

BULLETIN OF 17 JULY 1979 Remimeo Issue I Word Clearers Tech Staff Word Clearing Series 64

***THE MISUNDERSTOOD WORD
DEFINED***

Ref: HCOB 23 Mar 78RA Word Clearing Series 59RA Rev. 14.11.79 CLEARING WORDS HCOB 25 Jun 71R Word Clearing Series 5R Rev. 25.11.74 BARRIERS TO STUDY HCOB 26 Mar 79RB Esto Series 35RB Rev. 2.9.79 Word Clearing Series 60RB Product Debug Series 7R MISUNDERSTOOD WORDS AND CYCLES OF ACTION

“MIS-UNDERSTOOD” or “NOT-UNDERSTOOD” are terms used to define any error or omission in comprehension of a word, concept, symbol or status.

Most people go around thinking that a misunderstood is just something they obviously don't know—a “not-understood.”

A “not-understood” is a misunderstood but there are additional ways a person can misunderstand a word.

A MISUNDERSTOOD WORD OR SYMBOL IS DEFINED AS A WORD OR SYMBOL FOR WHICH THE STUDENT HAS:

1. A FALSE {TOTALLY WRONG) DEFINITION: A definition that has no relationship to the actual meaning of the word or symbol whatsoever.

Example: The person reads or hears the word “cat” and thinks that “cat” means “box.” You can't get more wrong.

Example: A person sees an equals sign (=) and thinks it means to subtract something twice.

2. AN INVENTED DEFINITION: An invented definition is a version of a false definition. The person has made it up himself or has been given an invented definition. Not knowing the actual definition he invents one for it. This is sometimes difficult to detect because he is certain he knows it, after all he invented it himself. There is enough protest preceding his invention of it to make it read on a meter. In such a case he will be certain he knows the definition of the word or symbol.

Example: The person when very young was always called “a girl” by his pals when he refused to do anything daring. He invents the definition of “girl” to be “a cowardly person.”

Example: A person never knew the meaning of the symbol for an exclamation point (!) but seeing it in comic strips as representing swear words invents the definition for it “a foul curse” and regards it accordingly in everything he reads.

3. AN INCORRECT DEFINITION: A definition that is not right but may have some relationship to the word or symbol or be in a similar category.

Example: The person reads or hears the word “computer” and thinks it is “type-writer.” This is an incorrect meaning for “computer” even though a typewriter and a computer are both types of machines.

Example: A person thinks a period (.) after an abbreviation means that you halt in reading at that point.

4. AN INCOMPLETE DEFINITION: A definition that is inadequate.

Example: The person reads the word “office” and thinks it means “room.” The definition of the word “office” is: “a room or building in which a person transacts his business or carries on his stated occupation.” (Ref: Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language) The person’s definition is incomplete for the word “office.”

Example: The person sees an apostrophe (') and knows that it means that something is owned (’s) but does not know that it also is used to show that a letter has been left out of a word. He sees the word “can’t” and immediately tries to figure out who can is.

5. AN UNSUITABLE DEFINITION: A definition that does not fit the word as it is used in the context of the sentence one has heard or read.

Example: The person hears the sentence: “I am dressing a turkey.” The person’s understanding of “dressing” is “putting clothes on.” That is one definition of “dressing” but it is an unsuitable definition for the word as it is used in the sentence he has heard. Because he has an unsuitable definition he thinks someone is putting clothes on a turkey. As a result the sentence he has heard doesn’t really make sense to him. The definition of “dressing” that correctly applies in the sentence he has heard is: “to prepared for use as food, by making ready to cook, or by cooking.” (Ref: The Oxford English Dictionary)

The person will only truly understand what he is hearing when he has fully cleared the word “dressing” in all its meanings. as he will then also have the definition that correctly applies in the context.

Example: The person sees a dash (-) in the sentence: “I finished numbers 3 - 7 today.” He thinks a dash is a minus sign, realizes you cannot subtract 7 from 3 and so cannot understand it.

6. A HOMONYMIC (one word which has two or more distinctly separate meanings) DEFINITION: A homonym is a word that is used to designate several different things which have totally different meanings; or a homonym can be one of two or more words that have the same sound, sometimes the same spelling, but differ in meaning.

Example: The person reads the sentence: “I like to box.” The person understands this sentence to mean that someone likes to put things in “containers.”

The person has the right meaning for the word “box,” but he has the wrong word! There is another word “box” which is being used in the sentence he has just read and means: “to fight another in a boxing match.” (Ref: Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language)

The person has a misunderstood because he has a homonymic definition for the word “box” and will have to clear the second word “box” before he understands the sentence.

Example: The person sees a plus sign (+) and as it resembles a cross he thinks it is something religious.

Example: The person hears the word “period” in the sentence: “It was a disorderly period in history” and knowing that “period” comes at the end of a sentence and means stop, supposes that the world ended at that point.

Example: Homonymic misunderstands can also occur when a person does not know the informal or slang usage of a word. The person hears someone on the radio singing: “When my Honey walks down the street.” The person thinks a “thick, sweet, yellow or golden liquid, good to eat, that bees make out of the nectar they collect from flowers” is walking down the street! He doesn’t know the informal definition of “honey” which is: “sweet one: a

pet name.” which is how it is being used in the song. (Ref: Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language)

7. A SUBSTITUTE {SYNONYM—a word which has a similar but not the same meaning)
DEFINITION: A substitute definition occurs when a person uses a synonym for the definition of a word. A synonym is not a definition. A synonym is a word having a meaning similar to that of another word.

Example: The person reads the word “portly” and thinks the definition of the word is “fat.” “Fat” is a synonym for the word “portly.” The person has a mis-understood because the word “portly” means: “of a stately appearance and carriage; impressive, especially on account of size.” (Ref: Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language)
The person does not have the full meaning of “portly” if he thinks it just means “fat.”

Knowing synonyms for words increases your vocabulary but it does not mean you understand the meaning of a word. Learn the full definition for a word as well as its synonyms.

8. AN OMITTED {MISSING} DEFINITION: An omitted definition is a definition of a word that the person is missing or is omitted from the dictionary he is using.

Example: The person hears the line “The food here is too rich.” This person knows two definitions for the word “rich.” He knows that “rich” means “having much money, land, goods, etc.” and “wealthy people.” Neither of these definitions make much sense to him in the sentence he has just heard. He cannot understand what food could have to do with having a lot of money.

Omitted definitions can come about from using dinky dictionaries. If the person had looked up “rich” in a small paperback dictionary, he would probably still be stuck with his misunderstood. A dinky dictionary probably will not give him the definition he needs. In order to understand the word he would have to get a good sized dictionary to ensure it gives him the omitted definition which is: “having in a high degree qualities pleasing to the senses; luscious to the taste: often implying an unwholesome excess of butter, fats, flavoring, etc.” (Ref: Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language)

Example: The person reads “He estimated the light at f 5.6.” He can’t figure what this “f” is, so he looks up “f” in the American Heritage Dictionary and wonders if it is temperature or money or sports for “foul” or maybe the money “franc.” The text doesn’t refer to France so he can’t figure it out. Omitted in the American Heritage is the photography definition of “f” which simply means “the number which shows the width of the hole the light goes through in the lens.” The moral of this is to have enough dictionaries around.

NOTE: It can occur that an accurate definition for a word is not given in any dictionary which is an error in the language itself.

9. A NO-DEFINITION: A no-definition is a “not-understood” word or symbol.

Example: The person reads the sentence “The business produced no lucre.” No understanding occurs, as he has no definition for “lucre.” The word means:

“money, especially as the object of greed; gain.” (Ref: Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of the English Language) It isn’t that he has the word in-correctly, unsuitable or any other way defined, he has no definition for it at all. He has never looked it up and gotten it defined. Thus he does not understand it. The definition does not exist for him until he looks it up and gets it clearly understood .

Example: The person sees a dot at the end of a word on a printed page and having no definition for “a period (.)” tends to run all of his sentences together.

10. A REJECTED DEFINITION: A rejected definition is a definition of a word which the person will not accept. The reasons why he will not accept it are usually based on emotional reactions connected with it. The person finds the definition degrading to himself or his friends or group in some imagined way or restimulative to him in some fashion. Although he may have a total misunderstanding on the word he may refuse to have it explained or look it up.

Example: The person refuses to look up the word "mathematics." He doesn't know what it means, he doesn't want to know what it means, and he won't have anything to do with it. A discussion of why he refuses to look it up discloses that he was expelled from school because he flunked with violence his first month of his first course in mathematics. If he were to realize that he flunked because he didn't know what he was supposed to study he would then be willing to look the word up.

Example: The person refuses to look up the definition of asterisk (*). On discussion it turns out that every time he sees an asterisk on the page he knows the material will be "very hard to read" and is "literary," "difficult" and "highbrow."

Discussion of why he won't look it up usually reveals and releases the emotional charge connected with it which he may never have looked at before. Properly handled he will now want to look it up, having gained an insight into why he wouldn't.

Any word you come across which fits one or more of the above definitions of a misunderstood word or symbol must be cleared up, using a good size dictionary or more than one dictionary or text book or encyclopedia.

It is catastrophic to go on past or ignore a misunderstood word or symbol as one simply will not understand what he is studying.

A student must discipline himself not to go past misunderstood words. He should learn to recognize from his reaction to what he is reading, especially the mental blankness which usually ensues right after one, that he has gone by a misunderstood. He should look them up and get them fully defined before going on with his reading. Students must be persuaded to do this. It is a self-discipline that has to be learned.

The definitions of "misunderstood" and "not-understood" and their different types, must be clearly understood by a person seeking to clear them in himself and others. The commonest error in Word Clearing is for the person being word cleared to believe that a misunderstood is something he simply does not know. With this limited definition he cannot adequately be word cleared nor can he adequately word clear others. So these definitions of "misunderstood" and "not-understood" should be very well known as it will often be necessary to clarify them to the person being word cleared.

Good reading.

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