

Telephone English

Telephone English

This section is all about speaking on the phone in English. It includes a vocabulary list and quiz, common phrases and tips, and a series of practice exercises.

If you answer the phone and you hear someone speaking in English, don't be afraid to reply. The fear of talking on the phone in a second language will disappear if you practise often. Most people find speaking on the phone in a language that's not their own quite difficult at first because they can't see the other person's eyes, mouth and body movements (or body language). In face-to-face conversation we communicate not only with words, but also with our eyes, with facial expressions like smiles and frowns, and by moving our hands and bodies. When speaking on the phone, however, all you can use is spoken language. But speaking on the phone will become much easier after you've learned the special vocabulary and phrases in the pages that follow and had a chance to practise them.

Telephones have changed a lot over the years. Before the first mobile phones (or cell phones) were invented over thirty years ago, nearly everyone used phones connected to telephone lines. These lines ran to telephone exchanges in which calls were connected through a switchboard. These landline phones are still being used in some places, but most people now use mobile phones or smartphones. These phones send signals through the air rather than through physical telephone lines. The most advanced phones are called smartphones. These are like small computers with many functions besides making telephone calls. You can send text messages, take and send photos, record and play audio and video files, connect to the internet, and do much more. Even though telephone technology has changed a lot over the years, the language and vocabulary used when making a call has remained mostly the same.

Example sentence
I phoned the shop but nobody answered so I guess they're closed.
Leave a message on the answering machine and I'll call you back when I can.
If the line's busy and you can't get through, call again later.
Mum's always on the phone after dinner, so I'll get a busy signal if I call now.
I'm sorry, but I really have to take this call .
If you need a lift home, call me and I'll come and get you.
I spoke to hundreds of callers every day while I was a receptionist.
Don't forget to charge your phone before you go camping.
I'm having a conference call with some old friends tonight.
Have you seen the cordless phone ? I had it in the bathroom but it isn't there now.
Are you sure you dialled the right number?
I think the line's dead. There's no dial tone when you pick up the phone.
Someone called, but as soon as they heard my voice they hung up .
Why don't we use that free Wi-Fi hotspot at the public library?
The icon for email on my phone is a white envelope on a blue square.
We've all got smartphones, so do we really need a landline in the house?
The line was really bad so I called again to get a better connection .
I check my missed calls every night in case I've missed an important one.
Oh no! I left my mobile phone in the taxi.
There aren't many pay phones left these days.
The phone rang and everybody stared at it. Then Maria slowly picked it up .
The phone rang and John picked up the receiver and said "Hello?"
He didn't return my call , so I knew something was wrong.
The phone was in the bathroom so I didn't hear it ring .
I should change my ringtone . I'm sick of hearing this one.
Most people hate getting robocalls , don't they?
Don't forget to save his number if he calls again.
You can use any mobile phone that's got your SIM card in it.
We were on the bus watching video clips on my smartphone .
Do you have to pay to have your number in the telephone directory , or is it free?
He sent me lots of text messages after I told him our relationship was over.
We don't call each other much, but we're always texting each other.
My grandma says she has trouble using the touchscreen on her phone.
If I can't answer your call, leave a message on voicemail if you like.
We have Wi-Fi throughout the building, so you can use your smartphone or computer anywhere you like.