

1 SPEAKING

- a Work in groups. Talk about ...
- the last mistake you made
  - the biggest mistake you've made
  - a mistake you've made which had a good outcome
- b Work with a partner from another group. Share your discussion from 1a.

2 READING

- a Work in groups. Match the events 1–3 with the things that caused them A–C.

1 In 1912, the ship the <i>Titanic</i> sank when it hit an iceberg.	A a peanut butter bar
2 In 1945, engineer Percy Spencer invented the microwave oven.	B an administrative error
3 In 2009, 18,000 people got the wrong email.	C a key

- b Read the article on page 53 to check your ideas in 2a.

- c Read the article again. Match the sentence beginnings (1–5) with their endings (a–e).

- If David Blair hadn't forgotten to give the keys ...
  - If the binoculars hadn't been locked away ...
  - If Fred Fleet had seen the iceberg ...
  - Staff wouldn't have had to say sorry ...
  - Percy Spencer wouldn't have exploded an egg if ...
- a if they had sent the email to the right people.  
b Fred Fleet would have been able to get the binoculars.  
c the *Titanic* wouldn't have sunk.  
d a peanut butter bar hadn't melted.  
e Fred Fleet would have seen the iceberg.



BETTER READING:  
PATTERNS OF ORGANISATION 2

It helps you understand if you can see how ideas are organised. Here is a typical example:

the general idea → more information → comment or consequence

- Look at 'The key' section of the article.  
A Underline the general idea like this.  
B Underline more information like this.  
C Underline the comment or consequence like this.
- Now do the same with the other sections of the article. 'The database' and 'The peanut butter bar'.

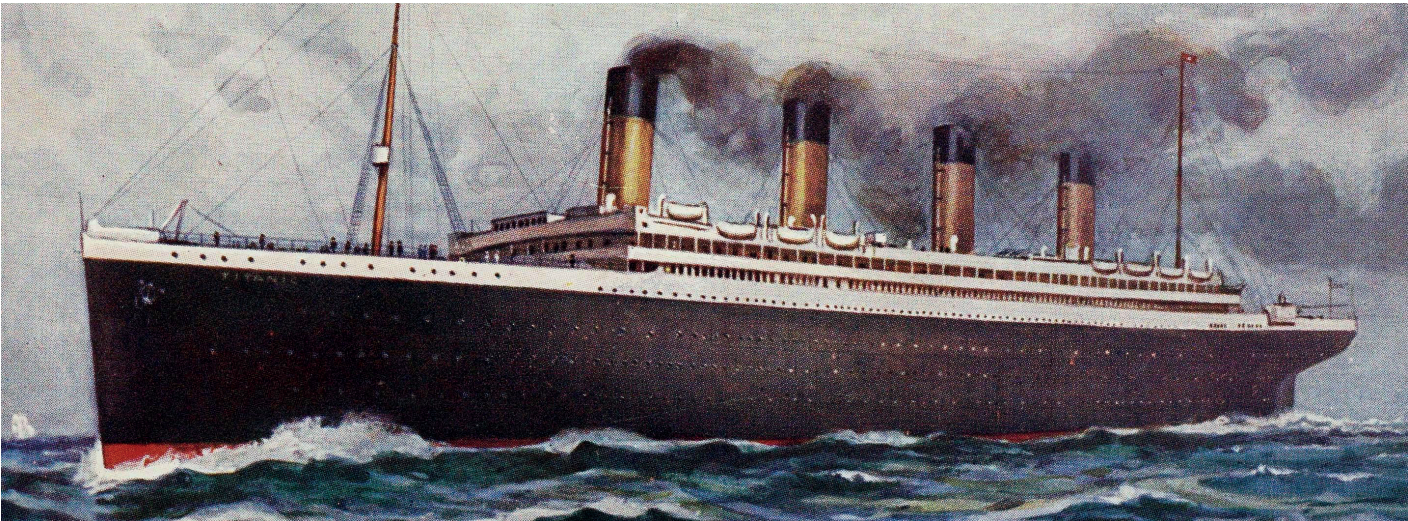
- d Read the article again. Answer the questions.

- How did people try to find out what happened to the *Titanic*?
- How do we know that David Blair didn't sail on the *Titanic*?
- Why was the university sending an email to students?
- Why was the mistake such a problem for staff, parents, and students?
- What was Percy Spencer planning to study?
- Why did Spencer make popcorn?

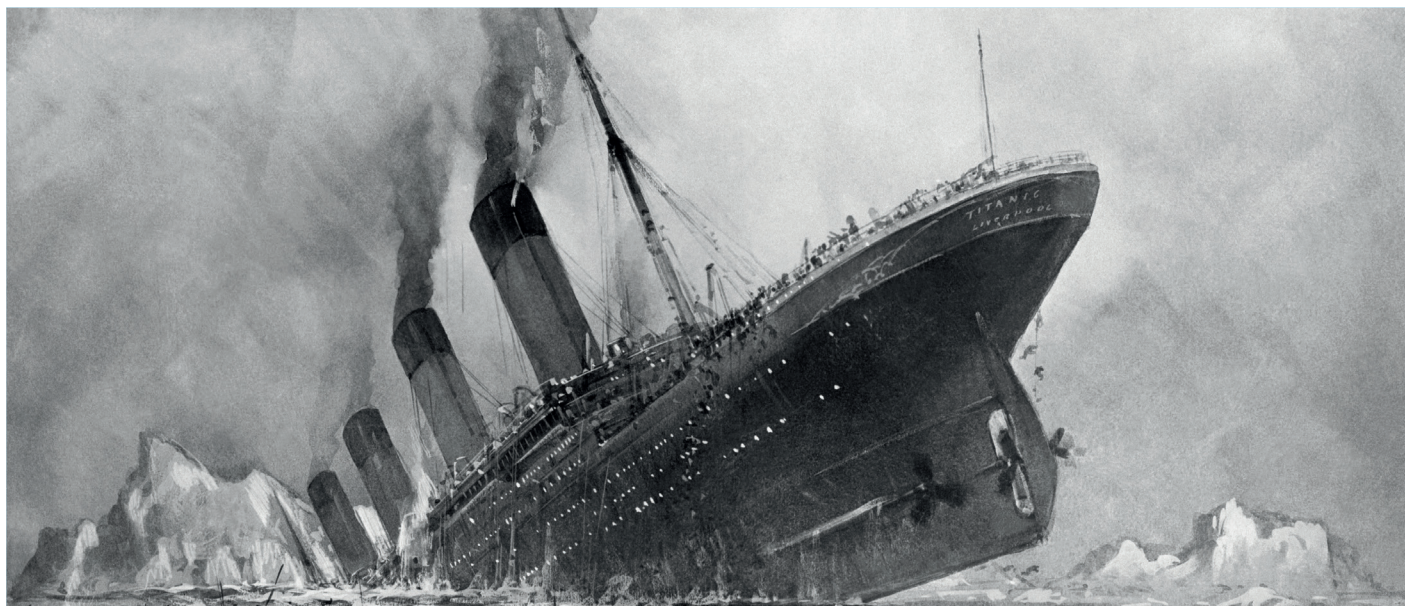
3 SPEAKING

- a Work in groups and answer the questions.

- Which story did you like the most? Why?
- Which mistake was the most serious? Why?
- Have you ever sent an email or message to the wrong person or people? What happened?
- Do you know any other stories like the ones in the article?
- Have you ever made a small mistake which had big consequences?







## Small Mistakes, Big Consequences

We've all made mistakes in life. Inevitably, when things go wrong they have some kind of impact. On the whole we get over it, move on and, well, make more mistakes on our way. But sometimes, just the smallest mistake can have a huge consequence – something which at the time seems so insignificant, yet shapes our future, for better or for worse. Here are three real-life examples of those little unfortunate events that have shaken history.

### The key

Everyone knows the story of the Titanic, the great unsinkable ocean liner that represented everything incredible about the age of industry. Until, that is, it sank with the loss of 1517 lives. There has been a great deal of debate as to just why this famous tragedy actually happened. Interestingly enough, some people think the ship sank because of a lost key.

Following the disaster, there was an official inquiry where survivors were questioned to establish what had happened. Of the 706 survivors, 214 were members of the ship's crew. Among them was Fred Fleet whose job on the Titanic was to look out for icebergs. At the inquiry he said he didn't have any binoculars. If he'd had binoculars, he would have seen the iceberg earlier.

So, why did a ship travelling through Arctic waters have a look-out with no binoculars? As the inquiry discovered, there were binoculars on board the Titanic, but they were locked away in a drawer and there was no key on the boat. According to witnesses, before the Titanic set sail, the ship's second officer, David Blair, was replaced by another crew member. David Blair made a small but terrible mistake: he forgot to give the keys to the new second officer. If he'd remembered the key, perhaps the Titanic wouldn't have sunk.

### The database

You know that sinking feeling when you realise you've sent an email to the wrong person? Bad enough when it's just one person. But imagine you got it very, very wrong. In 2009, staff at the University of California San Diego did just that. But it wasn't just one person they sent a message to. They sent the wrong email to 28,000 people.

Staff had intended to send an email to the 18,000 students who had been accepted to study for the fall semester. The email, used as a standard way to welcome new students to the university, congratulated them on getting a place. Unfortunately, someone used the wrong database. Instead of just contacting successful applicants, the email was sent to everyone who had applied for a place, a total of 47,000 people. This included students who had already been told that they had failed the application process.

The next few days were a nightmare for the admissions staff. The phone never stopped ringing and there were many confused and angry students and parents trying to work out if a new offer had been issued. In the end, it was an apology that was issued, by a very embarrassed university employee.

### The peanut butter bar

In 1945, military engineer Percy Spencer unintentionally invented the microwave oven. And it was all because of a peanut butter bar in his pocket.

Spencer was working in a laboratory, doing some tests on radar systems. During one experiment, he produced some microwaves and noticed that the peanut butter bar in his pocket was melting. But his clothes weren't hot and neither was he.

Interested to find out more, Spencer got some popcorn kernels and placed them in front of the machinery.

These began popping all over the place. Next he got an egg and it blew up. Spencer was already on his way to inventing the microwave oven. But it wouldn't have been invented if a peanut butter bar hadn't melted in his pocket.

