

Communication Errors

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll look more in depth at the effects of miscommunication on the messages we send and receive. Two areas of focus include:

1. How Miscommunication Occurs
2. The Importance of Confirmation Messages

1. How Miscommunication Occurs

We often think that what we hear is what the person communicating meant, and this assumption can lead to miscommunication and conflict.

Miscommunication is a state in which a **receiver** has interpreted a message in a way other than that intended by the **sender** of the message.

This typically happens when we don't ask for confirmation; we think we understand, but we don't confirm our understanding.

➡ **EXAMPLE** Jean wants to send a message to Amy. This makes Jean the sender, or the person moving information from themselves to another. Amy is the receiver, or the person receiving information from another. Jean tells Amy to meet her at the coffee shop.

Amy says, "Great! What time?" They talk about what time they're going to meet, and Amy's excited to see Jean at the coffee shop.

However, Amy goes to the wrong coffee shop, and Jean's across town wondering where she is. They get on their cell phones, and there's a conflict. Amy had interpreted "the coffee shop" to mean the one that they typically go to. Jean claimed she told Amy that she was going to a different coffee shop.

At this point, it becomes "No you didn't, yes you did" because no one confirmed which coffee shop.

If you've ever been in a situation like that, you know what can happen when you send a message, and it's not interpreted the way you intended.



TERMS TO KNOW

Miscommunication

A state in which a receiver has interpreted a message in a way other than that intended by the sender of the message.

Receiver

In communication, the person receiving information from another.

Sender

In communication, the person moving information from themselves to another.

2. The Importance of Confirmation Messages

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If you remember, a **message** is a packet of information which has been encoded and is moved from sender to receiver. In the example we just discussed, the message was verbal.

However, the message could have been confirmed with another phone call or with a text. By simply sending a confirmation message to clarify the information you received, conflict can be avoided.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You're at work, and you get an email request from somebody on your team saying, "I need this data immediately. Please get it to me now."

You think that sounds bossy, and you are put off by this. What you're hearing is anger, and that this person is upset with you, but this is merely your interpretation.

Without checking it out, you may never know that the person who sent you this email really just found out that she has a new deadline, and thus quickly sent the message to you without intending the tone to come across the way it did.

This can happen not only in email, but speech as well.

➦ **EXAMPLE** You may have a family member say, "You always do that." Words like "always" and "never" are hot button words because they can immediately get in the way of what the person is trying to communicate to you. Without some discussion or confirmation of what the person is intending here, there could be a conflict.

Sometimes two people can misinterpret the same word because they have different meanings for it.

➦ **EXAMPLE** Let's say you're in a meeting at work, and your boss says, "We decided that the dress code for the conference will be casual." You think, "Great, it's casual dress over the next day and a half."

When you show up in jeans, you're taken aside and told, "Jeans are not considered business casual. You're going to have to wear something other than jeans." You didn't know this because you didn't understand what was meant by casual, or in this case, business casual. Now you feel a bit embarrassed, as you are in a situation that you didn't foresee because you never clarified what business casual meant in this context.



BIG IDEA

When we don't confirm with one another what we heard, and what we thought someone meant, it's very possible that we could find ourselves in conflict over miscommunication. This is why it's always best to send a simple confirmation message before moving ahead.



TERM TO KNOW

Message

A "packet" of information which has been encoded and is moved from sender to receiver.



SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned **how miscommunication occurs** when the receiver of a message interprets that message in a way other than that which the sender intended. You now understand **the importance of sending confirmation messages**: by asking questions to clarify the meaning of the information you received, you can avoid any potential conflict caused by miscommunication. Good luck!

Source: Adapted from Sophia tutorial by Marlene Johnson.



TERMS TO KNOW

Message

A "packet" of information which has been encoded and is moved from sender to receiver.

Miscommunication

A state in which a receiver has interpreted a message in a way other than that intended by the sender of the message.

Receiver

In communication, the person receiving information from another.

Sender

In communication, the person moving information from him or herself to another.