



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

GLOSSARY

power outage – a failure in the electricity system, leaving users without electricity for a period of time

* The windstorm caused a power outage last night.

phone number – the series of seven or ten numbers that must be dialed to call someone (three numbers for the area code and seven numbers for the phone number itself)

* I gave him my phone number when we met last weekend, but he still hasn't called.

offhand – without needing to look for something or think about it for a long time; without difficulty; right away; immediately

* I can't find those papers offhand, but if you can give me a few minutes I'm sure I'll be able to find them.

address book – a small book where one writes other people's names, addresses, and telephone numbers

* I used to have an address book, but now I keep all the data on my computer instead.

phone book – a large book that lists people's and businesses' names and phone numbers in a particular area, given to the customers of a phone company for free

* The phone book has two sections: the white pages, which list phone numbers alphabetically by name, and the yellow pages, which group businesses by type.

to program (something) into (something) – to save data in a cell phone or similar electronic device

* I programmed my doctor's phone number into my cell phone so that I always have it with me in case of an emergency.

speed dial – a technology that allows you to automatically dial all seven or ten numbers of a phone number by pressing just one single number

* My home phone has speed dial, so I just press "1" to call my wife, "2" to call the office, and "3" to call my parents.

battery – a small device that stores electricity, so that electronics do not have to be plugged into the wall

* This laptop computer has a battery, but it only lasts for about 40 minutes before it needs to be recharged.



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

landline – a traditional phone that is connected to a home or office; not a cell phone; not a mobile device

* As cell phones are becoming less expensive, many people are considering having only a cell phone and getting rid of their landline.

directory assistance – a service offered by a phone company where a person or computer system will help one find a phone number for a person or business, often for a small fee

* When they needed to know John Smith's phone number, they called directory assistance, but his name was too common. More than 40 John Smiths are listed in the city, and they didn't know which one to call!

operator – a phone company employee who provides phone numbers and other information to people who call, and can transfer calls to other numbers

* I called the operator to ask for assistance in making an international call.

area code – the first three digits of a full ten-digit telephone number in the United States, usually put in parentheses (###), designating a geographic area

* People who work in Washington, DC often dial three area codes: (202) for DC, (301) for Maryland, and (703) for Virginia.

dial tone – the constant musical note that one hears when one picks up the phone, indicating that one may start typing the numbers one wishes to call

* In this office building, you need to dial a 9 to get an external dial tone.

Otherwise, you can make only internal calls.

earpiece – the part of a phone that noise comes out of and should be placed next to one's ear

* Yvonne speaks very loudly when she talks on the phone, so I usually hold the earpiece away from my ear when I speak with her.

mouthpiece – the part of a phone that one speaks into and should be placed near one's mouth

* I can't hear you very well. Could you please hold the mouthpiece closer to your mouth?

keypad – the 12 buttons on a telephone, with the numbers from 0-9, the asterisk (*), and the pound sign (#)

* Are you able to type numbers on a keypad without looking?



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

not a moment too soon – a phrase used to show that one is very happy and relieved that something has finally happened, because one couldn't wait any longer

* Randy finally returned from his business trip, and not a moment too soon! His wife was getting very tired of taking care of the kids by herself.

COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Where might you program a phone number?
 - a) In an address book.
 - b) In a phone book.
 - c) In a cell phone.
 2. Where does the dial tone come from?
 - a) The earpiece.
 - b) The mouthpiece.
 - c) The keypad.
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WHAT ELSE DOES IT MEAN?

offhand

The word “offhand,” in this podcast, means without needing to look for something or think about it for a long time: “Offhand, I think we had sales of \$400,000 last year, but I can look it up if you want a more exact figure.” The word “offhand” can also be used to talk about something that one says or does without thinking about it or planning it, especially if it is offensive: “Without thinking, she made an offhand comment about his baldness, and he was very upset by it.” The phrase “hands-off” means without one’s active participation: “Many Republicans believe that the government should have hands-off policies toward business, not regulating them too much.” In contrast, “hands-on” means with active participation: “He has a hands-on approach to teaching, always interacting closely with his students.”

battery

In this podcast, the word “battery” means a small device that stores electricity, so that electronics do not have to be plugged into the wall: “We plan to take lots of pictures, so we need to bring extra batteries for the camera.” A “battery” can also be a group of things: “When Mariah got sick, the doctors asked her to give a



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

blood sample for a battery of medical tests.” The phrase “assault and battery” refers to the crime of physically hitting someone: “He went to jail for three years for assault and battery against his boss.” Finally, the phrase “to recharge (one’s) batteries” means to relax for a period of time in order to have more energy: “Why don’t you go on vacation somewhere and recharge your batteries for a week or so?”

CULTURE NOTE

In most parts of the United States, you can make a “local” (nearby, not far away) call by dialing only seven numbers. Local calls are free and “unlimited” (without a maximum number of something) with any basic “calling plan” (the combination of services that you pay the phone company for). If you stay in a hotel, however, be sure to ask before making local calls. Some hotels charge for local calls or charges another fee for any phone calls.

If you wish to call someone farther away, you will need to make a “long-distance” (not local) call. You do so by dialing a “1” to indicate that you are making a long-distance call. Then you dial the three-“digit” (number) area code and then the regular seven-digit telephone number. Years ago, many states only had one area code and most long-distance calls were made “out-of-state” (outside of the state where one is) or out of the country. Today, most states have several different area codes, and in larger cities like Los Angeles, there are many different area codes within the same city.

Large cities sometimes have an “overlay plan,” through which the telephone company introduces a new area code in an area where there is already more than one area code. Rather than “partition” (separate geographically) an area and give a new area code to one section of a city, the phone company gives the new area code for all new phone numbers. In an overlay district, you always need to dial the area code, even if you are making a local call within the same city. For example, in Los Angeles, people need to dial the full ten-digit phone number (the area code plus the seven-digit telephone number) whenever they make a call.

Comprehension Questions Correct Answers: 1 – c; 2 – a



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

COMPLETE TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to English as a Second Language Podcast number 363: Using the Telephone.

This is English as a Second Language Podcast episode three-six-three (363). I'm your host, Dr. Jeff McQuillan, coming to you from beautiful Los Angeles, California, and the Center for Educational Development.

To learn more about this podcast and to download a Learning Guide for this episode, go to our website at eslpod.com.

This episode is called "Using the Telephone." We are going to talk about some common vocabulary related to the telephone. Let's get started.

[start of dialogue]

Charles: I don't know how long this power outage is going to last. Do you think we should call Elizabeth to tell her we'll be late for dinner?

Jane: That's a good idea. Do you know her phone number offhand?

Charles: No, I don't, and I can't look it up in my address book or in the phone book without any lights. Oh, wait. I have it programmed into my cell phone. I should be able to use speed dial to call her. Oh, no.

Jane: What's the matter?

Charles: My cell phone battery is dead.

Jane: Maybe we can use the landline to call directory assistance. The operator should be able to give us her number.

Charles: I doubt it. There must be more than one Elizabeth Bennett in our area code.

Jane: You're probably right, but I'll try anyway. Where's the phone? Oh, here it is. Why aren't I getting a dial tone?

Charles: Try listening through the earpiece instead of the mouthpiece.

Jane: Oh, right. How do I dial 411 if I can't see the keypad?



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

Charles: Hey, the power is back on!

Jane: Not a moment too soon!

[end of dialogue]

Our dialogue between Charles and Jane begins by Charles saying, “I don’t know how long this power outage is going to last.” A “power outage” is when there’s a failure in the electricity system of a city or an area that means that people do not have electricity in their homes and businesses. This sometimes happens here in California in the summertime. When there are so many people trying to use air conditioners, for example, there is often a power outage. I shouldn’t say often – sometimes a power outage.

There’s a power outage in our dialogue. Charles asks, “Do you think we should call Elizabeth to tell her we’ll be late for dinner?” Jane and Charles are going to have dinner with Elizabeth. Jane says, “That’s a good idea. Do you know her phone number offhand?” The phone number in the United States has a total of 10 numbers, 11 if you dial “1.” Every telephone number has 10 numbers; sometimes, however, if you are in the same city or area, you only have to dial the last seven numbers. Phone numbers in the United States are usually grouped by three numbers for the area code – the general area where you’re calling, then followed by three numbers and then four numbers. So, for example: 310-555-1212, that would be a typical phone number in the U.S.

Jane asks if Charles knows the phone number offhand. “Offhand” means without needing to look it up. You know it right away, immediately; you’ve memorized the number. “Offhand” is one word. Take look at our Learning Guide for some additional explanations of that term.

Charles says, “No, I don’t, and I can’t look it up in my address book or the phone book without any lights.” Your “address book” is a small book that people have with people’s names, addresses, and telephone numbers. Many people now have these electronically on their computer or phone. Charles says he can’t look it up in the address book he has or in his phone book unless he has some lights, and of course, because there’s no electricity, there are no lights that he can use. The “phone book” is a large book that has everyone’s phone number; usually most businesses have their phone number there as well.

Then he says, “Oh, wait. I have it programmed into my cell phone.” “To program something into something else” is to save information, for example, on your cell



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

phone so you can find it later. “I should be able to use the speed dial to call her,” he says.” “Speed dial” is a technology that allows you to automatically dial all 7 or 10 numbers, or 11 numbers, of a phone number just by pressing one number usually on your cell phone or also on your phone at home.

Charles then says, “Oh, no,” and Jane says, “What’s the matter?” What is wrong? He says, “My cell phone battery is dead.” The “battery” is, as you may know, a small device that stores electricity to give power to things like your cell phone. There are several meanings of that word; take a look at the Learning Guide for some more help on that. He says that his “battery is dead,” meaning it has no more power.

Jane says, “Maybe we can use the landline to call directory assistance.” A “landline” (one word) is a traditional telephone that is connected with a wire in your home or office. It’s not a mobile phone; it’s not a cell phone. It’s the phone that we used to have, exclusively, before cell phones; the only phones we used to have were landlines. “Directory assistance” is a service offered by phone companies, or sometimes now by automatic computer systems, where you can find a phone number for a person by calling them up. It used to be that directory assistance was always free in the United States, now sometimes you have to pay for directory assistance.

Jane says, “The operator should be able to give us (Elizabeth’s) number.” The “operator” is the employee at the phone company who actually answers your call and gives you the information. If it’s a computer, of course, there is no operator. Charles says, “I doubt it (I don’t think so). There must be more than one Elizabeth Bennett in our area code.” What he’s saying is that the operator won’t be able to help them because there are many different people with the same name, Elizabeth Bennett in this case, in our area code. Your “area code” is the region or area where you’re located. Remember I said that telephone numbers in the U.S. have 11 digits: one plus three numbers for the area code. So in my part of Los Angeles, the area code is 310, and everyone who lives around me in my neighborhood has that same area code. He’s saying here that there are too many people with same name in the area code, so the operator won’t know which one we want.

Jane says, “You’re probably right, but I’ll try anyway. Where’s the phone? Oh, here it is,” she says, “Why aren’t I getting a dial tone?” Why am I not receiving or hearing a dial tone? A “dial tone” is the sound you hear when you pick up a phone before you start dialing the number; that’s a “dial tone.” It tells you that the phone is working and you can then press the numbers for the person you are trying to call.



ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

Charles says, “Try listening through the earpiece instead of the mouthpiece.” The “earpiece” of a phone is what goes next to your ear so you can hear what the other person is saying. The “mouthpiece,” logically, is the part of the phone that goes by your mouth so you can talk to someone. What happened here is that Jane has the phone upside down so that the mouthpiece is by her ear and the earpiece is by her mouth. Not too smart, Jane!

Jane says, “Oh, right. How do I dial 411 if I can’t see the keypad?” She’s saying it’s so dark she can’t see the numbers on the phone to press them in order to call someone. We call those numbers the “keypad.” There are 12 buttons on a telephone, with the numbers zero (0) through nine (9) and then two other little buttons, one of which we call the “asterisk,” it looks like a star (*), the other is called the “pound sign,” which has two lines vertically and two lines horizontally (#). It’s also the symbol that we use for “number” – the “pound sign” (#).

Charles then says, “Hey, the power is back on!” The power is working; the electricity is now working correctly. Jane says, “Not a moment too soon!” That expression, “not a moment too soon,” means just in time. You say this when you’re waiting for something to happen and then it finally happens, just as you need it, right at the right moment, not too late. You say, “Not a moment too soon!”

Now let’s listen to the dialogue, this time at a normal speed.

[start of dialogue]

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ESL Podcast 363 – Using the Telephone

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Charles: Try listening through the earpiece instead of the mouthpiece.

Jane: Oh, right. How do I dial 411 if I can't see the keypad?

Charles: Hey, the power is back on!

Jane: Not a moment too soon!

[end of dialogue]

I can tell you name of our scriptwriter for this episode offhand, it's Dr. Lucy Tse. Thank you Lucy!

From Los Angeles, California, I'm Jeff McQuillan. Come back and listen to us next time on ESL Podcast.

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