

Lesson 4.

Speaking on the Phone

Warming-up.

«The phone is an extremely important medium in private life, and it's a lifeline for business» – Craig Newmark

Questions to discuss.

1. Do you agree that the phone is a “lifeline” for business? Why or why not?
2. In what types of business situations is a phone call better than an email?
3. How often do you make or receive business phone calls?
4. Have you ever had a misunderstanding over the phone? What happened?
5. What are some advantages and disadvantages of using the phone for business communication?
6. Do you prefer calling, voice messaging or texting in your private life? What about at work?
7. What phone etiquette should people follow during a business call?
8. Have you ever received a sales or cold call? How did you respond?
9. How has mobile technology changed the way we communicate in business?
10. What tips would you give someone who feels nervous about making business calls?

I. PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

A. Read the sentences about phone calls. Match the meanings to the phrasal verbs in bold.

Sentences	Meanings
1. I'm in a train station and it's very noisy. I can't hear you very well. Can you speak up ?	a. answer the phone
2. Oh no! We're going through a tunnel and you're starting to break up ! I only heard the first part of what you said.	b. end the call
3. The phone's ringing. If he's not busy, he'll pick it up .	c. speak more loudly
4. If you get a wrong number, just say you're sorry and hang up .	d. your voice is on and off again
5. Yes, Ms Watkins is available. I'll put you through to her.	e. connect someone on their personal line
6. I tried and tried to call the school, but I couldn't get through to anyone. I'll send them an email instead.	f. wait – <i>informal</i>
7. You want to speak to my brother? OK, hang on a second. Jim?	g. make contact with the person you are calling
8. Could I just ask you to hold on for a moment while I see if the manager is available?	h. wait – <i>more formal</i>

II. READING

A. You will read three phone conversations on your own. Fill in the gaps with appropriate phrasal verbs from the previous exercise (pay attention to the verb tense). Then role-play them in class. Define the register of each conversation (formal, semi-formal, informal).

Business Phone Call 1

A: Hello? Josh's phone.

B: Hey, is Josh around?

A: Who's calling?

B: It's Tamara, from the marketing team. I've been trying to ¹ _____ all morning.

A: Ah, okay. ² _____ a sec... Josh? ... Sorry, he's tied up in a meeting and can't ³ _____ right now.

B: Hmm, all right. He ⁴ _____ on me the last time we spoke – we had a bit of an argument. Could you let him know I called and that I'm sorry?

A: No problem, I'll pass that on.

B: Thanks. And can you also ask him to check the client brief I emailed?

A: Will do.

B: Appreciate it. Catch you later.

Business Phone Call 2

Receptionist (C): Good afternoon, Gladstone Hotel. This is Trudy speaking. How may I assist you?

Client (D): Good afternoon. May I speak with Mr. Bunn, please?

C: May I ask who's calling?

D: This is Mr. Abernathy from May Flowers Ltd.

C: One moment, please. I'll ⁵ _____ you _____ to his line. ... I'm afraid Mr. Bunn is currently in a meeting and won't be available until 3 o'clock.

D: I'm sorry, could you ⁶ _____, please? The line is unclear.

C: Certainly. Mr. Bunn is in a meeting until 3 o'clock.

D: I see. I'd like to leave a message, then.

C: Go ahead.

D: I need to confirm the order number. It's 2-4-5-6-9-2. Could he email me to verify it?

C: Of course. Would you mind repeating just the order number?

D: Sure – 2-4-5-6-9-2.

C: Thank you. I'll make sure he receives the message.

D: Much appreciated. Goodbye.

C: Goodbye, and thank you for calling.

Business Phone Call 3

Andy (voicemail): Hi Laurence, it's Andy. I tried calling but it looks like you're probably on your way to the office, so I'll just leave a message.

Just wanted to let you know I'll be late for our meeting. I'm on the train and, surprise – delayed again. Originally I thought I'd be there by 10:30. ⁷ _____, there's an announcement...

OK, now it looks like 11:00 instead. Sorry! Could you text me to confirm you got this? I'm probably ⁸ _____ now – we're entering a tunnel.

Anyway, see you soon.

Source: adapted from linguahouse. Phone calls

B. What situation does each conversation refer to?

- Inform someone about a delay,
- Leave a message about an order issue,
- Apologize and pass on a personal message.

III. ACTIVE READING ACTIVITIES

A. Check comprehensions. Answer the following questions by comparing the phone calls:

1. Which two calls involve someone leaving a message with another person?
2. Which call is a voicemail rather than a direct conversation?
3. Which caller uses a formal register, and how can you tell?
4. In which call is the person being contacted unavailable due to a meeting?
5. Which call includes a request for confirmation? How is it phrased?
6. Which call involves a previous conflict or disagreement?
7. Which calls include numbers or specific details? What do these details refer to?
8. Who is most likely to be from the same company as the person they're calling?
9. What technical or practical problems appear during any of the calls?

10. How does the tone of the call affect the language used in each case?

B. True or False

1. All three calls involve rescheduling a meeting. _____
2. Only one call uses formal business language. _____
3. None of the callers give contact details or follow-up actions. _____
4. The voicemail call includes a delay update and ends abruptly. _____
5. The second conversation is the most structured and polite. _____

C. Phone calls follow certain routines. This makes it easier to understand what's happening and complete the call successfully. It's important to use the correct style when you're speaking on the phone. The style you use depends on the situation and the relationship you have with the other person.

Look at phone calls above and complete the table with the appropriate phrases.

	personal/informal, semi-informal	business/formal
answer the phone		
ask for someone		
identify yourself		
ask for caller's name		
ask someone to wait		
say you will try to make the connection		
say someone is not available		
offer to take a message		
leave a message		
ask for confirmation		
say that you will give the person the message		
ask for repetition		
checking the other person has understood		

Source: adapted from linguahouse. Phone calls

D. Complete the table below with helpful phrases you can use throughout a business call. You can use phrases you already know and from the box under the table. Be ready to complete the table further on your own.

Stages of business call	Phrases
1. Starting a call	
2. Answering a call	
3. Asking for information or clarification	
4. Confirming details	
5. Providing updates	
6. Promising action or following up	
7. Handling technical issues	
8. Ending a call	

Source: Adapted from <https://preply.com/en/blog/business-calls-in-english/>

E. Listen to the phone call from a customer to practise and improve your listening skills. Do the exercises and enrich your vocabulary about phone calls in business.

<https://learnenglish.britishcouncil.org/skills/listening/b1-listening/phone-call-customer>

IV. POST-READING ACTIVITIES

A. Read the text and make a note of key points.

An Essential Guide to Proper Phone Etiquette (With Tips)

Despite the rise of digital tools like email, messaging platforms, and automated systems, telephone communication remains a key component of day-to-day business operations. Clients and colleagues still value direct verbal interaction, making effective phone communication essential for creating a positive customer experience and maintaining professional relationships.

Phone etiquette refers to courteous and professional behaviours when speaking with others. This includes opening and closing the call, tone, vocabulary, active listening skills, and responsiveness. Even your body language – though unseen – can influence how you sound and, consequently, how you are perceived.

Professionals in customer service rely heavily on telephone communication, but strong phone etiquette is essential for all employees, regardless of job title or work location. Whether speaking from a corporate office or remote setting, how you handle calls reflects directly on your professionalism and your organization.

Why Phone Etiquette Matters

1. Reinforce professionalism. Every phone call is an opportunity to represent your organization. A polite tone, clear structure, and confident delivery of project competence create a lasting impression.

2. Shape first impressions. A customer's first phone interaction often sets the tone for future engagement. A smooth, respectful call can foster goodwill and potentially lead to repeat business or referrals.

3. Build trust and loyalty. Positive telephone interactions can increase client confidence in your ability to support them across various channels, helping to foster long-term loyalty.

4. Enhances customer satisfaction. Clients who feel heard and supported during phone calls are more likely to perceive your business as reliable and consistent.

Key Practices for Effective Phone Etiquette

Answer promptly. Strive to answer calls within the first few rings. A timely response communicates that the caller's time is valued. If unavailable, ensure voicemails are checked frequently and returned promptly. Consider using an answering service if needed.

Identify yourself and your business. Begin every call by introducing yourself and your company. This builds trust and allows the caller to proceed without hesitation.

Maintain a positive tone. Smile while you speak – your tone will reflect it. A positive attitude helps build rapport and can de-escalate tense situations. Recording and reviewing your calls can help identify areas for improvement.

Minimize disruptions. Create a quiet environment before answering. Set aside distractions and turn your attention fully to the caller. A headset may improve focus and efficiency, allowing hands-free access to resources.

Practice active listening. Demonstrate engagement through verbal affirmations and paraphrasing key points. Taking notes helps ensure no detail is overlooked while asking clarifying questions, reinforcing your interest and commitment to assisting the caller.

Be honest and transparent. If you cannot meet a customer's request, be honest. Clear and empathetic communication can still leave the customer with a positive impression. If appropriate, direct them to additional resources or colleagues.

Ask before placing someone on hold. Always inform the caller if you need to put them on hold and ask for their consent. This demonstrates respect for their time and ensures a smoother interaction.

Manage emotional responses. Keep your tone calm and professional, even during challenging conversations. If necessary, pause briefly by placing the caller on hold or transfer the call to a colleague better positioned to help.

Ensure all needs are addressed. Before ending the call, confirm that the caller's questions have been answered. Asking if there is anything else you can assist with shows proactive service and ensures satisfaction.

Adapted from: <https://www.indeed.com/career-advice/career-development/phone-etiquette>

B. Find words and phrases in the text that mean the following:

1) телефонне спілкування, телефонний етикет, досвід клієнта, професійні відносини, тон голосу, активне слухання, оперативність, голосове повідомлення, служба відповіді на дзвінки, перше враження, довіра клієнтів, задоволення клієнтів, ввічливий тон, чітка структура, впевнене подання інформації, відволікання, уточнювальні запитання, емоційні реакції

2) відповідати негайно, представитися, зберігати позитивний тон, зменшити відволікання, демонструвати зацікавленість, робити нотатки, бути чесним і відкритим, поставити на утримання, контролювати емоції, переконатися, що всі потреби враховані

C. Translate from English into Ukrainian, keeping business communication style

1. Telephone communication remains essential for professional interactions.
2. Effective phone etiquette helps build trust and improve customer satisfaction.
3. Always identify yourself and your organization at the beginning of the call.
4. Be honest and transparent if you cannot meet a customer's request.
5. Asking clarifying questions shows your interest and improves communication.
6. Ensure all customer needs are addressed before ending the call.
7. Use a polite tone and maintain professionalism throughout the conversation.

D. Translate from Ukrainian into English, keeping business communication style

1. Телефонне спілкування залишається важливою частиною ділового спілкування.
2. Гарне перше враження починається з ввічливого тону голосу.
3. Важливо швидко відповідати на дзвінки, щоб показати повагу до часу клієнта.
4. Уточнювальні запитання допомагають краще зрозуміти потреби клієнта.
5. Якщо ви не можете допомогти, краще чесно про це сказати.
6. Перед тим як завершити розмову, переконайтесь, що всі питання вирішено.
7. Уникайте зайвих відволікань під час телефонної розмови.

E. Summarize the Do's and Don'ts of Business Phone Etiquette. Using the text and key vocabulary you have studied, create a clear and concise summary of the main do's and don'ts of business telephone etiquette. Your summary should highlight professional behaviors that should be followed during phone conversations, as well as common mistakes to avoid.

"Do's" – best practices, "Don'ts" – what to avoid (at least 5 items for each).