

# Using the Phone

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## Warm-Up A

1. How often do you talk on the phone at work?
2. Do you ever take messages for people at work? Do other people take messages for you?
3. Have you ever dealt with a difficult phone call at work?
4. What do you find easy or difficult about talking on the phone in English?

## Warm-Up B

Imagine you are talking to someone on the phone at work.  
What would you say if you wanted to do the following things?

1. Find out if the person wants to leave a message.
2. Inform the person that you will transfer their call.
3. Explain that your manager cannot take any calls at the moment.
4. End the conversation.
5. Ask the person to share their contact information, such as a phone number or email address.
6. Check the accuracy of some details that the person has just shared with you.
7. Tell the person to wait.

## Vocabulary Preview A

Match the beginning of each sentence with the correct ending.

- |                                 |                          |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| _____ 1. I'll just              | a) back later.           |
| _____ 2. I'll call              | b) on hold for a minute? |
| _____ 3. How can                | c) busy at the moment.   |
| _____ 4. Can I put you          | d) transfer you.         |
| _____ 5. I'm sorry, that line's | e) please?               |
| _____ 6. Can I take             | f) she's unavailable.    |
| _____ 7. I'm afraid             | g) I help you?           |
| _____ 8. Who's calling,         | h) a message?            |

## Vocabulary Preview B

Work with a partner. Read each of the completed sentences from Part A.  
How might a listener respond?

- Example: A: I'll call back later.  
B: Okay. No problem.

## Listening 1

Listen to the three phone conversations. In which conversation...

- \_\_\_\_\_ a) did the caller give their number?
- \_\_\_\_\_ b) did the caller offer a solution?
- \_\_\_\_\_ c) did the caller say they would call back instead of leaving a message?

## Listening 2

Decide if each statement is True (T) or False (F).  
Then listen to the conversations again and check.

### Conversation 1

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. The caller asked to speak with Maria Lopez.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. The call was very important.

### Conversation 2

- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. When Barry Watson called, Tom Sanchez was in a meeting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Barry Watson's order was incomplete.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. The receptionist was able to give Barry Watson the information he needed.

### Conversation 3

- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Amanda Gold was speaking to somebody else when Maggie Chen called.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Amanda Gold may already have Maggie Chen's phone number.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. The receptionist only gets one detail wrong when taking down Maggie's information.

# Language Functions

## A. Chart 1

The conversations included a lot of different questions. Who asked each question, the caller or the receptionist?

Which of the caller's questions sound less formal? Do you think it is okay to sound less formal when calling a company?

**Sentences:**

- ~~How can I help you?~~
- Can I take a message?
- Does she have your number?
- Could you put me through to [name]?
- Who's calling, please?
- Would you like to leave a message?
- Hi. Is [name] around?
- Hi. Can I speak to/with [name], please?
- Would you like [name] to call you back?
- Can I get your number?

| Caller | Receptionist   |
|--------|--|
|        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>How can I help you?</i></li> </ul> |

# Language Functions cont.

## B. Chart 2

Decide the function of the sentences. Add them to the chart.

**Sentences:**

- It's [name] from [company].
- ~~I'm afraid [name]'s in a meeting at the moment.~~
- Good morning. [company], [name] speaking. How can I help you?
- Can I put you on hold for a minute?
- I'm afraid [name]'s unavailable.
- I'll just put you through.
- I'm sorry, that line's busy at the moment.
- So, that's 258-555-8811.
- I'll pass that on to [name].
- Thanks for calling [company].

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>1. Greeting the caller</b></p>   | <p><b>5. Transferring a call</b></p>       |
| <p><b>2. Explaining that someone cannot take a call</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I'm afraid [name]'s in a meeting at the moment.</i></li> </ul> | <p><b>6. Explaining who you are</b></p>    |
| <p><b>3. Checking details</b></p>  | <p><b>7. Asking the caller to wait</b></p> |
| <p><b>4. Explaining that you will share a message</b></p>  | <p><b>8. Ending the conversation</b></p>   |

## Role-Play

### Task 1

Practise these role-plays with a partner.

#### Scenario 1

Receptionist: You work for General Electric.  
You take calls for Emma Beck.

- Emma is in a meeting.
- Ask the customer if they want to leave a message.

Caller: You work for Elgin Supplies.

- You want to speak to Emma Beck.
- Leave this message: "Please call me back at 656-871-9045."

#### Scenario 2

Caller: You work for A-Star Resumes.

- You want to speak with Liza Swift.
- Leave this message: "We've found two temps for the administrative position. Should I send them to your office tomorrow?"
- Liza already has your contact information.

Receptionist: You work for Pearson Personnel.

- Your boss, Liza Swift, is out of the office at the moment.
- Ask the caller if they want to leave a message.

### Task 2

Work with a partner. Create your own scenarios for the caller and receptionist. You might want to create scenarios related to your own company.

Take turns being the caller and receptionist. Practise receiving calls from customers and taking messages. Use phrases you learned in this lesson.

# Transcripts

## A. Conversation 1

Receptionist: Good afternoon. ABC Solutions. **How can I help you?**

Ahmed Noor: Could you put me through to Maria Gomez?

Receptionist: **Who's calling, please?**

Ahmed Noor: It's Ahmed Noor from Arcadia Office Supplies.

Receptionist: **I'll just transfer you.**

(...)

Receptionist: **I'm afraid Maria's unavailable** at the moment. **Can I take a message?**

Ahmed Noor: Um, no...er...**I'll call back later.** It's nothing urgent.

Receptionist: Okay.

Ahmed Noor: Thanks.

Receptionist: You're welcome. Goodbye.

Ahmed Noor: Bye.



## Transcripts cont.

### B. Conversation 2

Receptionist: Good morning. Network Supplies. Rita speaking. **How can I help you?**

Barry Watson: Hi. Is Tom Sanchez around?

Receptionist: I'll just see if he's available. **Who's calling, please?**

Barry Watson: Barry Watson. It's about the delivery.

Receptionist: **Can I put you on hold for a minute?**

*(Receptionist turns to Tom Sanchez.)*

Receptionist: Excuse me, Tom. I have Barry Watson on the line. He's calling about the delivery.

Tom Sanchez: Ah, sorry, Rita. I'm about to go into a meeting in, like, two minutes. Can you take a message for me?

Receptionist: No problem.

*(Receptionist speaks into the phone.)*

Receptionist: Sorry, Mr Watson. **I'm afraid Tom is unavailable. Can I take a message?**

Barry Watson: Well, can you tell him that there's a problem? Some of the order is missing.

Receptionist: Missing? Okay.

Barry Watson: Yes. We haven't received all the monitors. There should be eight new monitors, but we only have six.



## Transcripts cont.

### B. Conversation 2 cont.

Receptionist: Oh no. I'm sorry about that. I'll let him know as soon as he's available.

Barry Watson: Do you know when that might be? It's just that the delivery person is still here, so I could send him back to pick up the missing boxes if that's easier.

Receptionist: Um...he's in a meeting at the moment. I'm afraid I don't know how long he'll be. I'll ask him to contact you as soon as he can. Sorry for the inconvenience.

Barry Watson: That's okay. It's just one of those things.

Receptionist: You should hear from Tom soon.

Barry Watson: Thanks.

Receptionist: Thank you.

Barry Watson: Bye.

Receptionist: Goodbye.

## Transcripts cont.

### C. Conversation 3

Receptionist: Gold's Groceries.

Maggie Chen: Hi. Can I speak to Amanda Gold, please?

Receptionist: I'll just put you through.

Maggie Chen: Thanks.

(...)

Receptionist: **I'm sorry, that line's busy at the moment.** Would you like to leave a message?

Maggie Chen: Yes, please. This is Maggie Chen from Organic Supplies. I wanted to follow up on Amanda's email to us about buying in bulk. I thought it would be easier to speak on the phone.

Receptionist: Okay, sure. Would you like Amanda to call you back?

Maggie Chen: That would be great, yes.

Receptionist: Okay. Does she have your number?

Maggie Chen: It should be in the email signature, but...

Receptionist: Okay. Can I get your number just in case?

Maggie Chen: Sure. It's 258-555...

Receptionist: Yep.



## Transcripts cont.

### C. Conversation 3 cont.

Maggie Chen: 8811.

Receptionist: 88...1...1. So that's 256-555-8811.

Maggie Chen: Sorry. 258-555-8811.

Receptionist: 258-555-8811.

Maggie Chen: That's right.

Receptionist: And it's Maggie Chen calling from Organic Supplies?

Maggie Chen: Yes, about the bulk inquiry.

Receptionist: Great. I'll pass that on to Amanda and get her to give you a call.

Maggie Chen: Great, thanks for your help.

Receptionist: You're welcome. Thank you for calling Gold's.

Maggie Chen: Bye.

Receptionist: Bye.

# Answer Key

### LESSON DESCRIPTION:

In this lesson, students develop everyday skills for talking on the phone at work. They learn and practise phrases for starting phone conversations, transferring calls, taking messages, and more. Includes listening and speaking practice.

**LEVEL:** Int

**TIME:** 1–2 hours

**TAGS:** business English, Functional Business, phone, telephone, talking on the phone, taking phone messages, transferring calls

## Warm-Up A & B

Place students in pairs or small groups to discuss the questions. Answers will vary.

## Vocabulary Preview A

- |      |      |      |      |
|------|------|------|------|
| 1. d | 3. g | 5. c | 7. f |
| 2. a | 4. b | 6. h | 8. e |

## Vocabulary Preview B

Have students take turns reading out the completed sentences from Part A and responding. You could have them try this exercise again after they've learned some common responses in the rest of the lesson.

## Listening 1

- a) 3                      b) 2                      c) 1

## Listening 2

1. F – The caller asked to speak to Maria Gomez.
2. F – Ahmed Noor said that it was nothing urgent.
3. F – Tom said that he was about to go into a meeting.
4. T
5. F – The receptionist didn't know when Tom would be available.
6. T
7. T
8. T

## Language Functions

### A. CHART 1

Can be done in pairs or as a homework activity. Answers about formality may vary. "Is [name] around?" is very informal, and questions with "can" sound less formal than questions with "could."

| Caller  | Receptionist  |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Could you put me through to [name]?</li> <li>• Hi. Is [name] around?</li> <li>• Hi. Can I speak to/[with] [name], please?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can I help you?</li> <li>• Can I take a message?</li> <li>• Does she have your number?</li> <li>• Who's calling, please?</li> <li>• Would you like to leave a message?</li> <li>• Would you like [name] to call you back?</li> <li>• Can I get your number?</li> </ul> |

*(continued on the next page...)*

## Answer Key cont.

### Language Functions cont.

#### B. CHART 2

Can be done in pairs or as a homework activity.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p><b>1. Greeting the caller</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good morning. [company]. [name] speaking. How can I help you?</li> </ul>  | <p><b>5. Transferring a call</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'll just put you through.</li> </ul>                |
| <p><b>2. Explaining that someone cannot take a call</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'm afraid [name]'s in a meeting at the moment.</li> <li>• I'm afraid [name]'s unavailable.</li> <li>• I'm sorry, that line's busy at the moment.</li> </ul> | <p><b>6. Explaining who you are</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It's [name] from [company].</li> </ul>            |
| <p><b>3. Checking details</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• So, that's 258-555-8811.</li> </ul>  | <p><b>7. Asking the caller to wait</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can I put you on hold for a minute?</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>4. Explaining that you will share a message</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• I'll pass that on to [name].</li> </ul>  | <p><b>8. Ending the conversation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thanks for calling [company].</li> </ul>         |

### Role-Play

Place students in groups of two to practise the role-play scenarios.

Invite students to perform for the class.