



4A: Correcting Mistakes

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Self-correction

Usually, when a language learner corrects him/herself s/he does not repeat the same mistake as often. If you hear someone make a mistake, instead of pointing out that it is a mistake, just repeat what the student said but as a question. For example if the student learning English says,

"I go to the store now."

Then the conversation partner says,

"I go to the store now?"

The student may realize s/he made a mistake and will either ask what the mistake is or correct it him or herself,

"I am going to the store now."

Indirect correction

Sometimes you don't want to interrupt someone when s/he is really trying to communicate and any interruption might discourage him/her. Therefore, you can indirectly correct the student by perhaps asking a question with the corrected form of the student's mistake after s/he has finished speaking. For example, if the student learning English says,

"Yesterday I buyed a book."

Then the conversation partner says,

"I bought a book two days ago. It is a book of poetry. What kind of book did you buy?"

Notice in the conversation partner's reply s/he uses the correct form of the simple past for the verb "to buy" with the subject pronoun "I" and then asks a question that will encourage the student to respond also using the correct form of the verb "to buy."

Direct Correction

It's ok to say "no" it just depends on how you do it. Make sure your tone is polite and helpful, not authoritative and condescending. Particularly for the beginner you can say "no" and make a "no" motion with your hand and then give the correct form of what you were looking for. Avoid using grammar terminology since the goal is to focus on conversation and speaking, not teaching and a grammar lesson.

Five College Center for World Languages

79 South Pleasant St, Suite 100

Amherst College, AC Box 2264

Amherst, MA 01002

USA

[FCCWL website](#)

p: 413-542-5264

e: fclang@fivecolleges.edu



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[Staff login](#)
