Microsoft outage disrupts Australian services

LEVEL C1


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I. WARM-UP

1. How much does your work depend on email and chat tools?
2. What is your back-up plan if key software fails?
3. Have you ever lost access to an online service at a bad time?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

outage
a period when a service or power supply stops working

configuration
the technical settings that control how a system is set up

overload
to put too much demand on a system so it cannot work

authentication
the process of proving your identity to access a system

clerical
related to office work like records and paperwork

callback
a return phone call arranged to help a customer later

hearings
official sessions where a court listens to cases

workaround
a temporary method to do a task when normal ways fail

III. READING

A global Microsoft 365 outage on 13 November 2026 disrupted email and meetings across Australia, pushing schools, courts and government services back to phone calls and paper. Reports of trouble with Outlook and Teams began before dawn and peaked at 9.22am AEST with more than 5,500 problem reports.

Microsoft said there was no indication of a cyber-attack. The company linked the failure to a configuration change that left some servers overloaded and taken offline, and later admitted that fixes were not taking as expected. Service NSW asked customers to delay visits and set up a priority callback system.

Courts in South Australia and Victoria said email was affected, while Victoria's county court expected hearings to proceed. The Australian Medical Association reported clerical issues at some hospitals and clinics.

Dr Michael Bonning of the AMA said staff used paper for scripts because email-based authentication blocked access to prescribing software. He added that patient care continued thanks to established workarounds. Some users said Outlook was down while Teams still worked.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "'Looks like we'll have to talk to people'...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What Microsoft apps were mainly affected in Australia?
2. How many problem reports were there at the peak, and when was it?
3. What cause did Microsoft suggest for the failure?
4. Which government agency set up a priority callback system?
5. How did some health facilities handle blocked prescribing access?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Which public services suffer most when email fails? Why?
2. Should critical services rely on one tech provider? Explain.
3. What simple workarounds can keep organisations operating?
4. How should leaders communicate during large outages?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Ellipsis and substitution

We avoid repetition with short forms: so/neither + auxiliary + subject for agreement; do so / the same to replace a verb phrase; one/ones to replace a noun.

*"Users moved to phones; others **did the same**."*
*"Discard faulty cables; use the spare **ones**."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Outlook crashed; (did so / so did) calendars. _____
2. Some servers were overloaded; (were so / so were) others. _____
3. Printers didn't work; (neither did / did neither) scanners. _____
4. Use the paper form, not the digital (one / ones). _____
5. Phones were busy; (so was / was so) the helpdesk. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading, 10 minutes comprehension, 10 minutes grammar, 10–12 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or concept-check outage, configuration, overload, authentication, clerical, callback, hearings, workaround; elicit quick examples from students' jobs or studies.
- Run the reading as a gist scan (what happened, where, who) then a detail scan for numbers, names and actions; pair-check answers before open-class feedback.
- Keep discussion on service continuity rather than personal tech failures; if students share stressful experiences, start in pairs and then generalise to policy ideas.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Board likely answers (hospitals, courts, schools) and push for specific impacts and reasons.
2. Take a quick show of hands, then pair pro/contra groups to swap best arguments.
3. Ask for concrete actions (paper forms, phone trees, SMS alerts) and a time frame.
4. Model a clear update: status, workaround, next update time; then have students add examples.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Role-play: In pairs, deliver a 90-second IT stand-up briefing on the outage: status, workaround, next update.

Writing: Write an 80-word public notice for Service NSW advising customers what to do during the outage.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Ellipsis and substitution

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. What Microsoft apps were mainly affected in Australia?
   Outlook and Teams.
2. How many problem reports were there at the peak, and when was it?
   More than 5,500 reports at 9.22am AEST.
3. What cause did Microsoft suggest for the failure?
   A configuration change that overloaded some servers.
4. Which government agency set up a priority callback system?
   Service NSW.
5. How did some health facilities handle blocked prescribing access?
   They used paper for scripts as a workaround.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Circle the correct option in each sentence.

1. Outlook crashed; (did so / so did) calendars. **so did**
2. Some servers were overloaded; (were so / so were) others. **so were**
3. Printers didn't work; (neither did / did neither) scanners. **neither did**
4. Use the paper form, not the digital (one / ones). **one**
5. Phones were busy; (so was / was so) the helpdesk. **so was**

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: We avoid repetition with short forms: so/neither + auxiliary + subject for agreement; do so / the same to replace a verb phrase; one/ones to replace a noun. (Examples constructed.)

> *"Users moved to phones; others* **did the same**.*"*
> *"Discard faulty cables; use the spare* **ones**.*"*