

6. What do you say when you don't understand?



Don't pretend you know

Australian English can be difficult to understand. People can use a lot of expressions that you will not find in most English dictionaries or in bilingual dictionaries.

Terence used a lot of words that Jessica didn't understand but Jessica didn't clarify. She pretended she knew what he meant and there was a misunderstanding.

If you pretend you know something that you don't, it could lead to making mistakes on the job or to unfriendly relationships with your co-workers.

It is fine to say you don't understand. It is better to do this than to make a mistake because you don't know. You can say it in a way that shows you want to learn. For example, Jessica said, 'Sorry, I only understood some of what you said. I don't understand a lot of Australian terms. But I really want to learn'.

Here are some other models:

Sorry, could you repeat that? This is something I really need to know.

I know you explained how to do this, but I didn't catch all of it. Would you mind showing me again? I don't want to make a mistake.

Would you mind running through that again? I really want to do this properly.

Read Luis's story and discuss the questions with your group.

"My name is Luis, during my first week of work, another worker asked me. 'How do you find the place?' I said, 'I looked in the street directory'. He started to laugh. What he meant was, 'What do you think about working here?' I laughed too but I never made that mistake again!"

1. Have you ever had an English language misunderstanding?
2. What was the situation?
3. What was the misunderstanding?
4. Was the situation resolved and how?