

Talking on the Phone in English – Video

In this lesson, you can learn how to deal with common situations and problems when you're talking on the phone (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/talking-on-the-phone>) in English.

You'll see four dialogues, and then we'll explain the mobile phone vocabulary (<https://quizlet.com/46430619/mobile-phone-vocabulary-intermediate-flash-cards/>) and phrases that we use. This way, you'll learn everything you need to make phone calls in English!

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1. How to Make Informal (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/formal-informal-english>) Phone Calls

Let's start by showing you how to make an informal phone call, for example to a friend or a colleague you know well.

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/on-the-phone.webp>)

Oli: Hello?

Kasia: Oli, hi!

O: Sorry, who's this?

K: It's Kasia!

O: Oh, hi! Sorry, didn't have your number saved.

K: No worries. Listen: some of us are going rafting this weekend. Do you want to come?

O: Wow, that sounds great! Yeah, sure.

K: Brilliant! I'll text you the details.

O: Okay, cheers for the invite, see you then I guess.

K: Bye!

Let's look at the whole dialogue.

What do you notice?

First, I answered with a simple *hello*. This is common if you're answering the phone informally and you don't know who's calling.

I also used an informal way to ask who was calling: *who's this?*

And I used an informal way to give my name: *it's Kasia*.

Remember that you can't use *I'm* on the phone if the other person already knows you. If you're calling your friend, don't say, *I'm Kasia*.

Instead, say, *It's Kasia*.

Next, you can see that Kasia tells me why she's calling in a very simple way: Listen...

Also, look at the whole dialogue. It's quite short, right?

This is common in informal phone calls. We don't ask *how are you* or anything like that.

It's not bad to ask *how are you*, of course! But, it's not necessary in an informal phone call if you know each other well.

You can also see many examples of informal language that we both used, for example *wow*, *yeah*, *cheers*, *I guess*, or using *invite* as a noun instead of *invitation*.

Finally, we ended the conversation quickly and simply.

We used simple, informal goodbye words: *see you* and *bye*.

2. How to Make Formal Phone Calls

Next, let's look at how you can make a formal phone call, so you can see the difference.

(<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/phone-call.webp>)

K: Good afternoon, Oxford Online English, how can I help?

O: Hello, could I speak to Michael Hart, please?

K: Who's calling, please?

O: My name is Oli Redman. I'm calling concerning a proposal which Mr. Hart sent to me.

K: One moment, please...

[...]

K: I'm afraid he's not available right now. Would it be alright for him to call you back in about 30 minutes?

O: Yes, that would be fine.

K: And does he have your number?

O: Yes, he called me last week, so he must have it.

K: That's fine. He'll call you in half an hour or so. Is there anything else I can do for you?

O: No, that's all. Thanks for your help.

K: You're welcome. Thanks for calling, and have a nice day!

O: And to you. Goodbye!

Can you see the difference between this and the first dialogue you heard?

First, I answered the phone with a longer greeting. Instead of just *hello*, I used a full phrase.

I also said the name of the company—this is common when answering the phone at work.

You could also say your full name, like this:

Hello, Kasia Warszynska.

Or, you could say the name of your manager, like this:

Good morning, Anna Gilbert's office.

You can also see that you use different phrases to ask who's calling, or to say who you are:

Who's calling, please?

My name is...

In this case, I used *My name is...* because I was introducing myself for the first time.

If you're speaking to someone who you've met before, you could use *this is* and give your name.

For example, I could say:

This is Oli.

Oli also said why he was calling using a longer, more formal phrase:

I'm calling concerning...

You could also use something like:

I would like to ask about...

I wanted to discuss ... with you.

In general, you can see that the dialogue is much longer. We spoke more, and also used longer sentences.

You can see many examples of formal language that we both used, like *I'm afraid he's not available*, *would it be alright to...*, or *that would be fine*.

Finally, the goodbye is also much longer.

I started ending the call by asking:

Is there anything else I can do for you?

Compare this to the first dialogue, where we ended the call very quickly and simply. In this dialogue, ending the call took several sentences.

We also used more formal goodbye phrases, like:

Thanks for your help.

Thanks for calling.

Have a nice day!/And to you!

Goodbye

So you can see two important differences here: the language is almost totally different, and also the style is different, because everything is longer.

3. Common Problems

Next, let's look at another dialogue to see how to deal with a common problem when talking on the phone in English.

K: Hello?

O: Kasia? Hi, it's Oli.

K: Hi Oli!

O: So, we were thinking of going to the cinema tonight. Do you guys want to come?

K: Sorry, say that again.

O: I said, we're thinking of going to the cinema.

K: The sound's very quiet. Can you speak up a bit?

O: Can you hear me now?

K: Hello? Sorry, I really can't hear.

O: How about now?

K: Ah, yes, that's better!

O: Sorry, I'm in the subway, and the signal's not so good.

K: So, what were you saying?

O: I wanted to say... Hold on, my battery's about to die. Can I call you back later?

K: Sure, I'll be free till...

First, a question for you: was this dialogue formal or informal?

It was more informal.

Here, you can see some common problems you might have talking on the phone in English.

At the beginning, I couldn't hear Oli's question. So, I said:

Sorry, say that again.

You could use many different phrases here, like:

What was that?

What did you say?

In a more formal conversation, you could say something like:

I'm sorry, could you repeat that?

Could you say that again, please?

Next, Kasia couldn't hear me because the sound was too low.

She asked:

Can you speak up a bit?

Speak up (<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/speak-up>) means to speak more loudly.

More formally, you could say something like:

The sound is low. Would you mind speaking a little more loudly?

When speaking formally, you need to be more indirect, which means you need longer sentences.

We were having problems because Oli was on the subway. Do you remember what he said?

The signal's not so good.

You could also say:

I don't have much signal.

There's not much reception here.

Finally, he ran out of battery. He really should have charged his phone before he went out!

Finally, what if you call someone, and they're not there?

4. Leaving a Message (<https://www.thoughtco.com/telephone-english-leaving-messages-1210234>)

Let's look at our last dialogue.

O: Hello, OOE productions, can I help?

K: Hello, this is Kasia Warzsynska. I'm calling for Pieter Okker. Is he available?

O: Unfortunately he's busy at the moment. Would you like to leave a message, or should I get him to call you back later?

K: Um... Can I leave him a message? It's quite important.

O: Of course.

K: Could you ask him to double check the hotel reservations for the Italy conference? He'll know what I mean.

O: Very well. Anything else?

K: No, that's everything, but do please make sure he gets it as soon as possible.

O: I'll pass your message on as soon as he's free.

K: Thank you.

O: Would you also like him to call you back?

K: Yes, please. If you could get him to call me at my office, that would be wonderful.

O: No problem at all.

K: Thanks so much.

O: You're welcome, bye-bye now!

K: Bye!

Let's start with the same question: was this dialogue more formal, or more informal?

It was more formal this time.

In this dialogue, I wanted to speak to someone, but he wasn't there. Oli took a message for me. Do you remember the question he asked?

He said:

Would you like to leave a message?

You could also say:

Can I take a message?

Should I give him a message?

What can you say to answer this question?

You could say something like:

Can I leave him a message?

Could you pass on a message for me?

Then, give your message:

Can you ask him to...?

Could you tell her that...?

Just let him know that...

Here's a full example:

Could you tell her that I'll be arriving at five o'clock (<https://www.oxfordonlineenglish.com/tell-the-time>), instead of half seven?

You might also say how important your message is, particularly if it is very important!

For example:

Please make sure he gets it as soon as possible; it's really important./li>

It's urgent, so please tell her as soon as you can.

If it's not so important, you could say something like:

It's not urgent, so just let him know when he's free.

Thanks for watching!