

# Teaching Tips

## Three ways to - correct students' speaking

The constant dilemma: to correct and encourage accuracy or not to correct and encourage fluency. Interrupting your students when they make mistakes risks making them nervous and hesitant speakers. Not doing so may deprive them of a valuable learning opportunity.

In general, it is often worth avoiding interrupting students as much as you can. Immediate correction can be useful when you are interacting with the class but when students are involved in pair or group activities, delayed correction is better. Listen while the students are working and make mental notes of the most important mistakes. Let them complete the activity. Then you draw attention to the mistake and invite the student to correct it. Most mistakes in speaking are what we call 'slips'. Slips are mistakes which the student can correct if you draw attention to the mistake.

The techniques below may be used for both immediate and delayed correction.

### 1. Asking for repetition without indicating the mistake.

Many teachers use a rolling movement of the hand to ask the student to repeat without indicating where the mistake falls. In many cases students will be able to self-correct when you have indicated there is a mistake.

### 2. Drawing attention to mistakes and prompting self-correction.

Many teachers use their fingers to indicate the position of mistakes and prompt the student to self-correct. For example, if a student wants to say:

**'The motorcycle was invented in 1885.'**  
but the student actually says:  
**'The motorcycle was invent in 1885.'**

The teacher puts up three fingers and touches the first finger and says **IN**, then touches the second finger and says **VENT**, and finally touches the third finger and looks at the student with a questioning facial expression.



Or, if the student is trying to say:  
**'Mount Everest was first climbed in 1953.'**  
And the student actually says:  
**'Mount Everest was first clime bed in 1953.'**

The teacher first indicates where the problem exists:



The teacher then indicates the link between the two syllables, saying 'clime-bed' and then bringing the two fingers together.



### 3. Peer correction

Sometimes the student cannot self-correct (although they should always be given the opportunity). In this case you can prompt another student to provide the correction. After doing this, return to the original student to get the self-correction.

Beware of allowing two or three students in the class to become the ones who always provide peer correction. Correction of mistakes should be a task shared by all the students in the class.

[Illustrations from *Mistakes and Correction* by Julian Edge - Longman 1989, now out of print.]