There ain't a problem we can't fix!

Problem Solving on the phone - Modal Verbs, Phrasal Verbs and Idiomatic expressions.

EAE Learning objectives for this lesson

Review modal verbs and phrasal verbs, learn new idiomatic expressions, practice this new vocabulary and learn about intonation and stress.



Activity One - **Discuss with your teacher**



1 What kind of problems do you deal with over the phone?
2 What's the most complicated issue you have had to deal with over the phone?
3 What kind of misunderstandings have you had over the phone?
4 What advice would you give to someone about handling problems on the phone?

Activity Two - **Telephone Turns of Phrase** - with Phrasal Verbs.

One thing you can do to improve your telephone skills is to learn some of the phrasal verbs which are commonly used in telephone conversations. Here are some examples:

Hold on means 'wait' – and **hang on** means 'wait' also. Be careful not to confuse hang on with **hang up**! Hang up means 'finish the call by breaking the connection' – in other words: '**put** the phone **down**.'

Another phrasal verb with the same meaning as hang up is **ring off**. The opposite of hang up ring off is **ring up** – if you ring somebody up, you make a phone call. And if you **pick up** the phone, (or pick the phone up) you answer a call when the phone rings.

"Hang on a second..."

If you are talking to a receptionist, secretary or switchboard operator, they may ask you to hang on while they **put** you **through** – **put through** means to connect your call to another telephone. With this verb, the object (you, me, him, her etc.) goes in the middle of the verb: put you through.

But if you can't **get through** to (contact on the phone) the person you want to talk to, you might be able to leave a message asking them to call you back. **Call back** means to return a phone call – and if you use an object (you, me, him, her etc.), it goes in the middle of the verb: call you back.

With a prepare a brief dialogue using the following phrasal verbs:

Hang on	**Ring off**	**Put through**	**Call back**
Hang up	**Ring up**	**Pick up**	**Put down**

Activity Three - Common Problems on the phone… read the examples.

Expressions - State Problem - Offer Solution.

In these examples of polite expressions used on the phone, you will see how modals are used to soften the message and be more polite.

EXAMPLES:

- It's quite a bad line. **Could** I call you on another line?
  - Sorry I'm afraid I can't hear you very well. **Could** I ask you to speak up a little?
  - I'm afraid he's away from his desk. **Could** I ask you to call back later?
  - I'm sorry he is out of the office today. **Should** I take a message for him?
  - She had just popped out - **Would** you like to call back in five minutes?
  - I have tried to put you through but he is not answering. I'm afraid you **may** have to call back.
  - I've been trying to contact him for weeks now by e mail. I think it **would** be best If I spoke to him on the phone instead.
  - I've left several messages but no-one has called me back. **Could** I speak to the manager please?

With your teacher find other examples with the following modal expressions:

- Would you mind…
- Could you please…
- Would it be possible to…
- May I suggest…



Activity Four - Fill the gaps in the text with the following phrasal verbs.

Hang up	**Call back**	**Hang on**
Ring off	**Ring up**	**Put through**

C - Hello, please could I speak to Graham?
R - Sure, could you just ……. a minute. I will try to …… you …… shall I say who is calling?
C - Of course, no problem, it's Sarah.
——-
R - Hi again, sorry to keep you waiting. I'm afraid you will have to ……. ……. because he is on another call. I have been waiting for him to ……. ……. but it's taking a while.
C - OK, I will ……. ……. in ten minutes.
R - Great thanks for your patience.
———-
C - Hello, It's Sarah here again, I ……. ……. just ten minutes ago to speak to Graham. Is he available now?
R - Oh hello again Sarah. Yes I can ……. you ……., he has just ……. …….
C- Great thanks.

Activity Five - **Act out** one of the following dialogues with your teacher.

1. You call the parent of a student who has been coming to lessons drunk. You try to call several times and at last someone answers.

2. You call a new faculty member because she is late for her class. She sounds like you have woken her up by calling! She is from Australia.

3. You call a student who is late paying their school fees. They have some understandable difficulties and a good excuse.

Activity Six - Common Problems to explain politely.

If you have to call a customer or client, or a colleague to explain a mistake you have made, or your company is responsible for, then good manners can really soften the blow!

In English we can sometimes sound excessively apologetic, but it is considered polite to apologise profusely when you make a mistake. Here are some common expressions to use and in the last activity, a list of situations you can **act out**.

- Please accept our apologies.
- On behalf of EPF I'd like to apologise for the inconvenience this has caused.
- Please accept our sincere apologies for this…
- I would like to apologise on behalf of the school for this misunderstanding
- I'm terribly sorry
- I do understand that this must be difficult for you and I'm terribly sorry for the inconvenience
- I'm awfully sorry
- I really must apologise sincerely for this error

Activity Seven - AINT, CAN'T, DON'T, GONNA, WANNA - Swallowing words in English.

In the title of this lesson you can read the contraction 'aint' - short for is not/ or are not. We don't usually write this way, however it comes from the words of a song. We do write don't - do not, with an apostrophe, and won't - will not, for example.

Remember that as English is a stress timed language, we do not place the same amount of stress on each word. There is a rhythm to our speech. Some words we swallow and hardly pronounce at all, and others we say clearly, more slowly and louder.

The stressed syllables are said at approximately regular intervals, and unstressed syllables shorten to fit this rhythm. We weaken and shorten the sound of vowels in words which are less important in the sentence, often words which we can guess in the context (auxiliary verbs for example, or some prepositions).

We can choose which words are important to the sentence, in order to contrast or emphasise its meaning. Using such emphasis over the telephone is particularly important, in order to make people understand what's important in your message. It's also important to listen actively for words which are spoken the loudest and ignore the words you don't quite hear. Listening for key words is a good technique for improving your listening comprehension.

Activity Eight - Apologetic Situations - use the expressions from activity six, and strong intonation and stress, to **act out** the following situations.

1. You have to call a student to announce that they don't have a place in the school next year because of an administrative error.

2. You have to call a student to explain that they have to sit an exam again because their paper was lost.

3. You have to call the parents of a student to explain that their child will not be accepted because they don't have good enough grades.