3 Standard grammar usually states that modal verbs (like might, would, should, etc.) cannot be used in sequence, as in sentence (b), but in some regions of the United States, notably the Lower South, this is common practice.

4 Standard grammar has should have; should of (and must of, could of, etc.) is considered to be an inaccurate inference from the contracted form (should've) which sounds like should of. Hence, only when it is written is it truly non-standard.

5 The repetition of is in sentence (b) is redundant, since the sentence requires only one verb, of which the problem is the subject. Nevertheless, sequences like the problem is, the thing is, the fact is, etc. are perhaps considered to be reduced forms of the clause what the problem/thing/fact is … and hence require a following verb: the thing is is that he never calls; the simple fact is is we cannot be everywhere (the Cambridge English Corpus). Again, this is considered non-standard in writing, but not in speech.

6 Prescriptive grammars insist that than is not a preposition but a conjunction, and therefore must be followed by a clause, with a subject and a verb, even if the verb is omitted: He was taller than she (was). Usage now treats than as a preposition (like to, for, like, etc.) which is followed by an object: than her, than me, etc. To many ears, than she and than I sound pedantic.

7 Prescriptivists claim that can should only be used for ability (Can you swim?) and not for asking permission (Can I leave now?), where may is preferred. Popular usage, both in spoken and written English, suggests otherwise.

8 Standard grammar prefers ‘if + subject + had + past participle’ (if I’d known, if you’d said, etc.) but ‘if + subject + would + have + past participle’ constructions are increasingly common, especially in spoken English: You could have had a lot of money if you would have only had two kids; If we would have stayed in Florida maybe she would have (the Cambridge English Corpus).

9 In spoken English the use of like to introduce reported speech is very common, especially among younger speakers, but is considered informal and non-standard, and rarely occurs in written language.

5 In each case, ‘real’ examples from corpus data show that the rule is not categorical, and that there are exceptional cases. It may be the case, indeed, that these ‘exceptions’ prove the rule, in the sense that they show that norms can be broken in order to create certain effects. This freedom to ‘bend the rules’ is sometimes known as ‘grammar as choice’, to distinguish it from ‘grammar as structure’. In the case of ‘grammar as structure’, no such bending is possible. For example, in English, articles precede the noun they modify, as in the private detective, not *private detective the. However, the choice as to whether to use a definite or an indefinite article, or even no article at all, is often an open one, depending on the speaker’s intentions: Here lived Sherlock Holmes, the private detective (or a private detective or private detective). In teaching, it is probably not a good idea to treat ‘grammar as choice’ as inflexibly as ‘grammar as structure’.

1 In the majority of cases, one-syllable adjectives form their comparative with –er, but the fact that there are plenty of exceptions in the corpus data suggests that the rule needs to be qualified, e.g. We generally use –er … .

2 The use of the subjunctive form after adjectives such as important and essential is more common in American English than in British English, so perhaps the rule should state this.
3 Again, while the frequency of occurrences of *I am understanding*, etc. is far less than *I understand*, etc., the fact that there are cases – and that these are perfectly grammatical – needs to be acknowledged in the rule statement, along the lines of (e) in the comment on Task 1 above.

6 These examples demonstrate that learner language is often ‘well-formed’, in the sense that it conforms to the rules of ‘grammar as structure’ (see comment on the preceding task), but is nevertheless non-standard, in that certain word choices or combinations are not those that a speaker of standard English might make. But this does raise the question as to whether these choices are wrong, or simply not idiomatic. Is using non-standard grammar more or less a ‘crime’ than speaking with a non-standard accent?

a This is a well-formed sentence and could pass as standard, although convention prefers *a roof over your head* rather than *above*.

b The spelling error (*sheep* for *ship*) is no doubt induced by the learner’s pronunciation, but once this is accounted for, the sentence is standard English.

c Again, the grammar is structurally correct: what is non-standard is the choice of word combinations (or *collocations*), where *as long as possible, go back to my city* and *keen on doing* would be more idiomatic.

d As we have seen, the use of the progressive form (*am remembering*) is unusual with verbs of mental processes, but not necessarily incorrect. We would need to see the larger context in order to assess how appropriate this choice is.

e In standard English *information* is invariably an uncountable noun, hence is not pluralized: *informations* is therefore non-standard. The choice of *expect*, rather than *hope*, might also be inappropriate, depending on the context.

f In standard English, people *make* progress, rather than *get* progress. The choice of the definite article *the*, rather than no article at all, before *life* and *computers*, is also non-standard, although perfectly intelligible.

g Unlike verbs like *tell, explain* does not take an indirect object (*me*) in standard English.

h It is likely that, even in context, this sentence would be unintelligible as well as non-standard.

i Standard English requires the infinitive form of *go* in the negative construction *didn’t go* (although this is not necessarily the case in some varieties of English, where *didn’t went* would be acceptable).

j This is a well-formed sentence by the standards of standard English, although *go fishing* is the more frequent way of expressing this idea.

7 The way you answer this question will depend, to a large extent, on your teaching context and, specifically, your learners’ needs. Learners of English as a second language (ESL) – i.e. those intending to integrate into the host English-speaking culture – may need to know what other members of that culture consider to be ‘proper’ or appropriate, just as they may need to know the local rules of etiquette. It is arguable, though, whether or not learners of English as a foreign, or as an international language (EFL and EIL) need to be concerned with the finer points of ‘linguistic good manners’. For their purposes, a descriptive grammar will be more appropriate, and ‘correct’ or ‘standard’ grammar their aim. What is the difference? Simply one of attitude. As suggested in the comment to the previous task, the idea that non-standard grammar is ‘incorrect’ implies some kind of negative value judgement – not dissimilar to the