

# “ On the phone ”



## How to make a successful phone call in English?

“ In this module, we propose to give you the phrases and expressions you need to make a successful phone call in different business situations.”

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## Introduction:

It has always been and remains a challenge for every one of us to speak English on the phone, particularly in a business context.

More and more local firms or private companies are forced to go international and so people in the workplace have to make or receive phone calls in English.

Speaking on the phone is difficult because we don't see the person we are talking to ; The line may sometimes be bad ;

We have to make the call quick to save money ; the discussion partner is not always an English speaking native and his English may be problematic ; if he is British, he may speak quickly or use idiomatic expressions we don't know ;

We may then totally misunderstand what we are being told ; we may fumble for words or not find the right ones to get the message through.

All this can make us nervous and generate stress in the long term.

### - 1 - First thing to do to avoid problems later on:

We must not hesitate to show modesty and ask for clarification when we do not understand a word or a phrase.

Pretend we got the message right when we did not and mix up "subcontractor" and "desk blotter" may be risky as a result.

We shouldn't feel embarrassed to ask our interlocutor to repeat a word or a sentence so as to make our phone call successful.

It would also be good to practice phrases, grammar and vocabulary before making the call.

### - 2 - Level of formality :

#### **Be polite but relax**

We, French, tend to be formal when making conversation with somebody.

In some way, we are right: It involves politeness and good manners.

On the phone, it is also very important to be polite and the overall tone of the conversation should be formal.

When making a request we must use: "Could I, would you, please, may I, thank you etc".

But we should also try to use the right level of formality.

If we are too formal, people might feel uncomfortable with us ; if we are too informal they might think we are rude.

Keep polite but do not refrain, as the British do in a business context, from using informal and everyday English short forms like :

**"no problem"**

**"that's okay"**

**"see you soon"**

**"he's off to London/ to a conference."**

### - 3 - Useful language and phrases to find your feet and improve your spoken communication skills on the phone in English :

#### **Connecting or getting in contact with somebody**

You are calling a company and want to speak to someone who works there. Here are the phrases you can use to make the usual requests:

- > Could I speak to Norman Mailer, please ?
- > Can I speak to Margery Foster, please ?
- > Can I speak to the chief executive or the chief assistant, please ?
- > Could I speak to the managing director ? Please ?
- > Could I speak to the head of the marketing department, please ?

Here are the phrases you can hear:

- > Who's calling, please ?
- > Who shall I say is calling ?
- > How can I help ?
- > I'll see if he's in. I'm afraid He's off to a meeting in London.
- > Just a second, I'll put you through to him.
- > Please hold

You may have to use these sentences if you receive a phone call from an English speaking area.

#### - 4 - The telephone conversation's typical multi-word or phrasal verbs :

On the phone people use specific vocabulary.

It is imperative to know the multi-word or phrasal verbs that are commonly used in telephone conversation.

You will hear: "**Hold on/ hang on**". This means: "wait".

If you are talking to a receptionist, a personal assistant or switchboard operator, they may ask you to **hang on**.

Do not confuse **hang on** with **hang up**. **Hang up** is the exact opposite of **hang on**.

It means: finish the call by putting the receiver back again and breaking the connection.

Another phrasal verb with the same meaning as **hang up** is **ring off**.

The opposite of **hang up** and **ring off** is **ring up**. If you **ring someone up** you make a phone call. If you **pick up** the phone ( **pick the phone up**), you answer a call when the phone rings.

Another typical multi-word verb we hear on the phone is : **put through**.

This phrasal verb means to connect your call to another telephone:

"**Hold on and I'll put you through.**"

#### - 5 - How to leave a message:

If you can't get through to the person you want to talk to, you might be able to leave a message asking them to **call you back** that is to **contact you** on the phone.

**Call back** means to return a phone call. "**Can you ask Mr Santry to call me back, please ?** "

#### - 6 - Here are two telephone conversations :

> **Secretary** : Hello, (you've reached the)marketing department. Can I help you? ( How can I help?)

> **Jean Dupont** : Hello. This is Jean Dupont speaking. I am head of the import/export department at Danone and Co, Gevisy, France. Could I speak to Margery Foster, please?

> **Secretary** : I didn't get that. Who's calling, please?

> **Jean Dupont** : It's Jean Dupont here. I'd like to speak to Margery Foster, please.

> **Secretary** : Certainly. Please, hold on; I'll put you through.

> **Jean Dupont** : Thank

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> Hello, import/export. How can I help?

> Hello. Can I speak to Nigel Terry, please?

> Certainly. Who shall I say is calling?

> My name's Robert Legrand

> Just a second, Mister Legrand. I'll see if Nigel is in. Hold on, please.

( Hello Nigel, I've got a Mr Robert Legrand for you....okay, I'll put him through.).

> Mister Legrand, Nigel's ready to speak to you. Hang on a moment, I'm just putting You through.

## - 7 - The answering machine :

If, after dialling the telephone number, you get the answering machine, You must try to sound calm, serene, logical, self-confident but self-contained. Try to smile while expressing yourself. It is difficult to find the right words when speaking to a machine. But first, try to understand the recorded message:

Answering machine: "Your call cannot be taken for the moment. Please leave a message after the tone."

## - 8 - Wrong number :

In case you should dial the wrong number, here is an example of what you may hear and have to say :

**Switchboard operator (S.O.) :** Hello, Litex Ltd. What can I do for you ?

Caller: Hello, This is Jean Dupont speaking, can I speak to Marjory Foster, please?

**S.O. :** I am sorry, you've got the wrong number. There's no one of that name here.

J.D. : I'm sorry about that. Can I check the number I've got. ( don't say: " Excuse me about that.")

The expression : " is used only when you approach a person for information or help.) Is that not : 00441952673803 ?

**S.O. :** No, it's 673804 here.

J.D. : Sorry to have troubled you. I must have dialled the wrong number.

**S.O. :** No problem, Sir. Bye.

## - 9 - More complex telephone conversations :

Now that we have seen the basics of telephone connecting , we can move on to more complex conversations. It is common in business to make a distinction between incoming and outgoing phone calls. An incoming phone call comes from outside. You have to deal with a caller. An outgoing phone call goes from inside . You give someone a ring. You are the caller. Here are a few examples:

### A - Incoming phone calls

#### A.1 - A satisfied customer

**Paul Clément :** Allo, Compagnie: " La Prévention ", Paul Clément à l'appareil.

**Marc Burley :** Hello, Paul, this is Marc Burley speaking.

**Paul :** Hello, Marc, how are you?

**Marc:** Fine, thanks. Paul, can you put me through to Alain Berger?

**Paul :** I'm sorry. He's away on a business trip and won't be back until Wednesday. He has a very busy schedule.

**Marc:** Paul, you will probably know : last week, our chief fire loss control engineer, John Maxwell, visited five locations in France accompanied by Alain Berger and later had discussions with Michel Perret.

**Paul :** Yes, I know. I remember.

**Marc :** My purpose in telephoning you, Paul, is first to say how pleased we are with the fire engineering service we receive from your company. The relationship with Alain Berger is first class. We are now able to obtain very good results indeed.

**Paul :** I'm glad to hear that you're satisfied with our services.

**Marc :** We are and I wonder whether you would be kind enough to pass on our thanks to Michel Perret and Alain Berger for the very good work they are providing in fire loss control. I look forward to renewing our acquaintance in the future. I might have paid him compliment by mail but I wished to tell Alain personally how pleased we are to be able to cooperate with you.

**Paul :** I'll pass on your thanks to Alain as soon as he is back.

**Marc :** Thank you, Paul. Bye.

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## **A.2 - An inquiry from a potential customer**

- **Arnaud Lesage** : Allo, Arnaud Lesage, Agencement cuisines, Annecy. Arnaud Lesage à l'appareil.
- **James Hull** : Hello, Sir. I am James Hull. I am calling on behalf of Score. I normally have diallings with Mr Leclerc.
- **Arnaud** : He is on leave, sir.
- **James** : Oh, I see. As I am a little pushed for time and I have a very important matter to discuss, I would appreciate if you gave me leave to deal with you about an item we are unable to find in France at your authorised distributor's.
- **Arnaud** : Which item are you referring to, Sir?
- **James** : The one referred to as B5T in your last brochure on page twenty-four. The qualities of this item seem to correspond to the needs of our clients. We are particularly attracted by it.
- **Arnaud** : Let me see: B5T. You mean : "La hotte aspirante" ?
- **James** : Sorry?
- **Arnaud** : Item B5T, you mean : "The extractor hood", page twenty-four in our leaflet ?
- **James** : Correct, Sir. That's it exactly.
- **Arnaud** : I do remember. We are the leading manufacturers for this article. This new item is outstandingly reliable. We gave an important media coverage to it last year.
- **James** : A real hype. You see, as you advised, we've contacted Modaz in Chambéry, not far from Annecy, I guess.
- **Arnaud** : It's roughly the same area.
- **James** : You mention Modaz as the exclusive distributor in the area but we were told that this firm no longer distributes your products.
- **Arnaud** : Correct. Modaz is no longer our exclusive distributor.
- **James** : So, I wonder wether you would be able to give us the address of another supplier or, failing this, to let us know if you are in a position to deliver directly.
- **Arnaud** : We do, Sir. We do home delivery. We now have our own delivery service. Our products are payable on delivery in full or by instalments.
- **James** : In that case, we would be grateful if you would give us details of your terms of sale.
- **Arnaud** : We have your e-mail address, Sir. I will send you our catalogue by return. You will find our price list and terms of payment enclosed in it. Let me know about the exact quantity you might be able to place with us. Trial orders are welcome and should be sent to us on the form which you will find in our brochure. We are prepared to grant you a 15% discount on all orders for B5T received before the thirty-first of December.
- **James** : That sounds fine.
- **Arnaud** : Just dial and we'll be happy to discuss the matter with you. Keep in touch.
- **James** : I'll call back as soon I get further information in your catalogue, Sir.
- **Arnaud** : Thank you, good bye.

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## B - Outgoing calls

### B.1 - How to book a flight

In a global economic context, even a small, private, local modern business might have to turn international. Businessmen today, often have to book flights and a hotel over the phone. What words and expressions can we use? Here again are examples of what we may have to say:

- **Pierre Lemoine** : Hello, I'd like to book a flight from London, Gatwick, to New York Kennedy airport, please. I am calling from Annecy, France and will be in London on the twenty-first of May. Is there any flight availability from there on that day? The return flight from New York to Geneva, will take place on the twenty-six of May. I would also like to know about the prices.
- **Switchboard operator** : Certainly. Do you want to fly economy, business or first class, Sir?
- **Pierre** : Economy, please.
- **Operator** : How many of you will be travelling, Sir?
- **Pierre** : Sorry?
- **Operator** : Economy for how many people, Sir?
- **Pierre** : oh, just for me, please.
- **Operator** : That's one seat, economy, to New York, Kennedy airport, from London, Gatwick, on Monday the twenty-first of May . Return flight on Saturday the twenty-sixth of May, from Kennedy airport: New York to Geneva. Let me see... That's possible, Sir. I have here two flights that might be convenient for you. From London, Gatwick, to Kennedy airport in New York : Flight with Easyflight, L.G.567984. on Monday, the twenty-first of May at ten-thirty a. m. Check-in from nine-thirty. a.m. Return flight, from Kennedy airport, New York, on Saturday the twenty-sixth of May, flight with British Airways, N.K. 895390, eight-thirty a.m. Check-in from seven-thirty.
- **Pierre** : How much will that be?
- **Operator** : £ 1280, return ticket Sir. Airport tax included from London and New York.
- **Pierre** : All right, it suits me, I'll book it.
- **Operator** : Can I help you with anything else?
- **Pierre** : Yes, I'd like to book a hotel room in New York for the full four days. From May the twenty-first until May the twenty-fifth included. Can you do that for me and check if the Hilton chain in New York has any room free?
- **Operator** : certainly, Sir.
- **Pierre** : Is there any discount rate ?
- **Operator** : You are not a conference delegate, are you ?
- **Pierre** : No, I'm not. I am meeting someone in charge with import-export at Limberg furniture manufacturers. I would like them to become my exclusive distributor in the US.
- **Operator** : I don't think you qualify for it, Sir, but I'll make sure they have any vacancies and can put you up. You want a single room with a shower, don't you?
- **Pierre** : Yes, please.
- **Operator** : All right, I'll see about it.
- **Pierre** : Thank you. Good Bye
- **Operator** : Good Bye, Sir.

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## B.2 - Complaints

**Francis Terret** : Allo, Le Salon du Bricolage, Francis Terret à l'appareil, j'écoute :

**Douglas Tomkins** : Hallo, Francis, It's Douglas Tomkins, "Do it Yourself" 24, Crescent Street, London. Good afternoon, Francis. I am telephoning you about our order N° 1522 Which has just been delivered. Order N° 1522. Can you have a glance at it ?

**Francis** : Certainly. Order N° 1522. Let me see....Yes, here. I have it right in front of me. What's the problem ?

**Douglas** : Francis, I am sorry to say that the quality of the DIY items Number : 2041, 3, 4, 5, is not up to your usual standard. I am sure you will understand our disappointment.

**Francis** : I am certainly sorry to learn that, Douglas. What can I do for you?

**Douglas** : It will be possible to retail the handyman's goods eventually but only at a lower price. We must therefore ask you to allow us a supplementary discount of 10% on items 2041, 3,4,5, or take them back.

**Francis** : If you agree to it, I'd rather take them back, replace them and urgently send you The corresponding new items. And I will add some other items free of charge to make up for the inconvenience.

**Douglas** : That's fine. Thank you, Francis. Bye

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## Comment

The above scripts or dialogues could be seen as making up the theoretical part of this vocational training module.

Theoretical part in the sense that it can be used as an aid to role-playing.

These dialogues need to be learnt as a guide towards getting a better command of telephone connection and conversation.

From there we can shift to practice through staging the various situations and roles previously referred to. They are roles and situations you are likely to be faced with in the workplace.

And so, role-playing from the scripts will enable you to safely train in real conditions and thus improve your skills.

## Conclusion

This module provides the essential basics and tutorials for telephone conversation.

In fact, It is but an example of what we can offer to help you make things easier at work in any requested situation: Telephone calls ,e-mails, mailshots, advertising on line, face to face meeting, job interview, replies to complaint etc...

It is now obvious that English has become a worldwide communication tool.

Small local concerns may have to use it sooner and more often than they think.

We are trying to answer the needs of those who are looking for practical solutions to their difficulties.

