

Reading and listening: International misunderstandings

1 Work in pairs. Read these situations. What do you think went wrong, and why?

1 I invited Mr Chen to join us for lunch. He hesitated before he replied and he was very vague. He didn't say it was impossible but he said it was inconvenient. I didn't understand so I asked what the problem was. Why did he seem uncomfortable?

2 I called and asked, 'Can I speak to Herr Schmidt, please?' His assistant said, 'No, he's out today but you can leave a message on his voicemail.' I'm a good customer, so why didn't she apologize and try to help me herself?

3 My Iranian neighbour often invites me in for a chat and offers me something to eat. If I say 'no thanks', ten minutes later she brings me something anyway. And when I eat it, she puts more on my plate. I don't want to be unsociable but do I have to eat everything she gives me? I'm putting on weight.


4 I got a little lost in Mumbai so I stopped a man in the street and asked, 'Can you tell me how to get to Rula College?' He didn't know the way, but he didn't tell me that. Instead he gave me wrong directions and 20 minutes later I was really lost. Why didn't he say, 'No, I can't help'?

5 I met John at a friend's house. We talked about Birmingham because it's John's home town and I often go there on business. He asked me to visit him next time I go. We didn't know one another well but I didn't want to be rude, so I asked for his address. Why did he seem surprised?

6 Maria's party was on the same day as my sister's wedding so I had to turn her invitation down. Maria was disappointed and she said, 'But you must come, all my close friends will be there.' She told me to slip away from the wedding early but how can I do that? Why did she insist?

2 Find words and phrases in the situations that mean the same as the following. The first letter of each word is given.

- 1 stopped for a moment before saying something h_____
- 2 unclear, usually because someone does not give detailed information v_____
- 3 not useful because it doesn't suit your plans or save you time i_____
- 4 refuse an invitation t_____ it d_____
- 5 unhappy because something you hoped for didn't happen d_____
- 6 disappear from an event in secret, so that nobody notices s_____ a_____
- 7 demand that someone should do something i_____


3  **1.36** Listen to some other views of these misunderstandings. Match each one to the correct situation in exercise 1. Why did the misunderstanding happen?


4 Discuss how people give and turn down invitations in your country. Do they ...


- 1 give indefinite answers like 'I'll try' when they mean 'no'?
- 2 give detailed excuses or vague ones?
- 3 insist and say things like 'You must come' when they know it's impossible?
- 4 always know if people have said 'yes' or 'no' to an invitation?

Listening: Refusing invitations

5 When did you last refuse an invitation? What was the event and why did you turn it down?

6  **1.37** Listen to Tim inviting someone to a barbecue. Why do they turn him down?

7  **1.38** Listen to Tim inviting some other people. Do they accept? Why?/Why not?

8  **1.39** Listen to the conversations again and complete the phrases in the table.



Invitations	
Preparing to invite	1 Are you _____ anything this weekend? 2 What _____ on Saturday?
Inviting	1 _____ you _____ to come? 2 _____ you _____ to come?
Positive responses	1 Oh, it's _____ of you to invite us. 2 _____ be great! _____ love to.
Saying 'no'	1 I'm _____ she's not well enough for a party. 2 _____ be lovely, _____ we're already booked.
Responding to 'no'	1 Oh, that's a _____. 2 Not to _____.
Suggesting alternatives	1 _____ love to come _____ time. 2 _____ the weekend after next _____

9 Compare the phrases in exercise 8.

- 1 How well does Tim know the people he's inviting in the two conversations?
- 2 Which phrases (1 or 2) do we use with people who are socially distant socially close?