



Telephone Talk - General Advice

You have few problems reading the language or understanding others. But telephoning in English? That's when you start to panic. This is understandable. You can't see the other person, and voices are often more difficult to understand on the phone. All is not lost, however. There are some simple steps you can take to improve your telephoning skills.

1. Don't Panic

This is easier said than done, but really is the key to success. You must lose your fear of the phone. Make at least one call a day in English to a friend just to practice.

2. Learn Key Words and Standard Phrases

Key words and standard phrases come up again and again on the phone. Learn them and use them! Don't try to be too clever on the phone; stick to the standard phrases.

3. Start and Finish Well

A confident opening is important. Say clearly, and not too quickly, who you are and why you are calling: "This is Helen Chan from IBF Ltd. I'm calling about your order for ..." Try to avoid saying "My name is ..."; this sounds less professional. At the end of the call, thank the other person: "Thanks for your help." If they thank you, answer with "You're welcome".

4. Learn to Control the Call

Native speakers of English often speak too quickly and not clearly enough. Make sure you know how to stop them or slow them down. Phrases such as: "I'm sorry, I didn't catch that" and "I'm sorry, could you speak a little more slowly" will help you to control the situation. Don't be embarrassed to stop the caller.

5. Listen Carefully

Listen to the vocabulary and phrases that the caller uses. Often you will be able to say the same things later in the same conversation. Your partner won't notice what you are doing, but you will feel good that you have activated your passive vocabulary.

6. Soften your Language

Chinese speakers often sound impolite in English because they are too direct. "Would" and "could" are the two key words. "I'd like to speak to Jane Brown, please" is much better than "I want to speak to...".

7. Create a Positive Atmosphere

Smile when you are on the phone. It really does make a difference to the way you sound. And the impression you create can make a big difference to your chances of business success. If you are unsure how you sound on the phone, record yourself during a conversation. You may be surprised by the result.

8. Learn to Spell

Do you know the telephone alphabet in English? If not, learn it. It is important not only to know how to say the individual letters, but also to be able to check them: "Was that I for India or E for Echo?" (Don't say "E like Echo".)