two nouns refer to two different persons definite article or possessive pronoun should be repeated and the
   verb should be used in plural.
   e.g. The orator and the statesman are good friends.
       The orator and statesman is no more. [Here the reference is to the same person, so a singular verb is
       used.]
36. Pronoun ‘one’ must be followed by one’s.
   e.g. One must do his best. (Wrong)
       One must do one’s best. (Right)
37. Words like politics, ethics, economics, mathematics etc. usually take a singular verb. But they take a plural verb
    when they refer to study, science, or practice.
   e.g. 1. Economics is a popular subject
        2. The economics of the situation have been discussed at some length.
   When adjectives such as much, less, little, more are used as nouns, they must have a singular verb.
   e.g. Less than a million of rupees is required.
       A little of good habits makes our life happy.
38. A gerund is placed after a preposition.
   e.g. He insisted on taking his car.
39. Nouns followed by a gerund are put in the possessive case.
   e.g. She dislikes her child’s playing all the time.
40. ‘With a view to’ is always followed by a gerund and not by an adjective.
   e.g. We go to school with a view to studying.
41. Expressions like would rather, rather than, had better and some principal verbs like bid, watch, see, let, make, help,
    hear etc. take bare infinitives (infinitives without ‘to’)
   e.g. You had better not buy that TV set. (‘not to buy’ is wrong)
       Help him lift that box. (not to lift)
42. Else is always followed by but and never by than.
   e.g. It is nothing else but your pride which makes you say such a thing.