

CONVERSATION REPAIR

Often when two people are having a discussion or conversation, there are temporary breakdowns in communication. If these minor breaks in communication are not repaired, the entire exchange is soon lost. There are different types of breakdowns and several ways of repairing each type.

PROBLEM: The listener didn't hear what the speaker said.

SOLUTIONS: "I'm sorry, could you repeat that?"
(listener) "I didn't catch the last thing you said."
"What was that?"
"Could you repeat the part about...?"
"I'm sorry; I didn't hear what you said."
"What did you say?"
"How's that again?"
"Say what?"
"Come again?"
"What?"
"Huh?"
Gesture with the hand to get the speaker to slow down.

PROBLEM: The listener thinks he/she understood a student or conversation (or at least, part of it), but wants to check his/her understanding of what the speaker said.

SOLUTION: Repeat the last utterance or part of it with a question intonation.
(Echo question)
Repeat the last utterance or part of it with a declarative intonation.
Repeat the last utterance or part of it up to the break and add an appropriate Wh- question word.
Paraphrase the part that wasn't understood. (e.g., "So you mean" "Did you mean...?")