

Dealing with telephone enquiries tips and useful phrases

What are general tips for politeness in English?

What tips would you give for politely dealing with enquiries?

What about politely dealing with enquiries by phone?

Look at the list of dealing with telephone enquiries tips below. Are there any you disagree with or could improve?

Give your name and the section you work in when you answer the phone.

If they are online while they are speaking to you, you can help them find online information and then refer to it

Tell them exactly what you are doing if there is silence your end

If something will take more than two or three minutes, take their phone number and call them back

Make sure that they don't have to repeat the same question to another member of staff.

Apologise every time that they have to wait.

Show you are listening by reacting to everything that they say.

If you can't answer the question, tell them what other actions you will take to help them.

Double check what they want to know if you have any doubt about what the question is.

If you still aren't sure you understand, tell them what you understand the question to be.

With questions that are difficult to understand or complicated to answer, ask them to email the questions and say that you will then phone them back.

Some enquiries are best dealt with by sending information (or links to information) and inviting further questions after they have looked at it.

With very complex enquiries, suggest they come in to your office to discuss it face to face.

Brainstorm useful language for the correct tips and then compare with the phrases on the next page.

Suggested answers

Give your name and the section that you work in when you answer the phone. – **“Good morning. Tokyo University Student Affairs section. Alex Case speaking. How can I help you?”**

If they are online while they are speaking to you, you can help them find online information and then refer to it. – **“Are you online now?”/ “Do you have access to the internet while we are speaking?”**

Tell them exactly what you are doing if there is silence your end – **“Just a second. I’m looking at the computer system now.”/ “Just a moment, I’ll get a pen and paper.”**
“I’m putting you through.”/ “I’ll check if my colleague is available to help you now.”

If something will take more than two or three minutes, take their phone number and call them back – **“If you can give me your contact details, I’ll phone you back as soon as I’ve found the information you are looking for.”**

Make sure they don’t have to repeat the same question to another member of staff – **“I’m putting you through to my colleague now. I’ve explained what your problem is and they said they can definitely help you with this.”**

Apologise every time that they have to wait – **“Sorry to keep you waiting.”**

Show you are listening by reacting to everything that they say – **“Right.” “Mmm hmm”**
“Okay” “I see”

If you can’t answer the question, tell them what action you will take to help them – **“I’ll have a look in the staff regulations booklet and email you by lunchtime.”**

Double check what they want to know if you have any doubt about what the question is – **“Can you explain a little more what you want to know?”**

If you still aren’t sure you understand, tell them what you understand the question to be – **“If I understand you correctly, you want to know...”**

With questions that are difficult to understand or answer, ask them to email the questions and say you will then phone back – **“It might be easier to write my answers down.”**

Some enquiries are best dealt with by sending information (or links to information) and inviting further questions after they have looked at it – **“I can send you a link to that information online, if that’s okay.”**

With very complex enquiries, suggest they come in to your office to discuss it face to face – **“Do you live near...?”**

Telephone enquiries roleplays

Choose situations from the list below and roleplay the full telephone conversation each time.

The information that they need is in a leaflet/ pamphlet/ prospectus that they don't have
The information that they need is on a difficult to find page of your website
They need to speak to your colleague who is sitting nearby to get the information they are asking for
They need to speak to your colleague who is in another office to get the information they are asking for
They need to speak to your colleague who isn't there to get the information they are asking for
You need to dictate something to them
Ask them to dictate something to you
They need to come into the office to get the information they are asking for