Common Verb Errors That Can Choke You to Death

Written English and spoken English are two totally separate entities. You never want to write how you speak. These common verb errors can choke you to death; watch yourself!

Error #1  The incorrect usage of the past participle
We seen the movie last night.  I done a good job.  He gone out of town.

Why are these verbs incorrect?
"Seen," “done,” and “gone” are past PARTICIPLES! They are not past tense verbs! What’s a past participle, you might ask? It is a verb that relies on a helping verb to create the past perfect tense; these verbs cannot stand alone. In this case, you would need a form of “have” to stand with the participle.

We have/had seen the movie last night.
I have/had done a good job.
He has/had gone out of town.

If you want to avoid this whole mess, just use the correct past tense verb!

We saw the movie last night.    I did a good job.     He went out of town.

Error # 2  Mistaking objects of the preposition as a subject
One of the children have gone home sick.
Each of those ideas are good.

Why are these verbs incorrect?

One of the children have gone home sick.
Children should NOT be seen as the subject in this sentence. If you read the sentence carefully…ONE of the children went home sick. ONE is a singular noun, and it is also the subject of the sentence. The prepositional phrase ‘of the children’ is confusing you. Sometimes it’s best to find the prepositional phrase and cross it out.

One have gone home sick.
Does not make sense? No, it does not. Therefore, the verb is incorrect. The same goes for the other example.
Each of those ideas are good.
Yes, idea is plural; however, like “children” in the other sentence, it is NOT the subject! “Each” is the subject, and “each” is a singular noun.
Each are good.
As you can see, this verb is not correct. The two sentences should read like this:
One of the children has gone home sick.
Each of those ideas is good.

Error # 3 – Using “be” by itself!
He be feeling better today.  I be going to the store tonight.  They be coming over next week.

This error makes English teachers cringe. The verb “be” is NEVER to be used on its own. NEVER. There are FEW times you can use this verb by itself, but NOT in this context. In THIS context, you are using the present participle. You NEED a form of “be,” but NOT the word “be.”

He is feeling better today.
I am going to the store tonight.
They are coming over next week.
You can use the verb ‘be’ in these cases:
Be good!
Be here by noon!
Do not be afraid.
Be sure to drink lots of water!

*Why can you use “be” in THESE sentences and not in the previous examples? Well, this is why:*  
1) *Be good!* is a command. The verb “be” is NOT used in this case as a helping verb.  
2) *Be here!* is also a command. It is common for commands to contain the verb “be.”  
3) *be afraid* is a complete verb from the infinitive *to be afraid*. It is perfectly acceptable to use the verb ‘be’ when the word is part of the entire verb.  
4) *Be sure* is a complete verb from the infinitive *to be sure*.

**Error # 4  Mistaking singular indefinite pronouns as plural subjects**

Either Gina or Mary run on the cross country team.  
Neither Joshua nor Corey understand the calculus problem.

Either and neither are both *singular indefinite pronouns*. They are also the subjects. Just because there are two names within the sentence (Gina/Mary or Joshua/Corey), it doesn’t mean that the subjects are plural. Notice the conjunction OR. The conjunction OR makes the two names SEPARATE, not TOGETHER. That is why the subjects are NOT plural.

*Either Gina or Mary runs on the cross country team.* (Either runs/Gina runs/Mary runs)  
*Neither Joshua nor Corey understands the calculus problem* (Neither understands/Joshua understands/Corey understands)

**Error # 5  Being careless and not making your simple subjects and verbs agree!**

They is not happy.  
Our dog run wild!

In the first sentence, “they” is the subject; “they” is a plural pronoun. Plural subjects need plural verbs. In this case, “is” is NOT correct because it is a SINGULAR verb.  

In the second sentence, “dog” is the subject. Since “dog” is singular, it needs a singular verb in order for the sentence to agree.

*They are not happy.*  
*He is not happy.*  
*Our dog runs wild!*  
*Our dogs run wild!*

**REMEMBER THIS:**  
*Singular verbs end in “s”; singular subjects do not.*  
*Plural subjects end in “s”; plural verbs do not.*

Note: There MAY be exceptions to this rule, but generally, if you remember this, you will be fine.