

AUDIO SCRIPT

[M1: Male Student; F1: Female Student]

M1: Hi, Holly. Have you finished your research for our presentation about the airplane accident?

F1: Yeah. I thought I would focus on the lessons learned after the accident.

M1: Maybe we should begin with what happened.

F1: That's a good idea, Ralph. What did you find out?

M1: The accident occurred at 5:06 p.m. on March 27th, 1977 at the airport on the Spanish island of Tenerife, one of the Canary Islands off the coast of North Africa. On that morning all planes were told to land at the smaller Tenerife airport instead of the main airport, Las Palmas which was temporarily closed.

F1: Wait. I think we should project a map of the islands so people can see where the accident happened. I don't think many people know where the Canary Islands are.

M1: That's a great idea, Holly. I'll make a note to find a good map.

F1: Let's move on to exactly what happened.

M1: Okay ... One of the planes was a Dutch KLM 747. The other plane was an American Pan-Am 747. While the planes were waiting for the Las Palmas airport to reopen, a thick fog rolled in and visibility on the runway was poor. When the Las Palmas airport finally reopened, the planes proceeded to the runway to await instructions to take off. It was still foggy, so the pilots couldn't see each other. Since the airport did not have a ground radar, the only way the air traffic controller knew where the planes were located was from the pilots' reports over the radio. As a result of several misunderstandings, the KLM plane started to take off while the Pan-Am plane was still on the runway. The KLM plane didn't leave the runway in time and hit the Pan-Am plane at over 160 miles per hour. All of the 248 passengers on the KLM plane died, and 348 of the 396 passengers on the Pan-Am plane died—a total of 583 people. It was the biggest disaster in aviation history. What do you think, Holly?

F1: I think you did a good job, Ralph. Now, I'll summarize what went wrong and the lessons learned from the accident.

M1: Okay, go ahead.

F1: Well, a whole sequence of events led to the disaster that day. First, there was the need to divert all planes to the smaller Tenerife airport. Second, the weather. Heavy fog

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meant the pilots and the controller couldn't see each other very well. Third, since there was no ground radar, the controller depended on the pilots to tell him their location by radio. Fourth, there was miscommunication because of language differences. The KLM pilots spoke Dutch, the Pan-Am pilots spoke English, and the controller spoke Spanish. English is the common working language in the aviation industry, but investigators believe there was a misunderstanding. The transcript of the conversation revealed that the KLM pilot had said, "We are now at takeoff," and the controller had responded, "Okay." The KLM pilot may have interpreted "Okay" as an approval for takeoff. After the disaster, air traffic controllers and pilots must use expressions like *Wait for departure* and only use the word *takeoff* when they are allowed to take off. Also, after the accident a ground radar was installed at Tenerife airport. So, hopefully a disaster like this will never happen again. That's it. I think we've covered everything.

M1: Yes, I think so, too.