

Resolving misunderstandings

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL
Upper-intermediate

NUMBER
EN_BE_3804X

LANGUAGE
English

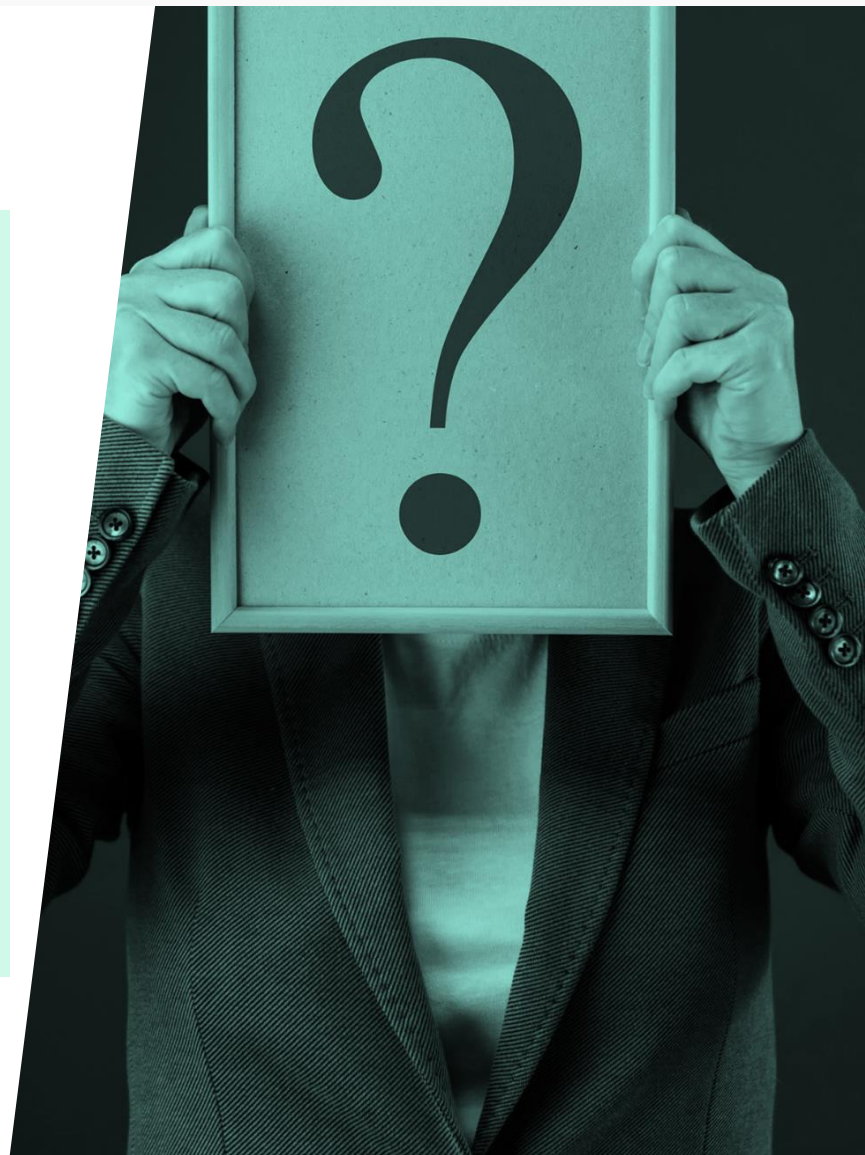
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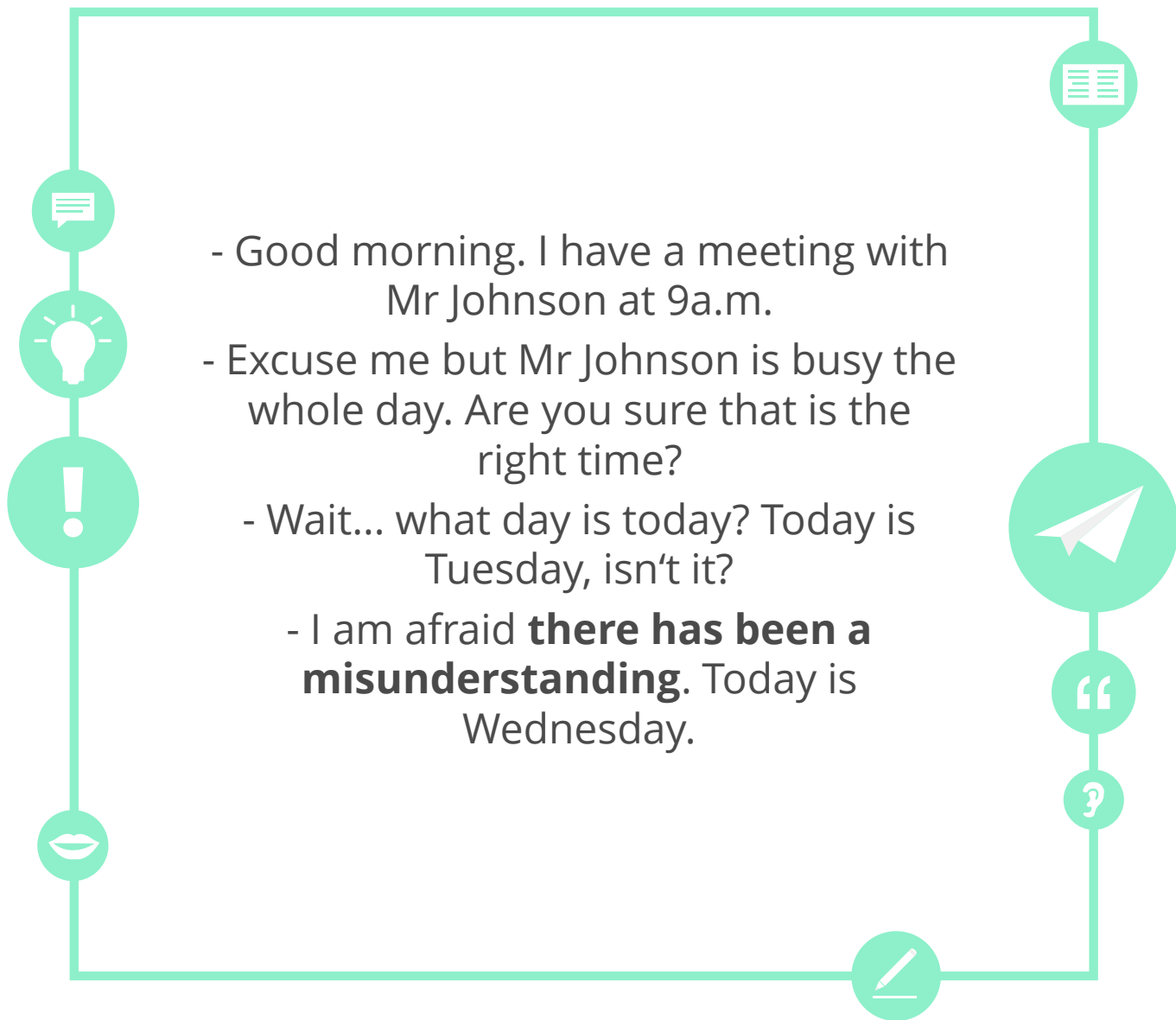




Goals

- Can understand standard phrases typically used during a misunderstanding
- Can use new phrases and the passive voice to deal with cultural misunderstandings







Misunderstandings



Can you think of a time when you had a misunderstanding at work? How did you resolve it? How do you feel when there is a misunderstanding in business situations?



Cultural misunderstandings

Have you ever committed a cultural *faux pas* in another country? What happened?





Phrases to solve misunderstandings

- Below are certain phrases you can use when you realise that you have been **misunderstood** and want to **clear it up**.

I think there may have been a misunderstanding.

We might have misunderstood each other.

I'm sorry, I didn't explain that very well before. What I meant was...

That's not exactly what I was trying to say.

Perhaps I wasn't clear before. What I wanted to say was...

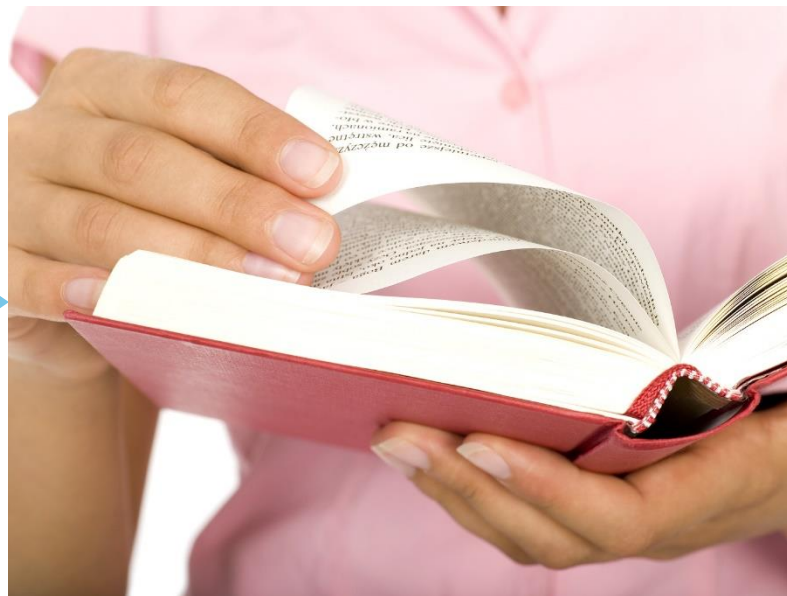




Idiomatic phrases to solve misunderstandings

- Below are some **idiomatic phrases** to **solve misunderstandings**. These phrases can add a **light-hearted** note to a situation, but you should be careful when speaking to **non-native speakers** of English as they may serve only to confuse the situation further.

- I'm not sure we're **on the same page**.
- I don't think you've fully **caught my drift**.
- We seem to have got our **wires crossed** somewhere.





Using tact

- It can be awkward to **clear up** a misunderstanding with someone you just met or someone who is senior to you. It is important to use **tact** in this situation in order to make your conversation partner **feel at ease**.

Take responsibility.	Say: <i>I didn't explain myself properly.</i> Don't say: <i>You didn't understand.</i>
Share the responsibility.	Say: <i>We misunderstood each other.</i> Don't say: <i>You misunderstood me.</i>
Be less direct by using phrases for uncertainty.	Say: <i>I don't think we're on the same page or we might have misunderstood each other.</i>
Be less direct by using adverbs.	Say: <i>I'm not sure we entirely understood each other or I don't think we're fully on the same page or we haven't quite understood each other.</i>



Changing the dialogue

**Is this a polite way to clear up a misunderstanding?
Make the dialogue more polite.**



No. You've misunderstood me completely.

Oh! I thought we were on the same page.



I explained perfectly well what I wanted. You weren't listening.

I was listening, but I don't think I caught your drift.





Role play

You are trying to schedule a conference call with a colleague in a different time zone. Clear up the misunderstanding below.

Let's schedule it for 4p.m. then.



4p.m.? I'm not sure about that.

Student A (or teacher):
You suggest meeting at 4pm, without specifying that you mean your colleague's time zone.

Student B (or teacher):
You take it to mean their time zone, which is a very anti-social hour for you. You are a little affronted.



Read the dialogue

**Look at the dialogue below.
What is the misunderstanding?**



When are you available to chat with me?

I'm free Monday – Thursday until 6p.m., or Friday until 12p.m.



Great! Friday afternoon is perfect for me.



Role play the dialogue

Role play the next steps of the dialogue with your teacher or another student. Can you clear up the misunderstanding politely?





Role play the misunderstanding

You are abroad and you invite a new business colleague to visit you in your country. They think you are offering a place to stay. Clear up the misunderstanding.





Clearing up misunderstandings

- Below are some more **polite phrases** that you can use to clear up **misunderstandings**:

I think you've got the wrong end of the stick.

I didn't mean any offence.

I'm sorry for the misunderstanding. I wasn't aware of...

I'm deeply sorry. I'm not used to these customs.

I hope I haven't offended you in any way.

I honestly meant no offence by...





Indirect Speech

- As you have seen in previous phrases, we often use **indirect speech** when trying to be **polite**, so as not to apportion responsibility or blame.

active	passive
You misunderstood me.	There has been a misunderstanding.
You are mixed up.	There has been a mix up.
You are confused.	I think there is some confusion.
You misinterpreted what I meant.	There may have been a misinterpretation.



Role play

In London, you arranged a meeting with a colleague for 2p.m. You arrive at 2.15p.m., as in your country it is normal, even polite, to be a little late. Your colleague is annoyed, as in the UK you should arrive on time. Solve the conflict.

Hi John, it's great to see you.



I've been sitting here for 20 minutes!

Student A (or teacher):
You think you were being polite by being late.

Student B (or teacher):
You feel your colleague has wasted your valuable time.



Punctuality

How important is punctuality in your country? How would you feel if someone was late? Is it different in business and in private?



Do you know the difference between being *in* time and *on* time?



In a restaurant

**At a business dinner in the USA you leave a 10% tip for the waiter. It is normal in the US to leave 20-30% as waiters get paid very little.
Read the exchange below.**



Sir, was there something wrong with my service?

Not at all, it was wonderful.



In that case, I'm a little confused by the tip.



Resolve the misunderstanding

How would you resolve this misunderstanding?
You should be aware that your North American business colleagues are watching.



waiter



customer



Read the dialogue

Read through this dialogue between a new employee and her Polish boss. What do you think might be the problem?



Hi, I'm looking for Jan Kowalski.



Yes, I'm Mr Kowalski. How can I help you?



Oh, Jan, great. I'm Alina, your new assistant.



Extend the dialogue

In Poland, people senior to you should be addressed using *Mr*, *Mrs*, *Miss* or *Ms* and their full name or surname. Extend the dialogue on the previous page to **solve the misunderstanding** between Alina and Mr Kowalski.





Addressing superiors

**How should you
address those senior
to you in your
country?**

Hey John!

Good
afternoon, Mr
Allen

Good morning,
James



Role play

In Spain it is normal to greet women with two formal kisses on the cheeks, even in business situations. Your colleague in Spain introduces you to his colleague Marta. You shake her hand. She is offended and thinks you are being cold towards her. Solve this misunderstanding in a role play.



I'm so sorry.

Have I done something to offend you?

It's normal here...

It's unusual where I'm from...



Misunderstandings

**Discuss the following statements.
Give your opinion and share your experience.**

“

Misunderstandings are always to do with cultural differences.

”

“

Since I am always very clear, I never have to deal with misunderstandings.

”



Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!







Unscramble the words

A

have

each

might

other.

We

misunderstood

B

page.

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same



Write a dialogue

Think back to the creative input on page 3. Write a short dialogue to solve that misunderstanding.

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Homework answer key

Exercise p. 27

A. We might have misunderstood each other. B. We're not on the same page.



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