

Telephoning problems vocabulary and roleplays

Roleplay some of the following telephoning problem situations, starting with any you like (the easiest, the most similar to your real calls, etc).

1. It is difficult to understand somebody on the phone
2. Someone phones you but you are in a meeting.
3. Someone phones you when your *mobile* (= cell phone) battery is nearly *flat*.
4. The *caller* asks to speak to Kim Smith. You are Kim Smith.
5. The *caller* asks to speak to Kim Smith. You aren't Kim Smith.
6. The invoice that you have sent someone is wrong.
7. The person who you want to speak to is *out of the office*. You want them to *call you back*, so leave your telephone number.
8. The person who you want to speak to *isn't at her desk*. You will *phone again*.
9. The person who you want to speak to *isn't in* today, but you don't need to *leave a message*.
10. The person you want to speak to is *on another line*. You don't need to anyone to *take a message*.
11. The person you want to speak to is *out of the country*. Ask for their *mobile number*, then ask them to *hold on* while you look for a pen and paper.
12. The phone of the person who you want to speak to has been *engaged* (= *busy*) for two hours, so phone someone else in their company.
13. The receptionist *puts you through to* (= *connects you to* = *transfers your call to*) to the wrong person.
14. The time that you have arranged to meet has suddenly become impossible.
15. There is a *bad line* so you can't hear the other person very well.
16. There is a *message* on your *answer machine* from last night asking you to *call back* as soon as possible.
17. There was something missing from what your company sent to a customer.
18. You answer the call but you *have someone on another line*.
19. You are *cut off* halfway through a call.
20. You are going to be late to meet someone but when you phone no one *picks up*.
21. You can't pronounce the name of the person you want to speak to ("Mr. Boisseaux").
22. You don't know the correct *extension number*, so phone *reception*.
23. You don't know who exactly you need to speak to.
24. You got someone's order wrong.
25. You have *dialled* the *wrong number*.
26. You phone someone because you need to send them something by post and you don't have their postal address.
27. You were *cut off* when your train went into a tunnel.
28. You were put *on hold* for ten minutes so *hang up* and *call again*.
29. Someone left a *voice mail* message for you. *Return their call*.

Ask about anything above which you don't understand, e.g. the vocabulary in italics, discussing good ways of dealing with that issue each time.

Try to write typical telephoning phrases using these words from above. Some of them can be used together, and most have more than one possible phrase.

1. again
2. back
3. busy
4. call
5. country
6. desk
7. flat
8. hold
9. line
10. message
11. mobile
12. office
13. on
14. put
15. through
16. transfer
17. up

Do the same with this other useful telephoning vocabulary (changing the grammar of the words if you like).

18. check
19. help
20. moment
21. repeat
22. sorry
23. speak
24. spell
25. talk

Without looking above for now, put one word into each group of words on the next page.

Use the list of words above to help you.

Check as a class or with the suggested answers.

Test each other on the phrases:

- Say phrases with the same key word missing for your partner to complete
- Say a key word and help your partner make phrases from it
- Say a phrase and see if your partner can respond to it
- Say a phrase, listen to your partner's response, respond to that, then together roleplay the rest of the conversation

Mixed answers

- “Can I take a _____?”/ “Can I leave a _____?”/ “Would you like to leave a _____?”/ “I’ll make sure he gets your _____”/ “I’ll pass your _____ onto him”
- “Can you _____ me through to extension 767?”/ “Could you _____ me through to Mr Jones, please?”
- “Can you ask him to phone me _____?”/ “Can I read that _____?”/ “Can I check that _____?”
- “Can you say that _____?”/ “No, that’s okay. I’ll phone _____ this afternoon.”/ “When might be a good time to try _____?” / “We seem to have a bad line. Shall we hang up and try _____?”
- “Hold _____, I’ll just get a pen and some paper”/ “I’m afraid he’s _____ another line. Would you like to leave a message?”
- “I’m _____ing you”/ “Please hold the line while I _____ your call”
- “I’m afraid he’s away from his _____ at the moment”/ “I’m afraid she isn’t at her _____ at the moment”, “Okay, I’ll leave a note on his _____”
- “I’m afraid he’s not picking _____ his phone. Shall I tell him that you’ve called?”, “There’s a lot of noise on the line. Let’s hang _____ and try again”
- “I’m afraid he’s on another _____”/ “I’m afraid I’ve got someone on another _____”/ “We seem to have a bad _____ . Shall we hang up and try again?”
- “I’m afraid he’s out the _____”/ “Do you know the _____ code?”
- “I’m afraid his line is _____.”/ “I’m a bit _____ at the moment, so...”/ “Are you _____?”
- “I’m afraid she’s out of the _____”/ “I’ll phone you again when I get back to the _____”
- “I’m on my _____, so can I phone you when I get home?”/ “Do you have his _____ number?”/ “It might be worth trying his _____”
- “I’m putting you _____”, “Can you put me _____ to Mr Jones, please?”
- “Please _____ the line”, “_____ on, I’ll just find your order on my computer”/ “I’m putting you on _____”
- “Sorry, my battery is nearly _____ . Can I phone you later from my office phone?”/ “My battery is nearly _____ but I just needed to quickly tell you that...”
- “Thanks for your _____”/ “Thanks for _____ing”/ “I’ll _____ you back...”/ “Thanks for _____ing me back”/ “I’m returning your _____”/ “No, that’s okay, thanks. I’ll _____ again later”/ “I’m transferring your _____”

Do the same with these:

- “_____ to keep you waiting”/ “_____ to phone you so late”/ “_____, he’s in a meeting at the moment”/ _____, we were cut off”/ “_____, my battery is nearly flat. Can I call you back later?”
- “_____ to your later”/ “It was nice _____ing to you but...”/ “Can I _____ to Mr Smith?”/ “I need to _____ to someone about...”
- “Are you free to _____?”/ “I don’t have much time to _____ but...”
- “Can you _____ your name?”/ “Can you _____ the first/ last part?”
- “How do you _____ your family name?”/ “Can you _____ the street name for me?”
- “I’ll _____ with my boss and call you...”/ “Can I _____ that back?”/ “Can I just _____ what you said?”/ “Could I _____ what you mean?”
- “Just a _____, I’ll see if he’s available”/ “Just a _____ while I find a pen and paper”/ “Just a _____, I’ll put you through”, “Do you have a _____ to talk?”
- “Thanks for your _____”/ “I’m phoning to see if you could _____ with...”

Suggested answers

1. again – “Can you say that _____?”/ “No, that’s okay. I’ll phone _____ this afternoon.”/ “When might be a good time to try _____?” / “We seem to have a bad line. Shall we hang up and try _____?”
2. back – “Can you ask him to phone me _?”/ “Can I read that _?”/ “Can I check that _?”
3. busy – “I’m afraid his line is _____.”/ “I’m a bit _____ at the moment, so...”/ “Are you _____?”
4. connect – “I’m _____ing you”/ “Please hold the line while I _____ your call”
5. call – “Thanks for your _____”/ “Thanks for _____ing”/ “I’ll _____ you back...”/ “Thanks for _____ing me back”/ “I’m returning your _____”/ “No, that’s okay, thanks. I’ll _____ again later”/ “I’m transferring your _____”
6. country – “I’m afraid he’s out the _____”/ “Do you know the _____ code?”
7. desk – “I’m afraid he’s away from his _____ at the moment”/ “I’m afraid she isn’t at her _____ at the moment”, “Okay, I’ll leave a note on his _____”
8. flat – “Sorry, my battery is nearly _____. Can I phone you later from my office phone?”/ “My battery is nearly _____ but I just needed to quickly tell you that...”
9. hold – “Please _____ the line”, “_____ on, I’ll just find your order on my computer”/ “I’m putting you on _____”
10. line – “I’m afraid he’s on another _____”/ “I’m afraid I’ve got someone on another _____”/ “We seem to have a bad _____. Shall we hang up and try again?”
11. message – “Can I take a _____?”/ “Can I leave a _____?”/ “Would you like to leave a _____?”/ “I’ll make sure he gets your _____”/ “I’ll pass your _____ onto him”
12. mobile – “I’m on my _____, so can I phone you when I get home?”/ “Do you have his _____ number?”/ “It might be worth trying his _____”
13. office – “I’m afraid she’s out of the ___”/ “I’ll phone you again when I get back to the ___”
14. on – “Hold _____, I’ll just get a pen and some paper”/ “I’m afraid he’s _____ another line. Would you like to leave a message?”
15. put – “Can you _____ me through to extension 767?”/ “Could you _____ me through to Mr Jones, please?”
16. through – “I’m putting you _____”, “Can you put me _____ to Mr Jones, please?”
17. up – “I’m afraid he’s not picking _____ his phone. Shall I tell him that you’ve called?”, “There’s a lot of noise on the line. Let’s hang _____ and try again”
18. check – “I’ll _____ with my boss and call you...”/ “Can I _____ that back?”/ “Can I just _____ what you said?”/ “Could I _____ what you mean?”
19. help – “Thanks for your _____”/ “I’m phoning to see if you could _____ with...”
20. moment – “Just a _____, I’ll see if he’s available”/ “Just a _____ while I find a pen and paper”/ “Just a _____, I’ll put you through”, “Do you have a _____ to talk?”
21. repeat – “Can you _____ your name?”/ “Can you _____ the first/ last part?”
22. sorry – “_____ to keep you waiting”/ “_____ to phone you so late”/ “_____, he’s in a meeting at the moment”/ _____, we were cut off”/ “_____, my battery is nearly flat. Can I call you back later?”
23. speak – “_____ to your later”/ “It was nice _____ing to you but...”/ “Can I _____ to Mr Smith?”/ “I need to _____ to someone about...”
24. spell – “How do you _____ your family name?”/ “Can you _____ the street name for me?”
25. talk – “Are you free to _____?”/ “I don’t have much time to _____ but...”