

<i>900 exercises for Vocational Communication</i>	Notes for teachers	E3 / 21
<i>General aim</i>	E: Evaluate a message	
<i>Level of difficulty</i>	3	
<i>Intermediate aim</i>	2: Give meaning to someone else's message	
<i>Operational aim</i>	1: Reformulate someone else's message (for example to understand it better or to reach an agreement).	
<i>Pre-requirements</i>	None	
<i>Number of exercises</i>	4	
<i>Summing-up exercise</i>	E2/11-16	
<i>Applications (examples)</i>		
<i>Comments</i>		

In order to understand a message, either oral or written, it is often useful to repeat it to yourself in your own words. This is very helpful in a discussion. It is especially useful when you need to reach an agreement with somebody. It helps to make sure you have not misunderstood.

Often in a discussion, you will hear people say things like:

“So if I have understood correctly...”

“What you’re trying to say is...”

“So you think that...”

It helps to clarify a situation, and lets the other person know you have understood. Then you can offer your opinion.

Look at this example:

Chris is talking about a problem at work. This is what she says:

“When I try to suggest an improvement in the way the factory is managed, all they do is tell me to get back to work. What I say is reasonable; it represents the feelings of my colleagues. But they just don’t listen.”

If we want to make sure we have understood Chris’s problem, we can re-phrase what she has said. Like this:

“Okay Chris, what you are saying is that you try to give suggestions to improve work in the factory, but no one listens to you. And these suggestions come from what your colleagues have told you.”

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You are doing a work experience placement in a local company that sells precision tools. Your tutor has called you into his office. He has some instructions for you. It is an important assignment, and you must be quite sure you have understood correctly.

This is what he tells you:

So, you'll be working in the sales department with one of the sales reps. You'll accompany him on his customer visits, and I hope you'll learn a lot from his technique. Listen to him, try to understand why he asks certain questions, how much time he spends listening to the customer, and what kind of order he takes. Make a note of how he concludes the visit, and how he writes down the order, what kind of discount he offers, and so on.

Then, after about a month, you'll be accompanying the same rep, but this time, he'll leave you to conduct the sales interview. You should have acquired a reasonable sales technique by then. Don't worry, he'll be there to back you up if you need help. But you'll be doing the talking. And not too much of that. Remember that a good sales rep only talks about half the time. The rest of the time, he should be listening.

Don't forget to write a report about the visit when you get back here. I'll be away for two weeks next month, so when I get back, I expect to see a good few reports.

Right, any questions? Are you sure you have understood all that?

To make sure you have understood correctly, repeat, in your own words, what the sales manager said. Do the exercise orally first, then in writing. Try to write at least six sentences.

Look at the suggested answers on the next page.

So I'll be going with one of the sales reps on visits to customers. I have to listen to what he says, how much he talks, and the orders he takes. I should take notes too. When I've been going with him on visits for about a month, I'll start doing the interview myself. But the rep will be there all the time if I have any problems. I have to remember that a good sales rep only talks for half the time, and the rest of the time he listens.

You are replacing a sick colleague in a fairly up-market restaurant. The chef is known to be difficult and very fussy, but he's not an unfair man nor is he ill intentioned towards his assistants. One day, you overhear a scene in the kitchen between the chef and Adrian, one of the assistant cooks. You are going to try to explain to the chef what his assistants want from him.



Adrian: *Oh! He's such a difficult so and so! He really gets my back up!*

The chef: *Are you talking about me?!*

Adrian: *Well... you see, we don't think you're very easy to work with. You shout at us all the time, us assistants and waiters, you don't tolerate us talking when we're working, you are always stressing us out so that we always have to find something to do even when there's free time. You don't explain to us well enough how to make complicated dishes. You think we understand immediately but it's not always true. Because you have no patience, we daren't ask you to repeat or to give more explanations. So when the dish doesn't turn out the way you want it to, you get really angry with us. In fact, we are all afraid of you and we're at a total loss when you come into the kitchen, even though everything was okay just before. It's not easy working in these conditions. I apologise for the "difficult so and so". I didn't really mean that. We are fairly sure that somewhere deep down you like us ...*

The chef: *I know I get really stressed and I'm a perfectionist, you're right. But I want everything to be perfect at work, especially with my assistants. I want the restaurant to be a success even if I'm not the owner. So, basically, what do you want from me? Here you! Do you understand exactly what they want?*

You:

Look at the suggested answers for E3 / 31 – 1.2

You are replacing a sick colleague in a fairly up-market restaurant. The chef is known to be difficult and very fussy, but he's not an unfair man nor is he ill intentioned towards his assistants. One day, you overhear a scene in the kitchen between the chef and Adrian, one of the assistant cooks. You are going to try to explain to the chef what his assistants want from him.



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The chef: *I know I get really stressed and I'm a perfectionist, you're right. But I want everything to be perfect at work, especially with my assistants. I want the restaurant to be a success even if I'm not the owner. So, basically, what do you want from me? Here you! Do you understand exactly what they want?*

You: *Well, chef, the problem doesn't seem impossible to solve. Your assistants want you to be more patient with them, especially when you are explaining a complicated dish or a new one. They don't dare ask you to repeat or even ask you questions because they're frightened that you will run out of patience and be angry with them. Perhaps you overestimate them? They haven't been working for very long and they still have a lot to learn from you. They would like to work in a calmer atmosphere and relax a bit during the short periods when there's nothing to. The assistants do appreciate your knowledge, but they are also worried that you will take things out on them and then they are completely at a loss. You would certainly gain a lot from giving them more self-confidence and by proving yourself not necessarily more indulgent, but at least more patient.*

900 exercises for Vocational Communication	Exercise	E3 / 21 – 1.4
		Eval.:

You have a summer job in a shoe shop. You're working with a colleague who has more experience than you. One morning, just before the lunch break, you hear your colleague complaining.

The colleague: You're a real lazy bones, you know.

You: Who are you calling lazy?

The colleague: You! Every time a customer comes in, you seem to be "busy" doing something else. So of course, I have to go and see to the customer. I'm the one who has to go up and down stairs to the stock room each time. And I have to make an effort to be nice, to be welcoming, and all that. Then, when it comes to paying, you don't even offer to go to the till. I have to do that too. It's not fair. Just because I've got more experience than you, it doesn't mean that I have to do all the hard work. You're supposed to be learning how to deal with customers, you know, and you won't manage that unless you actually go and do it!

You are quite taken aback by this, as you had not realised that your colleague felt that way. You begin to explain. Complete the explanation to show that you have understood exactly what your colleague wants from you.

You: I didn't realise that was how you felt. I thought you enjoyed going to see the customers. I was afraid to take them away from you. I thought it would make you angry. So in fact, if I understand you correctly, you want me to...

Look at the suggested answers on the next page.

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***You:** Who are you calling lazy?*

***The colleague:** You! Every time a customer comes in, you seem to be "busy" doing something else. So of course, I have to go and see to the customer. I'm the one who has to go up and down stairs to the stock room each time. And I have to make an effort to be nice, to be welcoming, and all that. Then, when it comes to paying, you don't even offer to go to the till. Suddenly you're busy with the phone or some other unimportant business. I have to do the till too. It's not fair. Just because I've got more experience than you, it doesn't mean that I have to do all the hard work. You're supposed to be learning how to deal with customers, you know, and you won't manage that unless you actually go and do it!*

You are quite taken aback by this, as you had not realised that your colleague felt that way. You begin to explain. Complete the explanation to show that you have understood exactly what your colleague wants from you.

***You:** I didn't realise that was how you felt. I thought you enjoyed going to see the customers. I was afraid to take them away from you. I thought it would make you angry. So in fact, if I understand you correctly, you want me to...go and greet the customers and serve them, rather than finding something else to do when someone comes in. I have to smile and make myself agreeable. Then you would like me to go to the stock room from time to time, to get the different sizes. And you would also like me to go to the till sometimes. You're right, I'll only learn by doing, not just by watching. That way, I'll get much more experience.*

You are in the flat of your friend Daniel Kobayashi, who is having problems with his computer. You are trying to help him find a solution. Suddenly, a letter is slipped under the door of your friend's flat. He opens it, reads it, shouts out a few exclamations and launches into an angry tirade against the author of the letter, his neighbour from the flat below his.

“Who does she think she is, the old cow? This is incredible! She's sent me a letter, do you realise that! She didn't even have the courage to come and speak to me in person! I'm sure she hates foreigners. It's because I'm Japanese that she's taking it out on me, that's for sure. Well, we'll see about that. I haven't even begun to make a noise over her head! You should never take it out on your neighbour when you live just below! Here, read this!”

Daniel hands you the letter and you read it:

20th October 07

Dear Sir,

I am very sorry if this missive disturbs your tranquillity, but several things are bothering me somewhat. As I find it difficult to get about because of my hip and also as I am a bit hard of hearing, I prefer to write you a little note rather than coming directly up to your flat to talk to you.

As you know, this building is not at all soundproof and is thus very noisy. Which means that, each time your telephone rings, I hear it as if it were my own. And in your absence, it rings eight times before your answering machine responds. Do you think you might possibly see your way to lowering the volume of your telephone and, perhaps even, to set your answering machine to reply before the eighth ring?

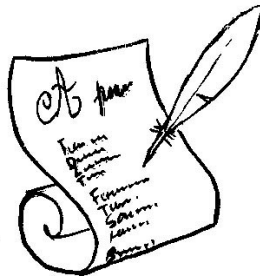
Similarly, when you are getting ready to leave your flat, it seems that you take your dustbin bag still open out on to the landing. It sometimes happens that you decide not to go out, or that you do not think to take your dustbin down with you on leaving the building. It therefore happens that the said dustbin bag remains there until the following day or even the day after that. As it would appear that you often eat fish, my cat, attracted by the smell, runs up to your landing and alas! I have to come up and fetch her, which implies my climbing up one whole floor, and I have to say that for me this is a most laborious and even perilous climb. Would you be so kind as to close your dustbin bag, or even better, not to let it remain on the landing?

I am so sorry to bother you with what might seem to you to be trivialities, but if you could possibly do something about it all, I would be extremely grateful.

Yours very sincerely,

Mrs George Saunders

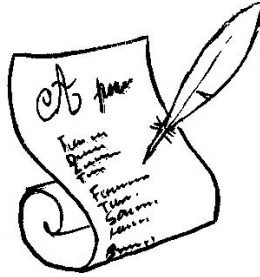
Exercise continued on the next page.



You consider that this letter is not at all insulting and is even extremely courteous. You think that the requests of the lady in the flat below are quite legitimate and not very complicated to fulfil. You say this to your friend who replies:

“So what exactly does she want? I don’t understand any of this rubbish that you find so ‘courteous’!”

You are going to explain to Daniel what he has to do to make life a little more pleasant for his neighbour.



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“So what exactly does she want? I don’t understand any of this rubbish that you find so ‘courteous’!”

You are going to explain to Daniel what he has to do to make life a little more pleasant for his neighbour.

What she is asking you (courteously, I repeat!), is not very difficult. Firstly, you should lower the ringtone of your phone because she can hear it in her flat as if it were ringing for her. Then, you set the number of rings before the answerphone picks up. She says there are 8 rings. Maybe you could set it to 4, for example? And finally, there’s the matter of your binbag. Apparently, her cat gets out of the flat to have a closer look at it, as it likes the smell of fish! And the old lady has to come up and fetch it, which is kind of difficult for her because of her aches and pains. So, maybe you could leave your binbag in your hall till you go out, don’t you think? No? But why not? Ah, because the smell of fish bothers you! Ha ha, very funny!