Asking for an explanation why something was done incorrectly, apologising and offering reasons.

(For email writing or business meetings practice.)

1) Choose words from list below to fit into each sentence. Only one final solution should be attempted. Note: these sentences are useful for email or meetings.

| turned out | utter | insist | can't help you | so sorry | reason why |
| misunderstanding | How come | fail | Why | state of affairs | pear-shaped | most profoundly | what | to rights |

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a) [ 1.                   ] there're pages missing in the report?

b) I am at an [ 2.                   ] loss to comprehend why...

c) I am really sorry. The reason for the error is because there was a [ 3.                  ].

d) I apologise for this [ 4.                   ]. Due to the re-structuring of the company there have been a few hiccups.

e) I apologise for the inconvenience. I’ll do my utmost to put this situation [ 5.                  ].

f) I [ 6.                   ] to understand why...

g) I must [ 7.                   ] you provide us with an explanation.

h) I should like to apologise [ 8.                   ] for mistakes made in your order.

i) I’d like to know the [ 9.                   ]...

j) I’d really like to know [ 10.                   ] this is about.

k) I’m dreadfully sorry things have gone [ 11.                   ] but I did it for the good of the company.

l) I’m [ 12.                   ] about this. The reasons why this happened are...

m) I’m sorry things have [ 13.                   ] this way. I did it because...

n) I’m very sorry, but I just [ 14.                   ] any more than I have done already.

o) [ 15.                   ] is it that...?

2) Analysis. General questions and activities for discussion and practice.

a) Re-read the above 15 sentence sets again. Divide them into two categories: (i) those that demand an explanation; (ii) those that apologise and/or give reasons.

b) Business meeting. You are going to hold a meeting. Ask you teacher for details.
Teacher's notes.
(Time for activity: 40 mins approx. Level: lower intermediate.)

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Answers to question 1:

1. How come
2. utter
3. misunderstanding
4. state of affairs
5. to rights
6. fail
7. insist
8. most profoundly
9. reason why
10. what
11. pear-shaped
12. so sorry
13. turned out
14. can't help you
15. Why

Answers to question 2a:

Asking for explanations.
a), i), o), f), b), j), g)

Apologising and giving reasons.
m), c), k), l), n), d), h), e)

During this activity you may need to explain the meanings of some of the terms used here. Ensure students understand everything before continuing and will be able to use the expressions in practice.

2 b)
There's has been an error in the company purchasing department. New furniture was needed for the entire open plan office (some 20 desks and 40 chairs). But due to an mistake (made by the purchasing dept and not the supplier), all the furniture that arrived is in bright pink with the Barbie doll logo printed all over the desktops.

Returning the furniture will mean a cost to their company.

Arrange the class into groups (2 or 4 or 6 etc.) to have a meeting where one side is the management and the other is the guilty party purchasing dept. Students should use the above vocabulary to demand explanations and the purchasing dept. should give apologies. Tell students they must also find and discuss a solution to the problem.

Homework. As these same phrases can be used for neutral email correspondence, ask some students to write a demanding explanation email and others to write an apology with reasons. (You may use the same problem as above.)