

# SUCCESS ON THE TELEPHONE

Im internationalen Geschäft ist der richtige Umgang mit dem Telefon von zentraler Bedeutung. KEN TAYLOR hilft Ihnen, Ihre Fähigkeiten richtig einzuschätzen und entscheidend zu verbessern.



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aking international phone calls is not always easy. For one thing, you can't see the other person, and seeing body language, gestures and facial expressions helps enormously — especially when doing business in a second language. Furthermore, accents can be exaggerated over the phone.

Another problem is that native speakers may take over the conversation if you are not careful. Sensitive situations can also be more difficult when you are not speaking face-to-face. Time pressures can influence our ability to express ourselves clearly and appropriately.

Think, too, about how *you* sound on the phone in English. How easy are *you* to understand? Do *you* create the right atmosphere for doing business?

If you feel you need to improve your international telephoning skills, do the following self-assessment. After each question, you will be guided to a short article with tips on how you can improve your skills. Also, on pages 75–76, you will find a pull-out “survival guide” to international telephoning, which you can keep near the phone or take with you on business trips.



## How good are your international telephone skills?

<b>accent</b> ['æksnt]	Akzent
<b>appropriately</b> [ə'prəupriətli]	in angemessener Weise
<b>exaggerated</b> [ɪg'zædʒəreɪtɪd]	übertrieben; hier: verstärkt
<b>facial expression</b> ['feɪʃl]	Gesichtsausdruck
<b>gesture</b> ['dʒestʃə]	Geste
<b>native speaker</b>	Muttersprachler(in)
<b>pull-out</b>	heraustrennbar
<b>self-assessment</b> [ə'sesmənt]	Selbstbeurteilung
<b>sensitive</b> ['sensətɪv]	hier: heikel
<b>skill</b>	Fertigkeit



**Do you make a good first impression at the start of the call?**

**a)** Yes, I know exactly how to introduce myself and describe the purpose of the call.

**b)** Check that your feeling is correct by asking a native-speaker colleague to give you feedback.

**c)** I'm not sure whether I'm doing it correctly.

**d)** GO TO “Starting the call” on page 73 and look at the first few sections of the pull-out guide.



**If someone asks you to spell your name, do you find this easy?**

- a) Yes, I am good at spelling in English.  
☞ To make sure, check whether people spell your name correctly in follow-up correspondence.
- b) I do not find this easy to do.  
☞ GO TO "Spelling correctly" on page 73 and learn the international alphabet in the pull-out guide.

**Do you feel and sound self-confident when talking on the phone in English?**

- a) Yes, I am confident on the phone in English.  
☞ Record yourself on tape. Listen and decide whether your assessment is correct.
- b) I probably sound hesitant.  
☞ GO TO "Sounding confident" on page 73.

**Do you find it easy to understand different and difficult accents?**

- a) Yes, I have no problem with that.  
☞ This is a sign that you have a high level of English. If you are not sure this is the case, monitor the number of times you need to say "Sorry?" in your next three or four international calls.
- b) I find this causes difficulties for me.  
☞ GO TO "Dealing with difficult accents" on page 73.

**Do you know the special words and phrases you need to make international calls?**

- a) Yes, I use these words and phrases regularly.  
☞ TEST YOURSELF, using the pull-out guide.
- b) No, I have to find other words to explain myself.  
☞ LEARN the telephone words and phrases in the "International Telephoning" pull-out guide.

**Is your voice easy to listen to and your accent in English easy to understand?**

- a) Yes. People have told me this.  
☞ Ask a native-speaker friend to listen to a recording of your voice and to give you some feedback on how you sound.
- b) No, I have had problems in the past.  
☞ GO TO "Speaking clearly" on page 74.

**Can you create a positive atmosphere in which to conduct business on the telephone?**

- a) Yes, I can do that.  
☞ Your international calls should usually be a pleasure to make. Next time you make a call, check whether you can hear your partner smile or laugh during the call.
- b) I'm not sure if I can.  
☞ GO TO "Creating a positive atmosphere" on page 74.

**Do you know how to manage more sensitive situations like making or dealing with complaints?**

- a) Yes, I am able to manage those situations.  
☞ Monitor how native speakers deal with your complaints. Maybe you can pick up some more tips from them.
- b) No, I find that difficult to do.  
☞ GO TO "Sensitive situations" on page 74.

**Can you keep control of the conversation even when a native speaker is talking most of the time?**

- a) Yes — no problem!  
☞ Well done! Keep controlling them, but also LOOK AT "Controlling native speakers" on page 77 for a few new tips.
- b) No — big problem!  
☞ READ CAREFULLY the section "Controlling native speakers" on page 77.

**Can you end a call in an appropriate way in English?**

- a) Yes, I can.  
☞ Monitor how you do it in your next international call and think about the impression you leave with the other person.
- b) No, I can't do that very well.  
☞ GO TO "Closing the call" on page 77 and also check the pull-out guide.



## STARTING THE CALL

The first few moments of a call are critical, especially if this is the first time you are speaking to someone. A few minutes' preparation is often the key to success. Make sure you know the main words and phrases you need before you start.

If you don't know the other person, start with a greeting and by saying his or her name: "Good morning, Mr Svensson!" Our names are important to us, and starting this way shows you respect that. Then say which organization you represent and your own name: "I'm calling from EMAG in Stuttgart. This is Dieter Walther speaking." Make sure you say your own name clearly. We often say our names too quickly, as they are so familiar to us. But for people from other countries, our names may seem strange and difficult to understand. Use the phrase "This is..." instead of "My name is...". It makes you sound more important and businesslike.

Now tell the other person what you do and why you are calling: "I'm in charge of accounts, and the reason I'm calling is to check some outstanding payments from last month."

Then move on to the main part of the call.

## SPELLING CORRECTLY

"Could you spell that, please?" Many non-native speakers dread these words. It's so easy to make a fool of yourself when spelling your name or your address in English, and often just as difficult to take down a name spelled over the phone. There are two things you can do:

1) Learn the English alphabet by using the rhyming version you can find in the pull-out guide. The letters

<b>accounts</b>	Buchhaltung
<b>apology</b> [ə'pɒlədʒi]	Entschuldigung
<b>attentive</b>	aufmerksam
<b>businesslike</b>	geschäftsmäßig
<b>chat</b>	(lockeres) Gespräch
<b>close (a call)</b>	(ein Gespräch) beenden
<b>complaint</b> [kəm'pleɪnt]	Beschwerde
<b>conduct business</b>	Geschäfte erledigen
<b>critical</b>	entscheidend
<b>differentiate</b> [ˌdɪfə'renʃiəɪt]	unterscheiden
<b>dread sth.</b> [dred]	etw. fürchten
<b>embarrassed</b> [ɪm'bærəst]	verlegen
<b>emphasize sth.</b> [ˈemfəsaɪz]	etw. betonen
<b>er</b> [ɜ:]	äh
<b>familiar to sb.</b> [fə'miliə]	jmdm. vertraut
<b>hesitant</b> ['hezɪtənt]	zögerlich; hier: unsicher
<b>insecure</b>	unsicher
<b>interrupting</b> [ˌɪntə'rʌptɪŋ]	Unterbrechen
<b>keep control of sth.</b>	etw. im Griff haben
<b>lack of sth.</b>	Mangel an etw.
<b>make a fool of oneself</b>	sich blamieren
<b>monitor sth.</b> ['mɒnɪtə]	hier: auf etw. achten
<b>outstanding</b>	hier: ausstehend
<b>over-politeness</b>	übertriebene Höflichkeit
<b>phrase</b>	Redewendung
<b>reassure sb.</b> [ˌri:ə'sʊə]	jmdm. versichern
<b>rhyming</b> ['raɪmɪŋ]	Reim-
<b>self-confident</b> [ˌself'kɒnfɪdənt]	selbstbewusst
<b>spell</b>	buchstabieren
<b>take sth. down</b>	etw. notieren

are arranged according to their sound. This makes it easier to differentiate between difficult letters like "G" and "J" or "I" and "E".

2) Use an international spelling system like the International Radio Telegraphy system, which you can also find in the pull-out guide: "No, sorry, I said 'I' as in India, not 'E' as in Echo".

Spelling is a basic skill we learn in school at a very early age. Spelling in English is a basic business skill. If you feel insecure or embarrassed, it's time to go back to school and learn your ABC.

## SOUNDING CONFIDENT

"Er... sorry... I was wondering if you could help me... umm... you see, I thought I could perhaps come to see you sometime soon to have a little chat about possible co-operation. Would that be OK with you?"

I don't think I would be very interested in co-operating with someone who sounded so insecure. Would you?

Insecurity in language can be interpreted as lack of confidence in general. We need to show our business partners we know clearly what we want and how we intend to achieve it. Here are some "dos" and "don'ts" to help you sound more confident on the phone.

### FOUR DON'Ts

1) Avoid "cow sounds"!

"Mhmm", "er" or "uh-huh" can sometimes help show you are listening, but if there are too many of them, it sounds too hesitant.

2) Avoid apologies.

Apologize only if there is a reason. Doing it too often can easily be seen as a sign of weakness.

3) Avoid "weakeners".

Too many words like "perhaps", "sometime", "little" and "I thought" take away a feeling of confidence.

4) Avoid over-politeness.

Used too often, expressions like "I was wondering if..." or "Would that be OK with you?" sound as if you need to be reassured that you are not wasting the other person's time.

### THREE DOS

1) Take a deep breath before you start. This will calm you down and help your voice sound stronger.

2) Talk slowly. Talking quickly gives an impression of nervousness.

3) Use words that emphasize your confidence: "I'm sure...", "I'm confident that...", "I know..."

## DEALING WITH DIFFICULT ACCENTS

When phoning internationally, you must be able to deal with Mr Yamamoto from Kyoto, Ms Bartfay from Budapest and Mr Kowalski from Brooklyn. Each of them speaks with a particular accent. Your job is to deal with this situation.

There are two key skills you need: attentive listening, and interrupting for explanation.



If you listen attentively, you don't have to understand every word your partner says. Often the context will tell you what is meant. You need to encourage the other person when you understand him or her, and regularly check that you do understand:

■ Encouraging signals on the phone are the occasional "hmm-hmm" or short words and phrases such as "Yes", "I see", "I get you".

■ Check your understanding by repeating key words or phrases: "Friday", "2 o'clock", "Ida is coming, too".

■ Summarize regularly: "So you will be coming to the office next Friday at 2 o'clock together with Ida. Is that right?"

If something is unclear, interrupt for explanation as quickly as you can. The best interruption is the shortest: "Sorry?" or "Pardon?". If you still don't understand, guess what you think you heard, repeat that, and let your partner in conversation correct it.

You: "So you want me to send the papers to your office in Doncaster by Thursday?"

Your partner: "No — sorry — Lancaster, not Doncaster, and by Tuesday, not Thursday!"



## SPEAKING CLEARLY

It's important to make yourself understood. There are three things you can do.

■ **Speak at the right speed.** If you speak too quickly, you often swallow words and make things hard, especially for second-language speakers. But more often, one speaks a bit too slowly, making it harder for the listener to keep his or her concentration. Particularly native speakers may let their minds wander if the speed is too slow. Varying the speed is a way of keeping your listener's interest. It can also allow you to emphasize the important part of the message by slowing down. Do remember that pausing either before or after a key message helps emphasize its importance.

■ **Put more stress on key words.** Second-language speakers generally need more stress — not in their lives, but in their voices! Which word you stress can make a big difference: "No, we need *all* the goods by Thursday", has a different emphasis from "No, we need all the goods by *Thursday*".

■ **Take care with your pronunciation.** If you speak with a distinct German accent, that's OK as long as eight main sounds are clearly differentiated:

- ☛ /θ/ as in **think** is different from /s/ as in **sink**
- ☛ /ð/ as in **breathe** is different from /z/ as in **breeze**
- ☛ /v/ as in **vest** is different from /w/ as in **west**
- ☛ /dʒ/ as in **jail** is different from /j/ as in **Yale**



## CREATING A POSITIVE ATMOSPHERE

"Always Look on the Bright Side of Life" was a popular song by the Monty Python team some years ago. We can learn from their attitude to life in our

international calls. In most cases, we want to sound friendly, upbeat and professional.

A good way to begin is to look for positive ways of getting your message across. Instead of saying, "Our office closes at 5 p.m.", turn it around and say, "Our office is open until 5 p.m." Or instead of saying "I can't make the 27th", say "I could make the 28th or 29th".

Look for opportunities for small talk during the call. It helps build positive relationships and doesn't always have to come at the beginning of a conversation. It would often not be appropriate on the phone, but listen for any signals during calls that your partners would like to lighten up the business with a few words about the weather or, more interestingly, about themselves. Give pieces of information about yourself and see whether your partners respond.

Don't be afraid to laugh. Many cultures enjoy a good-humoured approach to business, and people look for a chance to laugh or smile. A smile can be heard in the voice and can really help in building relationships on the phone.



## SENSITIVE SITUATIONS

People are at their most vulnerable when you are giving them negative feedback. It's hard to accept it without being defensive, and it's hard to give it without sounding superior. These difficulties are made worse in a second language.

When you are giving negative feedback on the phone in English, here are two tips.

■ Use a "good-news sandwich": give the negative news between two positive pieces of information. This makes the bad news easier to accept. This method, used in many cultures, also has the positive effect of forcing you to look for the good news before picking up the phone.

Continued on page 77

<b>approach to sth.</b> [ə'prəʊtʃ]	Herangehensweise an etw.
<b>at one's most vulnerable</b> ['vʌlnərəbl]	am verletzlichsten
<b>attitude</b> ['ætɪtjuːd]	Einstellung
<b>be defensive</b>	in die Verteidigungshaltung gehen
<b>bright</b>	hier: positiv
<b>context</b>	Zusammenhang
<b>encourage sb.</b>	hier: jmdm. positive Signale geben
<b>get sth. across</b> <i>ifml.</i>	etw. vermitteln
<b>good-humoured</b> ['hju:məd]	gut gelaunt; hier: scherzhaft
<b>I get you</b> <i>ifml.</i>	etwa: verstehe
<b>let one's mind wander</b>	seine Gedanken (ab)schweifen lassen
<b>lighten sth. up</b> ['laɪtn]	etw. auflockern
<b>make the 27th</b>	es am 27. schaffen
<b>occasional</b> [ə'keɪʒnəl]	gelegentlich
<b>pronunciation</b> [prəˌnʌnsi'eɪʃn]	Aussprache
<b>respond</b>	reagieren; hier: darauf eingehen
<b>stress</b>	hier: Betonung
<b>summarize</b> ['sʌməraɪz]	zusammenfassen
<b>superior</b> [su'piəriə]	überheblich
<b>swallow sth.</b> ['swɒləʊ]	etw. (ver)schlucken
<b>upbeat</b> <i>ifml.</i>	positiv eingestellt
<b>vary sth.</b> ['veəri]	etw. variieren

## FURTHER READING

**Effective Telephoning**, J. Comfort, Cornelsen/Oxford, ISBN 3-464-11427-9, DM 49.80. Cassette DM 37.90, video DM 249.

**How to Phone Effectively**, R. Bosewitz, R. Kleinschroth, Rowohlt, ISBN 3-499-60139-7, DM 14.90.

**Telephoning in English**, B. J. Naterop, R. Revell, CUP/Klett, ISBN 3-12-533001-7, DM 37. Cassettes/CDs DM 58. To order, see pages 19–20.

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■ Soften your language with words like “would”, “could” and “might”, and use the conditional to make the advice less dogmatic: “If you spent a bit less time on organizational matters, you might be able to visit a few more customers.”

When you receive negative feedback, try to remind yourself that you might learn something valuable for the future. This is more easily said than done, especially if you hear that the other person is upset or angry.

■ Listen positively and encourage the other person to let off steam. Try not to criticize.

■ Don't defend yourself or your organization, even if you are “right”.

■ Use empathetic language: “I understand how you must feel”; “I'd be upset in your place, too”; “That must have made things difficult for you”.

■ Thank the person for the feedback and promise to think carefully about it.

The calmer you are, the more quickly your partner will calm down.

## CONTROLLING NATIVE SPEAKERS

There are a number of things you can do to regain control of the conversation from native speakers.

### Interrupt quickly

As soon as you don't understand, interrupt quickly. Native speakers may get irritated if it becomes clear that you lost the thread several sentences back and they now have to go back and repeat information. Use short interrupting words like “Sorry?” or “Pardon?”. These

<b>all's well that ends well</b>	Ende gut, alles gut
<b>as a last resort</b> [rɪ'zɔ:t]	als letzter Ausweg
<b>close: bring sth. to a close</b>	etw. zu Ende bringen
<b>empathetic</b> [em'pæθetɪk]	einfühlsam
<b>give sb.'s regards to sb.</b>	jmdn. von jmdm. grüßen
<b>grateful</b>	dankbar
<b>irritated</b> ['ɪrɪteɪtɪd]	verärgert
<b>keep up</b>	mitkommen
<b>let off steam</b>	Dampf ablassen
<b>note of agreement</b>	hier: positive Note
<b>pleasantry</b> ['plezntri]	nette (belanglose) Bemerkung
<b>reminder</b>	Erinnerung
<b>thread</b> [θred]	Faden
<b>upset</b> [ʌp'set]	aufgebracht

are a simple, quick way of showing that you are having problems keeping up. Don't use the phrase “Could you repeat that, please?” unless you want exactly the same words again. Use this phrase for getting spelling or telephone numbers repeated, but not for getting an explanation. If you use the word “understand”, don't put the word “you” after it, as in “I don't understand you”. This sounds as if you are criticizing the other person's thought processes. Whenever a second-language speaker says, “Ken, I don't understand you”, I reply: “Neither does my wife!”

### Ask native speakers to slow down

Native speakers usually speak too quickly. You need to remind them of this often, because they may slow down for a few minutes and then reach their normal speed again. “Could you take it a bit more slowly, please?” or “Could you speak a bit more slowly, please?” are polite ways of doing this.

### Speak German

If your native-speaker business partner always speaks too quickly over the phone, then as a last resort say a few sentences in German! It acts as a great reminder to the native speaker that you are the one making the effort of speaking in a second language, and it will usually have the effect of making him or her feel grateful that the call is being held in English and not German!

## CLOSING THE CALL

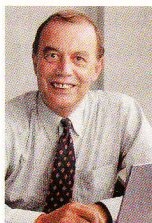
It is important to end a call in an appropriate way. Usually, you want to leave a good final impression — a pleasant aftertaste like a good wine.

First of all, how do you know when to start bringing the call to a close? Listen for closing signals from your partner. These are usually short words such as “Right!”, “So!”, “OK!” or “Well!”. They are clear signals the caller wants to bring the conversation to a close. Use them yourself to show you have finished the business of the call.

This is also the time for a few words of small talk, now that the business is over. This simply reminds both of you of the relation you have built up during the call and allows you to end on a note of agreement.

Finally, end with a pleasantry: “I look forward to seeing you next month”; “Please give my regards to Margaret”.

Just remember your Shakespeare: “All's well that ends well”.



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