

Effective communication on the phone

COMMUNICATION

LEVEL
Upper-intermediate

NUMBER
EN_BE_3508X

LANGUAGE
English





Goals

- Can understand the importance of being concise and how to choose the most important points out of many
- Can clearly and politely express own wishes and ask follow-up questions to avoid misunderstandings



Sometimes less is more! During a phone call it is helpful to **be concise**. Of course, getting to the point while **being polite** is a balancing act!





Preview and warm-up

- Finding the sweet spot between **formal, elaborate language** and being **too short** can be challenging. How do you say what you want without seeming too **aggressive**? How do you speak **politely** while still being **direct**?



Effective communication on the phone involves **stating your purpose** and **being specific** when necessary.



Loving or loathing the phone

Is being on the **phone** a big part of your working life?

Do you find **phone** or **face-to-face** conversations easier?





Effective communication on the phone

- There are three key ways of making sure you **communicate effectively** on the phone:

state your purpose

- In a work setting, you should explicitly state the **purpose** of your call.

provide background information

- You don't always need to do this, but it can be helpful if you're **following up** on a previous discussion or contacting someone new.

be concise

- If you choose to provide background information, avoid giving your whole life story or going into **unnecessary detail**.



Stating your purpose

- Here are some useful phrases for when you want to give your **reason** for calling.



I'm calling about the issue of your contract.

I wanted to call and confirm your attendance at the seminar.



Do you have a few minutes to discuss tomorrow's meeting?

I'd like to speak to somebody about the status of my shipment.





Which one is best?

Look at the two phone calls below.
Which one is clearer about the purpose of the call?

A)

Hi Lynne, how are you doing today? Did you look at the report sections yet? What did you think about them?



B)

Hi Lynne. This is Louisa. As we agreed yesterday, I'm phoning to go over the last three sections of the annual report. Are you ready to discuss them?





Words and phrases for phone calls

pertaining to

Do you have any information **pertaining to** the investigation into his misconduct?

as agreed

As agreed, we'll submit the report by Friday and go through the feedback next week.

as discussed

As discussed yesterday, I'd like to talk over our agenda for the meeting.

following on from

Following on from what I said in my e-mail yesterday, I'd now like to discuss the matter in more detail.



Words and phrases for phone calls

to refer to

I want to **refer to** the e-mail you sent earlier today.

**The purpose of
this call is...**

Hi Lauren! **The purpose of this call is** to give you an overview of our client services and answer any questions you might have.

FYI
(for your information)

Chris? It's Joanne. **FYI** the meeting has been moved to the downstairs conference room.

heads up

Hi, I just wanted to give you a **heads up** that I'm going to be a bit late with my report. Would you mind if I sent it to you tomorrow instead?



Role play

Imagine you have to make the following calls. Practise stating the purpose of your call to the person you are phoning (your teacher).



call Richard

Go over agenda for first evening of conference. Need his input on the programme before publishing.

call Vijay Patel

Invite for interview for accounting director position.

call Yuko

Let her know meeting has been moved to next week.

call Monique

Remind her to send travel receipts.



Are these examples of effective business communication or not?

	EFFECTIVE	NOT EFFECTIVE
1. Hi, Cliff. FYI there's going to be construction work in the office tomorrow, so you may want to work off-site.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. Hello Martina, this is Beth. I'm your co-worker down the hall. We were at our weekly meeting and you and I chatted quite a bit. Anyway, the point is...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. Hello Rose, this is Henry from the Bristol office. Do you have a moment to discuss an issue we've been having with a contract?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. Hi Barbara, what's up? It's Jeremy from work. I work in the marketing department. How you doing? Ah, I've forgotten why I rang in the first place, hang on...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. Christine? It's Sally. HR has approved the leave you requested for next week. Enjoy your holiday!	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. Hi, this is just to let you know that maybe we need to reconsider the budget for the new project. You know the one I mean? The marketing one. Or was it sales?	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>



Role play

An up-and-coming tech firm wants an office to match its corporate identity and is therefore looking for an interior designer. Complete the following dialogue in which a design firm phones the tech firm for the first time.



Student A: you are from the design firm and are calling to provide requested information about the services your company offers.



Student B (or teacher): you receive a call from the design firm.

to beat around the bush

to go off on a tangent

To **beat around the bush** means to avoid saying something **directly**. We tend to do it when we're dealing with an **uncomfortable** topic. However, it is not a **good strategy** for effective communication.

Going off on a tangent means **leaving the original subject** and talking about something that is only loosely related.



Stop **beating around the bush** and just say what you want to say!



This was supposed to be a talk about marketing and now he's talking about the HR department – he's **gone off on** a bit of **a tangent**!



Getting things back on track

- What do you do if you find a conversation is **going off track**? You've moved on from the **original point** and aren't really sure where things are going.
- You can **interrupt** and **ask for clarification**.

getting off track	politely getting back on track
Anyway, we'll need a lot of help from you.	Sorry, could you please be more specific ?
We've made some changes to the agenda, just small details, but anyway...	Sorry, but could you please inform me about the changes to the agenda?
Jill's in charge of the grant... She's actually quite disorganised. Do you know what she did the other day?	Joan, I think you're moving away from the subject . What's my role?



Being firm but polite

- Your time is valuable, so it is important to be able to **steer a conversation back** to the main subject or **ask for clarification** while still being polite.
- Note that the phrases below are **polite requests**, but that it is still wise to use **sorry, please** and **thank you** with these phrases.

interrupting and redirecting

I just wanted to know more about this particular issue.

I think I'm clear on the itinerary, so maybe we could focus on the agenda instead?

Sorry but I have limited time available, so I'm afraid I'll have to hurry you. Is it alright if we quickly get to the point?

I need to go soon, so could you briefly tell me what I need to do?





Asking follow-up questions

- Another way to **control the direction of the call** is to ask **follow-up questions**.



We have developed partnerships with some of the key stakeholders in the area.

Those partnerships – are they public or private sector?



You can also ask shorter questions throughout a conversation e.g. With whom? Where?



Find the best response for each of the scenarios described

A

Your colleague is supposed to call you and explain the new online purchasing system but is being very vague and just describing the website generally.

B

Your supervisor phones you to discuss how to set up for a big meeting, but ends up complaining about the office manager... for a long time!

C

You have a conference call about the foreign investors that will be visiting your company. Your team, however, is not providing any new information. They've just told you the date and time, which you already knew.

D

You scheduled a 20 minute phone call with your summer intern. You only wanted a quick update but now your time is running out and you haven't actually discussed much.

1. James, I think you're moving away from the subject.

2. I'm sorry, could you be more precise?

3. Sorry but I already have this information. Do you have any new developments?

4. Jenna, I don't have much time available. Is there anything else you want to go over?



Role play

You are on the phone with a colleague (your teacher) to discuss upcoming interviews for job candidates at your company. This was meant to be a quick chat before you go to another meeting. Use the phrases below to help your colleague stick to the subject.



I think you're moving away from the subject.

Could you please get to the point?

I just wanted to know about this particular issue.

I don't have much time.

We're going off on a tangent, I think.

I'm sorry but...

I've got to go soon.



Following up

Match each statement with its logical follow-up question.

1. It's essential that we have a bigger budget next year.

a. Saying *worked with* is a bit vague. How exactly did you work together?

2. I've worked with most of the major tech firms in the region over the past few years.

b. How much exactly?

3. We're submitting a grant that would pay for all our educational programming. It's a good amount of money.

c. You've brought up the budget a few times: what do you need a bigger budget for?

4. This project is really quite cutting edge.

d. This project you've mentioned, is it the one about self-driving cars?



Interrupting and interjecting



How does it feel to **interrupt** and **ask for more precision**? Does this feel **uncomfortable** at all? Or does it feel **natural**?

Explain your answer.



Intonation makes a difference

- Changing your **tone** or which word you **emphasise** can change the meaning of your statement. It can also impact how someone **perceives** what you say. For example, you can seem friendly or upset based on **tone** and **intonation**.

the word you emphasise	how it changes the meaning
I haven't had any problems with him.	Emphasising the total lack of problems. He is fine!
I haven't had any problems with him .	He's fine, but perhaps another employee is a problem .
I haven't had problems with him.	There is another issue with him – something which is perhaps more serious than just a problem.





Observe the difference

Say the two sentences aloud, stressing the words in bold.
How does the change in stress change the meaning?



Could you **please** focus on the discussion now?



Could you please focus on the discussion **now**?





**Try saying each statement with different intonations.
How does the meaning change?**

Please come with me.
They're waiting for
you in the conference
room.

I'm sorry, we can't
make any purchases
right now.

I'm sorry but I know
this already. Can you
update me on any
new developments?

Have you finished
your section of the
presentation yet?



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

Exercise p. 8
B is clearer.

Exercise p. 12
1. effective, 2. not, 3. effective, 4. not, 5. effective, 6. not

Exercise p. 18
1b, 2a, 3c, 4d

Exercise p. 20
1c, 2a, 3b, 4d



Transcription

Exercise p. 19

[The teacher should play the role of a colleague who does not stick to the subject or provide precise information. The student should be encouraged to use strategies to seek more precise information and to get the conversation back on track.]

Teacher: Hello [student name]! Have you got a moment to discuss tomorrow's interviews? We've got three good candidates... Oh, what do you know, two of them went to my university! I loved studying there. Wonder if they've had any of my old professors. Say, where did you go to university?

[Let student respond.]

Teacher: Right, the first interview is with a young lady named Grace... then next is Paul... and the third one is in the afternoon with Harry. That about covers it. I guess we should plan around 40 minutes for each interview, right? And what should we wear? Will you be a bit formal, do you think? I can't remember what I wore during the last round of interviews.

[The student should interrupt as needed to obtain necessary information. Teacher may ad lib as desired.]





Fill in the gaps

1. _____ in the meeting yesterday, I'm calling to hear about your experience working with the new software platform.

- a. As discussed b. This conversation refers to c. FYI d. Brief update

2. Hi Caroline, just _____ we've had to cancel the teleconference. Jim is sick. Sorry for letting you know at the last minute.

- a. to stick to the point b. FYI c. as agreed d. as discussed

3. _____. Can we come back to the issue of Chris's behaviour? We need to find a solution.

- a. You're moving away from the topic b. Heads up c. As agreed d. FYI

4. I'm sorry, I've _____. I tend to do that! I'm just so passionate about the topic.

- a. had limited time available b. beating around the bush c. gone off on a tangent d. taken a tangent



Being firm but polite

In your own words, describe the best ways to keep phone communication effective. How do you avoid being rude while still trying to stick to the subject?

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Homework answer key

Exercise p. 29
1a, 2b, 3a, 4c



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