

## BEP 34 INT – Meetings: Clarifying what was said

Welcome back to Business English Pod!

This is the first in a two-part series on clarifying. To clarify means to make clear.

Today we'll learn phrases and skills for clarifying what was *said*. For example, "I didn't quite catch that. Could you say that again?" This is useful when you don't hear clearly or when someone speaks too fast.

Then, in the second podcast, we'll be looking at language for clarifying what was *meant*, for instance "What exactly do you mean by that?"

The listening today is from a shipping company. You'll hear Wim Zeldenhuis and Andre De Vries in Rotterdam call their American colleague Benny McClenahan in Boston. First the receptionist in Benny's office picks up the phone...

### Dialog:

[sound of phone ringing]

Receptionist: Good afternoon, De Groot and Smit, this is Anna, how can I help you?

Wim: Yes, this is Wim Zeldenhuis in the Rotterdam office. I'm here with Andre De Vries.

Receptionist: Uh huh.

Wim: We have a conference scheduled with Benny McClenahan. Could you put us through?

Receptionist: Yes, of course. Sorry, I didn't quite catch your name. Mr. ...?

Wim: Zeldenhuis

Receptionist: Z-E-L...?

Benny: Z-E-L-D-E-N-H-U-I-S

Receptionist: Z-E-L-D-E-N

Benny: ...H-U-I-S. Zeldenhuis

Receptionist: Thank you. Can you hold please?

Wim: Yes, of course.

[Phone ringing]

Benny: Benny speaking. How can I help you?

Receptionist: Hi Benny. This is Anna. I've got a Mr. Zeldenhuis on the line from Rotterdam.

Benny: Sorry, who did you say?

Receptionist: Mr. Zeldenhuis. Z-E-L-D...

Benny: Ohp, I know.

Receptionist: He's calling together with a Mr. De Vries.

Benny: Great. Put them right through.

Receptionist: All right. Here they are.

Benny: Wim? Andre?

Wim: Yes! Hello Benny! This is Wim.

Andre: Hi Benny! This is Andre.

Benny: Wow, it's great to hear you two! How have you been holding up?

Wim: Sorry, Benny, I missed that. Could you say that again?

Benny: No problem. I said how have you two been doing? I hear it's cold there!

Wim: It sure is. It's freezing. There's ice everywhere.

Benny: Oh my goodness!

Andre: But it's not much better in Boston, right Benny?

Benny: No, it's not. We haven't seen weather like this for years.

Benny: So... is ice slowing down shipping on the river any? [silence]

Benny: Hello? Wim? Andre? [silence]

Benny: Maybe your phone is on mute.

Wim: Oh, sorry about that.

Benny: That's okay.

Wim: Sorry, what did you just say?

Benny: Yeah, no worries. I said, is the weather affecting shipping on the river?

Wim: [laughs] Well, I think Andre can tell you about that.

Andre: You wouldn't believe it! Of course, it doesn't affect the seagoing vessels. But on the river, we're seeing partial blockage of the...

### Listening comprehension questions:

1. What industry do Benny, Wim, Andre and Anna work in?
2. What is the name of their company?
3. What's the weather like in Rotterdam? How about Boston?
4. Why can't Benny hear Wim and Andre?

### Debrief:

All right. Now, let's go through the dialogue bit by bit.

Remember, it's very important to ask when you don't understand. That way the communication can keep going forward. Let's start at the beginning.

At first the receptionist, Anna, doesn't hear Wim's name clearly, does she? She says, "Sorry, I didn't quite catch your name." Here, "catch" means "hear" or "understand."

Wim repeats his surname, but she still doesn't catch it—perhaps because it's an unfamiliar foreign name for her.

So what does she do? She doesn't ask him to repeat again, which might irritate him. Instead, she signals to Wim to spell his surname by starting to spell it herself.

Receptionist: Z-E-L...

Wim: Z-E-L-D-E-N-H-U-I-S

Receptionist: Z-E-L-D-E-N

Wim: ...H-U-I-S. Zeldenhuis

Asking someone to spell his name is a great skill for dealing with difficult words or names.

She could have also asked:

- How do you spell that?
- Would you mind telling me how that's spelled?
- May I ask how that's spelled?
- Could you spell that for me, please?

Then, when Benny answers the phone, *he* doesn't catch Wim's surname either. How does he clarify it?

Receptionist: *Hi Benny. This is Anna. I've got a Mr. Zeldenhuis on the line from Rotterdam.*

Benny: *Sorry, who did you say?*

Benny says, "Sorry, who did you say?" You can use the same kind of sentence form (or pattern) with all of the "5 Ws"—Where, when, why, what and how, including "how much," "how many," and "how long."

A: *Tomorrow, we're going to Madras.*

B: *Sorry, where did you say?*

A: *I said Madras.*

B: *Oh, Madras.*

A: *They're arriving at 4:00 a.m. in the morning.*

B: *Pardon me, when did you say?*

A: *4:00 a.m. In the morning.*

B: *Oh dear. That's what I thought you said.*

Okay, let's get back to the dialogue. To greet Wim and Andre, Benny uses an idiomatic expression. He says, "How have you been holding up?" This means "How have you been doing?" It's informal and familiar. It's usually used to ask someone how they are doing during a difficult situation. For example,

A: *I heard it's been a hard week. How are you holding up?*

B: *Fine, I guess. Yeah, it's really tough. But we'll survive.*

Remember, Wim doesn't hear clearly or doesn't understand. Let's listen again.

Benny: *Wow, it's great to hear you two! How have you been holding up?*

Wim: *Sorry, Benny, I missed that. Could you say that again?*

"I missed that" is a useful expression for when you didn't hear clearly. You can also say:

- *I'm sorry, could you repeat that, please?*
- *Sorry, what did you say?*
- *I'm afraid I didn't catch that. Could you say that again?*
- *Sorry, I'm afraid I didn't quite hear what you just said. Would you mind saying it again?*

More informally, you can just say:

- *Pardon?*
- *Come again?*
- *What was that?*
- *Say again?*

Now, here's a question that many students ask: When do you use "it" and when do you use "that"?

Let's listen to two short dialogues:

A: My name is Karamasov.

B: Sorry, what was that?

A: My name is Karamasov.

B: Sorry, I'm afraid I didn't catch your name. Could you repeat it?

As you can see, "that" usually refers to what the other person said. "It" refers to what I just said.

Okay, let's look back at another part of the listening. It is a special case of not being able to hear.

Benny: Hello? Wim? Andre?

[silence]

Benny: Maybe your phone is on mute.

Wim: Oh, sorry about that.

Benny: That's okay.

What is happening here? Andre and Benny's phone is "on mute." "Mute" means "makes no sound." Benny could also say:

- Can you take your phone off mute?
- I think you need to hit the mute button. There. That's better.

Here's a tip. As you know, in teleconferences—especially when there three, four or more locations—you should keep your phone on mute when you're not talking to avoid background noise—or to keep your boss from hearing what you really think of her!

Finally, let's look back at the end of the dialogue. Wim says sorry for not hearing what Benny said. How does Benny respond? Listen again:

Wim: Sorry, what did you just say?

Benny: Yeah, no worries. I said, is the weather affecting shipping on the river?

When someone asks you to repeat something, you can say "no worries." This is a good informal spoken English expression. It is used for small things to say "It doesn't matter."

What else can you say? How about:

- That's fine.
- That's okay.
- No worries, that's fine.
- That's all right.

Of course, "no worries" can also mean "Don't worry—I'll take care of it."  
For example:

- A: I don't know how we are gonna be able to get this project done on time.
- B: No worries, I have a plan.

Well, that's about it for today's show. Today we've studied several different ways to clarify what was said. We've also learned some useful tips and idiomatic expressions.

In the next part of this series on clarifying, we'll be taking a close look at clarifying what was meant, which is another important skill in meetings and discussions.

In the meantime, stay well and No worries—Here at Business English Pod, we'll be working hard on ways to help you keep your English off mute! Thanks for listening, and see you next time!

### Language review:

Choose the appropriate question from the box below to clarify the following statements:

Sorry, how many was that?	May I ask how that's spelled?
Sorry I missed that, who did say?	When did you say?

1. *Lets meet at 12.15.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. *I'd like to order 33 sandwiches for our sales meeting.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. *Just let him know John Higinbottom called.*  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. *I met Frank from Cemex at the conference and he said they expect strong demand in the second quarter from Chinese customers.*  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Useful Language:

### Asking someone to spell his or her name:

- How do you spell that?
- Would you mind telling me how that's spelled?
- May I ask how that's spelled?
- Could you spell that for me, please?

### Using the "5 Whs"—Where, when, why, what and how – to clarify a particular type of information:

A: Tomorrow, we're going to Madras.

B: Sorry, where did you say?

A: I said Madras.

B: Oh, Madras.

A: They're arriving at 4:00 a.m. in the morning.

B: Pardon me, when did you say?

A: 4:00 a.m. In the morning.

B: Oh dear. That's what I thought you said.

### Asking someone to repeat information:

- I'm sorry, could you repeat that, please?
- Sorry, what did you say?
- I'm afraid I didn't catch that. Could you say that again?
- Sorry, I'm afraid I didn't quite hear what you just said. Would you mind saying it again?

### More informally, you can just say:

- Pardon?
- Come again?
- What was that?
- Say again?

### Informally acknowledging:

- That's fine.
- That's okay.
- No worries, that's fine.
- That's all right.

## Answers

### Listening Comprehension:

1. Shipping
2. De Groot and Smit
3. It's very cold in both cities
4. Their phone is on mute

### Language review:

1. When did you say?
2. Sorry, how many was that?
3. May I ask how that's spelled?
4. Sorry I missed that, who did say?