

COMMUNICATION

# Resolving misunderstandings

**LEVEL**

Upper-Intermediate  
(B2)

**NUMBER**

EN\_B2\_3101X

**LANGUAGE**

English

## Learning outcomes

- I can identify different types of misunderstanding.
- I can use advanced words and phrases to clarify a misunderstanding in a range of situations.



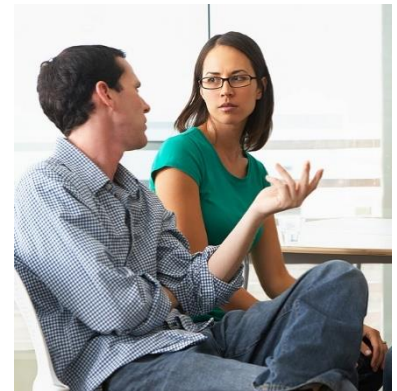
# Warm-up

**What kind of things lead to misunderstandings, in your experience?**

Have you ever been misunderstood when communicating in a foreign language?

Have you ever been misunderstood when communicating in your mother tongue?

What can you do to overcome these situations?



# Complete the dialogue. What would you do in this situation?

meant                      host  
unfortunately              call



It would be great to see you again. When you're next in Paris, give me a \_\_\_\_\_.

Oh, I just \_\_\_\_\_ call me when you are there. I can't \_\_\_\_\_ people in my flat.

\_\_\_\_\_, my flat is too small for guests. But there are lots of reasonably-priced hostels. I'll have a think about it.

suggest                      offer  
understand                      ok



Thanks for the \_\_\_\_\_. I'll definitely contact you when I can make it to Paris.

Oh, I \_\_\_\_\_. Maybe you could \_\_\_\_\_ somewhere nice to stay if I visit Paris then...

That's \_\_\_\_\_, mine is too! And thank you, that would be great.



# Vocabulary related to misunderstandings

Do you know the vocabulary below? Can you think of any other words or phrases related to misunderstandings?



**a faux pas**

**to misconstrue**

**room for  
interpretation**

**to misinterpret**

**to (not) be  
intended**

**to presume**

**a genuine  
misunderstanding**

**to overestimate**





# Misunderstandings



**a faux pas**

**room for  
interpretation**

Which phrase means...

...an embarrassing act or statement made  
in a social setting

...the meaning of something is unclear or  
undefined



# Complete the sentences

**Fill in the gaps** using the words and phrases in the red box. Note: you won't need all of the words.

- 1 The document left a lot of \_\_\_\_\_ on the matter of how the policy would actually be implemented.
- 2 I'm going to overlook your lateness, as I believe there was a \_\_\_\_\_ misunderstanding regarding the meeting location.
- 3 I shouldn't have \_\_\_\_\_ that you would prefer to stay at a hotel. Next time, you can stay with me!
- 4 She \_\_\_\_\_ how much time she had left and couldn't complete the last question in the exam.
- 5 Did you hear about the boss's latest \_\_\_\_\_ at the office party? He kept calling someone the wrong name all night...

faux pas

room for interpretation

genuine

to presume

to overestimate

to misinterpret

to misconstrue



# Phrases to clarify meaning

Have you used any of these phrases before?

1



**I think there's been a misunderstanding.**

2



**I don't think we're talking about the same thing.**

3



**What I meant to say was that...**

4



**Maybe I didn't explain myself properly...**





# Phrases to clarify meaning

Have you used any of these phrases before?

5



**Sorry, it was not my intention to...**

6



**I am not sure we have understood each other properly.**

7



**That's not exactly what I meant.**

8



**My apologies. I think there has been some miscommunication...**



# Social misunderstandings

**Read** the scenario below. **Answer** the questions.

Ben is at the bar of a restaurant, waiting to be seated. He's meeting a business acquaintance, Anna, for dinner. They've never met in person, as all contact between them up until now has been via email and phone calls. Anna told Ben what she looks like when they arranged to meet. A woman, Carla, enters the restaurant and sees Ben sitting at the bar by himself. She sits down beside him and orders a drink. Carla and Ben begin chatting. After about 5 minutes, Ben notices a woman looking around for someone at the other end of the bar. This woman fits the description of Anna much more closely than the woman he has been chatting to.

1. What can Ben do to politely clarify this misunderstanding?
2. What might Ben have done differently to avoid this situation?
3. What would you do if you were Carla or Anna?



# What can go wrong?

**Write a short dialogue** that deals with a misunderstanding in one of the situations below.  
You can do this **in breakout rooms** or **as a class**.  
Use vocabulary from the previous slides.

1 Speaking over the phone

2 Ordering food

3 Trying to meet someone at a particular location



## Cultural misunderstandings

All cultures have unique ways of greeting each other and customs about how to behave and what to say in certain situations.

Are there any things you do to try and prevent cultural misunderstandings when you travel overseas?

Do you recognise the situations below? What's tipping culture like where you are? And is it common custom to remove your shoes before entering someone's home?



Sorry, I think there's been **a misunderstanding**. **I didn't realise** I was meant to leave you a tip.

**My apologies, I had no idea** I was meant to take my shoes off before coming inside.



# Clarify a cultural misunderstanding

You're in New York and you have paid your bill, but haven't paid a tip. The waitress stands at the table for the tip and looks upset.

You are in Spain and your colleague introduces you to his sister who kisses you on the cheek. You offer her a hand shake and she doesn't shake it.

You're on the train and have bought the wrong train ticket in a foreign country. You think you have the right ticket, but the conductor explains that you need to buy an additional ticket. She thinks you are trying to avoid paying the right fee.

You're in Germany and you have submitted an invoice in the middle of the month because that is usual in your home country. Your manager asks if you are having financial difficulties and if there is anything she can do to help.



## Workplace misunderstandings

Are there any factors that make a misunderstanding in a work environment different from everyday situations?

What are some things that can lead to misunderstandings at work? Consider relationships with both colleagues and customers or clients.

Are there any **unspoken rules** in your workplace?

Oh, I didn't realise you were still using the photocopier. **Sorry about that.**  
You can go in front of me!

**We apologise for any inconvenience caused.** Customer satisfaction is  
our top priority



# Dealing with a complaint at work

**Read** Bob's complaint. What's the issue?

## Smith Street Project – safety concerns and delays



To: david.figgs@build.workplace.com

Dear David (Project Manager),

I am writing to lodge a complaint about the quality of works performed on the Smith Street Bridge building project. After several inspections of the site, I have noticed that several construction workers are not following safety protocol and that they are running behind schedule.

I was told two months ago that delays were unlikely, but that there was still some uncertainty about when the steel would be delivered to the site and that I would be informed once it arrived. This project is worth a significant sum and any prolonged delays are likely to lead to a cost blow out. I therefore need immediate confirmation of the status of the project so that I can report on it at the next key stakeholder meeting in a fortnight's time.

I have called your office twice and spoken with your secretary. Both times I was told that the project manager was out of the office and will return my call later, but I am yet to receive a call back.

Please get back to me as soon as possible.

Regards,  
Bob





## Discuss

**What could be some reasons that David hasn't replied yet?**



**How should he respond to Bob's email?**



# Roleplay

**Role play** a call between David and Bob. You can use the words and phrases below to help you.



David

Hello Bob. I hope you are keeping well. I'm ringing in relation to a complaint we have received... Are you free to talk?

Hi David. Yes, I am. In fact, I've been waiting for a response from you for a while!



Bob



David

...

...



Bob

room for interpretation

miscommunication

to overestimate

to (not) intend



# End of the lesson

Idiom

***to get hold of the wrong end of the stick***

**Meaning:** to misunderstand something

**Example:** Oh sorry, I must have got hold of the wrong end of the stick – I thought she said four o'clock!



# Additional practice





# Fill in the gaps

Complete the sentences with the correct verb in the correct form.

1 My apologies. I completely \_\_\_\_\_ your meaning.

a. to misconstrue

b. to overestimate

2 Oops! I didn't realise you'd \_\_\_\_\_ to keep the party a surprise

a. to intend

b. to presume

3 I guess we haven't \_\_\_\_\_ each other properly. What I meant was...

a. to understand

b. to misunderstand



# Misunderstandings at work



**When was the last time  
you dealt with a  
misunderstanding at  
work?**



**How did you manage to  
clarify the  
misunderstanding?**





# Dealing with a written complaint

← → ↺ www.email.com ☆ ☰

## Smith Street Building Project Update

To: <Bob> bob@bobbbuildingconstruction.com

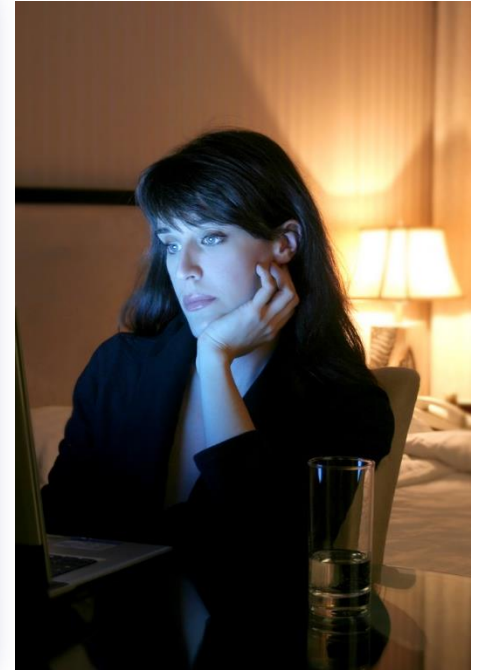
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Dear Bob,

I appreciate your multiple attempts to contact me about the status of the Smith Street Bridge building project. Unfortunately, several of my messages failed to reach you...

As to the status of the project...

▼ | 📎 🖼️ 😊 🔍 Send



Write a professional email to Bob that explains why there has been a delay and addressing Bob's concerns about safety protocol.



## Answer key

**P.4:** (L-R) 1. call 2. offer 3. meant; host 4. understand; suggest 5. Unfortunately 6. ok

**P.7:** 1. room for interpretation 2. genuine 3. presumed 4. overestimated 5. faux pas

**P.21:** 1. misconstrued 2. intended 3. understood



# Summary

## Misunderstandings:

- *A faux pas; room for interpretation; to (not) be intended; a genuine misunderstanding; to misconstrue; to misinterpret; to presume; to overestimate*
- *The document left a lot of **room for interpretation** about the implementation of the rules.*
- *I think there was **a genuine misunderstanding** about the meeting time.*

## Clarifying meaning:

- *I think there's been a misunderstanding.; I don't think we're talking about the same thing.; What I meant to say was that...; Maybe I didn't explain myself properly.*
- *Sorry, it was my intention to...; I am not sure we have understood each other properly.; That's not exactly what I meant.; My apologies. I think there has been some miscommunication...*

## Cultural misunderstandings:

- *All cultures have unique ways of greeting each other and customs about how to behave and what to say in certain situations.*
- *Sorry, I think there's been **a misunderstanding. I didn't realise** I was meant to leave you a tip.*
- ***My apologies, I had no idea** I was meant to take my shoes off before coming inside.*

## Workplace misunderstandings:

- *Oh, I didn't realise you were still using the photocopier. **Sorry about that.** You can go in front of me!*
- ***We apologise for any inconvenience caused.** Customer satisfaction is our top priority*



# Vocabulary

a faux pas

room for interpretation

to (not) be intended

a genuine misunderstanding

to misconstrue

to misinterpret

to presume

to overestimate

unspoken rule



