



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

GLOSSARY

to dispute – to disagree about something, especially to challenge the accuracy of something; to argue

* The two countries are disputing ownership of the islands in the sea between their two territories.

billing error – a mistake in calculating the amount of money that is owed

* I was billed twice last month. Could you please check to see if your system made a billing error?

statement – a written report about all activity in an account over the past month or other period of time

* The bank statement shows that we spent more than \$600 in restaurants last month.

past due – overdue; not paid on time and still needing to be paid; an outstanding balance

* Your account is 45 days past due. If we do not receive your payment by the end of the month, we will cut off your electric service.

to report – to officially notify; to provide information on something

* The gas company asks residents to report any gas leaks.

corrected – fixed or repaired; rewritten to make something accurate

* After our credit card was stolen, it took months to get our credit history corrected.

record – written, detailed information; documentation of what has happened

* All of the details about the theft are in the police record.

look – a word used to get someone's attention and ask them to understand what one is saying or showing

* Look, if we can't come to an agreement, we'll need to hire lawyers and that will get very expensive, so let's try again.

sorted out – arranged and organized so that a solution can be found

* It took us a while to get all the details sorted out, but now we're finally ready to proceed.



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

disconnected – no longer connected; no longer providing service

* They installed solar panels so that they could be disconnected from the city's electric service.

to reflect – to show; to indicate; to result from

* This report reflects the auditor's conclusions of the company's financial position.

usage plan – an agreement with a phone company about how much one will pay for a certain number of phone minutes and/or Internet data

* This usage plan gives us 300 daytime minutes each month, plus unlimited calls on nights and weekends.

to upgrade – to improve one's account or service so that one receives additional service or benefits

* If you upgrade to the hotel's Gold level, you'll get a two-room suite for the price of a regular room.

overage charge – a fee paid when one uses too much of something; money that must be paid if one goes over certain limits

* Last month, I used my cell phone more than usual, so I had to pay some overage charges.

allotted – allowed and designated for a particular purpose

* I should have allotted more time for studying for that exam. There is more material to learn than I thought.

limit – the maximum allowable amount of something; the upper extreme or boundary

* Their payment was denied because they had reached the limit on their credit card.

to escalate – to move something to a higher level, especially to get more senior people involved in addressing a complaint or resolving a problem

* If the customer remains dissatisfied, please escalate the complaint to the director of customer service.

supervisor – boss; manager; a person whose job is to support, direct, and evaluate other employees' work

* The new supervisor doesn't care if we work from home or the office as long as we get all of our work done on time.



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COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What does Bob mean when he says, “I just want to get this sorted out”?
 - a) He wants to hear an apology.
 - b) He wants to find a solution.
 - c) He wants to file a formal complaint.

 2. Why would you pay overage charges?
 - a) If you were responsible for a billing error
 - b) If your service were disconnected
 - c) If you exceeded your monthly limit
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

statement

The word “statement,” in this podcast, means a written report about all activity in an account over the past month, quarter, other time period: “These statements show how much money we’ve made from our investments.” A “statement” is also something that one says or writes, but not a question or command: “The president’s statements about the healthcare program are very controversial.” The phrase “to make a statement” means to do or wear something that presents a strong idea and changes how other people think about oneself: “That short dress certainly made a statement at the office!” Finally, a “mission statement” is a sentence that explains why an organization exists: “Our company’s mission statement is to organize our clients’ information and make it easily accessible and useful.”

look

In this podcast, the word “look” is a word used to get someone’s attention and ask them to understand what one is saying or showing: “Look, I’m sorry I hurt your feelings, but I didn’t mean to insult you.” The word “look” also refers to one’s appearance, including clothing and hair: “Sheila prefers a very sophisticated look, but her brother likes a more casual look.” The phrase “to look up” means to find a piece of information in a directory, manual, or database: “I need to look up the plumber’s phone number.” The phrase “to look down on (someone or something)” means to judge and determine that one is better than someone or something: “William looks down on poor people.” Finally, the phrase “to look the other way” means to ignore something or pretend that something isn’t happening or doesn’t exist: “How can you look the other way when so many people are homeless and hungry?”



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

CULTURE NOTE

Consumer Reports

Consumer Reports is an American magazine that publishes “detailed” (with a lot of specific information) “reviews” (opinions about the value and worth of something) of “consumer products” (things that are purchased and used by individuals, not by businesses). Since 1936, Consumer Reports has conducted careful “product testing” (efforts to determine whether a product does what it is supposed to do) and “research” (efforts to learn more about something in a systematic and scientific way). It has become a “trusted” (believed and respected) “household name” (something that almost everyone is familiar with) for American “consumers” (people who buy things).

“Manufacturers” (companies that make products) are not allowed to use “favorable” (positive) Consumer Reports reviews in their advertisements. However, they sometimes improve their products to “address” (deal with and respond to) “shortcomings” (problems; weaknesses) in their products that were identified in the reviews. For example, when Consumer Reports didn’t recommend the Nissan Murano, a “sports utility vehicle” (a vehicle with four-wheel drive) in 2003 because it had “stiff” (difficult to move) “steering” (moving left or right, usually of a wheel), Nissan improved the steering in its 2005 model, which did receive the magazine’s recommendation.

There are now about seven million “subscribers” (people who pay to receive something regularly) for the “print” (in print; on paper) and online versions of Consumer Reports.

To maintain “objectivity” (the ability to observe and evaluate something without being pressured to reach certain conclusions), the magazine never accepts money from advertisers. However, the Consumer Reports website does show ads for “retailers” (stores that sell products to consumers). The company “largely” (mostly) “relies” (depends) on “revenues” (money that one receives) from its “buying guides” (detailed information on products to help shoppers make good buying decisions).

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – b; 2 – c



COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 1,303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode 1,303. I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from the Center for Educational Development in beautiful Los Angeles, California.

Go to ESLPod.com for more information about us. This episode is a dialogue between Regina and Bob about a problem with Bob's bill – the indication of how much he should pay a certain company. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Regina: Hello, this is Horizon. My name is Regina. How may I help you today?

Bob: I'm calling to dispute my bill. There's a billing error.

Regina: Let me take a look at your statement. Your last bill was \$650 and it is past due.

Bob: It's past due because this is the third time I've called to report the problem, but my bill still hasn't been corrected. My bill is normally \$65 a month.

Regina: I'm looking at your account and I don't see a record of any previous calls about this problem.

Bob: I called last week and the week before. Look, I just want to get this sorted out so I can pay my bill before my service is disconnected.

Regina: I understand. Your bill may reflect changes you've made to your usage plan, such as upgrading to a more expensive plan.

Bob: I've made no changes to my usage plan. I've had the same plan for eight months.

Regina: Your bill may also reflect overage charges if you went over your allotted minutes or data.

Bob: I haven't gone over my limit. Can my case be escalated so that I can speak with a supervisor?



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

Regina: Certainly, sir. Let me have a supervisor call you back when she's available.

Bob: Will that be today?

Regina: I can't tell you that, sir.

Bob: I just hope she calls me back before my service is [call ends].

[end of dialogue]

Regina that begins our dialogue by saying, "Hello, this is Horizon." She's answering the phone, of course. She works for a company called "Horizon." She says, "My name is Regina. How may I help you today?" Bob says, "I'm calling to dispute my bill. There's a billing error," he says. Your "bill" is usually a piece of paper, though nowadays it could be an email that you get from a company, telling you how much you have to pay for some product or service that you buy from that company.

Bob says that there is a problem with his bill. There is a "billing error" (error). An "error" is a mistake. A "billing error" is a mistake in the amount of money that the company says you have to pay. Bob is calling "to dispute" (dispute) his bill. "To dispute" means to disagree about something, especially when you think there is something wrong. In this case, Bob thinks there's something wrong with his bill, so he's disputing it. He's saying "No, that's wrong, that's incorrect." We often use this verb when there are problems with money and the amount of money on a bill.

Regina says, "Let me take a look at your statement." A "statement" (statement) here refers to a written report – or again, nowadays, an electronic report – that shows all of your financial activity over a certain period of time. For example, many of us have credit cards. Every month, the credit card company sends us a "statement" which has a list of all the things we bought with our credit card as well as how much money we paid to the credit card company during that same area of time. That's a "statement." Regina is going to look at Bob's statement – electronically, of course.

She says, "Your last bill was \$650 and it is past due." If a bill is "past (past) due (due)," it is late. It has not been paid on time and still needs to be paid. We may also use the term "overdue" (overdue). A bill that is "overdue" or "past due" is a bill that has not been paid on time. So if you have to pay your rent on the first of



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

the month, and you don't pay it for five days or 10 days, the rent is "overdue." It's past due. You are late.

Bob says that his bill is "past due because," he explains, "this is the third time I've called to report the problem, but my bill still hasn't been corrected." Bob says yes, my bill is past due, but that's because there's a problem with it, and I have called to report it but it has not been corrected. "To report" (report) means to give someone information about something. It's often used to mean to officially notify someone.

"To notify" (notify) means to tell someone, but usually in a formal way or in a way that is used, say, in a business or governmental situation. You "notify" the government that you are not going to pay your taxes this year, and the government notifies you that you will be going to jail. That's how it works here in the U.S. sometimes.

Bob reported a problem to this company that has not been corrected – that is, it hasn't been fixed. There's an error that is still present on his bill. He says normally his bill is \$65 dollars a month, not \$650, which is what the company says it is. Regina says, "I'm looking at your account and I don't see a record of any previous calls about this problem." A "previous call" would be a phone call that Bob made in the past.

Regina says she doesn't see a "record" (record) of any previous calls. A record would be some written detailed information, probably in the computer system of the company, showing that Bob, in fact, called. Bob says, "I called last week and the week before." Then he says, "Look, I just want to get this sorted out so I can pay my bill before my service is disconnected."

The use of the word "Look" (look) in this sentence is to get someone's attention. In conversational English, if we want a person to pay attention, perhaps because he hasn't been listening very closely up to this point, we might say, "Look." We might also say, "Listen." They mean the same thing, even though of course "look" is something you do with your eyes, and "listen" is something you do with your ears. The point is that we're not saying they should actually look with their eyes, but rather that they should listen to what you're saying.

Bob says, "Look, I just want to get this sorted out." "To sort (sort) out" something, in this case, means to fix the problem, to take care of this situation, to find a solution to the problem. "To sort out" can also mean to take a group of things and put them in different categories. But here, "to sort out" means to get fixed. Bob



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

wants to sort out this problem. Why? Because he doesn't want his service with this company, whatever this company does for him, "to be disconnected."

It sounds like Horizon is a phone company, no relation to an actual phone company here in the United States called "Verizon." No relation at all. The service that Bob gets, we're guessing his telephone service, "may get disconnected." "To disconnect" (disconnect) means to stop providing service to someone. We usually use this verb "to connect" and the opposite, "to disconnect," when we're talking about telephone service. If your telephone service gets "disconnected," you no longer have it. The company will no longer provide you that service.

Regina says, "I understand. Your bill may reflect changes you made to your usage plan, such as upgrading to a more expensive plan." Regina is saying that, in effect, Bob is wrong. She says that perhaps the bill, that has a much higher cost than Bob says it should, just "reflects changes" he's made to his usage plan. "To reflect" (reflect) means to show or to indicate or to result from. Regina is saying that perhaps Bob made changes to his "usage (usage) plan."

Your "usage plan" is an agreement you have with your phone company about how many minutes you're going to use every month, how much time you're going to talk on your phone, or how much data you're going to use. "Data" would refer to using the internet on a smartphone or an app. "To upgrade (upgrade) to a more expensive plan" means to go from using, say, five hours of time every month, to 10 hours of time every month, or from using one gigabyte of data to two gigabytes of data.

Many phone companies, especially cell phone companies, have the option of upgrading plans, meaning you can get more service by paying more money. That's what Regina is suggesting happened to Bob – that he upgraded his plan and that's why it's costing him more money. But Bob says no, no, no. "I've made no changes to my usage plan. I've had the same plan for eight months," he says.

Regina says, "Your bill may also reflect overage charges if you went over your allotted minutes or data." In the U.S., if you talk too much on your cell phone or you use too much data on your smartphone, you may have to pay extra money. That's called "overage (overage) charges (charges)." "Overage" means you've used too much. You've gone over your limit.

Every month, most people are allotted a certain number of minutes or a certain amount of data. "To allot" (allot) means to give someone a certain amount of something. We say that you are "allotted" a certain number of minutes or data on



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

your phone by the phone company. They give you a certain amount that you can use. Bob complains, however, that he has not gone over his limit – the maximum amount that he can use. “Can my case be escalated so that I can speak with a supervisor?” he asks.

When you are talking to a company, usually the first person you talk to works for the company but may not have a lot of power to change things, especially if you are disputing your bill. That’s why Bob asks for his “case,” meaning his problem, “to be escalated” (escalated). “To escalate” nowadays means to have your complaint given to someone with more authority or more power in the company.

I don’t remember this verb when I was growing up to be used in this case, but nowadays, especially when a lot of what we call “customer service” – where a company takes care of problems for customers or clients – is done over the telephone, we now have this verb of “escalating a problem” – making someone responsible for it who has more power than the first person you talk to in a company.

Usually after talking to the first person who answers the phone, you are given to someone with more authority, someone called a “supervisor” (supervisor). A “supervisor” is a manager or a boss, someone who is responsible for other people and someone for whom you would want to ask if you have a problem that the first person you talk to can’t solve.

Regina says, “Certainly, sir. Let me have a supervisor call you back when she’s available.” In other words, Regina will take down Bob’s name and number, write it down, and give it to a supervisor so that the supervisor can call Bob back. Bob asks, “Will that be today?” meaning “Will she call me today?” Regina says, “I can’t tell you that, sir,” meaning probably she doesn’t know.

Bob says, “I just hope she calls me back before my service is” – and then suddenly the phone call, the conversation between Regina and Bob, ends. The idea here of course, and the joke, is that Bob’s phone service has ended because he hasn’t paid his bill. We know he hasn’t paid his bill because of a problem that Horizon apparently has made with his bill or has caused, and now he doesn’t have phone service so that the supervisor won’t be able to talk to him after all. This, of course, is the worst possible case for poor Bob.

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]



ESL Podcast 1303 – Disputing an Incorrect Bill

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[end of dialogue]

There's no disputing the fact that we have the best scriptwriter on the internet here at ESL Podcast. I speak, of course, of the wonderful Dr. Lucy Tse.



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From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Thanks for listening. Come back and listen to us again right here on ESL Podcast.

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