

Making Phone Calls on Business - Methodology

I.

Teaching telephone English can be frustrating as students really need to practice their skill as often as possible in order to improve their comprehension skills. Once they have learned the basic phrases used in telephoning, the main difficulty lies in communicating without visual contact.

Telephone English poses a special problem for English learners because of the lack of visual clues used when speaking. Practicing telephone English in class can also seem rather artificial as exercises generally ask students to practice speaking on the phone through role-plays sitting together in small groups. This telephone English lesson plan focuses on creating some more realistic telephoning situations to encourage students to practice authentic telephoning situations.

Aim: Improving Telephoning Skills

Activity: Role playing using office telephone lines

Level: Intermediate to upper-intermediate

Outline:

- Review phrases used in telephoning.
- Ask each student to write out notes for a telephone conversation that they would typically have with a native speaker.

Example: Order 100 pieces of item No. 1234 in your catalogue

Delivery: Next Friday

Payment Method: Bank transfer - Company Account

Address: Student's /Company Address

Telephone: Student's/Company Telephone

etc.

- Ask students to choose another student who should respond to the call for which he/she has written notes.
- This next step is the most important, and if possible goes a long way to improving students' skills. Use mobile phones each of your students definitely has. This is suitable also for business classes.
- Stress the fact that students need to understand and take note of everything crucial. If they do not understand they need to ask you to repeat, tell you to speak more slowly - anything that is needed to understand.

- Ask your students to go to a different classroom, alternatively to a different corner or part of the classroom, or to the corridor, and make sure they do not disturb the other students.
- Ask students to take notes on the call.
- Now, this is when your acting skills come in handy! Take the various notes, call the other extension and ask for the person suggested by the student who wrote the notes.
- Take a variety of roles and act them out on the phone. Really put your students through the paces. You can be angry, impatient, in a hurry, etc.
- Once you have repeated this exercise, get students to call each other in their own offices to repeat the exercise. Remember it is crucial to actually use the phone, as the difficulty lies in understanding English over the phone.

II.

Have you ever had problems understanding native English speakers on the telephone? If so, you are not alone. All English learners have difficulties understanding people on the telephone. This is for a number of reasons:

- People speak too quickly
- People don't pronounce the words well
- There are technical problems with the telephones
- You can't see the person you are speaking with
- It's difficult people to repeat information

Follow these tips to help you get native speakers of English to slow down.

- ***Immediately ask the person to speak slowly.***
- ***When taking note of a name or important information, repeat each piece of information as the person speaks.***

This is an especially effective tool. By repeating each important piece of information or each number or letter as the spell or give you a telephone number you automatically slow the speaker down.

- ***Do not say you have understood if you have not. Ask the person to repeat until you have understood.***

Remember that the other person needs to make himself/herself understood and it is in his/her interest to make sure that you have understood. If you ask a person to explain more than twice they will usually slow down.

- ***If the person does not slow down begin speaking your own language!***

A sentence or two of another language spoken quickly will remind the person that they are fortunate because they do not need to speak a different language to communicate. Used carefully, this exercise in humbling the other speaker can be very effective. Just be sure to use it in an appropriate situation!

III.

Practicing speaking English on the telephone is one of the most challenging tasks for any English learner. There are a number of common phrases to learn, but the most challenging aspect is that you cannot see the person.

- **Tape yourself** - If you are practicing alone, tape standard answers and then practice using the tape recorder stopping and starting to simulate a conversation.
- **Real life situations** - Businesses are always interested in telling you about their products. Find a product you are interested in and research it over the telephone. You can:
 - call a store to find out the prices and specifications.
 - ring the company representative to find out details on how the product works.
 - telephone a consumer agency to find out if the product has any defects.
 - call customer service to find out about replacement parts, etc.