*Mean*

**Understanding**

We use *mean* to explain or ask what a word or phrase refers to. We form questions with *mean* with the auxiliary verb *do*:

*What****does****‘strike’****mean?***

Not: ~~What means ‘strike’?~~

**Warning:**

We don’t normally use *mean* in the continuous form when we are talking about expressing ideas:

*What does that sign****mean****?*

Not: ~~What is that sign meaning?~~

**Talking about intentions**

We use *mean* to clarify something that we have said or to explain what we intended to say:

**A:** *You have to take the road by the church*.

**B:** *Which church?*

**A:** *Here’s what* *I* ***mean***, *Lynn: there are two roads ahead. Take the right-hand road*.

We use *mean* followed by a *to*-infinitive to express intentions:

*Sorry, I****didn’t mean****to upset you.*

*I****meant****to call you before I left. I forgot.*

We often use *keep meaning to* for longer-term intentions:

*I’ve got to go to the dentist. I****keep meaning to****make an appointment.*

**Talking about significance**

We use *mean* to say that something is important or significant:

*The bracelet****meant****a lot to her. It had belonged to her grandmother.*

*Does this name****mean****anything to you?*

***Mean***: **result in**

We can use *mean* + noun to talk about one thing resulting in another:

*Higher fuel prices will****mean****higher airfares.* (will result in or involve)

**Talking about necessity or obligation**

We use *mean + -ing* form to talk about something necessary or the result of something:

*I’ll have to catch the 7 am train to Nottingham, which****means****getting up at 5 am.* (I need to get up at 5 am.)

We also use the passive *be meant to* to express obligation. It has a similar meaning to ‘be supposed to’:

*Why are you watching TV? You’****re meant to****be working.*

***Mean by***

We can use *mean by* to ask what somebody is specifically thinking of when they use a word or phrase:

**A:** *We don’t want to discourage her from studying*.

**B:** *It depends what you* ***mean by*** *‘discourage’*.

**A:** *Well, I mean make her think we can’t afford to pay for her*.

***Means*** **(noun)**

Even though it ends in an ‘s’, *means* is a singular noun. We use a singular verb with it. We use it to talk about a method of doing something:

*The most economical****means****of travelling to Aberdeen is by plane.* (the most economical method or way)

Not: … ~~most economical mean~~ … or … ~~most economical means are~~ …

***I mean***

**Spoken English:**

We use *I mean* very commonly in speaking as a discourse marker. We use it when we want to add to what we have just said, to make a point clearer or to correct what we have just said:

*The law is not fair.****I mean****, it’s just not right that he didn’t go to prison.*(adding)

*It cost over £200.****I mean****, that’s more than most of us can afford.* (making something clearer)

*We need to ask Helen,****I mean****Harriet.* (correcting)

We often use *I mean* when hesitating, to make something negative less strong or to soften a disagreement:

**A:** *What do you think of Ben?*

**B:** *Well*, ***I mean***, *he’s not very confident and not always sure what he’s supposed to be doing*.

*I think Peter probably has a strong view about that. It’s interesting …****I mean****I … what I said earlier and****I mean****Peter might disagree with me.*

When we are not sure what to say, we sometimes use *I mean*. We often pause before or after it:

*She’s not coming back, er****I mean****, erm … she and I have broken up.*

**Warning:**

We don’t use *I mean* to introduce opinions. It is not the same as *I think*:

*I****think****we should stay at the Lakeside Inn.*

Not: ~~I mean we should stay at the Lakeside Inn~~.

***You know what I mean***

**Spoken English:**

We often use the phrase *you know what I mean* (or *if you know what I mean* or *do you know what I mean?*) in speaking, to check that our listener understands what we are saying or to show that we assume the listener has the same opinion about something:

**A:** *I just can’t go to Norah’s house*.

**B:** *Why’s that?*

**A:** *I just don’t like all the cats*. ***You know what I mean?*** *They’re everywhere even in the beds*.

**B:** *Yeah, I have to say I’m not a fan of cats either*. (A is checking that B understands that she doesn’t like all the cats in Norah’s house and she assumes that B is going to understand)

*Ken isn’t very helpful,****if you know what I mean****.*

*We’ve got white on the walls in the back room now, but I think he feels as though, pink is not the right colour for the front room,****do you know what I mean?***

*Mean*: typical errors

* We use auxiliary *do* in questions with *mean*:

*What does ‘rosehip’****mean****?*

Not: ~~What means ‘rosehip’?~~

* We don’t use *I mean* to introduce opinions:

***I think****people shouldn’t start university until they are 20.*

Not: ~~I mean people shouldn’t~~ …

* *Means* is a singular noun. We use a singular verb with it:

*A very relaxing****means****of transport is the train.*

Not: … ~~very relaxing mean of transport are the train~~.