

US TELEPHONE TEACHING COURSE

Learn to give effective telephone or distance English lessons to your students with this helpful specialist unit.

Units in this course:

- Unit 1: Introduction to Telephone Teaching
- Unit 2: Lesson types and needs analyses
- Unit 3: Structures and strategies

Unit 1: Introduction to Telephone Teaching

Welcome to the course

Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

Hi there, and welcome to our telephone teaching course. This is a specialist course covering a unique way of teaching English to students – so let's start off by explaining what telephone classes are and why we teach English in this way.

Nowadays, there are many students who want to be taught English by a tutor, but either don't have the time to commute to lessons, or don't have a teacher nearby at all. As an extreme example, some students might prefer to have a teacher located in an English-speaking country, as they may not have many native or high-level speakers where they are. This means you'll potentially be teaching students who live thousands of miles away.

Another group of telephone students are those who want to practice speaking on the telephone – which is especially common among those learning Business English. We know that speaking on the phone is a bit different to having a face-to-face conversation, and your goal will be to train students to do this effectively while building their overall English skills.

With these differences between students, you'll find different needs and different reasons for learning English over the telephone. But they do all have one thing in common: you'll need to deliver lessons that work without having constant face-to-face interaction. That means your lessons will need to be suited to the medium of the telephone, or as is becoming more common, the medium of the internet via Skype or other VoIP software.

So why should you learn telephone teaching, you might ask? First of all, these classes don't just give your students flexibility, they also make it easier for you too. Telephone classes can be scheduled back-to-back without needing to commute to a school or change classrooms. You'll be able to teach a diverse range of students from around the world, and you'll also be able to have all your teaching resources at your fingertips without having to carry them around. Many teachers also find telephone teaching to be more engaging and creative, as your lessons will use a different structure to normal English lessons, and allow you to teach in a unique style.

Above all, telephone teaching classes are highly rewarding since they give you a chance to improve the English skills of students in a way that suits both you and the students themselves.

Our course will teach you all you need to know to start teaching telephone classes, from how to structure your lessons and use different technologies in order to deliver them, to conducting a telephone needs analysis and working out students' levels. We'll look at how to use your initial lesson to gauge students' learning needs and how to tailor lessons towards individual students. We'll also show you what to do outside the lesson, so that you can focus on delivering the best classes you can.

You'll understand now that there's more to telephone teaching than just picking up the phone, so click on to the next lesson and let's get started.

What are telephone classes?

Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

Let's have a look at what makes up an actual telephone class first, as it may not be what you originally expected.

First and foremost, the reality is that telephone teaching doesn't actually mean you have to use a telephone. Many people nowadays teach over the internet using VoIP software – which stands for Voice over the Internet Protocol. This includes well-known apps such as Skype, and allows you to use a headset and microphone to replicate using the telephone. These apps also allow you to speak face-to-face with students or send files and resources across to students, making lessons more engaging. Online classes also let you make group calls, letting you teach more than one student at a time. Another advantage of these lessons is that they are typically cheaper than a traditional phone call, allowing you and your students to save on costs. Telephone lessons using cell phones or landlines are still important, particularly for students living in places with poor internet connection, but online classes are growing rapidly and well worth understanding if you want to further your teaching skills.

So it turns out the best definition of a telephone class is a lesson conducted where the teacher and student are not in the same location. Your students will more than likely have similar goals to students you'd find in the classroom – aiming to improve their understanding and use of language – but how you go about this will need to be different. Naturally, as the classes are much smaller the lesson may be more intense, as there is constant interaction between the student and teacher. This means it might make sense to keep lessons shorter, with around 30 minutes being standard, so that students aren't overloaded.

Telephone teaching is different from stepping in front of a class and delivering a lesson, but this course will guide you through these differences and enhance your existing knowledge of TEFL so that this avenue of teaching is wide open to you.

Why choose telephone classes?

Now that we know what telephone classes are like, let's look at why both students and teachers choose to make use of them.

Activity:

Let's get you thinking first of all. Use the countdown timer below and give yourself a minute to think of four reasons a student would choose telephone classes, and four reasons why a teacher might as well.

Name 4 reasons for both students and teachers to choose telephone classes

Start timer

What makes a telephone teacher different to a classroom teacher?

Our methodology course focuses on classroom-based and face-to-face teaching, and how to make those lessons as good as can be. Lots of the same principles apply in telephone teaching, but you will need to adopt different approaches when delivering a telephone lesson. What do you think makes a telephone teacher different to a classroom teacher? How can you be the most effective telephone teacher you can be?

The end goal of a telephone lesson is the same as a classroom lesson: to give your students the chance to progress in their English language ability. Making sure that you do this in an effective way, taking into account the particular medium of teaching together with your students' aims, is what makes the real difference.

Check out the video on the next lesson for more differences.

Classroom teachers vs Telephone teachers

■ Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

Classroom teacher (Brian): Hi there, my name's Brian and generally I teach my English lessons in a classroom.

Telephone teacher (Kelsey): My name's Kelsey, but I teach telephone English lessons.

Brian: We're both English teachers, teaching students of all ages and all levels. We teach grammar and vocabulary and cover the skills of speaking, listening, reading and writing. We have students with different motivations and backgrounds: some young learners, some adults, some General English students and some Business English students.

Kelsey: Yes, we both teach a wide range of students. But what's the difference between your type of teaching and mine?

Brian: Well for starters, I work in a classroom. My students sit together, with a whiteboard in front of the class and we do lots of group and pair activities. I present things from the front of the class at times, then sit with my students at other times to help them. I teach one-to-one classes too, but I do this face-to-face.

Kelsey: For me it's quite different, as I work from home. I use my computer or a telephone to call my students and have lessons with them. I usually only teach one student at a time, but sometimes teach groups as well. I haven't met any of my students in person, only through speaking to them on the phone or online. We know each other quite well though even still.

Brian: My job is in a school, and they schedule my classes for me and decide who's going to be in them. The classes tend to be the same day after day and week after week.

Kelsey: I have some students that have had lessons arranged through a local school and some that I've arranged myself from other countries. My students and I agree when to have our lessons, so I can be free to have my own schedule. I don't need to commute anywhere to teach, even though my students are from different places. All my work is done here.

Brian: My lessons use a lot of different resources and activities. We do lots of pair work and group work to engage people, but students do work on their own at times too. We use different books and texts, music pieces and dialogues and use lots of realia as well to vary the lessons. I like to display my students' work around the classroom too to help motivate them.

Kelsey: I use lots of resources too, but they need to be suited to my telephone lessons. I often send my students the materials before class so that they can look at them in advance. If I'm using Skype for my lessons, I can send files and videos during the lesson too. We do use pair work and group work when I'm teaching multiple students, but most of the work is done individually.

Brian: My lessons are planned with the whole group in mind, doing a little of everything so that all students can improve the skills they need to bit by bit. The classes are structured using the PPP format, or the skills format if we're looking specifically at reading, writing, speaking or listening.

Kelsey: My lessons are tailored to the individual students' needs. It takes time to get a plan that works well for each student, as each have different reasons for studying and different strengths and weaknesses. I use a before, during and after lesson plan to cover what students will need for the lesson to be as effective as possible.

Brian: For me, the school assesses the students themselves when they join and puts them into classes based on their level. I still do a needs analysis when beginning my first lesson with them, but I have a good idea about what their levels and needs are before getting started.

Kelsey: I sometimes know the level of the student I teach if a school refers them to me, but for self-arranged students I need to do a level test and needs analysis right away. I can personalize my lessons, so I can learn more about what my students' goals and interests are in English. The aim is to improve their ability in a way that's most relevant to them and their needs.

Brian: So as you'll have seen, our lessons cover a lot of the same ground – but just do so in a different way.

Kelsey: We'll go into more detail in this course about how you should deal with these differences, but recognizing where things might be different between the classroom and telephone lessons is the first step in understanding how to be the most effective teacher you can be.

Classroom vs Telephone teaching: Quiz

true-or-false

Telephone classes are always taught using a landline or mobile phone.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

Telephone classes are always taught one-to-one.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

Telephone lessons are always speaking and listening based.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You can teach telephone lessons to students in any part of the world.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

Telephone classes can be highly tailored to individual students.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

Lessons should go at the pace of the student.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

Telephone teaching is only for Business English students.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

Telephone students will never come to a classroom to learn.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You don't need any resources for a telephone lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You use the same lesson plan structure for telephone lessons as for a classroom lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

Unit 2: Lesson types and needs analyses

Using VoIP as a teaching tool: Introduction

■ Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

So why do we use Skype or other VoIP applications as teaching tools?

We can send audio, video, or text files to students – either before, during or after lessons – so that they can make use of resources, like in a normal classroom.

Other features include being able to share your screen, send or receive instant messages or have a virtual whiteboard so that you can communicate in different ways and practice different skills.

These applications also allow you to switch between video or audio calls, and make group calls, so you can teach more students at a time.

Using VoIP as a teaching tool

We've mentioned already that Skype and other VoIP applications are now increasingly common alternatives to using a telephone in lessons.

We're going to show you why Skype is so popular for telephone teaching, but also outline some VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) applications that you can use to make free or low-cost calls online.

Check out the next few pages for a quick breakdown of some of the pros and cons of software that you can use to deliver your lessons.

VoIP options: Skype

Skype

Use this to: transfer files, send text messages, video chat and video conference.



Summary

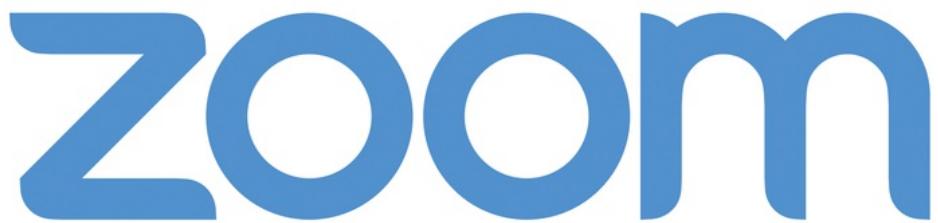
Skype offers free calls between subscribers and low cost calling for non-subscribers. It works on all mobile devices. The basic package is free of charge and very easy to set up.

✓	Pros	✗	Cons
✓	Easily set up video chats.	✗	Not all options possible with the free option.
✓	Saves all your text chats.	✗	Possible technical problems, especially when using a webcam on both sides.
✓	You can have lessons with more than one student at the same time (group call).	✗	Can be technical issues for students in China.
✓	You can share your screen (you will need to upgrade for using group screen sharing and group video calls).	✗	Might be hard for a student to concentrate – a good quality headset is an advantage here.
✓	Most popular and simple tool to use, so students should be familiar with it.	✗	Need third party software to record the lesson.

VoIP options: Zoom

Zoom

Use this to: video conference with groups and individuals.



Summary:

Zoom is a video conferencing online platform. It requires minimal bandwidth and therefore very reliable. Zoom works exceptionally well with group classes; the teacher can create “breakout rooms” for students to work on their own, with a partner or a group of other students while the tutor facilitates the discussions before bringing the class back together.

✓	Pros	✗	Cons
✓	You can request a demo from Zoom.	✗	Not as well-known as other platforms – will need to allow time for learners to familiarize themselves with Zoom.
✓	You can broadcast videos, audios and text. You can also turn the camera on/off which is useful when doing a listening activity and you don't want the student to see the speaker. You're able to add annotations when you are sharing the screen.	✗	Some teachers find it more professional to have the class material isolated in an application window rather than a screen share in Zoom.
✓	You can record your lesson and set up a timetable for recurring lessons.	✗	Lacks an interactive whiteboard.
✓	24-hour access to technical support.	✗	Might be technical problems for students in China; however it is more effective than Skype.



Service quality is very good. Excellent for low bandwidths. Easy to hold group lessons. Within the group session can share your screen, embed videos, have private and/or group chats.

VoIP options: Google Hangouts

Google Hangouts

Use this to: Send SMS and instant messages, video chat.



Summary

Google Hangouts is a communication platform built into every Android phone that has Google Play services. Users can communicate with anyone who has a Google account. The service is free and allows up to 10 participants to join a video “hangout” at a time.

✓	Pros	✗	Cons
✓	It has more features than Skype.	✗	You need a Google account to log in to the app.
✓	Has an easy to navigate interface.	✗	Video chats do not save, although text chats outside of a webcam call are saved.
✓	You can call anyone who has a Google account and record the call.	✗	The app might lag on mobile phones.
✓	You can chat, use video calls and share your screen.	✗	It does not show who is online in your contact list.
✓	Can embed YouTube videos and use a whiteboard (using free app Cacoo).	✗	No association with SIM.

✓	Also includes a handful of fun Google effects to choose from and features like GIF support.	✗	Blocked in China.
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VoIP as a distance learning tool

Why should you use Skype, or any other VoIP application, to teach English then? There are a couple of key factors that are commonly cited, with the first being that they are low-cost, so you won't rack up big phone bills for long calls.

From a learning point-of-view, they can facilitate face-to-face communication through the use of video calls, making it easier to communicate with students while still practicing the skills a telephone lesson focuses on. This means that even though you are at a distance, you can still have a relatively normal lesson.

Activity:

Why do you think it's important to have face-to-face communication with your students? Take a minute to think of five reasons why this might be true.

Name 5 reasons face-to-face communication is important

Start timer

Audio-only lessons

Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

We've spoken already about how using software like Skype facilitates face-to-face learning, and why having this in your lessons can be very useful. But what about audio-only lessons? What are the advantages of a situation where we can only use a telephone or can't use video features online?

Audio-only lessons are the more traditional type of telephone teaching, and can be very beneficial for some students. Think for a second about students whose main goals for learning English are to use the language to make or answer calls. This could be because of their job, or because they're moving to an English-speaking country and have never had to use the language on the phone before. Audio-only classes will allow these students to focus specifically on their speaking and listening skills, and learn the real-life implications of communicating in English without any visuals. This gives them the confidence and ability to speak on the telephone and have better conversations.

Getting started with audio-only lessons is tricky for some students to begin with, as they might find the constant interaction very intensive and they might experience some of the issues we talked about when lacking visual cues. But what you'll find is that the more they practice, and the more you practice delivering these lessons too, the better your students' English will become. They might not understand everything right away, but this improves over time and their technical language skills will certainly get better.

Audio-only lessons can still be engaging for both the student and you. You'll still be able to build some rapport with them too, as long as you keep positive and friendly. This is important to make students comfortable and confident and will encourage them to listen more intently to how you use the language and make real progress.

With audio-only lessons, you need to make sure that your speech is as clear as possible for students to understand you. Use a telephone or headset that is free from any crackling or interference and make sure that there is no background noise in your environment – or your students could get distracted.

All-in-all, audio-only lessons might have some limitations, but there's no reason why you can't make the most of them and improve your students' skills.

Preparing for a telephone lesson – Needs analysis

As with all types of TEFL, you need to prepare your lessons well – and the key to preparing an effective telephone lesson is to learn as much as you can about your student, starting with their English level.

If your student has been arranged for you through a school, there's a good chance they've already taken a level test or been assigned a level – so you should make sure to ask the school for this information. If you've arranged the student's lessons yourself, or otherwise don't know their level, then you'll need to do a level test before starting your teaching.

There are many level tests around and available for free. Be aware though that most English tests will focus on the students' understanding and knowledge of grammar and vocabulary, rather than any other skills. This means you'll need to check their use of the language, particularly their speaking and writing ability, in your first lessons.

For other skills that are vital for telephone lessons, such as listening, it's sometimes good to offer students a free trial lesson before getting started on a program with you – as this lets students see if your style of teaching will suit them and allow you to perform an informal level test and see what their listening ability is like. A free trial lesson means that both you and the student can decide if you want to work together, and will enable you to start planning relevant lessons for the student from the very start.

So what else do you need to know about your students before planning lessons for them? Check out the next video for more info and some new needs analysis techniques.

What should you find out about your students?

■ Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

As a telephone teacher, there are many things you need to find out about your students so you can make sure your lessons are appropriate, useful and fun! Obviously, the first thing you'll do is find out the student's level of English so that the content is appropriate, but there's other things you'll need to learn about them too.

The basics of your needs analysis are to find out what your students' motives are for doing telephone lessons. This means why they want to practise their English with you, which will in turn provide the content you'll want to cover with them.

The first area you'll need to consider is that of language issues. Does the student want to improve their grammar, or maybe their general vocabulary? Maybe they want to focus on pronunciation, or speaking naturally. Alternatively, they might want to focus on listening and understanding native English speakers, so be sure to tailor your lessons to the area they want to cover, not just what you think they should be doing. Another area to explore is emotions. The student might attach different emotions to their English use, like feeling shy or embarrassed about speaking, and they'll want more practice to overcome this. Students might be anxious that their ability is not improving and want extra practice. Students might also be hopeful that learning English will allow them to meet and learn about English-speaking people and cultures. These all require different types of lessons that will help students to get what they want out of their lessons.

Employment is another key reason why students opt for telephone lessons. They might need to use English for their job, or as a skill they want to improve to look for new jobs or promotion. Students could also be looking to move to an English-speaking country and need to reach a certain level of English to do that.

Often these speakers will have had some level of English tuition before, but will lack the confidence or ability to use the language over the phone – since it requires a different skillset to using English in other ways.

Telephone classes will help bridge the gap in their knowledge between real-life English and telephone English, and improve their career prospects in doing so.

Students might also want to learn English simply for educational purposes. They might be learning English in school or thinking about taking a course taught in English either in their country or abroad. No matter what skill they are looking to learn, students may choose telephone classes for their convenience and because they can have access to a native or fluent English speaker who will help them practice in an effective way.

Finally, some students will learn English in their free timesince they might want to improve their skills as a hobby or get involved in another hobby that involves using English, like watching films for example. There are lots of cultural reasons why students want to learn English, and telephone lessons can be an important way for them to gain the skills to speak on the phone – which isn't covered in other types of English lessons. Bearing all of this in mind, you should be conducting a level test that gauges their ability in the language, and also a needs analysis to decide what you are going to teach them. This process can be as informal or formal as you wish: as a question and answer session on the phone or as a form that's filled in before a lesson, or something entirely different – it's up to you.

There are two things that you should follow when conducting this needs analysis:

PSA – Present Situation Analysis

First a present situation analysis, or PSA. This will help you assess the current level, or situation, of the student.

TSA – Target Situation Analysis

And a target situation analysis. This is what the student hopes to achieve in the future and how your lessons will make that happen.

The best needs analyses are tailored to your student and cover the questions you've asked above to give them a personalized lesson. For example: a Business English student might be asked to tick a list of skills they want to work on, such as speaking on the phone, giving presentations or writing emails. A general English student could be asked what they enjoy doing in their free time so that you can choose topics that make lessons interesting.

Let's look at some more ways of conducting a needs analysis.

Different ways to do a needs analysis

Needs analyses are important when planning a program of English lessons, and there are many ways in which you can do them.

We've listed some ideas below that you can use, mix and match to make your needs analysis personal to your students and to your teaching style.

Remember that a needs analysis should be one of the first things you do with your students, and a good needs analysis can be revisited throughout your lesson program. This means your lesson plans will always be relevant to your students' ability and their goals, particularly as they progress and improve.

Here are some great ways of conducting needs analyses. Click on the headings to expand their descriptions:

Forms / Questionnaires

This is the most traditional way of doing a needs analysis, though perhaps not the most exciting. You can make these more interesting by working on them in a group and asking students to interview and give feedback about each other, although this will only work in an online lesson.

Interviews

This is the easiest way of doing a needs analysis. You can interview the student with your questions, perhaps making it into a role play to keep things interesting. For example: if you're teaching a Business English student, you could set up the needs analysis like a fictional job interview for their current role or one that they'd like in the future.

Combining the needs analysis with a lesson

You can use the needs analysis as part of an activity on becoming a self-sufficient learner or a lesson on a particular language point or skill. This is ideal for revisiting a needs analysis later on in a lesson program. For example: if your student's language level wasn't high enough to find out everything you wanted to know to begin with, you can try this to see how it has improved and how their needs and attitudes to language learning have changed.

Adverbs of frequency

Ask students questions about how often they use English and what they do to improve their skills, with answers to be given using adverbs of frequency. For example: "I often watch TV shows in English", "I sometimes speak in English" etc. This works well with lower-level students as they mostly use the present simple tense here.

Predictions, Possibility and Probability

Ask students to talk about their future needs for English, for example: "I will definitely", "I probably won't", "I might" etc.

Modals

Get students to select the correct modal verbs to complete a sentence about their own ability, for example: "I _____ understand films/articles in English" (can/can't/should/need to/must)

Functions review

Ask the student to match sentences to their functions (agreeing, requesting, commanding, prohibiting etc.) and talk about how often they need to perform those functions using English.

Ranking

Ask the student to rank things they need to be able to do in English and how important they are to them.

Guess the job

The student matches descriptions of how and when people need to use English in their jobs. Then they can give or write a similar description for themselves. This is great for Business English students.

True or False

Ask the student to mark sentences about their English use and studies as true or false, for example: "I write in English more often than I speak it" or "I think I am better at reading in English than listening to it". They can then talk through and expand on their answers.

Make it true

The student changes sentences to make them true for themselves, for example: "I mostly write stories in English" could be changed to "I mostly read stories" or "I mostly write emails".

Presentations

Students give a short presentation about their own needs for English, their past and present use of English and any relevant studies they've had. You can then ask questions at the end to catch anything they've missed. This is good for students who might need presentation skills, such as Business English students.

Presentations

You could also record the presentation and ask them to identify things they did well and what they could improve on.

Needs analysis meeting

Run a needs analysis as a formal meeting with an agenda and action minutes. Again, this is good for Business English students.

Syllabus negotiation

Students negotiate to decide how much time will be spent on certain topics and skills in the course. This is especially useful before or after covering language for negotiating.

Needs analysis questions

You can use all of the ideas on the previous page to conduct a good needs analysis for your telephone lessons, but for those looking to improve specific skills you'll need to ask more pointed questions.

This is especially true for Business English students, who will often want to enhance particular skills they use often in the workplace.

Listening and speaking skills questions

- Who do you normally have to speak or listen to?
- Are they English native speakers?
- What is the context?
- Is the setting formal or informal?
- Do you have to speak in public?
- Do you have to answer or ask questions?
- Do you have to interrupt?
- Do you have to speak on the telephone?
- Do you have to take instructions in English?

Reading and writing skills questions

- What type of things do you have to read or write?
- Is communication from within the company or from outside?
- Do you work with reports or manuals?
- Do you need to follow written instructions?
- Do you have to read for detail or just skim the document?
- Do you regularly write letters, memos or emails? If so, who are they to?

It's also important to think about teaching functions to your students, so that they can use natural language to perform certain tasks. For example: a Business English student might need to cover topics such as greeting clients, negotiating, emailing, running a meeting, conducting an interview or presenting.

Students might also want to learn vocabulary that's specific to how they'll use English outside of the classroom, so you should prepare some quick questions about the types of words they already know and what they'll need to learn.

Once you have answers about what skills or functions a student wants to learn, you can start thinking about the curriculum or program of lessons you'll deliver to your students.

Lesson types and needs analysis: Quiz

multiple-choice

You can use _____ to teach telephone lessons.

Select the correct answer from these options

VoIP applications like Skype

Instant messaging services

Social media

multiple-choice

VoIP stands for _____ and is a cheap or free way to make calls over the Internet.

Select the correct answer from these options

Video or Internet Programs

Voice or Image Programs

Voice over Internet Protocol

multiple-choice

Skype is _____ VoIP applications available.

Select the correct answer from these options

The only

One of many

The only free

multiple-choice

You can teach using a standard telephone but this won't allow you _____.

Select the correct answer from these options

To teach students in every country.

To do writing practice.

To have face-to-face communication.

multiple-choice

Face-to-face communication with your student will help you _____.

Select the correct answer from these options

Build rapport Work on pronunciation and natural body language

Gauge students' understanding and participation All of the above

multiple-choice

Audio-only classes are _____, particularly for Business English or general students who will have to make and receive calls.

Select the correct answer from these options

Important Impossible Unnecessary

multiple-choice

With a needs analysis, you _____.

Select the correct answer from these options

Only need to find out your student's level

Need to find out your student's level, reasons for study and what they want to get out of the class

Should always use a written questionnaire

multiple-choice

You should _____ every student.

Select the correct answer from these options

Use the same needs analysis with Adapt your needs analysis to

Not always do a needs analysis with

multiple-choice

:_____ are a good way to find out about your student.

Select the correct answer from these options

Forms and questionnaires

Language points, like adverbs of frequency, or predicting the future

True or false statements

All of the above

multiple-choice

Business students often need functional language lessons, for example: _____.

Select the correct answer from these options

How to greet clients, negotiate, or hold interviews

Focussing heavily on past, present and future tenses

Pronouncing words correctly

Unit 3: Structures and strategies

Teaching strategies

■ Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

You're now well aware of the students you are teaching and what you want to include in your lessons, so now it's time to start planning. But where do you start with that? How do you tailor your lessons to students' English levels? Can you structure lessons in the same way that you would for classroom lessons, using PPP or ESA?

Let's tackle these questions one by one, first of all: where do you start? With a telephone lesson you can be a lot more flexible in terms of content compared to a classroom group lesson, so start by thinking about what the student wants to cover. Your needs analysis and level test will have also told you their current ability and what they want to get out of the lessons, and with all this information you should be able to form a student-specific lesson plan. Use a course book if you wish, which can give your content some extra structure, but don't be too over-reliant on them. Course books can give you good ideas, but you need to vary your lessons to include topics your students will be interested in, rather than a set and impersonal selection of subjects.

How do you tailor lessons based on English level then? Higher levels are perhaps easier to plan for, as your student will already have a certain amount of language to work with. For lower levels it's still possible, but you'll need to plan more in advance – perhaps by sending some set phrases for them to practice before using them during the lesson, or by asking them to practice the pronunciation of certain words on their own. As long as you make sure lessons are achievable for students, and give plenty of praise when students get things right, then you'll find that their ability and confidence will improve – even if they're at a low level.

Now finally, can you structure classroom lessons in the same way as telephone lessons? The answer here is No. In traditional methodology we use the PPP and ESA lesson plan structures, alongside skills-based lessons for reading, writing, speaking or listening. In telephone lessons, we use a different lesson structure called the Before, During and After structure – which you'll find out more about in the next video.

Before, During and After lesson structure

▶ Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

We've now looked at some of the differences between classroom and telephone teaching strategies, so let's look at the lesson structure that's best for the latter: the before, during and after lesson structure.

This structure is more suited to telephone lessons as it takes into account the interactions that take place for this type of teaching. We can also add extra activities to further our students' knowledge and to prepare them for the main teaching session.

Naturally, the first stage of this lesson structure is the **Before** stage. Here, you'll send some material to your student to prepare them for the lesson you'll have with them. This gives them an opportunity to think about the topic of the lesson and maybe do some specific language practice prior to the class. They can discover the target language through real-life contexts, focus on specific vocabulary or ideas, or even work on a grammar point. Then when they go into the lesson, they'll already be warmed up.

The tasks or activities you send in the Before stage shouldn't be too time-consuming, as students might not have the time to complete them. You'll know from your needs analysis how busy the student's schedule is, and you can use that to decide what activities will best suit them.

So what can you send students? A good example is a short text to read with some basic comprehension questions to complete, or maybe a glossary to work on. For more advanced students you could work in grammar questions, a predictive pre-reading task or a gap fill to get them thinking. Listening tasks also work well, getting them to focus on specific vocabulary or grammar points, and then answer and check their answers in their own time. These help students understand the language and allow them to work at their own pace, whilst also saving valuable lesson time for practice in speaking and listening.

The ideal Before stage activity will allow students to get an idea of what they will encounter in the lesson and to build their knowledge in a comfortable and controlled way; something that they couldn't do during a class. It's in your student's best interests that they come prepared to class, but remember not to overload students with work or they might be unable to complete it.

The next phase of the lesson is **During** the actual telephone session – which is the lesson itself. Your activities should have been introduced in the Before stage, but they should stand alone so that if students haven't prepared, they'll still be able to take part effectively.

So what should you do during the lesson? The focus should be on speaking, as this is the only chance your student will have to practice this with you. Free activities are brilliant here, perhaps running through what you've already covered or discussing a certain topic in depth. For best results, let students guide the conversation and explain things in more depth where possible. They'll have their own ideas and opinions and it's important to let them express those through the medium of English.

If you have asked students to prepare for a role play, you would do that in this stage. If they haven't prepared for it, you can start off with some quick brainstorming and then go into it. Remember that flexibility is important, and you need to make sure your lesson fits what the student is able to do – so you might need to change discussion topics to help make the lesson flow better if the student isn't interested.

During the lesson, take notes on mistakes your student makes, whether it be on vocabulary, grammar, intonation, facial expression, body language or pronunciation. You can send your notes to the student after the class and ask them to work on correcting them. If they struggle with this, you can build practice of these areas into future lessons.

Whatever you decide to do, make sure this section is structured beforehand. You need to make sure your discussion is organized so that you fill the time and manage to help the student with the areas they need work on. A typical lesson will be 30 minutes long, and you need at least enough material to fill that. Don't make the mistake of thinking that because the lesson is flexible you can do less preparation, as it will have a negative impact on your teaching and you might give the impression of being disorganized.

Finally, the last part of a telephone lesson is **After** you've ended your session. It's a good idea to set a consolidation task to help students remember what they've learned. For example: you could give them a writing task based on the theme or topic you discussed, where they need to write an email or story, or report on the lesson. You could set a grammar task, or ask them to research a topic or design a questionnaire for family and friends. You could also ask them to contribute to a blog or use social media in English. The goal with this section is to get students using the language in a natural way that complements what they have been learning in the lesson.

You'll see now that the Before, During and After structure covers a lot more than just a simple telephone session, and it works on more skills than just speaking and listening. You can use this structure for any area you want to help your students with, but just remember to have it planned out beforehand.

With a good understanding of your students, good choices of topics and discussion points and a well-structured lesson plan you'll be able to create the ultimate personalized learning experience for your students!

Offering a free trial lesson

One of the best ways of attracting new students is to offer a free trial lesson. This lets them see what kind of teacher you are and get a feel for the sort of lessons you'd offer them. You also get to assess what type of student they are, performing a needs analysis, level test and getting to know them before embarking on a program of lessons.

A trial doesn't need to be a full lesson. It's best to give a taster of what you have to offer so perhaps a 15-minute session is preferable to your usual 30 minutes. This should focus on the "During" section of the lesson, and can be a generic lesson plan you've used before that you can modify to suit your particular student's needs. This will show the student that your lessons can be 100% relevant.

Here are some key points to remember about a trial telephone lesson:

- First take a few minutes to introduce yourself, explaining: where you're from, where you're based and what kind of teacher you are. Get the student to introduce themselves too. This bit should be quick and informal, and help you and the student to get a quick first impression of each other.
- Next, work on a "getting to know you" activity that can double as a needs analysis. Your student could maybe provide some information beforehand, for instance in an email, and this would allow you to explore their answers in more depth with a focus on some language features.
This part should be short and snappy, focusing on only a handful of examples: such as a couple of new words or a specific grammar point. You want the student to feel they've understood what you're teaching them and learned something valuable they can use in the future.
- Finally, encourage students to ask you questions. This will help you find out what they want from your lessons and judge their ability to produce language themselves.
- Remember throughout to be positive and smile (as that will still come across in your tone of voice). It's important to seem as friendly as possible and create some rapport, rather than being too pushy, since this is what will encourage students to continue having lessons with you.
- Make sure not to monopolize the lesson either. You should aim for student talking time (STT) of about 70%, so they can feel like they've used a lot of English and got the practice they feel they need.

Free trial checklist: Introduction

Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

To make sure your free trial lesson is as effective as possible, use a checklist to hit the important points of the lesson.

This will also be effective when you start teaching telephone lessons, as you get to grips with what you need to do before, during and after your session with a student.

Free trial checklist

Before the lesson

- Are you calling the student Skype to Skype or to a landline telephone?
- If you are using VoIP or Skype, have you checked that your headphones and microphone are working properly?
- If you are using Skype, are you going to use the webcam or audio only?
- If using a webcam, how are you dressed? What about the background? What will the student see?

During the lesson

- Are you making notes for a class report?
- Are you talking too much?
- Are you talking too quickly without enunciating clearly?
- Are you smiling?
- Does the student understand you?
- Is the student laughing and enjoying the lesson?
- What is their level of English?
- Have you found out why the student wants to learn English?
- How can you make this student need you as a teacher?
- What do you specifically have to offer them?
- Are you discovering their needs and telling them how you can solve them?
- What does the student think about your prices?
- How did the student find you?
- Why did they choose you? (important to know)
- Do you have the student's e-mail address?
- Are you giving too much or not enough praise? Or the right amount?
- Should you give the student a special offer? (Buy 5 lessons and get 1 free)
- Did you ask them to arrange their first paid lesson?

After the lesson

- Send them a thank you email and attach the class report and a homework activity.
- On a scale of 1 to 10, how likely do they seem to buy your lessons?
- If they haven't contacted you after a couple of days, send a follow-up email and ask if they have any questions.

Final words of advice

- Have multiple plans for various kinds of students.
- Visualize possible lessons and scenarios.
- Talk as little as possible (be efficient).
- Be patient and calm.
- Be confident.
- The more you can practice your trial lessons, the better.
- You will get better with time.
- Understand and accept that rejection will happen: everyone has their own opinion on things.
- Learn from any mistakes you make.
- Remember your successful points.

Lesson structure: Quiz

true-or-false

You structure a telephone lesson in the same way as a classroom lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You can use a PPP lesson plan structure for a telephone lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You can use a course book in a telephone lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

The most important part of a telephone lesson is the "During" section.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

The "Before" activities should always be reading-based.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You shouldn't tell the students in advance what the "During" section of the lesson will be about.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You should insist on students preparing in advance for the lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

You can't practice grammar in the "During" section.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

It's a good idea to set a consolidation task for students to do after the lesson.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false

true-or-false

It's important to try to incorporate reading, writing, listening and speaking into your lessons.

Select the correct answer from these options

true

false



End of course Quiz

Course review assignment

Congratulations

■ Video

This video is available online. The transcript appears below.

Congratulations! You've now reached the end of our telephone teaching course and are all set to deliver great telephone English lessons.

We've covered how telephone lessons are different from classroom lessons, how to conduct a needs analysis specifically for telephone English students, what topics you can cover in a telephone lesson, how to structure your telephone lessons and even how to market yourself with a free trial lesson.

If you're interested in this type of teaching, why not check out our advanced Teaching English Online course – made up of sections on teaching English over the internet and a comprehensive guide to setting up and promoting yourself as an English teacher.

You might also be interested in our advanced Business English course, which goes into more depth about the different styles you'll need for teaching businesspeople and how you can go about exploring that specialist area of TEFL.

We'd like to thank you again for taking this course, and we wish you every success in using your new-found telephone teaching skills to help students learn English.