

How Bad Is the Problem? Minor, Serious or Urgent?

English learning resource · EN

Full episode script · English

89 lines

Study task: Listen again and notice the expressions you studied.

Martin, we have three problems before tomorrow's community event.

How bad are they?

The first is a spelling mistake in a draft handout.

That sounds minor.

The second is a funding gap that could cancel next month's free classes.

That is serious.

And water is leaking above an electrical socket right now.

That is urgent.

And I am moving away from the socket.

Good decision.

Three problems, three precise words.

Welcome to Your English Toolbox and Practice Arena Five-Minute English.

I am Martin.

And I am Julia.

Today we are learning how to describe problems precisely with minor, serious and urgent.

These words do not simply mean small, medium and large.

One focuses on limited consequences, one on severity and one on time.

Let us begin with minor.

A minor problem is small and has limited consequences.

A spelling mistake in a draft handout is a minor error.

We should correct it, but it will not threaten the event.

We often say a minor problem, mistake, delay, injury or minor damage.

For example: There was a minor delay because the room was still being cleaned.

Minor does not mean that we should ignore something.

It means the effect is limited.

Our second word is serious.

A serious problem is important or severe and may have significant consequences.



The funding gap is serious because the free classes could disappear next month.

It needs careful attention, but we do not have to solve it in the next thirty seconds.

For example: The organisation is facing a serious financial problem.

We can also talk about a serious illness, accident, risk or serious damage.

So serious tells us about the weight of the problem.

Yes.

It answers: How severe are the consequences?

Our third word is urgent.

An urgent problem needs immediate attention or action.

Water near an electrical socket is urgent because waiting could be dangerous.

For example: This is an urgent repair.

Turn off the power and call an electrician now.

We also use urgent with a request, message, meeting or deadline.

Urgent mainly tells us about time.

It answers: How quickly must we act?

A problem can be serious without being urgent.

A building may need an expensive new roof before winter.

That is serious, but if winter is months away, there is time to plan.

And something can be urgent without being very serious.

Your presentation begins in two minutes and you cannot find the correct cable.

Finding it is urgent, but the long-term consequences are limited.

A problem can also be both serious and urgent.

Water leaking beside electricity is both.

Serious describes the danger.

Urgent describes the need to act now.

Let us compare the words once more.

Minor means small, with limited consequences.

Serious means important or severe, with significant consequences.

Urgent means requiring immediate attention or action.

Time for a quick challenge.

Choose minor, serious or urgent before we answer.

Situation one.

A report has one comma in the wrong place, and the final version is not due until next week.

It is a minor problem.

Situation two.



A charity may lose the building where it provides essential services, but the decision will be made in three months.

It is a serious problem, but not necessarily urgent today.

Situation three.

A passenger has left their passport at the hotel and the airport bus leaves in five minutes.

The problem is urgent.

Situation four.

A patient has severe chest pain and needs medical help now.

The situation is both serious and urgent.

Now improve this general sentence: We have a problem.

Ask two questions.

How severe are the consequences?

And how quickly must we act?

Then choose the precise word.

On the episode page at yourenglishtoolbox.com, you can listen at seven speeds, from Extra Slow to Super Fast.

Choose a comfortable level, follow the transcript and move up when you are ready.

The direct link is in the episode description.

Martin, have you called someone about that leak?

Yes.

The power is off, the area is closed and an electrician is coming now.

Excellent.

You understood urgent.

I also found another problem.

We are almost out of coffee.

Minor.

I was afraid you would say that.

See you next time, friends.

Goodbye.

