

# Teach Business English

## Module 2: Spotlight on Telephoning

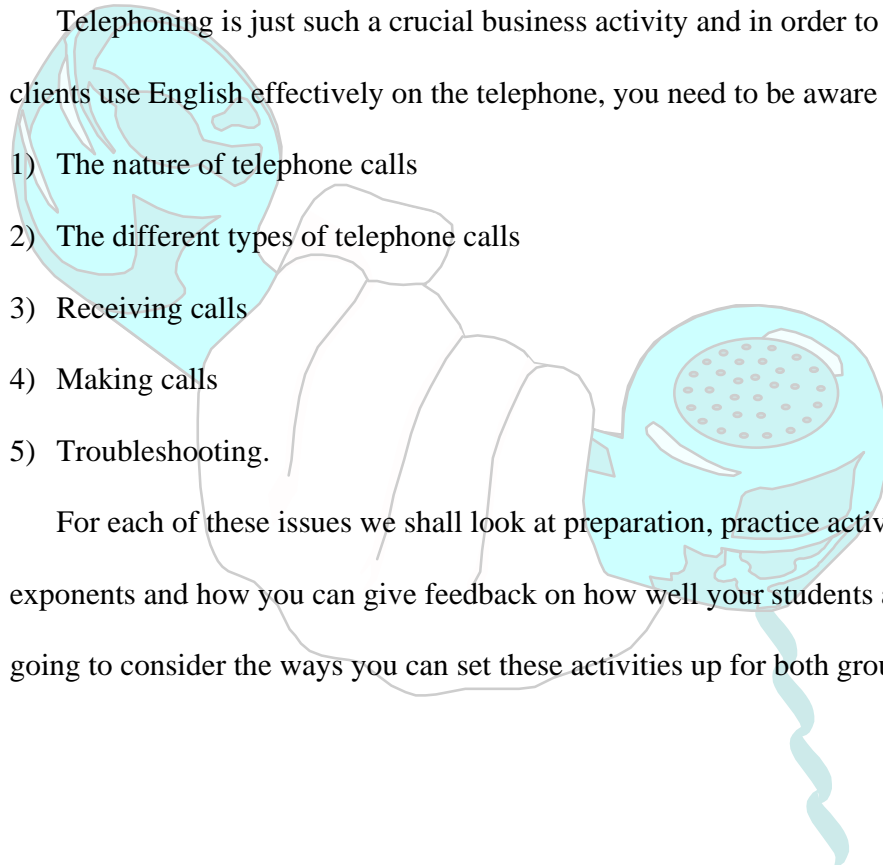
### *Introduction*

In this module we are going to examine some techniques for helping business English students improve their performance in making and receiving telephone calls in English. This activity will also be a platform for reading and writing activities. In the field of business English, it is useful to integrate the skills as much as possible so that tasks are more targeted and the skills more relevant to the activities the participants need in their professional lives. Since reading and writing in business are activities that relate to ongoing projects, it is better to deal with these skills as part of the sequence that builds up to and then follows a key activity.

Telephoning is just such a crucial business activity and in order to help business English clients use English effectively on the telephone, you need to be aware of:

- 1) The nature of telephone calls
- 2) The different types of telephone calls
- 3) Receiving calls
- 4) Making calls
- 5) Troubleshooting.

For each of these issues we shall look at preparation, practice activities, appropriate language exponents and how you can give feedback on how well your students are performing. We are also going to consider the ways you can set these activities up for both groups and one-to-one

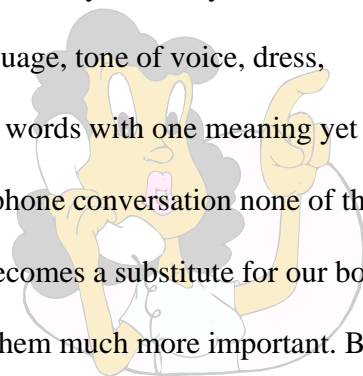


students. The approach suggested for training in telephone skills is that you go through the following stages:

- elicit information from the clients (this will allow you to gauge how much help they need. Remember you are not a business instructor but a language teacher—you should make use of their existing expertise as much as possible.)
- discussion of the area to be covered (this could be guided discussion from handouts, course books, audio-visual aids, or free discussion)
- guided practice
- free practice
- feedback from you and from their peers
- remedial work where necessary.

### **1) *The nature of telephone calls***

The most important fact about a telephone call is that you can't see the person you are talking to. If you remember, we said in Module One that communication is conveyed less by the words we speak than by the additional clues we send out by our body language, tone of voice, dress, position in relation to our interlocutor. It is quite possible to use words with one meaning yet indicate the exact opposite with our body language. With a telephone conversation none of these visual clues is available. This means our telephone *behaviour* becomes a substitute for our body language making the words we choose and the way we deliver them much more important. By the same token, the scope for misunderstanding is much greater and, of course, this is amplified when linguistic difficulties are factored in.



**Focus point #1**

How would you devise a questionnaire for your group to alert them to some of the inherent dangers in telephoning:

- It is more difficult to establish rapport: the telephone permits no smile, no handshake.
- You might ring at an inconvenient time: the telephone is intrusive and can be a source of annoyance when people are busy or don't want to be interrupted.
- It is more difficult to be accurate and thus easy to mislead: the listener has no visual clues and the telephone can distort certain sounds.
- It is easy to be distracted: it is tempting to do other things while holding a telephone conversation.
- It is easy to convey the wrong the impression if you are abrupt or offhand.

How might you use such a questionnaire to prepare for a practice activity? Would such a questionnaire be appropriate for a one-to-one student?

Once students have thought about and discussed the ways in which telephone conversations are different from talking face-to-face, you can move into a phase of practice to allow them to experience the issues they have discussed. We are going to look first at role play. Ideally, your training rooms will have internal telephones that can record the conversations for this type of practice but, if they haven't, you can get students to role play in pairs sitting back-to-back so that they don't have any visual clues.

**Ideas for role play**

A simple way to set up your telephone role play is to have pre-pared cue cards that students use in pairs. These could be based on various models:

- A scripted good practice/bad practice model
- A scripted guided conversation
- A scripted conversation with gaps

- A set of instructions about how to conduct the call.

## Example

In this example the students are going to role play a conversation in which a number of areas for misunderstanding are illustrated. One set of partners A and B, will practice the following telephone conversation. The rest of the group will make notes about the potential areas of misunderstanding. (If you have a one-to-one student, you would have to play one of the roles and record the practice for analysis afterwards.)

| A (makes the call)  | B (receives the call)   |
|---|---|
| 1) Good morning, is that Mr Klein?  | 1) Speaking; how can I help you?  |
| 2) I'd like to change my order for office furniture.                                      | 2) I see, and your company is?  |
| 3) Satécouer S.A.   | 3) Could you confirm your address and order number?   |
| 4)The address is B.P. 60, 55320 Givry, Cedex 9. I'm sorry, I don't know the order number. | 4) I'll just find your details on the computer. What did you say your name was?                     |
| 4) Oh, I'm Guy Robert, the Managing Director.   | 5) Just bear with me Mr Robert, I don't seem able to find your company. It's Fattyker, did you say? |
| 5)No, it's Satécouer: S-a-t-e-c-o-e-u-r.  | 6) Did you say -S- or -F-?  |
| 6) I said : S. S for sea  | 7) C? Oh, no, I see, you mean S.  |