

2º ENGLISH

On the phone

04

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OBJECTIVES

Answer the phone properly.

Learn expressions related to usual phone conversations.

Arrange appointments on the phone with our clients.

Learn structures of the Present Continuous tense.

Learn uses and special cases about Present Continuous tense.

/ 1. Introduction and practical context

In this fourth unit, we will learn how to speak correctly in phone conversations and how to use the Present Continuous for actions at the moment of speaking and plans for the near future.

Listen to the following audio, which includes a case study that will be solved along this lesson.



Fig. 1. At the hotel



Audio intro. "Francesca, the receptionist"

<https://bit.ly/2LbKJdf>





/ 2. On the phone

Business phone conversations may be difficult when you are speaking a foreign language because there is no body language to help you, the audio quality is not always perfect, and there is more time pressure than in face-to-face conversations. You can try to practice these tips to make answering and making calls in English less stressful:

- Smile. The other person can notice if you are smiling, it makes your voice sound friendlier.
- Speak more slowly and at a lower pitch than you do during face-to-face conversations. It makes you sound confident, helps the other person to understand you better, and calms you down if you are feeling nervous.
- Don't be afraid to ask a caller to repeat something. It's better for the caller to repeat something several times than for you to write down the wrong information.

Phone calls can be made and received in many different situations. We are going to classify them, according to the type of context we may find.

Opening a call

Identifying yourself: *This is Michael Swam from Cambridge University / It's Michael Swam (from) Cambridge University here.*

Explaining the reason for the call: *I'm calling about...*

Getting through to the right person

Asking for the person: *Could I speak to Michael Swam, please?*

When the person isn't available: *Oh, that's a pity. I'll try calling later / Can I leave a message for him, please? / Can you ask him to call me back, please?*

Taking a call

Identifying yourself: *Good morning. Cambridge University. Alice speaking. How can I help you?*

Transferring a call: *I'll put you through to Mr. Smith / I'll just connect you to Mr. Smith.*

When the person isn't available: *Sorry, she's unavailable at the moment / I'm sorry, but she's on another call / She's in a meeting*

Calling someone back

Sorry, I'm really busy at the moment. Can I call you back later today/in ten minutes?

Ending the call

Is there anything else I can help you with today? / Thank you for your time / Thank you for calling



Fig. 2. On the phone



Communication problems

Could you repeat that, please? / This is a really bad line / Could you speak a bit more slowly?

Messages

Taking a message: *Can I take a message? / I'll make sure he gets your message*

Checking the message: *Let me just read that back to you*



Audio 1. "Answering the phone"
<https://bit.ly/2OILwXS>



2.1. On the phone (II)

Answering machines

Leaving a recorded message: *You've reached IT Consultants. Our normal office hours are 9 to 5, Mondays to Fridays. Please leave your message after the tone.*

Leaving a message: *This is Alice Walters for Michael Swan. I'm calling about...*

Making arrangements

Suggesting a meeting: *I was wondering if you might have time to meet next week*

Suggesting time and places: *When would it suit you?*

Reacting to suggestions: *I'm afraid Monday is bad for me / Yes, that would be good for me.*

Confirming an arrangement: *Ok, I'll see you on Tuesday at 9 am, then*

Changing arrangements: *I was wondering if we could reschedule our appointment*

Being late for an appointment: *I'm afraid I might be a few minutes late*

Now that we have revised expressions for telephone calls, here you have some related vocabulary:

Wrong number: it's when you dial an incorrect telephone number.

Missed call: it's when somebody calls you and you cannot answer the call at that moment.

To hold on/ to hang on: to wait

To hang up/ to ring off: to finish the call by breaking the connection

To ring up: to make a phone call

To pick up the phone: to answer the phone

To call back: to return a phone call



To put through: to connect your call to another telephone

To get through to: to contact on the phone the person you want to talk to



Audio 2. "Dealing with telephone problems"
<https://bit.ly/2OHrddr>



/ 3. Case study 1: "Rachel is not in"

Situation: A customer calls to the office of IT Consultants; Alice, the secretary of the company, answers the phone.

Question: The customer introduces herself and asks if she can speak to Rachel. Alice tells the customer that Rachel is out of the office, and she asks her if she can help at all. She says that she would like to arrange an appointment with Rachel next week, when she will be in Birmingham. The secretary looks in her schedule. Alice tells the customer that Rachel will be quite busy on Monday and Wednesday at Birmingham. They finally agreed to arrange the appointment on Tuesday morning. The customer thanks Alice and she says goodbye to her.

What expression would Alice say to the customer to find out the best day for the meeting?

Solution: When would suit you best?



Fig. 3. Talk, talk, talk...



Video 1. "Arranging an appointment"
<https://bit.ly/33kb1Cj>



/ 4. Present continuous

In English, the Present Continuous tense has several forms, according to the type of sentence in which it is used, that is, affirmative, negative and interrogative forms. Basically, we use the Present Simple of the verb To BE and we add -ing to the main verb.

Present Continuous Affirmative

| Subject | Verb To BE | Main Verb | Objects |
|---------|------------|-----------|-------------|
| I | am / 'm | playing | football |
| You | | | |
| We | | | |
| They | are / 're | buying | some apples |
| He | | | |
| She | | | |
| It | | | |



Present Continuous Negative

| Subject | Verb To BE | Main Verb | Objects |
|---------|---------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| I | | | |
| You | am not / 'm not | playing | football |
| We | are not / 're not | buying | some apples |
| They | | | |
| He | | playing | football |
| She | is not / 's not | buying | some apples |
| It | | | |

Present Continuous Interrogative

| Verb To BE | Subject | Main Verb | Objects |
|------------|---------|-----------|--------------|
| | I | | |
| Am | you | playing | football? |
| Are | we | buying | some apples? |
| | they | | |
| | he | playing | football? |
| Is | she | buying | some apples? |
| | it | | |

/ 5. Present continuous: Use

In general terms, the Present Continuous tense is used in the following situations:

- For actions happening at the moment of speaking: *Peter is watching a film in his bedroom right now*
- For future plans with a time reference: *I'm visiting my uncle this afternoon*
- For temporary activities or situations: *She's working in Madrid until the end of July*
- For annoying habits (usually with the adverb always): *My sister is always borrowing my clothes without asking!*
- For changing situations with verbs like become, grow, increase and expressions like more and more: *More and more people are buying houses lately. Temperatures are becoming higher all around the world.*

The Present Continuous is often used with the following **words and phrases**: now, right now, at the moment, today, tonight, this week, this month...

We must also take into account some important spelling rules when adding –ing to the main verb in the Present Continuous:

- Most verbs just add –ing: *play-playing // start-starting*
- Verbs ending in –e remove the –e and add –ing: *take-taking // make-making*



- Verbs ending in one vowel followed by a consonant double the consonant and add –ing: *get-getting // run-running*
- Verbs ending in –ie change –ie to –y: *die-dying // lie-lying*

Present Continuous is not used with **stative verbs**, which are verbs that describe states (feelings, thoughts, opinions, senses, possession or existence). Let's see some examples: appear, agree, believe, belong to, depend, forget, hate, have, hear, include, know, like, love, need, prefer, remember, see, seem, smell, taste, think, understand, want, weigh...

Sometimes we may not know if we have to use **Present Simple or Present Continuous**, but we will try to establish a quite simple difference between them.

When we talk about actions in progress, we use Present Continuous: Put on your coat, it's snowing outside. But when we talk about habitual actions or things that are always true, we use the Present Simple: It rains a lot in Galicia.



Fig 4. Present time.



Video 2. "Present continuous"

<https://bit.ly/2ZPNy9C>



/ 6. Case study 2: "Plans for the week"

Situation: Alice, the secretary of the company IT Consultants, is filling the agenda of Mr. Shaw with appointments for the week ahead.

Question: These are the notes she writes in the agenda:

| | Monday | Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday | Friday |
|-----------|----------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------|--|-----------------------------|
| Morning | Meet Mr. Benson 10am | | | | Meet Major of London 9.30am |
| Afternoon | | Go to press conference 2pm | | Do presentation new line of products 4pm | |
| Evening | | | Have dinner Mrs. Atkinson 7pm | | |

Speak about the appointments of Mr. Shaw using sentences in the Present Continuous tense.

Solution: On Monday at 10am he is meeting Mr. Benson. On Tuesday at 2pm he is going to the press conference. On Wednesday at 7pm he is having dinner with Mrs. Atkinson. On Thursday at 4pm he is doing the presentation of a new line of products. On Friday at 9.30am he is meeting the Major of London.



Fig. 5. Day planner



/ 7. Reading

Read the text and answer the questions. Source (adapted from: <https://its.lehigh.edu/services/explanation/telephone-etiquette>)

Telephone etiquette

Proper telephone etiquette is an important facet of communication, since you represent not only yourself. Remembering to use proper telephone etiquette, whether answering or making calls, leaves your respondents with a favorable impression of you, your department, and Lehigh in general. The following suggestions are helpful for making your phone conversations more effective.

- Using phrases such as “thank you” and “please” are essential in displaying a professional atmosphere.
- Listen actively and listen to others without interrupting.
- Try to answer the phone within three rings. Answering a phone too fast can catch the caller off guard and waiting too long can make the caller angry.
- Answer with a friendly greeting.
- Smile - it shows, even through the phone lines; speak in a pleasant tone of voice - the caller will appreciate it.
- Ask the caller for their name, even if their name is not necessary for the call. This shows you have taken an interest in them.
- When you are out of the office or away from your desk for more than a few minutes, forward your phone to voicemail.
- When putting a caller on hold, always ask permission. Examples: “Would you mind holding while I check?” or “Can you hold briefly while I see if Mr. Jones is available?” When taking a caller off of hold, always thank them for holding.
- Sometimes you may have other lines ringing too. Remember to write down the names of callers holding so you avoid asking who the caller is holding for more than once.

Questions

- a. It is always best to try to answer the call as quick as possible, right after the first ring. TRUE / FALSE
- b. Smiling is important because it shows even on the phone. TRUE / FALSE
- c. If the name of the caller is not relevant for the call, it is best not to ask for it. TRUE / FALSE

/ 8. Summary and unit's case study resolution

Throughout this unit, we have learnt, remembered and reinforced the following concepts:

- Answering the phone properly: we have learnt the correct attitude at the moment of taking telephone calls of our customers.
- Expressions related to usual phone conversations: in phone calls, we have many different types of situations (opening a call, taking a call, ending a call, taking and leaving messages, communication problems, calling



someone back, using answering machines,...). We have displayed a range of expressions to use in every communicative situation.

- Arranging appointments on the phone with our clients: we have learnt some significant expressions to use when in need to arrange appointments on the phone with our customers.
- Structures of the Present Continuous tense: we have learnt the structures of this tense for affirmative, negative and interrogative sentences.
- Uses and special cases about Present Continuous tense: apart from the structures, we have also learnt the most important uses of this tense.

Case study resolution

At the beginning of this unit we had proposed the practical case of Francesca, the young Italian receptionist who was sent to an internship in London at a hotel of her company. It was her first day at work in London and she had to answer her first telephone call in English.

The answer to this question is this expression (because she is taking a call in a formal context): Holiday Hotel, Francesca speaking. How can I help you?



Fig 6. Good work!

/ 9. Bibliography

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