

# Common Writing Mistakes - A Study on Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology Students, Hanoi, Vietnam

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## **Abstract:**

**Background:** English is the main language of international communication and more and more people all over the world use English as a second language. Writing is one of the four skills in language learning and it is considered a difficult and complex skill because it requires a broad understanding and learners need to have a good understanding of grammar and structures. Writing is a task that no two people do alike. Although most students learn English from high school; they were familiar with many writing exercises such as rewriting sentences, writing essays. However, through the process of directly teaching English to first- and second-year students, the author found that these students still had many problems in writing.

**Materials and Methods:** The object of the study is the writing errors that first- and second-year students make, and at the same time find out the causes of those errors; Comparison of English writing errors of first-year and second-year students. The subjects of this study were 50 first-year students and 50 second-year students. These are not random samples but purposefully selected. For accurate results, the author selects students who are studying the subjects that the author directly teaches. The reason for choosing such a research sample is that the author can easily approach these students, ask them to write essays, observe their learning, and can survey and interview them easily. The author chose the number of 100 students because this number can produce more diverse and objective results from the participants. If the number of research samples is larger, the reliability of the collected data will be greater, but it will be difficult for the author to control and analyze the data.

**Results:** The results of the analysis of the students' writing showed that they often made the following writing mistakes with tenses, word order, writings, punctuation, styles, writing structure, prepositional mistakes and misspelling mistakes. The causes of these mistakes are: students have little practice writing, the influence of their mother tongue, little vocabulary and structure, uncertain grammar, poor writing thinking, limited understanding of social knowledge, poor writing skills, carelessness, inappropriate teaching methods and mistakes correction from teachers.

**Conclusion:** The paper showed not only common writing mistakes but also suggested methods from both teachers and students to avoid misake and improve writing quality.

**Key Word:** Writing mistakes; common mistakes; PTIT first year students; PTIT second year students, causes of writing mistakes

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## **I. Introduction**

In the output of English, your writing is important. You use it on a daily basis to express yourself and your ideas, and the way it's received matters. It makes sense, then, to ensure that you're doing everything possible to be received well. There's a fact that students in Posts and Telecommunications Institute of Technology is making a lot of mistakes when writing. It is urgent to improve and ensure writing skills not only for PTIT students who are learning in the Institute, but also for graduates to have good opportunities to approach employers, thereby helping to affirm the teaching quality in the Institute. There have been no studies investigating errors in the writings here so far. Therefore, detecting students' writing errors is extremely necessary and urgent. For that reason, the author decided to study the mistakes in the writings of the first and second year students of the Institute of Posts and Telecommunications to find out the causes and propose some suggestions to improve students' writing ability and teaching quality.

## II. Material And Methods

### Materials

The sample in this research is a group of first-year and second -year students at the Post and Telecommunications Institute of Technology. During the teaching process, the author collects students' writings to identify and analyze sentence writing mistakes. In three writings in turn with the topics "Write a paragraph of 120-150 words about your imaginary company.", "Write a paragraph of 120-150 words about a person you admire." , "Write a paragraph from 120-150 words about changes in your hometown/country". Students must write within 30 minutes in class. During the writing period, the author encourages them to write on their own and not to open dictionaries or grammar books. The data collected from the writings are quantitative and qualitative data.

Then, the author informs the students about the research area and chooses the right time to interview and distribute the questionnaire. The data from the survey mainly consists of quantitative data and some student responses to qualitative data.

### Methods

In this study, the author used methods of synthesis, analysis, statistics and comparison to process data. After collecting students' writings, the author made statistics of the type of mistake, the frequency of mistakes, calculated the percentage of the total number of mistakes, and also compared the frequency of students' mistakes for each mistake specifically. In addition, the author also uses qualitative data from student writings to analyze mistakes and suggest ways to correct them. For data collected from student questionnaires, the author also statistics and calculates percentages. In order to process the data after interviewing the lecturers, the author analyzed their statements and assessments to have a more comprehensive and comprehensive view of the types of mistakes in the students' writings, causes of their mistakes and suggested measures.

## III. Result

After analyzing mistakes in 100 writings of students, the author has listed the mistakes as follows:

MISTAKE TYPES		First year students		Second year students	
		Quantity	%	Quantity	%
<b>GRAMMAR</b>	Gerund	97	13.4	72	9.3
	Singular/plural nouns	76	10.6	95	12.4
	Tenses	34	4.7	39	5.1
	Word order	13	1.8	9	1.2
	Writings	62	8.6	65	8.4
	Prepositions	26	3.6	45	5.8
	Puntuations	37	5.1	35	4.5
<b>VOCABULARY</b>	Wrong words	91	12.6	98	12.7
	Spelling	62	8.6	48	6.2
<b>CONTENT</b>	Expressing	157	21.7	196	25.4
	Style	50	6.9	55	7.1
	Structures	15	2.1	14	1.8
	Topics	2	0.3	1	0.1
<b>Total</b>		<b>722</b>		<b>772</b>	

It was surprising that second-year students made more writing mistakes than first-year students, 772 and 722 mistakes with 13 types of mistakes. Through analyzing their writings, the author found that second-year students tend to write longer, use more difficult vocabulary and structure, so a higher mistake rate is possible to happen.

The most common mistake was the ways of expression, specifically, the first-year students made 157 mistakes (accounting for 21.7%), while the second-year students made 196 mistakes (25.4%). Other mistakes that students of the two courses often make are mistakes with words, mistakes in verb forms, and mistakes with sigular/plural nouns, respectively 91 mistakes (12.6%), 97 mistakes (13.4%) respectively, 76 mistakes (10.6%) for first-year students and 98 mistakes (12.7%), 72 mistakes (9.3%) and 95 mistakes (12.4%) for second-year students.

Some of the mistakes that first-year students and second-year students make that are quite similar in quantity are mistakes with tenses, word order, writings, punctuation, styles, writing structure and respectively, 34 mistakes (accounting for 4.7%), 13 mistakes (1.8%), 62 mistakes (8.6%), 37 mistakes (5.1%), 50 mistakes (6.9%) 15 mistakes (2.1%) and 2 mistakes (0.3%) for first-year students and 39 mistakes (5.1%), 9 mistakes (1.2%), 65 mistakes (8.4%), 35 mistakes (4.5%), 55 mistakes (7.1%), 14 mistakes (1.8%) and 1 mistake (0.1%) for second year students.

Prepositional mistakes and misspelling mistakes have a large difference between students of the two courses, with 26 mistakes (3.6%) and 62 mistakes (8.6%) for first-year students and 45 mistakes, respectively. (5.8%), 48 mistakes (6.2%) for second year students.

## **Part 1. Common mistakes**

### **A. Grammatical mistakes**

#### **1. Using the wrong verb forms**

This is one of the most common mistakes that students make, with first-year students using the wrong verb form more often with 97 mistakes (13.4%) than second-year students with 72 mistakes (9.3%). In most cases, students make mistakes when using the wrong infinitive, -ing form of the verb, the wrong way: active, passive and singular. Among them, the mistake of verb conjugation is the most popular. For subjects that are third person singular (he, she, it) or singular nouns, students often don't remember to add "s" or "es" after the verb, or they add "s" or "es" to them. Verbs that go with the subject is a plural noun.

#### **2. Misuse of nouns**

Wrong spelling of nouns (singular, plural) is still a common mistake made by students. The obtained data have shown that second-year students (95 mistakes - 12.4%) have a higher rate of this mistake despite the longer study period. Meanwhile, first-year students have more optimistic evaluations for this mistake with 76 mistakes (10.6%). For 3rd person singular or singular nouns, students often forget to add "-s" after the verb. Some students mistakenly convert nouns from singular to plural, or confuse countable and uncountable nouns, leading to plural transformation for uncountable nouns.

#### **3. Tense mistakes**

In English, each period has its own formula and usage, but because students do not know the basic grammar knowledge, students often make grammatically incorrect sentences.

Tenses also cause many difficulties for students and is one of the mistakes students often make and fear the most. The student essays used in this study are all about the company's history of formation and development or the changes in the homeland compared to the past, so the past tense is used a lot. However, many students still do not really pay attention to using the past simple properly. Also, when writing about the company's future plans, many students still use "will".

#### **4. Wrong word order**

Because students often think in Vietnamese, when writing, students often make mistakes in word order, making many sentences they write become stupid and difficult to understand.

#### **5. Wrong writings**

Writing mistake is a common mistake made by students with 62 mistakes (8.6%) for first-year students and 65 mistakes (8.4%) for second-year students. Some students often do not pay attention to the use of writings in English writing or use them arbitrarily for two reasons. Firstly, there is no writing in Vietnamese like in English, so sometimes students use writings unnaturally when writing. Second, the mistake of using the writing is not seen by students as a serious mistake and they need to be aware of. Two basic types of mistakes made by students in using writings are lack of writings and misuse of writings.

#### **6. Wrong prepositions**

Preposition mistakes mainly focus on the lack of prepositions. The author also found that when writing about trends (up, down), students often lack prepositions or use prepositions incorrectly. In addition, students still use prepositions by mistake.

#### **7. Punctuation mistakes**

The two most common mistakes that students make are confusing the "." and the "," in numbers and lists "and so on". In it, the mistake "... " instead of listing "etc." is the most popular. In addition, many students also use arbitrary punctuation, for example, the sentence has not finished using the "." A period (.) is used to end a sentence, but many students forget to use it. Sometimes they use a comma (,) instead of a period (.) between two sentences. This may be because they don't think that these simple sentences carry complete informational content with independent grammatical structure, so they should be clearly distinguished. In addition, students do not usually capitalize the first letter of sentences to make this distinction more clear.

## **B. Vocabulary mistakes**

### **1. Wrong words**

Word mistakes are common mistakes made by students, in which, first-year students make 91 mistakes (12.6%) and second-year students make more mistakes with 98 mistakes (12.7%). Word combination is one of the areas that causes many difficulties for students in the writing process. A student can learn all the rules of grammar, but without knowing how to put words together (in a certain structure), that student cannot write well.

Mistyped words are also common in student writing, especially words whose types differ only slightly in spelling. Students also often get wrong words due to their Vietnamese way of thinking or wrong words with equivalent meanings but different structures. Students also sometimes forget to turn verbs into adjectives by adding 'ed' after them. Besides, the use of adjectives instead of adverbs or vice versa, confusion between adjectives and nouns, are also common mistakes when students write sentences.

In addition, students often confuse one word with another. There are many words in English that have similar spellings. Therefore, the phenomenon of word confusion also often occurs when students mistake one word for another because they look similar to the word they want to use.

### **2. Spelling mistakes**

According to the research results, first-year students misspell more often than second-year students, with 62 mistakes (8.6%) compared with 48 mistakes (6.2%). Some students are not sure about the rules of capitalization, so they also make this mistake unfortunately, in particular, there are students who do not capitalize their first name, but there are also students who arbitrarily capitalize in sentences. A student also used places with accents in Vietnamese to write in English. This violates spelling rules in English, a language that doesn't use accent marks.

## **C. Content mistakes**

### **1. Mistakes in expressing ideas**

Expressing mistakes are the biggest mistakes that students make and every student has. Students often do not have enough vocabulary and linguistic structures to express ideas and opinions while writing. So they often have to replace words and sentence structures they don't know with what they have learned. It is this that has led to the 'round the bush' way of expressing ideas.

The translation of each Vietnamese word into English has made the sentence cumbersome, confusing and sometimes funny.

### **2. Writing style mistakes**

The main stylistic mistake that students often make is abbreviations in the lesson. Some students are familiar with chat language, teen language, so they also include this language in the lesson without knowing it. These languages are colloquial and informal and should not be used in academic writing. In addition, intimate structures,

Only used in speaking or writing to friends and relatives, students are also used in writing. Writing numbers under 10 (not as letters) is also a stylistic mistake, making the writing less academic.

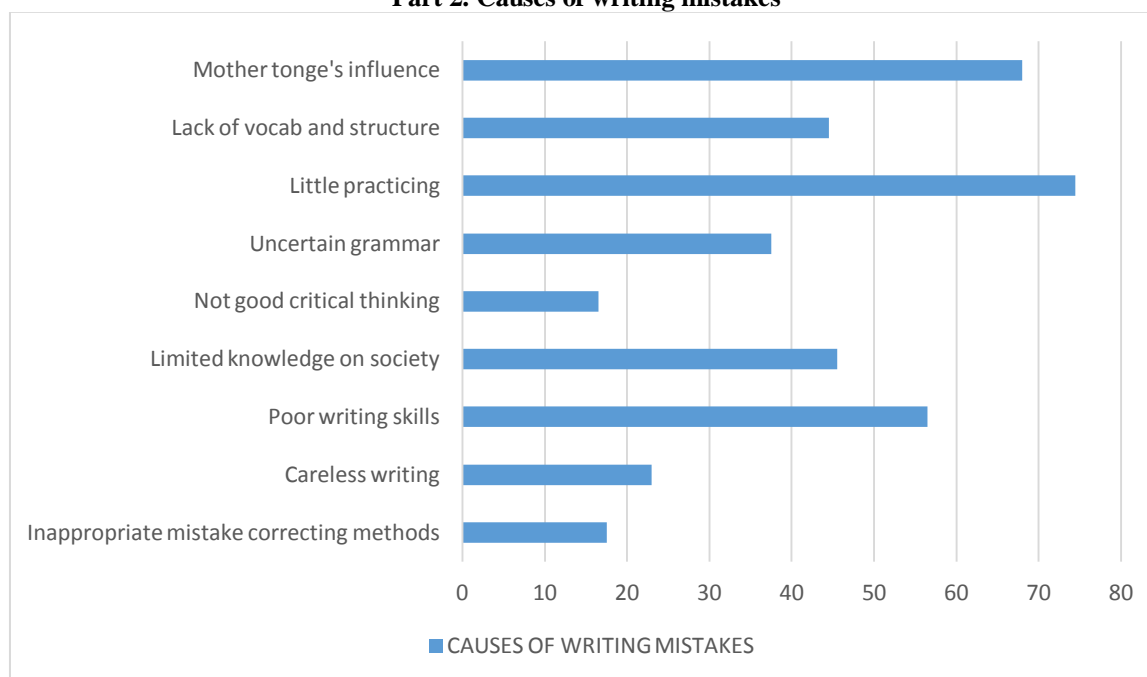
### **3. Mistakes in writing structures**

Mistakes in writing structure include incomplete writing mistakes. Specifically, in each lesson, students have to write a paragraph. However, many students have not completed their writing, the writing does not have a paragraph ending sentence. First-year students made this mistake the most with 14 incomplete papers, while 8 second-year students lacked the conclusion. The second type of mistake is that the student writes in several paragraphs while the writing requirement is to write one paragraph.

### **4. Out-of-topic mistakes**

The surprising thing is that the topics of the writing are quite easy, but there are still students who deviate from the topic, in which there are three students writing out of topic. The content does not stick to the topic and is incorrect.

**Part 2. Causes of writing mistakes**



**1. Little writing practicing**

According to author Vivian M. R. in 'Reading, Writing and Thinking', 'Learning to write is like learning to swim, no one can do it for you. You have to get up and down yourself. Remember that writing is like swimming, you don't just do it once, you do it over and over again.' A large number of students (75%) admitted they had little practice in writing. The interviewed teachers also said that students are reading less and less (writings, books) of reputable authors, less actively and persistently practicing writing, not paying attention to administrative documents which are very important. important in future work; while students are negatively affected by chat language, blogs, movies, comics and music market, even affected by the use of spelling and grammar mistakes in the textbooks, documents, texts, etc. Through the process of teaching in class, the author also observed that many students have not consciously done their homework. The exercises designed in the Practical Grammar textbook are diverse and follow the program. If students work hard on homework and practice writing, they will improve very quickly. In addition, because students have not practiced Writing skills on a regular basis, they are not quick to find ideas for writings and do not have the habit of thinking in English before writing. Therefore, they make quite a few mistakes in their writing.

**2. Influences of mother tongue**

One of the biggest reasons that the majority of students choose (68%) is due to the influence of their mother tongue. When being interviewed, teachers also said that Vietnamese has a great influence on students' writing. Many students think in Vietnamese and then translate into English, so the writing speed is slow, and at the same time, they make many writing mistakes such as translating word by word, wrong word order, etc. This makes the writing lengthy, incoherent and sometimes make the reader misinterpret the writer's ideas.

**3. Little vocabulary and structure**

48% of students when asked said that vocabulary and structure are less difficult for them, thus causing writing mistakes. The English Grammar curriculum has many stammers that require students to write about companies and economic issues, so many students have difficulty writing about these issues, simply because of their vocabulary. their economic terms are limited. In addition, vocabulary in English is extremely rich. In addition to synonyms, there are many homonyms but different spellings and meanings (homophones) such as I/eye, sun/son.... Besides, there are homonyms and homonyms with different meanings. homonyms such as left, flat, saw, play, ... Therefore, students face a lot of difficulties in understanding the exact meaning of words, the difference in usage of words with similar meanings. as well as from their kind. This is why students often make mistakes in vocabulary when writing English essays.

#### **4. Uncertain Grammar**

Although in high school they learn a lot of grammar and tests test a lot of grammar phenomena, but many students are still confused when applying it to the writing because their grammar knowledge is not complete. benevolent. 37% of students think that they make mistakes when writing because they have not mastered basic grammar knowledge. Interviewed with five teachers, all five teachers said that they were surprised that many students were unfortunately still confused about tenses and grammatical phenomena, for example, many students could not distinguish the usage of verbs. perfect imperfection, V-ing verbs and infinitives, etc.

#### **5. Poor logical thinking**

Only 15% of students choose this reason. Three teachers interviewed said that students' writing thinking is not good. Two teachers who used to teach the Vietnamese section said that many children when writing paragraphs in Vietnamese were confused, illogical, rambling or duplicated.

#### **6. Limited understanding of social knowledge**

Understanding of limited social knowledge is one of the reasons chosen by 45% of students. This will really make it difficult for students when they have to write about social issues. Little knowledge will make the writing lack of meaning and depth.

#### **7. Lack of writing skills**

Part of the reason for this is that they don't have good writing skills. 57% of students admit this. From the teachers' point of view, many students do not have the habit of making an outline before writing, do not know how to write topic sentences, concluding sentences, do not use linking methods in the passage, or do not master how to write sentences and paragraphs, does not grasp formal and academic writing style. According to observation of the author, some students, when they receive the topic, are immersed in writing, do not make an outline, do not list the main ideas, or additional ideas, so when they write a lot of ideas, they often get repetitive, rambling, unfocused or lack of intention.

#### **8. Carelessness in writing**

23% of students agree that they are not really careful when writing, have not re-read the writing before submitting to check for mistakes. If they reread the text, they will be able to correct simple mistakes like "She don't" or "We is".

#### **9. Inappropriate methods of correcting mistakes**

15% of students that teachers do not have appropriate teaching methods and correcting mistakes. The author also observed and found that some teachers have not re-emphasized the grammatical phenomena in each lesson to reinforce students, not allowing students to practice writing. Therefore, they have little chance to be corrected mistakes by teachers.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The results of the analysis of the students' writing showed that they often made the following writing mistakes mistakes with tenses, word order, writings, punctuation, styles, writing structure, prepositional mistakes and misspelling mistakes. The causes of these mistakes are: students have little practice writing, the influence of their mother tongue, little vocabulary and structure, uncertain grammar, poor writing thinking, limited understanding of social knowledge, poor writing skills, carelessness, inappropriate teaching methods and mistakes correction from teachers.

Following are some suggestions for both students and teachers to improve students' writing skill:

#### **For teachers**

- Explain the difference between English and Vietnamese

Teachers should analyze the structural and semantic differences between certain features in English and Vietnamese for students. Teachers can provide translation exercises that help students reinforce these phenomena. This is a very good way because through it students learn new words, structures and how to express them in essays in English.

- Apply flexibly many mistake correction methods

First, teachers should promote students' self-correction ability; let students re-read their own writing and then correct it themselves; re-read and come up with options to correct the mistakes that the students cannot correct.

Second, the teacher can apply cross-correction in pairs. Students shuffle their writing in pairs and correct their friend's writing. This activity excites students and changes the atmosphere in the classroom because students become proactive in giving feedback on their friends' writing.

Third, regularly recording and correcting students' writing is a good way to give feedback. Correcting student writing is a time-consuming job, so many teachers don't like it. However, the purpose of writing classes

is to improve students' ability to write accurately with many different types of writing. This requires teachers to provide clear instruction on many subjects such as grammar, punctuation, and structure, as well as creating and expressing ideas. Tennant (2001: 27) uses two methods of correcting students' writing: (1) correcting on paper, using red pen so that students can easily recognize them. (2) a more effective method is to write lengthy comments that explain grammatical features, ask questions regarding the development of meaning and logic, suggest alternative words, and restructure the text. If teachers can do this, the results will be very valuable because students can learn better. For example, teachers can remind students of a previously learned grammatical structure by explaining its use in a specific example. So, it will be helpful to the teacher in not simply correcting the mistake but providing explanations for the correction suggested by the teacher.

### **For students**

#### **1. Practice writing more**

Only regular practice and perseverance will bring the highest efficiency. The more students practice writing, the faster students improve.

#### **2. Rewrite**

In fact, most students do not rewrite their writing after being corrected and commented on by the teacher. They just skim through those mistakes without realizing that if they don't rely on those comments to rewrite their writing, those comments have little effect and are difficult to avoid making mistakes later. Rewriting is also an effective way to reduce mistakes and add new ideas that students may not have come up with in the first draft. Moreover, students will find it easier because the mistakes have been underlined by the teacher and the students' strengths and weaknesses have been pointed out so they can correct them. The fact that students can adjust and supplement their rewrites both in terms of grammar and content will help them develop their own writing skills and build confidence when writing later.

#### **3. Broaden vocabulary, structure and grammar**

To be able to build a good writing, what students need to pay attention to is not something far away, beyond their ability, but the basic knowledge in the textbook from which they can overcome mistakes in the use of tenses, structures, sentences, words, punctuation, and spelling. Students should learn from simple to complex knowledge carefully. Whenever they are unsure about the usage of a word, phrase or punctuation, they should look it up in a grammar book or dictionary to use it correctly.

#### **4. Expand social knowledge**

Students should get into the habit of reading a lot of books, magazines or Internet newsletters. Creating a habit of reading books in your spare time is essential, but students should read it carefully and deeply. This reading will help them learn English words, sentence structure as well as expressions and writing style, in addition, they can strengthen cultural, social and economic knowledge. This way they will find it easier to express themselves and break the habit of translating word for word. Here are the important steps when reading a book:

- Find out special phrases, sentence structures and expressions like a native.
- Underline or write them in your notebook.
- Make sentences with them and practice often until students can make sure not to forget and use them perfectly.

#### **5. Check for mistakes after writing**

There are some mistakes that we may not notice in the writing process (due to misspelling) but when we re-read, we will find out immediately. Therefore, it is very important if students reread the sentences or writings.

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