

English telephone phrases

Introductions

Start any telephone conversation by introducing yourself: *"Hello, this is Peter Jones.* If you answer the phone and the caller fails to identify himself, you can say: *"May I ask who's calling, please?"*

Asking for someone / Making a request

If you're calling to talk to a specific person, then phrase your request as a polite question, e.g. *"May I speak to Rachel Smith, please?"* When you have an extension number but no name you can say: *"Could I have extension number 635?"* But if you're calling with a specific purpose, then a statement works best: *"I'm calling to make a reservation."*

Holding and transferring

"Please hold" is telephone language for "just a moment". When you need to be **transferred** (connected) to another extension you'll often hear: *"Connecting your call..."* or *"Please hold, I'll transfer you..."* If you call a business at a busy time, you might hear only a brief, *"Hello, please hold!"* before the operator switches over to another line.

Leaving a message

When the person you're calling isn't available, be prepared to leave a message. You might use **voicemail** (a digital voice recording system) or an **answering machine** (a machine that records messages onto a tape). If you're talking to an operator, they'll ask: *"Would you like to leave a message?"* Or you can say, *"May I leave a message?"* Be sure to leave your phone number if you want the person to return your call. This is called a **call back number**.

Asking the speaker to slow down

If you're not sure you'll understand everything in English, be honest. Tell the speaker immediately: *"My English isn't very strong, could you please speak slowly?"* Most people will appreciate your honesty and will be happy to oblige.

Write it down

If you're nervous about telephoning in English, it's helpful to prepare a script. Write out a brief outline of what you need to say. You can use it to organize your thoughts beforehand and as a reference if you get confused during the call.

Remember your manners

It's very important to sound polite on the telephone. Use phrases like