

BEP 120 – Telephoning: Checking on an Order

Doing business across borders requires precise coordination, especially in the era of “just-in-time” delivery where goods need to be shipped to the customer at exact times.

When a product is made in one country, assembled in another, and sold in a third, the companies involved need to be in constant communication from start to finish. Making sure that orders are made and delivered on time is an essential part of international business, and a lot of the monitoring will be done by phone. So, in this episode we’re going to look at ways to check on the progress of an order over the telephone.

A while ago in BEP 92 & 93 we met Bill, a buyer for Bancroft’s, a chain of women’s clothing stores in the U.S. He’s placed a large order with Viva, an Italian fashion company, which is being coordinated by Catherine Traynor, Foxtrot’s shipping manager. Foxtrot is Viva’s U.S. distributor.



It’s now several months later and the order is due to be delivered. But Bill has just received a call from Bancroft’s warehouse to let him know that only half the order has been delivered so far. Now he’s calling Catherine to check on the rest of the delivery.

Listening Questions

1) How does Catherine let Bill know she’s looking for information about his order?

2) Where is the second part of the shipment?

3) What does Catherine offer to do to avoid separate deliveries in future?

Vocabulary

just-in-time: a manufacturing process where parts (or inventory) required to make a product are delivered to the manufacturer at the exact time they are needed, rather than kept in stock inside the factory. Just-in-time (or JIT) was a process pioneered by Toyota motors and is consider the foundation of most modern manufacturing approaches. "By implementing just-in-time inventory control, we can reduce lead times, improve quality, and most importantly, reduce manufacturing costs."

glitch: A minor problem that can easily be solved. "We've had a few glitches in changing over to the new billing system, but things have gone pretty smoothly on the whole."

distribution hub: A center where goods are collected for shipment before being sent out again to their final destination. "The company has opened a distribution center in Munich to service its Western European stores."

to sign for: To confirm the arrival of a delivery by signing a receipt. "The shipping records show that our client signed for the shipment when it arrived on Monday."

bear with me: a request for patience. "Please bear with me while I check your reservation."

to pull something up: To retrieve data from a computer system. "I can pull up your account and see if there are any charges outstanding."

in transit: in the process of being shipped. "The container arrived in port yesterday and is now in transit to our warehouse."

close of business: the normal end time of the business day. "I need the quarterly sales report finished by close of business Friday."

to cut it close: to leave very little time for errors or delays. "If we ship the parts on the 15th, they're scheduled to reach China on the 30th. Production starts on the 31st so that's cutting it pretty close."

to double-check: to check very thoroughly or repeatedly. "Katherine is going to double-check everyone's schedules and make sure we're all free to attend the meeting."

to consolidate: to combine goods in a shipment. "By consolidating the items in a single delivery, we can reduce our shipping costs by 40 percent."

to go the extra mile: to do more than is required for someone else. "Our sales team will always go the extra mile to keep our customers satisfied."

sounds like a plan: an informal expression for agreeing to a suggestions. A: "Do you want me to call Tony and ask him if the order will arrive today?" B: "Sounds like a plan. Call me back after you've spoken to him."

Dialog

Catherine: Catherine Trayner.

Bill: Hi Catherine, it's Bill Yardley at Bancroft's here.

Catherine: Hey Bill. How's it going over there?

Bill: Not too bad. But listen, Catherine, we seem to have run into a **glitch** on the initial shipment from Viva.

Catherine: You mean the Sports groupings?

Bill: Uh-huh. I checked with our **distribution hub** in Phoenix and they **signed for** a delivery this morning. But it was just a **partial** shipment: only 1000 sets. Do you think you could check on the rest of the order?

Catherine: Sure, Bill. Just bear with me a sec while I **pull that up** on my screen... Okay, here it is. It looks like the order was divided into two shipments – I'm not sure why, but that's what it's telling me – and they were shipped two days apart. The second shipment is still **in transit** but should be arriving by **close of business** today.

Bill: Oh, I see. That's **cutting it pretty close!**

Catherine: It is a bit. But Bill, I know how important it is for you to get this order to the stores before the weekend, so let me do this: I'll call Mario at Viva to **double-check** that the rest of the shipment's arriving today.

Bill: Great.

Catherine: And I'll see what we might be able to do about future orders. It may save time to **consolidate** everything at our Oklahoma warehouse before we ship to you.

Bill: Terrific! I really appreciate your **going the extra mile** on this.

Catherine: No problem Bill. I'll get back to you as soon as I've spoken to Mario.

Bill: **Sounds like a plan!** I'll be around till 5.

Catherine: Okay, speak to you soon.

Debrief

Bill and Catherine need to work together to solve what might be a problem with the Viva delivery – and in this short call, they’ve already made a lot of progress. Let’s look at some of the expressions they use to move the conversation along politely and professionally.

First, Bill needs to introduce himself to Catherine after calling her. They’ve worked together before, so he knows that she’s going to remember him and that he can use a less formal approach.

Catherine: Catherine Trayner.

Bill: Hey Catherine, it’s Bill Yardley at Bancroft’s.

Here, Bill’s approach is direct and brief, but he makes sure to give his name to avoid any confusion. It can also be useful to identify your company or provide some other information about your relationship to the person you’re calling.

Let’s practice a few other ways to quickly identify yourself.

- *Tony, hi. Sandra from Bancroft’s here.*
- *Hello Marcus, this is Frank returning your call.*
- *Bill? Hey, this is Yvonne calling from Lantos.*
- *Richard here, are you free to talk Jenny?*

Catherine recognizes Bill immediately and offers to make some small talk before getting down to business. But Bill wants the conversation to get straight to the point:

Catherine: Hi Bill. How’s it going over there?

Bill: Not too bad. But listen, Catherine, we seem to have run into a **glitch** on the initial shipment from Viva.

A *glitch* is an informal term for a minor problem, usually one that should be fairly easy to solve. By using this term, Bill is indicating that he’s not overly concerned about the shipment – but he wants to confirm with Catherine that there isn’t any problem that might affect the delivery of the rest of the order..

Listen to how Bill makes a request for Catherine’s help:

Bill: I checked with our **distribution hub** in Phoenix. They **signed for** a delivery this morning. But it was a partial shipment: just 1000 sets. Do you think you could check on the rest of the shipment?

The *distribution hub* for Bill’s company is a warehouse where shipments are received and then sent out to different stores. According to Bill, the warehouse *signed for* a shipment – that is, they accepted delivery from the shipping company – but they’ve only received part of the order.

By asking "Do you think you could check on the rest of the shipment?", Bill uses modal verbs and an indirect style to request action from Catherine. Here are a few other polite ways to ask for information on an order:

- *Would you mind confirming that the order has been shipped?*
- *Can you please check and find out what happened to the order?*
- *I'm a little concerned about the schedule, so please let me know the status of the shipment?*
- *Could you give me an update on the expected delivery time?*

It's going to take a little while for Catherine to check her computer system to get the information she needs, and while he waits she wants Bill to know that she's working on the problem. Listen to how she signals to Bill, to make sure he understands that she's making progress:

Catherine: Sure, Bill. Just bear with me a sec while I pull that up on my screen

Expressions like *bear with me*, which means 'please be patient', are useful ways to fill 'waiting time' in a phone conversation – for example, while waiting for a response from a computer search or from another person. To let people know that you are searching for more information you can use phrases such as these:

- *Let me just check that record in our system...*
- *Can you hang on for a moment while I check the status?*
- *Would you mind holding while I do a quick search?*
- *Hold on a sec while I pull that up on my screen.*

In the final example, we've used the verb collocation *to pull up*, which means to retrieve a file or other data on a computer system.

Once the data on Catherine's computer comes up, she explains what she's discovered to Bill:

Catherine: It looks like the order was divided into two shipments – I'm not sure why, but that's what it's telling me – and they were shipped two days apart.

Catherine's computer system only has part of the answer Bill is looking for. She knows that the missing part of the shipment is on its way to the warehouse, but she can't tell him why the shipment was split up, because the computer doesn't have that information. By saying "*that's what it's telling me*" or "*that's what the system says*", she lets Bill know that she's giving as much information as she can see herself.

Catherine and Bill also use some specific vocabulary to discuss the status of the order.

Catherine: The second shipment is still **in transit** but should be arriving by **close of business** today.

Bill: That's **cutting it** pretty **close**!

In transit means the shipment has left the manufacturer's location and is on the way to the customer, but hasn't actually arrived yet. *Close of business* means the time each day when the company usually stops working, usually around 5 or 6 pm. At many companies, close of business is at 5 p.m. And when Bill says the late shipment is *cutting it close*, he means that there's barely going to be enough time to send the items back out to his stores before the weekend.

Here are some other phrases Catherine could have used to tell Bill what her records are showing:

- *Here's what I'm seeing on my end.*
- *According to our system, it looks like everything's on track.*
- *Our records indicate that someone at your office signed for the package this morning.*
- *I'm seeing two different orders on that PO. One's due this week but the second is due at the end of the month.*

PO is short for *purchase order*, a request to purchase a product or set of products.

Now that Catherine has some information about the shipment, she can tell Bill what she plans to do to learn more.

Catherine: Bill, I know how important it is for you to get this order to the stores before the weekend, so let me do this: I'll call Mario at Viva to **double-check** that the rest of the shipment's arriving today.

Catherine promises to *double-check*, which means to check something very thoroughly to make absolutely sure the information is correct. In this case, she's going to contact Viva to confirm that the rest of the order is scheduled to arrive later the same day. By offering to do this, she indicates to Bill that she's taking the problem seriously.

Let's practice some more ways of offering to confirm or check on something:

- *I know this is important to you so let me just double-check with the factory.*
- *I'll be happy to check directly with production if that would put your mind at ease.*
- *Why don't I talk to the shipping department and confirm that everything's going smoothly?*
- *I'm going to speak personally with the supervisor to see what the hold-up is.*

In the last example, a *hold-up* means a delay.

To make sure Bill is kept informed about the progress of the shipment, Catherine also offers to call him back after she speaks with her contact at Viva. Listen to how their conversation ends:

Bill: I appreciate your **going the extra mile** on this.

Catherine: No problem. I'll get back to you as soon as I've spoken to Mario.

Bill thanks Catherine for *going the extra mile*, which means doing more than the minimum she needs to do. "Going the extra mile" is often a good way to build goodwill with customers and other business contacts, especially when problems arise.

Here are some other ways to promise a follow-up telephone call:

- *I'll get right back to you after I check with the head office.*
- *Let me speak with Sarah and then call you back.*
- *I should be able to follow up with you by the end of the day.*
- *Would you like me to ring back after I've searched our records?*

Okay, now it's your turn to practice.

First, let's practice ways to let another person know you're checking something for them. You can imagine that a client or business contact is calling you to with a concern. The caller will ask for information. After the beep, you can respond using some of the language we've studied today.

For example, if you hear:

Example Cue: Can you please check on what's happening? It's getting quite late.

You can say:

Example Answer: Sure Bill, just bear with me while I pull that up on my screen.

Other phrases you can use include: "*Hold on a sec while I check on that*" or "*Just a minute please whilst I do a quick search*" or "*let me just pull that up on my screen.*"

All right, let's give it a try. We'll play some example answers after the practice.

Cue 1: Hi Tony it's Fiona here. Can you check on that delivery of new computers?

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: I can't seem to find any record that you paid us for that last order. Do you have the invoice at your end?

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: I need to confirm that you've booked me a seat on the flight to Chicago next Monday. Can you give me a confirmation number, please?

Learner 3: _____

How did you do? Here's some examples of the language you could have used.

Answers

Cue 1: Hi Tony it's Fiona here. Can you check on that delivery of new computers?

Learner 1: Sure. Hold on a sec while I pull that up on my screen.

Cue 2: I can't seem to find any record that you paid us for that last order. Do you have the invoice at your end?

Learner 2: I'm sure we do. Can you hold on for a moment whilst I do a quick search?

Cue 3: I need to confirm that you've booked me a seat on the flight to Chicago next Monday. Can you give me a confirmation number, please?

Learner 3: Certainly, sir. Let me just check that record in our system.

Now let's practice useful collocations. You'll hear a series of sentences with a word replaced with a *beep*. Repeat the whole sentence, but say the missing word.

For example, if you hear...

Example cue: Just let me have a beep at my calendar.

You should say,

Example answer: Just let me have a **look** at my calendar.

We'll play an example answer after each exercise.

Are you ready? Let's begin.

Cue 1: There seems to be a beep in the software. It's been running very slow since the upgrade.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: I'd like to get the furniture delivered a few days before we open. I'd rather not cut it too beep and then have an unexpected delay.

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: I think all our outstanding bills have been paid, but let me just beep with finance to make sure.

Learner 3: _____

Cue 4: Richard really went the extra beep to help us finish the proposal in time.

Learner 4: _____

Cue 5: The rest of the parts are still in beep, so we can't start assembling the equipment until they arrive.

Learner 5: _____

Answer 1: There seems to be a **glitch** in the software. It's running very slow since the upgrade.

Answer 2: I'd like to get the furniture delivered a few days before we open. I'd rather not cut it too **close** and then have an unexpected delay.

Answer 3: I think all our outstanding bills have been paid, but let me just **double-check** with finance to make sure.

Answer 4: Richard really went the extra **mile** to help us finish the proposal in time.

Answer 5: The rest of the parts are still in **transit**, so we can't start assembling the equipment until it arrive.

That's all for this episode on checking on the progress of an order. We've studied *making a quick identification, asking to check on an order, letting a caller know you're checking, explaining the status of an order, reassuring a customer by offering to check and offering to call a customer back.*

Thanks for listening and see you next time!

Language Review

A. Letting the Caller Know you're Searching for Information

Put the following jumbled sentences in order to review language for letting the caller know you're searching for information. Write your correct response on the blank line below each group of mixed up words.

1. *check hang status while moment can you on a I the for*

2. *on my bear screen with me up just pull a sec while I that*

3. *screen a sec I pull on that on hold while up my*

4. *while quick mind you holding I do search would a*

5. *in me record system check let just that our*

B. Explaining the Status of an Order and Offering to Double-check.

Review useful language by filling in the blanks with words from the box below.

system	orders	signed	hold up	track
due	ease	indicate	end	double
shipping	seeing	personally	check	confirm

Explaining the status of an order:

1. Here's what I'm _____ on my _____.
2. According to our _____, it looks like everything's on _____.
3. Our records _____ that someone at your office _____ for the package this morning.
4. I'm seeing two different _____ on that PO. One's due this week but the second is _____ at the end of the month.

Reassuring the customer by offering to check:

5. I know this is important to you so let me just _____ -check with the factory.
6. I'll be happy to _____ directly with production if that would put your mind at _____.
7. Why don't I talk to the _____ department and _____ that everything's going smoothly?
8. I'm going to speak _____ with the supervisor to see what the _____ is.

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) Catherine says, *"Just bear with me a sec while I pull that up on my screen"* to let Bill know she's searching for information on his order.
- 2) We do not know the actual location of the second part of the shipment except that it is "in transit", that is, the goods are still being transported to Bancroft's distribution hub in Phoenix.
- 3) Catherine suggests to Bill that future shipments could be "consolidated", or combined, at Foxtrots warehouse in Oklahoma before being shipped on to Bancroft's. This will help avoid the problem of separate deliveries if orders have to be made in different locations.

Language Review

A. Letting the Caller Know you're Checking Information:

1. Can you hang on for a moment while I check the status?
2. Just bear with me a sec while I pull that up on my screen.
3. Hold on a sec while I pull that up on my screen.
4. Would you mind holding while I do a quick search?
5. Let me just check that record in our system.

B. Explaining the status of an order:

1. Here's what I'm **seeing** on my **end**.
2. According to our **records**, it looks like everything's on **track**.
3. Our records **indicate** that someone at your office **signed** for the package this morning.
4. I'm seeing two different **orders** on that PO. One's due this week but the second is **due** at the end of the month.

Reassuring the customer by offering to double-check:

5. I know this is important to you so let me just **double-check** with the factory.
6. I'll be happy to **check** directly with production if that would put your mind at **ease**.
7. Why don't I talk to the **shipping** department and **confirm** that everything's going smoothly?
8. I'm going to speak **directly** with the supervisor to see what the **hold up** is.