

English Pitfalls for Swedes

incorrect items are in red text

- ❖ **to be** not “to bee” (a bee = ett bi); **being** not “beeing”
Examples: Human being, alien beings, to be or not to be.
- ❖ **to see** not “to se”
- ❖ **cannot** is written as one word, not “can not”
- ❖ **itself, themselves, herself, etc.** reflexive pronouns (the -self words) are always written as one word, not two
Wrong: it self, them selves, her self, etc.
- ❖ “**thanks for me,**” “**thanks for us,**” **etc.** These sound really bizarre in English. If you said “thanks for me,” the only possible meaning in English would be something like “thank you for creating me—I’m really happy with the results” We just say *thank you* (*very much, for your attention, for the great meal, for a lovely evening, etc.*)
- ❖ **brukar** ≠ “**use to**” There is no such thing as “use to” in the present tense in English. You have to say, for example, “I usually” We can only say “used to,” *past tense*.
Wrong: We use to take the bus to go to Kiruna.
Examples:
Jag brukar se på Bingolotto. = I usually (*or generally, or like to*) watch Lasse.
Jag brukade gå dit varje dag. = I used to go there every day.
- ❖ **ago** is not used with the preposition “for”
Wrong: For five years ago . . .
Right: Five years ago . . .
- ❖ **mean** isn’t used to mean “believe” or “claim.”
Wrong: Williams responded so negatively because he meant that there was an important distinction between . . .
Right: Williams responded so negatively because he believed. . .
- ❖ When a mother gives birth, this is called **having a child**, not **getting a child**.
Wrong: When Suzy got her first baby . . .
Right: When Suzy had her first baby . . .
- ❖ Note the **unpronounced “al”** in “-ically” words: *specifically, radically, hermetically, etc.*
Exception: *publicly*.
- ❖ **You were born in 1981** (past tense).
Wrong: My sister is born 1978. My father-in-law is born 1874. The Internet was first conceived 1965.
- ❖ **hello** is much more common than the exclusively British “hallo” . . . 20 times more common, in fact, according to a search I did. So unless you want to sound veddy British, it’s *hello*.
- ❖ You **take a pill**, not “eat” a pill.
- ❖ You **feel guilty** after doing something you shouldn’t have; you don’t “get a bad conscience” (though your conscience may bother you).

- ❖ You **go to someone'S** house (to visit); for example, you may go to your mother's house, your friend's place, your daughter's apartment, etc.

Wrong:

- Yesterday we went to my mother. We're going to his father this weekend. (Because you don't say "my mother's" or "my father's" here, these sentences make it sound like you're going to them as a last resort, to ask them for help, to plead for mercy, to ask for a loan, etc., not just for a visit.)
- I drove the kids to my mother-in-law. (Here it sounds like your behavior was so awful, the kids felt compelled to seek solace with your mother-in-law.)

- ❖ Be careful not to use **it, this, that, they, their** and **those** ambiguously to refer to things you've already mentioned. Only use these words when their meaning is completely clear.

Wrong: Johnny and Bill hadn't gone to see any of the movies, even though they were playing downtown. (What does "they" refer to? There's no way to know for sure.)

- ❖ Avoid finishing off sentences with "**... or?**" in English. We never do this.

Wrong: You've been in Thailand, or? That's common in America, or?

Right: You've been in Thailand, haven't you? That's common in America, isn't it? But isn't that common in America?

- ❖ The present progressive form of *to study* is **studying**, not **studing**.

- ❖ You have to say:

What does he look like? or

How does he look?

Wrong: How does he look like?

- ❖ **today** and **tonight** are written as one word.

Wrong: to day, this day, to night.

- ❖ It's **the Internet** (usually capitalized).

Wrong: These days young people sometimes chat for months over internet without ever meeting in person.

- ❖ **so** vs. **too** and **very**

Awkward: I tried the chicken yesterday, it wasn't so good. I'm not so good at speaking Finnish.

Best: I tried the chicken yesterday; it wasn't very / too / that good. I'm not very good at speaking Finnish.

- ❖ **Be careful with have vs. has.** *Have* is used for every present-tense conjugation of *to have* except the third person singular (he has, she has, it has). **Incorrect sentences:**

The police **has** now arrested a man that **have** stolen \$4,000,000 . . .

The man, who is in his seventies, **have** been reported . . .

President Bush, who is against free abortions, now **have** got some problems . . .

Banks, insurance companies, attorneys and others who support a change in the flag **has** raised a great deal of money . . .

In Cincinnati there **has** been riots since an African-American male was . . .

- ❖ **Future tense. Always use verb tenses consistently.** For instance, when you're describing the future, it's important to use the future tense (or the present

progressive/continuous: *I'm going to the store tomorrow*). The following passage about the late twenty-first century should have been written in the future tense.

In the late 21st century, I think we **live** [*will live*] on another planet. Researchers **have come up** [*will have come up*] with many new inventions. Our energy **comes** [*will come*] from sun power, geothermal power and wind power. We also **have** [*will have*] special transformers that gather the enormous electric power of lightning. Because of the problems with nuclear power, the stations **have been** [*will have been*] closed. Research **finally solved** [*will finally have solved*] the problem of nuclear waste; it **is now** [*will be*] stored at a station on Mars. I think we **have** [*will have*] developed better ways of using energy.

Also: In five years I think that I **am** [*will be*] ready to be responsible for all customer contacts in Scandinavia.

- ❖ You **get up** in the morning, you don't **go up**.
Wrong: I went up yesterday at 4:00 to drive to Kiruna.
- ❖ The time expression is **o'clock**, not **a clock**.
Wrong: Did you really get up at four a clock?
- ❖ The word **laboration** does not exist in English. Instead we would say "lab(oratory) assignment."
- ❖ Be careful with words resembling **pedagogy**. They're much rarer in English than in Swedish.
pedagogy = the art or profession of teaching; the profession of a teacher.
pedagogical = of, relating to, or characteristic of pedagogy.
Awkward: I'm studying pedagogy. We're learning about alternate pedagogies.
Best: I'm studying education. We're learning about alternate teaching methods / styles / philosophies.
Wrong: He's very pedagogical (in the sense of "he's a good teacher").
Right: He's a very good teacher.
- ❖ Unless you're writing what someone has said verbatim, avoid using informal contractions like **gonna, oughta, wanna, shoulda, coulda, gotta**, etc., in your writing. These are only used
 - in spoken English
 - when people write about spoken English, and
 - in song titles and lyrics.
- ❖ **each other** is two words.
Wrong: We didn't see eachother until two years later.