

COMMUNICATION

Call home! Formal and informal calls

LEVEL

Upper-Intermediate
(B2)

NUMBER

EN_B2_3064X

LANGUAGE

English

Learning outcomes

- I can identify some strategies to handle formal and informal phone calls.
- I can accurately use a range of expressions for formal and informal phone calls.



Warm-up

1. Are you familiar with these words? **Brainstorm** more words related to phone conversations.
2. What was the last phone call you made? Was it formal or informal?





Fill in the gaps

Complete the sentences using the words in the red box.

1 The _____ of his voice made his meaning clear. He said he wasn't angry, but I could tell that he was.

2 _____ refers to the way the voice rises and falls, which contributes to the meaning of what is said.

3 I don't get _____ out here, it's very remote.

4 She answered with a _____ greeting, so I knew there was something the matter.

5 We had a _____ frank conversation. I know exactly where I stand with her.

coverage
intonation
perfunctory
delightfully
tone



Phone calls

**What are some
communication challenges
of speaking over the phone?**

**Describe a time when you experienced one of
these challenges.**



Sounding natural over the phone!

Read the tips below and **answer** the questions.

Communication over the phone has its own set of challenges. As the speakers cannot rely on visual cues or body language, speech has to do more of the work.

Using intonation to stress certain words can draw emphasis towards the importance of what you are saying. Raising your tone at the end of the sentence can be an effective way of inviting the other speaker to answer you. Other ways to sound more natural over the phone include using pauses and spacing between your sentences, and the use of fillers while listening to reassure the other speaker you are actively listening.

What elements of communication are absent during a phone conversation?

Identify the ways in which speech can be used to sound more natural over the phone.

Have you used any of these tips in a phone call in English before?



Respond to the questions

Discuss the questions **in breakout rooms** or **as a class**.



How does formality affect a phone call?

How would you speak differently on a call to your friend versus your doctor?

What are some things that could be frustrating on a business call?

In what situations is a phone call more appropriate than a written communication?



Questionnaire

Do you agree with the statements below?

		true	false
1	Phone calls require less context than face to face communication.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2	It is important to introduce your name and position as a greeting in a business call.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3	Using fillers like <i>Yes, of course</i> , and <i>Mmm hmm</i> can reassure the other speaker that you are listening.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4	Adding pauses and spacing during a phone call is a mistake.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5	Words mean more in a phone call.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Trying to understand



Sorry, I didn't quite
catch that...

Sorry, what was that?

Are these phrases more **formal** or
informal?

Which is more **polite**?



Formal or informal?

- Decide whether these beginnings of phone calls are formal or informal. How can you tell?



Ah, hello John! Great to hear from you. It's been way too long!

Good afternoon! I'm just calling to enquire about a reservation I made with you a while ago. Unfortunately, there has been a change of plan...





Formal or informal?

- Decide whether these endings of phone calls are formal or informal. How can you tell?



Well, it was lovely to catch up. Let's not leave it so long in future. Chat soon, bye!

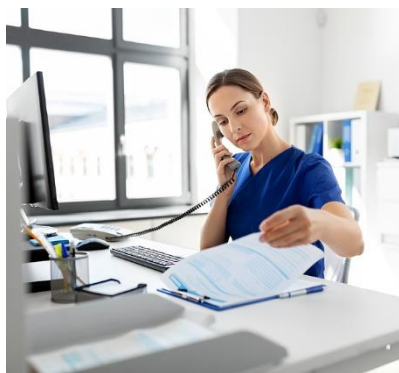
Thank you very much for such a pleasant conversation, Ms Redman. I hope you have a nice day. Goodbye!



Formal calls

The formal register is more common in phone calls. It is considered polite, especially if you haven't met the other speaker before. However, you must be careful of using too much formality. If you are too formal, people might find it difficult to feel comfortable in the conversation.

Below are some ways to use the formal register over the phone... Can you think of any others?



Use **would**, **could**, **can** or **may** when making a request

Avoid using too many contractions

informal calls

In more relaxed phone calls, or those with friends, it is normal to speak in a more informal manner. There are no major rules to speaking informally. It is closer to normal spoken English than the formal register.

Below are some ways to use the informal register over the phone... Can you think of any others?



Slang and **contractions** are acceptable
Short and **incomplete** sentences can be used
You can make **jokes** and include personal **opinions**

Leave a message after the tone

You have just tried to call your teacher to let them know you cannot make the lesson time. Unfortunately, you couldn't get through and got their answering machine instead.

Leave a message expressing the most important information.





Discuss

Have you ever had a phone call where you were unable to help the other person, or where they were unable to help you?

How did you respond?

Giving negative information

Sometimes if you are answering a phone call, you will not be able to help the caller on the other end. In a formal call this should be done delicately so as not to appear rude.

You can use the following phrases to give negative information in a formal phone call...
Can you think of any others?



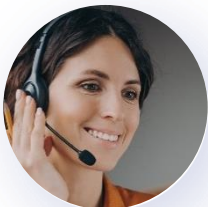
I'm afraid...
I'm sorry, but...
Unfortunately...



Giving negative information

Read the sentences below.

1



I'm afraid we have no further information at this point.

2



I'm afraid they are busy at the moment, could you call back later perhaps?

3



I'm sorry, but there is no one here by that name.

4



**They can't take your call right now, unfortunately.
Would you like me to take a message?**



A difficult conversation

Your boss has just called you. They are asking you to work at the weekend to finish an important job. However, it is your mother's birthday on Saturday. **Respond to your boss**, using expressions from the lesson and ensuring a formal tone is maintained.





End of the lesson

Idiom

Get hold of

Meaning: to manage to contact someone

Example: I've tried calling and texting but I can't get hold of her.



Additional practice



Customer service



My pizza arrived cold. This is unacceptable!

The delivery man was rude and asked for a tip.

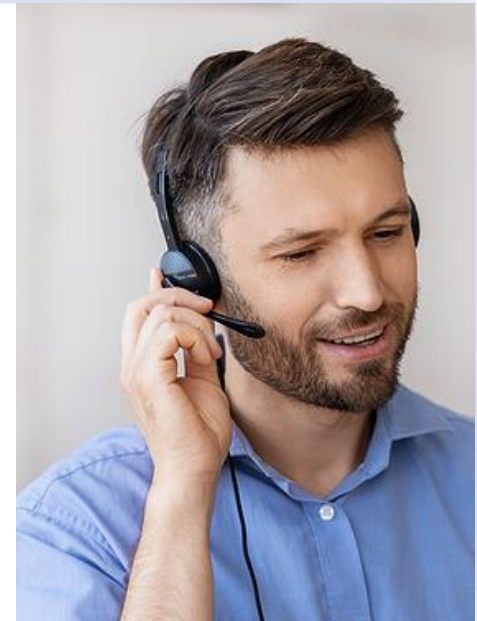
I will never order from Food Bird again!

There was a dead fly in my soup!

It's time to put your expert knowledge of telephone communication into practice.

You are working on the customer support line for a busy food delivery company.

Use the expressions and information from the lesson to respond to the upset customers below. Your task is to resolve the problem and make them happy.





Phone a friend

You have just come home from the most amazing music festival! Call your friend and describe it to them.

What did you like about it?

Where was it?

Try to use expressions to foster an informal tone in your call.





Write a guide

Complete the writing activity below.

Use your expertise to write a guide about how communicating over the phone at your workplace.

Try to use suggestions you have picked up from the lesson.

Aim for around 150 words.





Answer key

P.4: 1. tone 2. intonation 3. coverage 4. perfunctory 5. delightfully



Summary

Phone conversations:

- *tone; perfunctory; delightfully; conventional; coverage; intonation*
- *I didn't quite catch that.; What was that?*
- *It was a **perfunctory** conversation.*
- *His **tone** was rather brisk.*

Formal calls:

- The formal register is more common in phone calls. It is considered polite, especially if you haven't met the other speaker before. However, you must be careful of using too much formality. If you are too formal, people might find it difficult to feel comfortable in the conversation.
- Use **would, could, can** or **may** when making a request. **Avoid** using too many contractions.

Informal calls:

- In more relaxed phone calls, or those with friends, people speak in a more informal manner. There are no rules to speaking informally. It is closer to normal spoken English than the formal register.
- **Slang** and **contractions** are acceptable. Short and **incomplete** sentences can be used. You can make **jokes** and include personal **opinions**.

Giving negative information:

- Sometimes if you are answering a phone call, you will not be able to help the caller on the other end. In a formal call this should be done delicately so as not to appear rude.
- *I'm afraid...; I'm sorry, but...; Unfortunately...*



Vocabulary

tone

perfunctory

delightfully

conventional

coverage

intonation

I didn't quite catch that

What was that?

