Checking and clarifying politeness competition game
What is wrong with all the sentences below?

Eh?/ What?/ Say what?/ Say what now?

You've lost me./ I don't get it./ I have no idea what you are trying to say!/ It's all Greek to me./ It all sounds like gobbledegook./ That's as clear as mud.

I still don't get it./ Now I'm even more confused.

Please repeat./ Say again./ Once more.

That's…, right?

What you want to say is…, right?

That can't be right./ Surely you mean.../ You meant to say…, right?

Meaning…, right?

For example?/ Like what?

What on earth does… mean?/ Meaning?/ And that means?

And?/ So?/ Go on./ You haven't explained… properly.

You're speaking too quietly./ I can't hear you./ Speak up!

Slow down!/ Don't speak so fast!/ Too fast!

What's that in normal English?

Please try to say that another way.

Please spell that./ Spelling?

What's that in Japan?/ Japanese please.

Obviously I mean…/ Any idiot should be able to see that I mean…

… which everyone knows means…

If you need a simpler explanation,…

To explain it for someone like you,…

But you're not studying International Development, so you probably wouldn't understand.

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You don’t know how to spell that, do you?

You look like you have no idea what I’m talking about./ You’re staring at me with a blank face./ I’m not seeing the spark of comprehension.

You probably won’t understand that explanation, so…

Am I speaking slowly enough for you?

Do you understand?/ Do you understand what I said?/ Got it?/ Are you still with me?/ Understood?

Is that clear?/ Got it so far?

Do you understand the word…?

Choose one sentence above and take turns trying to make it more and more polite, e.g. by using longer phrases, until no one can take it further. Discuss which of those is probably most suitable for your own real communication in English, then repeat with other sentences above until your teacher stops you.

Try to use these key words to make more polite versions of the sentences above. Most words can be used more than once.

- afraid
- bit
- can
- could
- if
- just
- little
- more
- not really
- perhaps
- probably
- properly
- quite
- seem
- somewhat
- sorry
- would

Compare your ideas with the answer key.

Can you make any medium level ones, for example by editing down the super polite ones?

The sentences above are arranged by function. Try to draw a line across the list to make eight categories.

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Match those sections to these functions:
Asking for (more) explanation

Asking for changes in how something is explained

Checking the other person's understanding in general

Checking the other person's understanding of something specific

Checking your understanding

Giving more explanation

Mentioning the other person's (probable) lack of understanding

Showing a general lack of understanding

Brainstorm more suitable sentences for each function.

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Suggested answers without categories

- Eh?/ What?/ Say what?/ Say what now? – Pardon?/ Sorry?/ I'm afraid I didn't catch that. NOT I do beg your pardon RARE Beg your pardon
- You've lost me./ I don't get it./ I have absolutely no idea what you are trying to say!/ It's all Greek to me./ It all sounds like gobbledegook./ That's about as clear as mud. – I'm afraid I'm not really following what you are saying.
- I still don't get it./ Now I'm even more confused. – I could still do with a little more explanation./ I still don't quite understand./ I might be starting to understand, but…/ I'm afraid that hasn't really entirely cleared it up for me./ Can you explain it just one more time?
- Please repeat./ Say again./ Once more. – Can you say that again?/ Can you say that just one more time?/ Can you repeat what you just said?/ I didn't catch all of that.

- That's…, right? – Is that…?/ Am I right in thinking that it is…?
- What you want to say is…, right? – So, if I understand you correctly,…
- That can't be right./ Surely you mean.../ You meant to say…, right? – Do you perhaps mean…?/ Did you mean to say…?
- Meaning…, right? - Does that mean…? / So, would I be right in saying…?/ So, would it be correct to say that…?/ What I understand from that is…

- For example?/ Like what? – Could you give me an example (of the kind of thing you mean)?
- What on earth does… mean?/ Meaning?/ And that means? – What do you mean by…?
- And?/ So?/ Go on./ You haven't explained… properly. – Can you explain a little more about…?/ … could perhaps do with a bit more explanation./ Can you explain that in a little more detail?/ I could do with some more explanation of…/ Some more explanation (of…) might make it a bit clearer for me.

- You're speaking too quietly./ I can't hear you./ Speak up! – I'm having problems hearing you./ It's quite loud in here, so…/
- Slow down!/ Don't speak so fast!/ Too fast! – (I'm afraid I'm not keeping up). Can you speak a little more slowly?
- What's that in normal English? - Can you explain that in layperson's terms?
- Please try to say that another way. - Can you explain that another way?/ Can you explain… another way?/ Can you put that in other words?/ Is there another way of saying…?
- Please spell that./ Spelling? - Can you spell… (for me)?/ How do you spell that/…?
- What's that in Japan?/ Japanese please. – How would you (directly) translate that into Japanese?/ How would you say that in Japanese?

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- Obviously I mean…/ Any idiot should be able to see that I mean… - Hopefully it's clear that I mean…/ Hopefully I've made it obvious that…
- … which everyone knows means… - … , which is (commonly/ usually) defined as …/ The most common definition of that is…/ The term is used here in its usual sense of…
- If you need a simpler explanation,… - A simpler (but less precise) definition/ explanation is…/ In simpler terms,…/ Simply put,…/ To simplify (somewhat/ quite a lot),…
- To explain it for someone like you,… - In layperson's terms,…

- But you're not studying International Development, so you probably wouldn't understand. - That isn't widely known by people outside my field, so…
- You don't know how to spell that, do you? – That's quite difficult to spell./ Not many people know how to spell that./ I'm not sure if you will know how to spell that or not.
- You look like you have no idea what I'm talking about./ You're staring at me with a blank face./ I'm not seeing the spark of comprehension. – You don't seem entirely happy with my explanation, so…/ I can see from your face that I haven't explained it properly, so…/ I can tell from your voice that it still need some more explanation so…
- You probably won't understand that explanation, so… - Not many people understand that explanation, so…/ That's probably not a good enough explanation, so…

- Am I speaking slowly enough for you? – Am I going through it too quickly?
- Do you understand?/ Do you understand what I said?/ Got it?/ Are you still with me?/ Understood? – Have I explained myself properly?
- Is that clear?/ Got it so far? – Is that (all) clear so far?/ Does anything need explaining before I move on?

- Do you understand the word…? – Are you familiar with the word…?/ Have you come across the word… (before)?/ I don't know if you've come across that (word/ term/ concept) before./ Are you familiar with the term/ word/ concept (…)?

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Suggested answers with categories
Showing a general lack of understanding

- Eh?/ What?/ Say what?/ Say what now? – Pardon?/ Sorry?/ I'm afraid I didn't catch that. NOT I do beg your pardon RARE Beg your pardon
- You've lost me./ I don't get it./ I have absolutely no idea what you are trying to say!/ It's all Greek to me./ It all sounds like gobbledegook./ That's about as clear as mud. – I'm afraid I'm not really following what you are saying.
- I still don't get it./ Now I'm even more confused. – I could still do with a little more explanation./ I still don't quite understand./ I might be starting to understand, but…/ I'm afraid that hasn't really entirely cleared it up for me./ Can you explain it just one more time?
- Please repeat./ Say again./ Once more. – Can you say that again?/ Can you say that just one more time?/ Can you repeat what you just said?/ I didn't catch all of that.

Checking your understanding

- That's…, right? – Is that…?/ Am I right in thinking that it is…?
- What you want to say is…, right? – So, if I understand you correctly,…
- That can't be right./ Surely you mean.../ You meant to say…, right? – Do you perhaps mean…?/ Did you mean to say…?
- Meaning…, right? - Does that mean…? / So, would I be right in saying…?/ So, would it be correct to say that…?/ What I understand from that is…

Asking for (more) explanation

- For example?/ Like what? – Could you give me an example (of the kind of thing you mean)?
- What on earth does… mean?/ Meaning?/ And that means? – What do you mean by…?
- And?/ So?/ Go on./ You haven't explained… properly. – Can you explain a little more about…?/ … could perhaps do with a bit more explanation./ Can you explain that in a little more detail?/ I could do with some more explanation of…/ Some more explanation (of…) might make it a bit clearer for me.

Asking for changes in how something is explained

- You're speaking too quietly./ I can't hear you./ Speak up! – I'm having problems hearing you./ It's quite loud in here, so…/
- Slow down!/ Don't speak so fast!/ Too fast! – (I'm afraid I'm not keeping up). Can you speak a little more slowly?
- What's that in normal English? - Can you explain that in layperson's terms?
- Please try to say that another way. - Can you explain that another way?/ Can you explain… another way?/ Can you put that in other words?/ Is there another way of saying…?
- Please spell that./ Spelling? - Can you spell… (for me)?/ How do you spell that/…?
- What's that in Japan?/ Japanese please. – How would you (directly) translate that into Japanese?/ How would you say that in Japanese?

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Giving more explanation

- Obviously I mean…/ Any idiot should be able to see that I mean… - Hopefully it's clear that I mean…/ Hopefully I've made it obvious that…
- … which everyone knows means… - … , which is (commonly/ usually) defined as …/ The most common definition of that is…/ The term is used here in its usual sense of…
- If you need a simpler explanation,… - A simpler (but less precise) definition/ explanation is…/ In simpler terms,…/ Simply put,…/ To simplify (somewhat/ quite a lot),…
- To explain it for someone like you,… - In layperson's terms,…

Mentioning the other person's (probable) lack of understanding

- But you're not studying International Development, so you probably wouldn't understand. - That isn't widely known by people outside my field, so…
- You don't know how to spell that, do you? – That's quite difficult to spell./ Not many people know how to spell that./ I'm not sure if you will know how to spell that or not.
- You look like you have no idea what I'm talking about./ You're staring at me with a blank face./ I'm not seeing the spark of comprehension. – You don't seem entirely happy with my explanation, so…/ I can see from your face that I haven't explained it properly, so…/ I can tell from your voice that it still need some more explanation so…
- You probably won't understand that explanation, so… - Not many people understand that explanation, so…/ That's probably not a good enough explanation, so…

Checking the other person's understanding in general

- Am I speaking slowly enough for you? – Am I going through it too quickly?
- Do you understand?/ Do you understand what I said?/ Got it?/ Are you still with me? – Have I explained myself properly?
- Is that clear?/ Got it so far? – Is that (all) clear so far?/ Does anything need explaining before I move on?

Checking the other person's understanding of something specific

- Do you understand the word…? – Are you familiar with the word…?/ Have you come across the word… (before)?/ I don't know if you've come across that (word/ term/ concept) before./ Are you familiar with the term/ word/ concept (…)?

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