

Language exercises

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Precise use of language

Have a go at these activities – pay attention to ambiguous language.

1. The following are some newspaper headlines which, from a certain perspective, have an amusing second meaning. Can you re-phrase them so the second meaning is avoided?
 - (a) ‘Sisters reunited after 10 years in checkout line at Tesco’;
 - (b) ‘Large hole appears in high street; city authorities are looking into it’;
 - (c) ‘Mayor says bus passengers should be belted’.
2. Find two unambiguous but natural sounding sentences equivalent to the sentence ‘The man saw the woman with a telescope’, one where the man has the telescope and the other where the woman has the telescope.

Understanding what information you have been given

Have a think about these problems.

1. In a village live 800 women. Three percent of them are wearing one earring. Of the other 97 per cent, half are wearing two earrings and half are wearing none. How many earrings all together are being worn by women.
2. If you took three apples from a basket that held 13 apples, how many apples would you have?
3. A chemist discovered that a certain chemical reaction took 80 minutes when he wore a jacket. When he was not wearing a jacket, the same reaction always took an hour and 20 minutes. Can you explain?
4. Two market sellers are selling apples, one sells 3 apples for 1p and the other sells 2 apples for 1p. Both are called away with 30 apples each left to sell. They ask a friend to sell these at 5 for 2p. Separately, selling 30 apples at 3 for 1p and 30 at 2 for 1p, they would expect to collect 25p, but the friend sells all the apples and only collects 24p. Can you explain the discrepancy?
5. Three people check into a hotel and pay £30. The clerk later realised that the bill should have been £25, so gives the hotel porter £5 to return to the guests. As the guests don’t know the total of the revised bill, the porter decides to give each guest £1 and keep £2. Each guest got back £1, so only paid £9, which totals £27. The porter has £2. Now $£27 + £2 = £29$ so, if the guests originally handed over £30, what happened to the remaining £1?