

# Language Blocks

*What we mean to say—and what another person understands—are not always the same thing.*

## Try This

- Have a friend sit across from you at the table. Make sure that neither of you can see the other's tray.
- One of you should make a design in your tray with the colored tiles.
- Once you make a design, see if your friend can make the same design just by listening to your instructions.
- When you're both finished, put the trays side-by-side and compare the two designs. If the designs are different, try to remember your instructions and see if you can figure out what went wrong.

## What's Going On?

Don't be surprised if the two designs are not exactly the same. It's difficult to describe something in exact detail, because what is obvious to you may not be obvious to the other person. For example, if you refer to "the side of the rectangle," you may mean the long side of the rectangle, while the other person may assume you mean the short side. Many words or phrases also have double meanings.

## So What?

Explaining any complex procedure or idea can be quite tricky—which is one of the reasons why instructions for appliances and games are often difficult to understand. You may interpret the words differently from the person who wrote them.