Dealing with requests and enquiries line by line brainstorming

Dialogue 1: Face to face enquiry
Cover everything except the first line of the dialogue below. Read what you can see and work together to think of all possible answers to that phrase. Discuss which is the most likely of those replies, then reveal just the response on the one line below. Do the same with responses to that line, then repeat the same activity one line at a time until you reach the end of the dialogue.
Staff: Good morning. Can I help you?

Enquirer: I hope so. I need some information about space for club activities.

Staff: I should be able to help. What exactly do you need to know?

Enquirer: I was wondering how I should book a room for our society.

Staff: Can I check what you mean by "society"?

Enquirer: I'm sorry, I don't really understand the question.

Staff: I'd like to know if you mean an official university society or a more informal club.

Enquirer: Oh, I see what you mean. It's not an official club yet. We're just a few people who get together to chat in German.

Staff: In that case, you need to use the online reservation system.

Enquirer: I thought that might be the case. Could you possibly tell me the address of the page that I need to go to?

Staff: Of course. Just a moment and I'll find it for you.

Enquirer: Thanks.

Staff: Okay, nearly got it. Just a second. Right, here it is. It's http://grrm.king.ac.jp/j349 .

Enquirer: Sorry, could you write that down for me?

Staff: Sure. Just a sec while I find a pen and some paper.

Enquirer: Okay. Thanks.

Staff: Got it. I'll just write it down. Done. Here you are.

Enquirer: Thanks a lot.

Staff: Is there anything else that I can help you with today?

Enquirer: There is just one more thing, actually. Can you tell me how we can register as an official university club?

Staff: I'm sorry but I'm not sure what the process is. I'm afraid we don't deal with that here. You need to go to the student affairs department.

Enquirer: Oh, okay. Do you mean the office of the fourth floor?

Staff: Yes, that's right.

Enquirer: Okay, I'll go right there now then. Thanks for all your help.

Staff: You're very welcome. Please come again any time if you have any problems with the online booking system.

Enquirer: Thanks, I will. See you again, then. Bye.

Staff: Have a good day. Goodbye.

Perhaps after changing partners, go through the dialogue again and discuss what other phrases could be said in those places.

Dialogue 2: Telephone enquiry

Do the same things with the dialogue below, this time for a telephone call with enquiries.

Staff: Good afternoon. King University Library. Media Section. Alex Case speaking. How can I help you?

Enquirer: Good afternoon. Can I speak to the person in charge of ordering new publications, please?

Staff: That's Mr Kaneko. Please hold the line and I'll check if he's available.

Enquirer: Okay, thanks.

Staff: Hello?

Enquirer: Yes?

Staff: I'm afraid Mr Kaneko is abroad this week. Can I help you at all? What is it concerning?

Enquirer: It's about one of the journals which we regularly refer to. It's recently been bought by a different publisher, so we'll need a new, separate subscription if we want to continue reading it.

Staff: That sounds like it might be possible, but unfortunately Mr Kaneko will have to make the decision. If you can give me the details, I'll make sure he gets your message as soon as he gets back.

Enquirer: Okay. The publication is The Belgian Journal of Deep Shaft Mining. It's now published by PMT PLC.

Staff: Sorry, I didn't quite catch the first word. Can you spell it for me?

Enquirer: Sure. It's "Belgian". B, E, L, G, I, A, N.

Staff: Okay, got it. Could you also let me know your name and department?

Enquirer: Of course. My name is Alan Dupont and I'm head of Geological Sciences.

Staff: Sorry, was that Geographical Sciences?

Enquirer: Actually, it's Geological.

Staff: Oh, sorry. Got it now. Can I check all of that back?

Enquirer: Of course. Please go ahead.

Staff: It's the Belgian Journal of Deep Shaft Mining from PMT PLC, for Alan Dupont in the Department of Geological Sciences.

Enquirer: Yes, that's perfect, thanks.

Staff: Great. I'll pass that message onto him. Can I help you with anything else today?

Enquirer: No, that's all, thanks.

Staff: Okay, thanks for calling.

Enquirer: Thanks for your help. Bye.

Staff: Bye.

Perhaps after changing partners, go through the dialogue again and discuss what other phrases could be said in those places.

Brainstorming stage
Without looking above for now, brainstorm at least two suitable phrases into each of the gaps below.
Initial greeting

Offering help

Asking polite questions/ Asking indirect questions

Checking/ Clarifying/ Dealing with communication problems

Confirming that you understand

Asking people to wait/ Filling silence while you do something

Offering more help/ Checking that the conversation can finish

Explaining why a question can't be answered (now/ yet)

Polite language at the end of a conversation

Final greeting/ Social language at the end of the conversation

Look back at the model dialogues for phrases, brainstorm more, then compare as a class or with lists of phrases.

Suggested answers
Phrases in italics are not in the dialogues above. Phrases in italics and brackets with NOT or PROBABLY NOT are almost certainly not suitable for these kinds of situations. Many other phrases are possible, so please check anything else that you wrote with your teacher.
Initial greeting
Good morning./ Good afternoon./ *Good evening.*
Hello.

Offering help
Can I help you (at all)?
How can I help you?
How may I help you?
How can I be of assistance?
I should be able to help.

Asking polite questions/ Asking indirect questions
I was wondering…
I'd like to know…
Could you possibly tell me…?
Can you tell me…?
Could you (also) let me know…?
Can I ask…?
Can I check…?
Could you possibly give me some information on…?
Do you mind if I ask…?
Would you mind telling me..?

Checking/ Clarifying/ Dealing with communication problems
What is it concerning?
What exactly do you need to know?
Can I check what you mean by…?
I'm sorry, I don't really understand…
Sorry, could you write that down for me?
Do you mean…?
If you can give me the details, I'll…
Sorry, I didn't quite catch…
Can you spell it for me?
Sorry, was that… (or…)?
Can I check (all of) that back?
Can I read that back?
Can I just check what your question is?
Just to double check, you'd like me to tell you…
So, basically you'd like to know…
So, if I understand you correctly, you need to know…

Confirming that you understand
Oh, I see what you mean.
I thought that might be the case.
That's what I expected.
Okay, got it (now).
Okay, that's all very clear, thanks.
That's much clearer now. Thanks.
(PROBABLY NOT I understand PROBABLY NOT I see)

Asking people to wait/ Filling silence while you do something
Just a moment and I'll…
Please hold the line and I'll…
Just a second.
Just a sec while I…
Just a mo while I…
Please take a seat and I'll…
Okay, nearly got it.
Right, here it is.
I'll just… Done.
(NOT Please wait X)
(PROBABLY NOT Hold on)

Offering more help/ Checking that the conversation can finish
Is there anything else I can help you with today?
Can I help you with anything else today?
Please come again any time if you need more help with…
Does that answer all your questions?
(PROBABLY NOT Is that everything?)

Explaining why a question can't be answered (now/ yet)
I'm sorry but I'm not (really) sure.
I'm afraid I don't have that information (at the moment).
I'm afraid we don't deal with that (here).
I'm afraid Mr… is… abroad/ *out of the office/ not at his desk/ in a meeting/ on another line.*
(That sounds like it might be possible, but) unfortunately Mr…will have to make the decision…

Polite language at the end of a conversation
Thanks for (all) your help.
Thanks for calling./ Thanks for your call.
(NOT Thanks for your calling X)

Final greeting/ Social language at the end of the conversation
See you again.
Have a good day.
Bye./ Goodbye.
(NOT Bye bye X)