

Phone call strategies

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL
Upper-intermediate

NUMBER
EN_BE_3501X

LANGUAGES
English

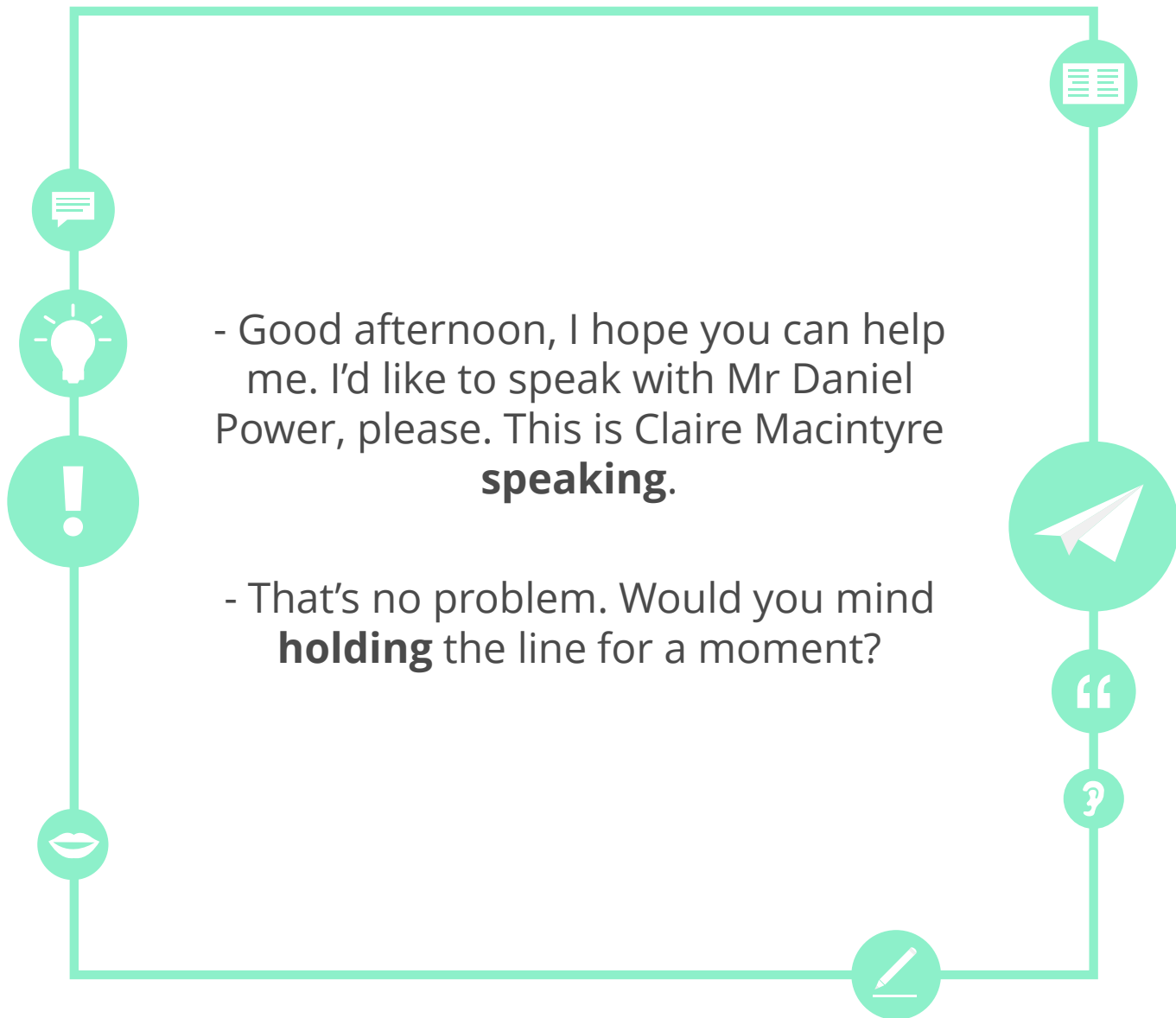




Goals

- Can recognise and understand different strategies for handling phone calls in different scenarios
- Can use new phrases and strategies to make formal requests on the phone







Preview and warm-up

Using the **telephone** is a central part of conducting business. This lesson will focus on teaching you phone-related vocabulary and different **strategies** for handling different kinds of **phone calls**.



That's no problem. I'll **call back** later for Mr Martin.



Warm up

What do you think of speaking
on the phone?

Do you use the phone just for
functional reasons, or are you
the kind of person who would
chat for hours?





Basic vocabulary for making a call



When you ring a company, it normally goes through to **reception**.

The person answering is normally called the **receptionist** or **secretary**.



The person you speak to before the person you are looking for is called a **gatekeeper**.

If the person you are looking for isn't there, the receptionist may tell you they are **out of the office**.





Basic vocabulary for making a call



If you know the person's personal office number, it is called their **direct line**.

When the person we want is not in their office, the call usually goes to **answering machine** (or **voicemail**).



When we put the phone number into the phone, we are **dialling** the number.

When we aren't getting any answer and the phone keeps ringing, we say it is **ringing out**.



phrasal verbs on the phone

Most of the **verbs** we use to talk about actions on the phone are **phrasal verbs**.

A phrasal verb is a combination of a **verb** added to one or two **particles** (a **preposition** or an **adverb**). The particle changes the meaning of the original verb.



The line was just **cut off**, I think the receptionist might have accidentally **hung up**!



The line is very bad – you are **breaking up** and it's hard to hear what you're saying!



Phrasal verbs

to put (someone) through

Yes, Mr. Newmann is in. I'll **put** you **through**. Just a moment.

to hold on

I'll have to transfer you to sales for that. Could you **hold on**, for a moment please?

to hang up

If there is no answer, just **hang up** and ring again later.

to call back

I'm sorry, she's in a meeting. Should I ask her to **call** you **back** when she's through?

to break up

I'm on the train, so the connection might **break up** soon.

to pick up

If you **pick up** line three, you can join the conference call.



Now make your own sentences

Use the phrasal verbs below to make your own sentences.
Don't forget to try conjugating some of the verbs into the past simple or present continuous.



I haven't **heard back** from Medko about that supply issue yet. The receptionist left me holding the line and never **picked** it back **up**.

to put someone through

to hold on

to pick up

to call back

to break up

to hang up

modal verbs

When speaking on the phone, it is more polite to use **modal verbs**.
Doing this makes it seem less like you are making demands, and more like
you are making **requests**.



I **would like to** talk to...
Could I please talk to...

making requests using modal verbs

So as to avoid sounding like you are giving orders or making demands of somebody when making a **request**, it is best to use **modal verbs**.

Have a look at some of the examples of requests below:

Could you please...

Would it be alright if...

May I please...

Would you mind...

Do you think you **could**...

I hope it **wouldn't** be too much trouble, if

Would it be alright to try calling back after lunch?



Conversation practice

Continue the dialogue using as many modal verbs and phrasal verbs as you can. Practise asking to speak to somebody, leaving a message and organising to call back later on.



Good afternoon! You're through to Connell Designs, this is Laura speaking.
How may I help you?

Hello, Laura...



...

...





Now read the transcript of the telephone call below

Receptionist	Hello, Industrial Industries. This is Ciara speaking. How may I help you?
Harold	Hello, could I speak to Ms Harrison, please?
Ciara	May I ask who is calling?
Harold	Yes, this is Harold Barnacle. It's concerning the Newton project.
Ciara	Just a moment, please. *puts Harold on hold* ... Hello, Mr. Barnacle?
Harold	Yes.
Ciara	I'm sorry-- unfortunately, Ms Harrison is in a meeting at the moment. Can I take a message?
Harold	Actually, I was hoping to confirm our tentative meeting for this afternoon. Would that be possible?
Ciara	I'm afraid I can't say at the moment. Several things have come up this morning and she is very busy.
Harold	Well, if she can reach me before 1pm that would be great. Can I give you my number?
Ciara	Go ahead.
Harold	It's 0143 687 9928. Thank you for all of your help.
Ciara	No problem, I'll let her know. Goodbye, now.



Discuss the following

How successful was Harold's business call? Were both parties polite? Answer the following questions about the call.

What is the purpose of Harold's call?

When will Ms. Harrison be available?

List any phrasal verbs that appear in the text.

Is any part of the conversation exceptionally polite? How so?

Did you notice any useful phrases or structures mentioned in the lesson so far?



The basics

When making a business phone call, what do you think are the three most important things to remember?

Do you agree or disagree with the words below?

identify yourself

be clear

be polite

gerund or infinitive?

When on the phone, we use a lot of different expressions. It's sometimes difficult to know whether we should use the **gerund**, or the **-ing** form of the verb, or the **infinitive**, the **to** form of the verb.

While there are no hard and fast rules, there are some guidelines you can use to help you.



Do you mind **holding** the line for a few minutes?



I'm wondering when is a good time **to call back**?

when to use the infinitive

The **infinitive** form of a verb, or the **to-** form, is used under the following circumstances:

When expressing the **purpose** or **intention** of an action:

I am calling **to speak** with Mr Swan.

Mr Swan isn't available **to take** your call at the moment.

Ms Smith rang earlier **to check** that you're available for a meeting on Tuesday.

When making a **comment** or **judgement**:

I don't think that was the best thing **to say** under those circumstances.

This is the best way **to handle** the problem.

I'm ringing **to confirm** our appointment this afternoon.

when to use the gerund

There is no real rule to explain when we should use the **gerund**. It has to be learned on a case-by-case basis. However, there are some guidelines to help you figure it out!

Whenever a **verb follows a preposition**, such as **for** or **of**, we use the **gerund**:

Thank you **for calling**!

I'm afraid **of giving** you the wrong idea. Let me just check that.

There are some **verbs** which are typically followed by the **gerund**. They are:

to mind: Would you mind **helping** me with this report?

to recommend: When do you recommend **calling** back?

to stop: Nick didn't stop **talking** for the whole conference call!

to suggest: How would you suggest **going** about this?

to finish: Could you drop by my office when you're finished **talking** to Mr Sands?

to avoid: I'm not sure how to avoid **taking** this phone call.

Do you mind **passing on** a message to Ms Carey?



Phrasal verbs with a gerund or infinitive

Match the sentence fragments on the left with their corresponding half on the right.

When you've finished, identify what kind of sentence it is: does it express purpose, make a comment, does it use a special verb?

Now, I'd like to summarise...

...holding on for another minute?

I'm not sure if that's the best thing...

...being so patient

Sorry to ask, but would you mind...

...the minutes from our last meeting.

I can't thank you enough for...

...to do in a situation like this.



More phrasal verbs for speaking on the phone

to sum up

to speak up

to pass on

to hang on

to keep up with

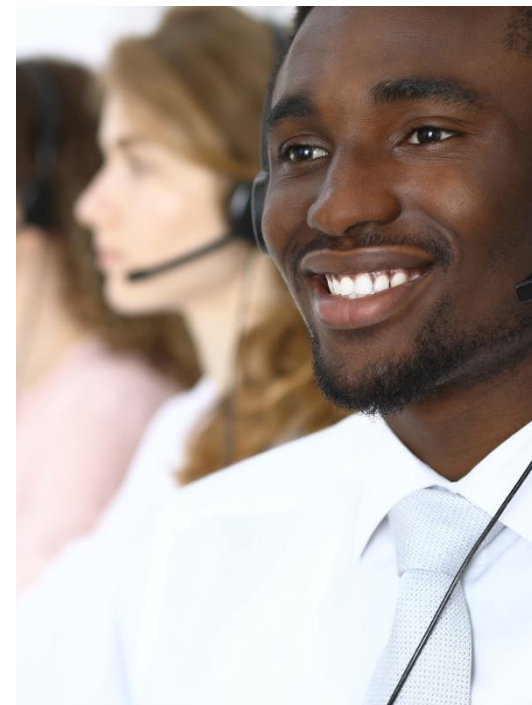
to cut off



Use the phrasal verbs from the previous slide to complete the sentences.

In one of these sentences, you will need to include a personal pronoun along with the phrasal verb so that the sentence makes sense. Can you figure out which one?

1. The line on my end is very quiet. Would you mind _____?
2. I'm sorry, you're speaking so quickly, I can't _____ you. Could you please slow down?
3. To _____, I need to talk with your operations manager, Ms Barnes, as soon as possible regarding the stationery order she placed.
4. Sorry again for the inconvenience, Mr Smith. I'll be sure to _____ your message.
5. I'm sorry to _____, Ms Santana, but I'm afraid the line is very bad!
6. I think Mr Swan is in a meeting, but if you _____ for a moment, I'll double check.



When you have finished, can you explain why each sentence takes the infinitive or gerund, where applicable?

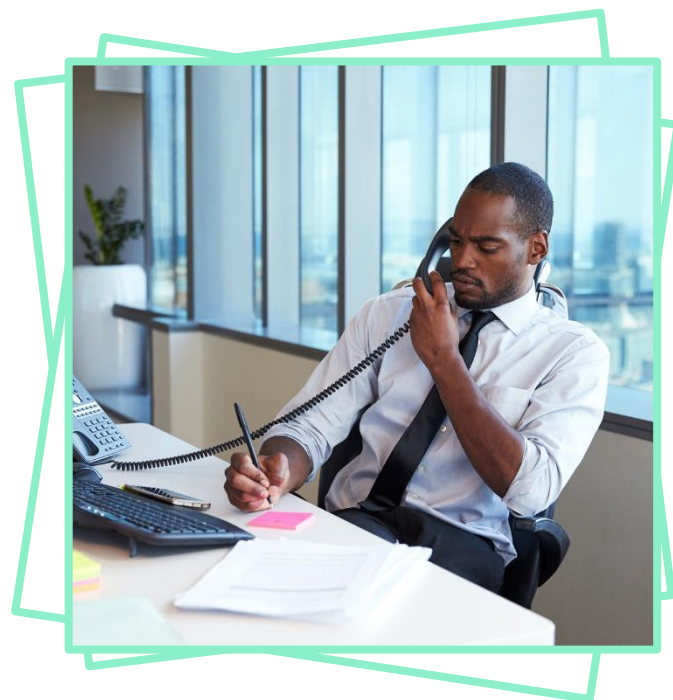


Follow-up activity

Read back over the dialogue on slide 14.

Imagine Ms. Harrison manages to call Harold back by 1pm. Write a possible telephone conversation between the two, then read it aloud as a role-play.

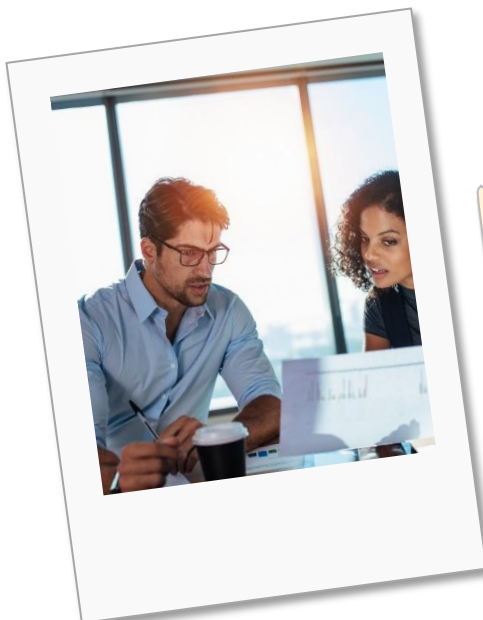
You can check the next slide for some useful phrases to help you.





Useful phrases

Use phrases from the following list to create a conversation between Harold and Ms. Harrison.



Sorry for the delay.

How are things?

Who am I speaking with?

I must have the wrong number.

I apologise for the disturbance.

Nice to hear from you.

Shall we meet?

Sorry I missed you.

I'm quite busy, to be perfectly honest.

Have you got a minute to spare?

Can I just ask... ?

Just a moment, please.

Did I catch you at a bad time?

Would you rather I rang back later?

Did you receive my message?

Hang on a moment, I'm just putting you through.



Brainstorming

**What other ways are
there of being polite
over the phone?**

pleasure

thank you

fine

may I ask

that would be



Answering requests politely

- There are lots of different ways of answering a request besides a simple **yes** or **no**.
- In the examples below, there are some different ways of saying **yes** to some more common **request** and **question** structures.
- The following slide gives some guidelines on how to say **no** to a request politely.

Question	Answering yes
Would you mind...?	no, not at all; of course not; it would be my pleasure
Is it ok if...?	That's no problem; of course, that's fine; certainly;
Could you...?	I can of course; it would be my pleasure; certainly; I will see what I can do!



Answering requests politely

- Especially when saying **no** to a request, it is important to be as **polite** and **professional** as possible.
- It is best to express **regret** that you cannot help. Observe the way each of the examples begins.
- Always try to suggest an **alternative** course of action to the person making the request. Offer to **refer** them on to somebody who can better deal with their request.

- Unfortunately I am very busy at the moment. Perhaps somebody else would be in a better position to help.
- To be honest, this particular task falls outside of my area of expertise/specialty. I'd be happy to direct you to someone who has the right skills to help you.
- I'm afraid that I would need to obtain permission from my superior/manager in order to help you with that. You might be better off consulting somebody with more responsibility in that area.
- I'm sorry, I am not sure that I am the best person to help you with this. If you hold for a moment, I can find out who in the company deals with these kinds of issues and direct you to them.



Dealing with a bad line

Read the dialogue below. The line is very bad and the receptionist is having trouble understanding what is being said. What do you think of how the situation is handled?



Good morning, I hope you can help me. This is Claire Callan ringing from MedKo Industries. I am hoping to speak with Martin Taylor please.

Hello, good morning, Ms Canston. I'm afraid the line is very bad so I can only partially hear you. Would you mind speaking up? You're looking for a Michael Tanner? I'm afraid we don't have anybody here by that name. Are you sure you have the right number?



The line must be very bad! My name is Claire CALLAN and I'm looking for Martin Taylor, your operations manager. M for monkey, A for apple, R for red, T for tiny, I for igloo and N for night; second name, T for tiny, A for apple, Y for yes, L for laugh, O for orange and R for red!

Oh, I see! Thank you for being so patient. Mr Taylor is currently in a meeting, but can I take a message and have him call you back later on?





Discussion

Discuss the following questions in relation to the dialogue above.



1

How can telephone conversations quickly lead to misunderstandings?

2

How can politeness on the phone help to avoid misunderstandings?

3

How can you deal with possible misunderstandings on the phone once you've suspected them?



Role play

Imagine a telephone conversation between Mr Swan, calling to request a meeting with the marketing department at your agency, SmRtAds, to discuss a long-term plan for his company. Improvise the scenario twice: once where you agree to help and one where you have to politely decline and direct Mr Swan elsewhere. There are some phrases below to start you off.



Good afternoon/ May I... / Would it be alright, if... / Do you think you could... / I hope it wouldn't be too much trouble, if... / Would you mind, if...



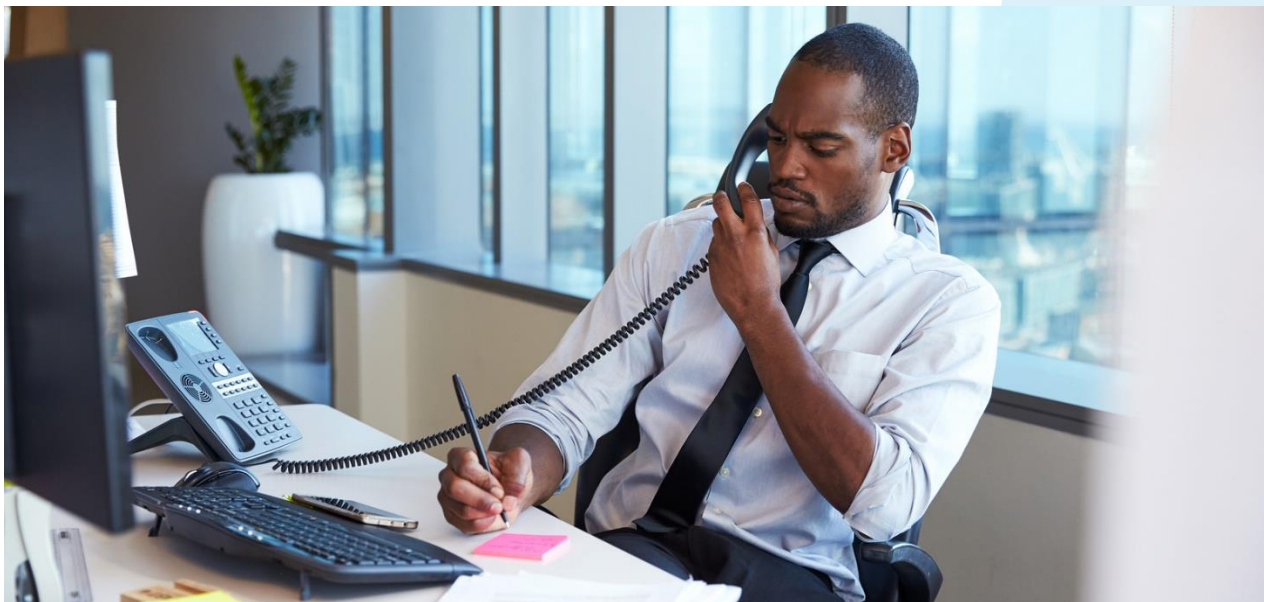
Yes, of course / That would be fine / No, not at all / I'd be delighted / Of course not. I'm afraid that... / I'm sorry, but... / The problem is that... / Unfortunately...



...



Get ready to listen



The next slide will focus on
training your listening comprehension



Leaving a message

Listen to the following client leaving a message on the office answering machine, then answer the following questions.

1. What is the name of the enquiring client's company?
2. What issue does the client want to deal with?
3. How does the client go about explaining the problem?
4. How does the client propose to resolve the issue?
5. What did you notice about the message in particular? What style of speech does he use?





Reflect on the lesson

Take a moment to review any new **vocabulary, phrases, language structures** or **grammar points** you have come across for the first time in this lesson.

Review them with your teacher one more time to make sure you don't forget!





Answer Key

Activity p. 22

1. speaking up (gerund – follows the verb **to mind**)
2. keep up with (no gerund or infinitive – not applicable)
3. sum up (infinitive – purpose)
4. pass on (infinitive – purpose)
5. cut **you** off (infinitive – purpose)
6. hang on (no gerund or infinitive – not applicable)

Activity p. 13

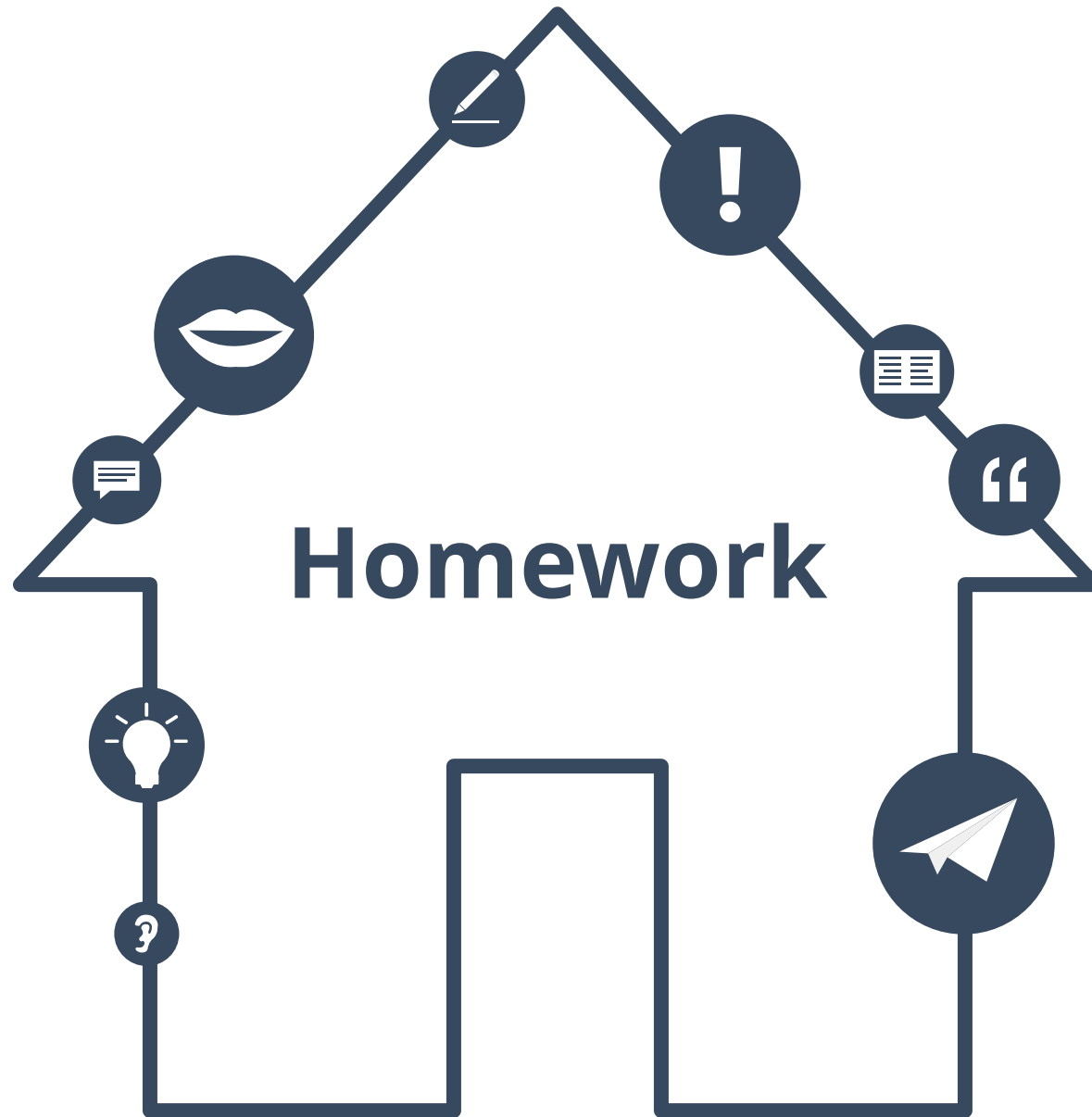
1. Now I'd like to summarise the minutes from our last meeting. (purpose)
2. I'm not sure if that's the best thing to do in a situation like this. (judgement)
3. Sorry to ask, but would you mind holding on for another minute? (uses the verb **to mind** which is followed by a gerund)
4. I can't thank you enough for being so patient. (verb follows preposition)



Transcription

beeping sound

Hello, good afternoon. This is Brian Locke calling from The Chocolate Company. I have tried several times for Ms Bonham this morning but each time the calls go to voicemail. I'm ringing in relation to an order I placed last week – number 3276A. Due to unforeseen demand, I need to amend the order and double the required quantity. I would greatly appreciate a swift response on this time sensitive matter. Call me on my direct line in the office at +447035298921 or alternatively on my mobile, +447923775234.





Homework: lists

Go back through the lesson and identify the phrasal verbs and polite expressions that you think will be especially useful to you.

Phrasal verbs

Polite phrases



Practise your telephone skills

Imagine you have received information from the local police that your car has been towed to a nearby lot. Prepare what you are going to say to the lot owner to organise getting your car back. Ask for directions to the lot from the city centre.

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