

## Module 5 – English for the Telephone

Center for Learning and Teaching

Sean Clifford

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## 1. What makes a good telephone call?

### Checklist

#### **Before the call**

- Prepare well before you call.
- Plan what you want to say.
- Prepare answers to possible questions.
- Send an e-mail before the call, if necessary.
- Have all information available.

#### **Beginning the call**

- Make a greeting and identify yourself clearly.
- Ask for connection to the person you want to speak to.
- After connection, greet the person.
- Smalltalk (*Check page 13*)
- Give a reason for the call.

#### **During the call**

- Create a positive atmosphere.
- Communicate your objective clearly.
- Listen—make sure you understand.
- Check—make sure the other person understands you.

#### **Ending the call**

- Confirm the result of the call.
- End politely and positively.

## **2. Reception Speaking**

### **Identifying your company/department**

Good morning. International Affairs Office.  
Housing Office.

### **Asking about the purpose**

How can I help you?  
What is it in regard to?  
What can I do for you?  
Who would you like to speak to?

### **Identifying the caller**

I'm sorry, could I have your name (again), please?  
Who's calling, please?

### **Connecting**

One moment, please.  
I'll check if he's in his office.

### **Apologies**

I'm afraid  
-the line is busy.  
-he's on the other line.  
-he's in a meeting (at the moment).  
-she's out of the office today.  
-he's on vacation.  
He'll be back soon/later this afternoon.  
She won't be back until this afternoon.

### **No connection**

Do you want to hold?  
Would you like to speak to his colleague?  
Can I take a message?  
Would you like to leave a message?  
Would you like him to call you back?  
Does she have your number?

### **Making the connection**

Just a moment. I'm putting you through, now.  
I'll connect you now.

### **Answering a call – identifying yourself**

Good morning. Danny Park (speaking).  
This is Danny Park.  
This is he/she.

### 3. Opening a call

#### Making the call – identifying yourself

Hello, this is....  
My name is....  
This is ...speaking.  
Hi, Danny. It's Seanan here.

#### Asking for connection

I'd like to speak to....  
Could/Can/May I speak to....  
Could you put me through to....  
Extension 6028, please.

#### Giving more details

It's in connection with....  
It's about....

#### Checking after connection

Is this William/the Finance Office?  
Are you the person responsible for...?

#### Reason for calling

I'm calling to....  
The reason I called is to....  
I'm calling about....

#### Shall I spell my name?

#### The alphabet – introduction to pronunciation Key sounds – a guide

/eɪ/	/i:/	/e/	/u:/	/aɪ/	/ɑ:r/	/ou/		<b>A</b>	Alpha
<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>Q</b>	<b>I</b>	<b>R</b>	<b>O</b>		<b>D</b>	Delta
<b>H</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>L</b>	<b>U</b>	<b>Y</b>				<b>E</b>	Echo
<b>J</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>M</b>						<b>G</b>	Golf
<b>K</b>	<b>E</b>	<b>N</b>						<b>I</b>	Indigo
	<b>G</b>	<b>S</b>						<b>J</b>	Juliet
	<b>P</b>	<b>X</b>						<b>R</b>	Romeo
	<b>T</b>							<b>S</b>	Sierra
	<b>V</b>							<b>T</b>	Tango
Z is pronounced 'zee' in American English and 'zed' in British English.								<b>W</b>	Whiskey
								<b>Y</b>	Yellow

## 4. Receiving and taking messages

### The switchboard

#### Names and addresses

Can I have your name again?

Could you spell that for me?

#### Numbers

Can I have your number?

What's the area/country code?

Is that your mobile/your office?

#### Noting and responding

I'd better write this down.

Just a moment. OK. Ready.

Let me get a pen. OK. Go ahead.

#### Checking

Could you go over that again, please?

Let me just repeat that for you.

Should I read that back, just to check?

#### Don't worry!

I'll make sure she gets the message.

I'll tell him you called.

I'll get him to call you as soon as he gets back to the office.

### The caller

#### Spelling

It's Seanan. Should I spell that for you?

Yes, it's Seanan. S-E-A-N-A-N.

#### Numbers

Yes, it's 010-794-2863.

[See *note* below]

That's my cellular.

#### The message

Could you tell him/her I called?

Could you ask her to call me back?

Please tell him that I'll call back.

#### Replies

Of course.

OK. Yes, that's right.

Please.

#### Thanks

Thank you very much.

Could I just have your name?

Thank you. Goodbye.

### Check!

#### TAKING MESSAGES

Name of caller:

Date and time of call:

Message:

Action to be taken:

Contact number:

Call taken by:

#### Note

Telephone numbers are usually said digit by digit. However, there are other ways. For instance, "2246" can be said like "double two-four-six" or "twenty-two, forty-six." The number "0" can be pronounced "oh," or "zero."

## 5. Structuring a call

### **The purpose**

I'm calling about....  
Peter asked me to call you to organize....  
I would like to discuss....  
We need to organize.  
We have to arrange....

### **Structure**

There are three things I would like to talk about.  
First, I want to discuss.  
Second,....  
Finally,....  
Another thing is....

### **Check**

Is that OK with you?  
Is this a good time to talk about this?  
Do you have time right now?

### **Deciding**

OK. Then we have decided to....  
Right. Then I will.  
I will leave this to you.  
So, you're going to handle this. OK?  
Should I deal with the logistics?

### **Deflecting**

Can we deal with that another time?  
I'll have to get back to you about....

### **Further action**

Could you send me an e-mail to confirm that?  
Would you please inform Peter?

### **Final check**

Is there anything else?  
Is that everything/all?

### *Telephoning tip*

Plan what you want to say carefully before you call!

## 6. Transferring information

### Starting

Ready?  
Have you got a pen?

### Confirming

Yes, go ahead.  
Yes

### Checking

Have you got that?  
Could you read that back to me, please?  
OK?  
Should I repeat that?

### Confirming

Yes, you said...  
OK.  
Let me read that back.  
Please, yes.

### Active listening –responding

OK. Right. Got that.

### You don't hear

Sorry?  
Pardon me?  
Excuse me?  
I beg your pardon?

I'm sorry, I didn't hear what you said.

I didn't quite catch that.

I didn't catch what you said.

I didn't understand. Could you repeat that, please?

I'm sorry. Could you go over that again, please?

### It is not clear

I'm sorry. What do you mean exactly?

I'm sorry. I don't follow. What is 'turnover'?

What do you mean by 'turnover'?

### You want to check

Did you say...?

Let me just check. You said... Is that right?

You said you wanted to cancel the meeting? Is that correct?

### Asking for spelling

Would/Could you spell that, please?

### Correcting information

Sorry, not the 30<sup>th</sup>. I said the 13<sup>th</sup>.

Sorry, that's not quite right.

Sorry, I think that's a mistake. It should be...

### *Telephoning tip*

Repeat important numbers to check.

## **7. Communication difficulties**

### **Problems**

#### **General**

Just a minute. Let me get a pen.  
The line is busy.  
There's no answer.  
I can't contact/get a hold of Peter!

#### **Technical**

The number is not in service.  
We were cut off.

#### **Sound**

I can hardly hear you.  
Can you speak up?  
It's very noisy here.  
Can you speak up a little, please?  
It's a terrible / bad line.  
Can you hear me?

#### **Cellular phones**

My battery is nearly out.  
I'm losing you. I'm going into a tunnel.  
There are some problems with the net.

#### **Wrong numbers**

I'm sorry, I think you have the wrong number.  
I think I have the wrong number.  
    Is this 019-945-5677?  
I'm afraid you've reached the International Office.  
    I'll try and transfer you back to the switchboard.

#### **Call back**

I'll call you right back.  
Hang up and I'll try again.  
Talk to you in a moment.

## **8. Calling back**

### **Opening**

I'm returning your call.  
My secretary said you called.  
I got your message.  
Thanks for calling earlier.

### **Thanking**

Thanks for calling back.  
Thanks for getting back to me so soon.

### **Reason for call**

The reason I called earlier was that....  
What I wanted to talk about was....  
I called earlier to....

### **Timing**

Is this a good time to talk?  
Do you have time now to...?  
Do you have the information with you?  
Can we go over the figures now?  
Do you have a few minutes to talk about this now?

### **Excuses**

Actually, I'm in a meeting right now.  
I'm afraid I'm on the other line.  
I was just on my way to a meeting.

### **Call back**

I'll call you back.  
Let me call you back.  
Can I call you back in five minutes?

### **Close**

Talk to you soon/again.

### **Calling back – restarting**

This is Peter returning your call.  
Hello again. It's Peter.  
Is the line any better?  
Can you hear me alright now?

### **Back to the subject**

The reason I called was....  
OK. Where were we?  
As I was saying...

## 9. Making appointments

### Arranging a meeting

Can we schedule a meeting?  
Can we have a meeting next month?  
Would you like to meet for lunch?  
Let me check my calendar.

### Responses

Yes, of course.  
Sure.  
That would be nice.

### Agreeing on a time

Could you manage sometime next week?  
When would be best for you?  
When is good for you?  
Are you free on...?  
I'm free on Tuesday. Is that convenient for you?  
How would Tuesday suit you?  
How does Tuesday sound?  
Shall we say 2 o'clock?

### Language Differences

<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>
Diary	Calendar
Bus timetable	Bus schedule

#### Note

1. Agenda is for meetings
2. For project planning we use 'schedule' or 'planner' in both British and US English.

### Canceling

Can we change our appointment time? Something has come up. I have to....  
Could we reschedule/rearrange it for Friday?  
Could we make it Friday instead?  
Could we postpone it until Saturday?  
Could we move it up/forward to Monday?

### Saying 'Yes'

Yes, I can make Tuesday.  
OK. Tuesday would be fine.  
Great. Tuesday is good for me.

### Saying 'No'

I'm afraid I have a meeting.  
Actually, I'm busy on Tuesday.  
That's not ideal, I'm afraid.  
I can't make it on Tuesday, sorry.

### Place

Where shall we have the meeting? Your office or mine?  
I'll come to your office if you like.

### Confirming

OK. So, I will expect you at my office at 10, then.  
OK, I'll see you on Tuesday at 10 o'clock in my office.  
I'll confirm that by e-mail.

### Organization

Someone will meet you at the airport.  
John will pick you up at your hotel and bring you to the office.  
If you're driving, there's a parking lot in front of the main building.  
Just ask for me at the reception desk.

## 10. Complaining

### The complaint

#### The problem

Excuse me, but I expected delivery....

I'm sorry but you promised...

You said that I would have....

I haven't received... yet. It's now three weeks late.

#### Request action

Please could you... as soon as possible?

If you don't repair it immediately, I will have to...

What are you going to do about it?

#### Accepting action

OK. That's fine.

OK. That will do.

OK. That will have to do.

#### Reject Action

I'm sorry but....

That's unacceptable.

I'm afraid we can't accept that.

### Handling the complaint

#### Ask for information

What is the problem exactly?

Could you explain exactly what the problem is?

#### Saying sorry

I see. We're very sorry about that.

Again, I do apologize.

#### Explaining the reason for the problem

I'm afraid that we can't/couldn't...

The reason is that....

The problem was caused by....

It was a clerical computer error.

It was an oversight on our part.

#### A promise of action [will]

I'll deal with it/attend to it/send an engineer immediately.

HI find/arrange a replacement right away.

Is that acceptable?/Is that OK?

#### Your fault

It's our fault. We accept full responsibility.

We are to blame. We should have.... (sent it yesterday.)

#### Their fault

I'm sorry but you didn't inform us that you wanted manuals.

#### Close

I apologize once again. We are very sorry about this.

I apologize for any inconvenience caused. It won't happen again, I assure you.

## 11. Closing a call

### Confirmation

So, just to confirm that...

Let me just go over that again.

So, that's 2 on Friday then.

### Promised action

OK. I'll send/mail/organize/phone..

### Closing signals – See 'Tip' below

Anyway.... /Right.... /OK....

OK. I think that's everything.

Is there anything else?

OK. Well, let's leave it at that for the moment.

OK. I'm sorry but I have to go. The other line is ringing.

### Thanking

Thanks for calling (back).

Thank you for your help/patience.

I'm very grateful for your assistance.

### Looking forward—positive close

I'll get back to you next week.

I look forward to seeing/meeting/hearing from you next week.

Nice talking to you.

(**Response:** Me too! Same here! Sounds good!)

Have a good weekend/trip/vacation.

### Good-byes

Bye!

Good-bye!

Talk to you again soon!

See you on Monday!

### *Telephoning tip*

Ending telephone calls can be difficult. Calls can easily go on too long.

Alternatively, they can finish too quickly and seem unprofessional. It is important to:

- Listen for signals showing that the other person is ready to close that call.
- Make signals yourself.
- End on a positive note.
- Not put down the receiver too quickly as it may seem rude.

## 12. Cross cultural tips

### Cultural aspects

- Small talk is expected at the beginning and end of calls in certain countries.
- Repeat important information to guarantee understanding.
- Be patient if there is silence. People need time to remember words.
- Clarify if you are not sure.
- Cultures have different rules for the use of first and last names. Last names are safer.
- Some people mistake friendliness for unprofessionalism.
- Idiomatic language is more difficult to understand. Keep it simple.
- Silence means different things: agreement to some; indifference, non-understanding to others.
- Punctuality can be very important. Respect expectations.
- Directness can be seen as rude.
- Humor is often very personal and culturally specific. Use with caution.

## 13. Golden Rules

### Practice and rehearse key English phrases.

#### DO

- plan the call thoroughly. Have clear objectives.
- send an e-mail before you call when necessary.
- anticipate what the other person will say. Prepare your responses.
- have all necessary information at hand.
- refer to this book for essential phrases.
- e-mail ahead to allow the person time to prepare.
- smile when you phone. Be polite and agreeable.
- check that your respondent is free to talk.
- be efficient. You are representing your company.
- use questions to identify key issues.
- be concise. Time is money.
- listen actively. Confirm regularly that you understand.
- stand up. It gives you more authority.
- speak clearly and slowly.
- allow people to finish what they are saying.
- handle complaints politely.
- avoid complex language.
- check that the other person understands.
- take notes during a call. Write them up afterwards.
- send a follow-up e-mail to confirm.
- finish with a positive phrase.

#### DON'T

- call if you are unprepared.
- assume your respondent is available to talk when you call.
- lose control if someone becomes aggressive.
- forget that you represent the company on the phone.
- waste time.
- pretend to understand.
- assume the person has understood everything.
- interrupt.
- rely on your memory for important details.
- forget to write down important details.
- put the receiver down too quickly. It can seem rude.

# 14. Telephone Activity Sheet

