

COMMUNICATION

Pointing out a mistake

LEVEL

Upper-Intermediate
(B2)

NUMBER

EN_B2_1043X

LANGUAGE

English

Learning outcomes

- I can point out a mistake using a variety of different phrases.
- I can use a range of techniques to politely point out a mistake.



Warm-up

**When was the
last time you
made a mistake?**

**Did you learn anything
from it or not?**



slip-up

A **slip-up** is a small mistake.

Either we were not **paying attention** or we were not **thinking carefully enough**.



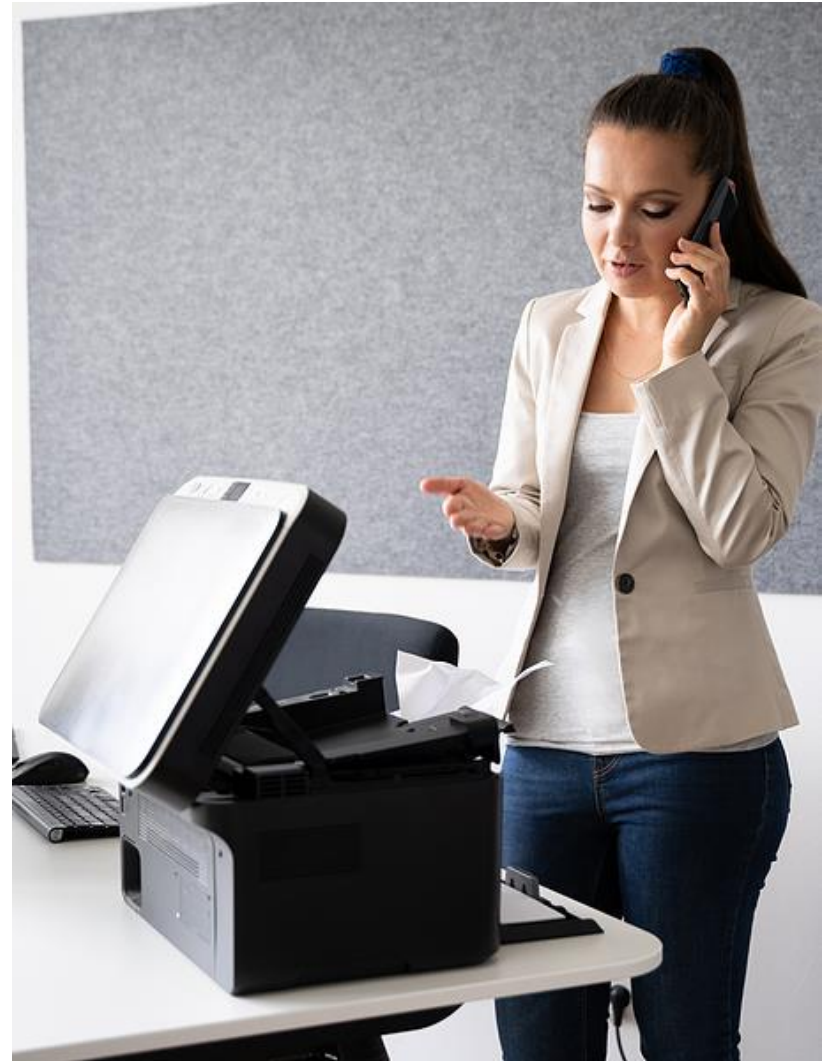
I had a couple of **slip-ups** at work today. First, I didn't copy my boss into an important email. Then, I emailed another person a report and forgot to attach the file!

There's been a **hiccup** with the printer!

Not signing the document was a bit of an **oversight**!

A **hiccup** is a small, temporary problem.

An **oversight** is when you didn't notice something.





Discuss

1. **Read** the four mistakes below.
2. **Discuss** if they are an example of a *hiccup*, *slip-up* or an *oversight* for you.



The internet connection kept turning on and off during a video-call

A teacher forgetting to mark one student's essay out of the thirty she had to mark

An employee called their boss the wrong name all morning

You booked a flight online for 30th June instead of 30th July



Discuss

Tell your partner about a mistake you've made recently.



What kind of mistake was it?

What did you do to correct it?

...didn't exactly go to plan!

When **pointing out** a mistake, it's important to do so **politely**.

This phrase is a polite way to say **something didn't go well**.

Let's look at some more ways to politely point out a mistake!



Oh dear, that presentation **didn't exactly go to plan**. Let's see if they understood what the new product is!

”

We've got our wires
crossed here.

I got the wrong end
of the stick!



Both these phrases mean
to **not understand** a
situation correctly.

They are both **more
idiomatic** ways of saying
this.



Politely pointing out a mistake

Avoid using sentences beginning with **you** and **use** more **impersonal** language instead.

Examples

You haven't understood me. → **There's been a misunderstanding.**

You mixed the times up! → **There's been a mix-up with the times.**

You didn't tell me about it! → **There's been a lack of communication.**

You need to do better! → **There's some room for improvement here.**



The phrases on the left are very direct. They sound **aggressive** and **rude**.



Politely pointing out a mistake

Here are **two more techniques**:

Use a positive adjective negatively

I agree, the speech **wasn't** particularly **great**.

You **didn't** give the **best** performance last night.

She **didn't** do **brilliantly** on that part of the exam.

Add 'softeners' (e.g. *slight, minor, a bit of*)

There's been a **slight** misunderstanding here. I ordered 15 pizzas, not 50.

There was a **minor** mix-up with your order, but I assure you the wine is coming.

There's been a **bit of** confusion over what time the meeting is starting.



Make these statements more polite

Use the techniques from the previous slides.



That presentation was awful; the worst I've ever seen.

John! I've got something to say: that was terrible!

That meeting was a total mess – what on earth happened?

Your spelling is extremely poor, Tina. Work on it asap!



Divide into pairs

1. **Think of** a mistake someone new at one of your jobs typically makes.
2. **Plan** a role play where you tell them about their mistake.

*Missed a deadline?
Emailed the wrong person?*

*Insulted a boss or colleague?
Spoke out of turn in a meeting?*



Types of mistake

- a hiccup
- a slip-up
- an oversight

Ways of politely pointing out a mistake

- Avoid saying 'you';
- Use impersonal language: e.g. *There's been a misunderstanding, a mix-up, a lack of...*
- Use a positive adjective negatively e.g. *wasn't great, not the best...*
- Add softeners: e.g. *slight, minor, a bit of*



Role-play

Using your notes, **role-play** the conversation with your partner.



Open the conversation.

Make small-talk.

Tell your colleague you need to tell them something.

Point out the mistake politely to them.

Clarify any questions from them.

Say what they should do differently next time.



End of the lesson

Idiom

to put your foot in it

Meaning: to say or do something that upsets, offends or embarrasses someone.

Example: I really **put my foot** in it when I told my boss he was dressed too casually.



Additional practice



How about you?

**Have you
experienced any
hiccups recently?**

**What happened? How did you
respond to the situation?**





Point out the mistake politely

Make the sentences more polite.



1 You've completely misunderstood me!



There's been a pretty big misunderstanding here.

2 You've ordered way too much sushi!



3 Your grammar is absolutely terrible!



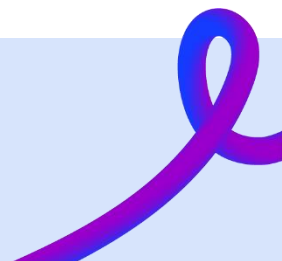
4 That presentation was just awful!



5 You majorly messed up in that meeting!



6 Your report was the worst I've ever read!





Discuss

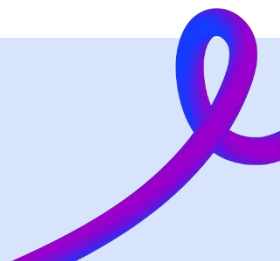
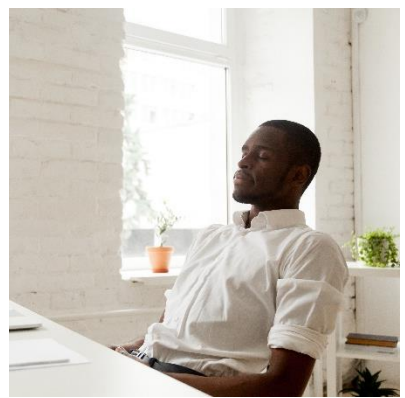


Mistakes teach us what doesn't work and encourage us to create new ways of thinking and doing.

How do you view making mistakes?

Do you have any examples from your own life of *good* mistakes?

What lessons or new ways of thinking did they teach you?





Answer key

P. 6:

Suggested answers:

1. **Internet connection:** a hiccup
2. **Teacher:** an oversight
3. **Employee:** a slip-up
4. **Flight:** a slip-up (i.e. a careless mistake made while booking) *OR* an oversight (i.e. failing to double-check the date before paying)



Summary

Pointing out a mistake

- *a slip-up; a hiccup; an oversight*
- *.... didn't exactly to plan; to get our wires crossed; to get the wrong end of the stick*
- *That meeting with the client **didn't exactly go to plan**. We didn't explain our ideas very well.*

Techniques for politely pointing out a mistake

- Use more **impersonal** language → *There's been **a misunderstanding**; **a lack of...**; **some room for...***
- Use a **positive** adjective **negatively** → ***wasn't great**; **didn't** give the **best...**; **didn't** do **brilliantly***
- Add a **softener** → *a **slight** misunderstanding; a **minor** mix-up; **a bit of** confusion.*



Vocabulary

slip-up

hiccup

oversight

didn't exactly go to plan

to get our wires crossed

to get the wrong end of the stick

a misunderstanding

a lack of communication

some room for improvement

slight

minor

a bit of

