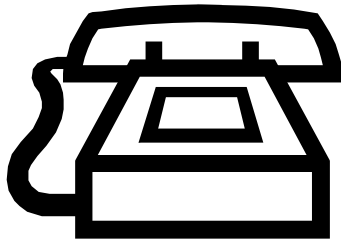


Telephone Skills Resource Kit: Curriculum Guide



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Telephone Skills Resource Kit

Introduction

Purpose: This resource kit is designed to help ESL instructors plan lessons to meet their learners' needs in the area of telephone skills. It provides a curriculum guide, goal setting tools, sample lesson plans, worksheets, assessment tools and an annotated bibliography of relevant resources.

Background: My students helped me see the need for a telephone skills resource for ESL instructors when they told me they wanted to work on telephone skills. I looked through books and searched the internet for some ideas. I found some lesson plan ideas, but everything seemed to cover telephone skills in one or two lessons. Most of the skills covered in these lessons were skills my intermediate students already had. I knew my students needed a more in-depth approach to telephone skills to help them solve more difficult problems.

How to use this kit: I have tried to make this kit easy for busy ESL instructors to use. The Kit is divided into 4 sections.

- **Curriculum Guide:** The curriculum guide is for instructors intending to work on telephone skills as a complete unit for several classes. It is a short guide that outlines the skills necessary for effective telephone communication. It includes some ideas for how these skills can be practiced in class.
- **Evaluation Tools:** The tools are designed to help instructors adapt the curriculum guide to their classes' needs. Instructors not using the curriculum guide may also find them useful.
- **Lesson Plans:** This section can be helpful for instructors who want to work on telephone skills for just one class and for instructors using the curriculum guide. The lesson plans are arranged according to the skill topics in the curriculum guide. They are examples of ways to practice the skills in the classroom, but they are not a full curriculum. Instructors using the curriculum guide will need to introduce the skills first with their own lessons.
- **Resources:** The Resource section includes descriptions of materials that instructors may find helpful when developing their own lesson plans for telephone skills. For easy reference, these resources are also arranged according to the skill topics in the curriculum guide.

Special Thanks: I had a lot of help on this project and I want to thank Amanda Harrison-Perez for sharing her lesson plans with me, helping me edit my writing and giving me the time I needed for this project. Thanks also to Susan Reeve and Mary Lambert for their feedback on my ideas. Thanks to the participants at Telephone Connections workshop at the SEPDC Regional Conference in Reading, PA for their suggestions and feedback. Thanks to Eric Pauli for sharing his voice with us. And thanks to my husband Casey for recording the listening activities and sharing his voice.

Curriculum Guide

How to use this Curriculum Guide

Purpose: This curriculum guide is designed to help instructors who want to address telephone skills with their students as part of a unit spanning several lesson plans. It helps instructors determine objectives to address during the unit and provides some thoughts for the different objectives.

Every class is different: There are different learners, different levels, different goals and different styles of instruction. Instructors are encouraged to use this guide to meet the needs of their individual classes. This guide does not provide complete lesson plans and activities; it provides guidance for instructors trying to determine their objectives. The approach and activities used to address those objectives can vary according to the instructor's own style and needs of the class.

Skill Topics: The guide is divided into six skill topics. Instructors may refer to these topics when planning the telephone unit for their own classes. The curriculum guide elaborates on each topic with [the importance of the topic] ideas for classroom use and useful points to remember.

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*****Before you Begin*****

Talk with your learners to determine what their needs and goals are for learning telephone skills. Depending on what needs your class has, you may want to skip many of the ideas or elaborate more on other ideas. The Evaluation part of the toolkit has some ideas for needs assessments and goal setting that you can use with your students, or develop your own tools to gather this information.

Phone Basics

Phone basics helps learners know what to expect during telephone calls and different points of culture for telephone use in America.

OBJECTIVES: Effective telephone users should be able to

- Answer the telephone – at home, at work
- Take a message – Who is the message for? Who is the person calling? Why is the person calling? What is their phone number? When is the best time to return the call?
- Dial a number – local, long distance, toll free, numbers with extensions, phone trees
- Leave a message – Name, phone number, who you're calling, why you're calling
- Understand the telephone system – long distance charges, local long distance, using a phone card, reading a phone bill, wireless phones, service “packages” and “bundling of services”
- Make phone calls – personal and for business, demonstrating socio-cultural competence (calling a utility company, child's school, a friend, a teacher, etc.)
- Prepare for a phone call – Gather all important information needed for the phone call (account numbers, claim numbers, important names, dates or addresses, etc)
- Use a telephone directory – yellow pages, white pages, government pages, internet

ACTIVITIES:

- Role plays -- Practice role-plays with a partner using ideas from the sample lesson plan (see Lesson Plans p. 4) or from *Conversation Strategies* (see Resources p. 3)
- Critical Thinking -- Look at advertisements for different long distance plans. Have students determine the plan that is right for their situation.
- Meet personal goals -- Have students determine a need they have for goods or services (ex. A haircut, car repair, local place of worship, restaurant, sports store, etc) and find a business that is close to one's home using the telephone book. For advanced students, you can ask them to call the business and ask for basic information (hours, specials, appointment necessary, etc.)
- System organization -- This is good for beginners or groups needing more experience with our alphabetization system. Have the students make a telephone directory of the class by asking each other for their name and phone number. In groups, they can alphabetize the list by last name. Cutting out the names into strips of paper can make the alphabetizing easier for corrections. If you use computers in the classroom, this is a great activity for Excel or other spreadsheet. (Don't show them the easy alphabetizing shortcut until after they finish!)

Pronunciation

Misunderstandings in pronunciation are more difficult to overcome in telephone conversations because we don't have the benefits of body language or the ability to write something out for the other person. Sometimes a pronunciation problem for a student can turn into a listening problem if the student only understands their own incorrect pronunciation and not the correct pronunciation.

OBJECTIVES: Effective telephone users should be able to

- Correctly pronounce the different sounds of the English language
- Distinguish between similar sounds (minimal pairs)
- Identify which sounds they have trouble with and understand how they can overcome the trouble
- Use correct intonation for sentences and questions
- Use appropriate rhythm, tone, speed, volume, etc. to help make speech understandable
- Use appropriate strategies to overcome pronunciation problems
- Recognize a pronunciation problem – determine if a misunderstanding is occurring because of pronunciation or another cause (vocabulary, volume, etc)

ACTIVITIES:

- The many sounds of the English language – Because there are so many sounds in English, it is overwhelming to go over the sounds in one class. Instead focus on 1-3 sounds each day and spend about 15 minutes practicing the new sounds. This can become part of your classroom's regular routine throughout the year.
- A systematic approach – Use a pronunciation program that covers all the sounds in the English language with a similar approach. The consistency will help the students as they learn new sounds. You can supplement the program with activities from other programs for additional practice. (See Resources p. 4)
- Strategies – Have students brainstorm strategies that they use when talking on the phone – spelling out words, speaking slower, using another word or phrase, etc. Some strategies are helpful, while others may not be (ex. hanging up the telephone) and it is a good discussion to go over the pros and cons of different strategies.
- Individual diagnostic – If you have the time, ask each student to read a list of words and a few sentences and questions, or you can use a tape for students to record. Have a checklist to mark the difficult sounds. It is best to create the word list based on the pronunciation program you are using with your class. The sentences can be from a sample telephone dialog. (See Evaluation Tools p. 4, 9-11)
- Mirrors – Have each student watch their mouths in a small hand held mirror as they pronounce the words. Tell them to practice at home every day in front of the bathroom mirror.
- Pictures – Find diagrams that show the shape of the mouth and placement of the tongue for each sound. (See Resources p. 4)

- Back & Forth – Have students practice minimal pairs with some pair activities. One student reads a word while the other student listens and marks the word that they heard. Students can determine which sounds give them the most trouble for pronouncing or listening. The book *Back & Forth* has some good ideas. (See Resources p. 4)
- ABCs – It is common to spell out one’s name or address when speaking on the phone. See Lesson Plans p. 8 for an activity to develop a spelling alphabet.
- Context – Have students practice pronunciation in context. Dialogs of telephone conversations can be good for practicing pronunciation. Students can practice common phrases in telephone use (“He’s not home right now. Can I take a message?”) Dialogs can also be used to focus on the larger parts of pronunciation, such as rhythm, intonation, speed, volume, etc.

Listening

OBJECTIVES: Effective telephone users should be able to

- Understand recorded messages
- Navigate a phone tree – listening for instructions from the recorded message and choosing the appropriate number option
- Understand regular spoken English – from a variety of voices, speeds, volumes and accents (choose standard English as well as some regional accents your students may hear)
- Respond appropriately to requests
- Answer questions with appropriate information
- Use various strategies to overcome listening difficulties – asking a speaker to speak more slowly, repeat, rephrase or spell out a word; minimizing other distractions (radio, TV, voices, etc.); anticipating possible questions the other person might ask

ACTIVITIES:

- Strategies -- Have students brainstorm strategies that they use when listening to others – asking to repeat or spell out a word, etc. Some strategies are helpful, while others may not be (ex. hanging up the telephone) and it is a good discussion to go over the pros and cons of different strategies.
- Role plays -- Practice role-plays with a partner using ideas from the sample lesson plan (see Lesson Plans p. 4) or from *Conversation Strategies* or *The Grab Bag of Telephone Activities* (see Resources p. 3)
- Tapes and CDs – Let students practice listening to other people talking on tapes or CDs. Try to use different voices, different ages, different speeds and different accents.
- Critical Listening – Have students listen to one side of a telephone conversation. Ask them to determine what the phone call was about, what questions were asked, how did the other person feel, etc.
- Phone trees – Listen to examples of recorded messages that include various options for the caller to choose from in order to proceed. Ask questions to check for understanding or give them a scenario and ask which number they should push in that situation. (See Lesson Plans p. 10)
- Making Phone Calls – Ask students to call different numbers with automated systems to practice listening. 1-800-FED-INFO is a hotline that answers questions about any federal program run by the Federal Citizen Information Center (<http://www.pueblo.gsa.gov>). Many questions are answered through a phone tree, although it is possible to talk with an actual person for some questions.

Questions

Remember the goals and levels of the class and of the individual students when deciding how much detail you want to teach and how much accuracy you ask from the students. For example a community based class may have students who need to focus mostly on the communicative aspects of questions. Minor errors in grammar are acceptable as long as the message is communicated adequately. However, a student who wants to work as a customer service representative in the future may want some extra time to learn the correct grammar, tense and word order.

OBJECTIVES: Effective telephone users should be able to

- Ask Yes/No Questions
- Ask Information Questions with Wh-Words – Who, What, Where, When, Why, How
- Indicate past, present and future tense in questions and/or responses
- Answer questions appropriately and completely
- Respond to implied questions – “I forgot your name.”
- Respond to embedded questions – “I need to know what your address is.”
- Respond to tag questions – “You are a citizen, aren’t you?”
- Respond to a command
- Give a command politely

ACTIVITIES:

- Interaction and Games– Interactive worksheets or activities that have the students asking each other questions helps students practice their grammar structures natural conversations. They can interview a partner for basic information or ask questions to find out specific information. Games are another fun way to practice the structure of questions. The class can play Jeopardy or 20 Questions. See Resources p. 7 for several books with ideas for practicing questions in interactive ways.
- Phone calls – Have students call local businesses or programs to ask for basic information. When is it open? Do you need an appointment? What services do they offer? What is the price? If the students are unwilling to practice a real telephone call, this could easily become a role play activity for partners.
- See Lesson Plans p. 19 for a sample plan on teaching Yes/No Questions and using interactive activities.

Descriptions

As instructors, we can't possibly prepare our students for every situation that they will encounter on the telephone. Instead we need to focus on the skills that will help them in any situation. Being able to give good descriptions helps one work through a variety of difficult and confusing situations.

OBJECTIVES: Effective telephone users should be able to

- Describe visuals – What does it look like?
- Describe events – What happened? What happened first? What happened next? Where did it happen? How did it happen?
- Describe reported speech – What did someone else say?
- Describe feelings – How do you feel? How does it feel?
- Develop vocabulary related to descriptions
- Prepare for a phone call – think about descriptions of the situation, write notes, talk to a friend
- Give a general description – sometimes a detailed description isn't necessary

ACTIVITIES:

- Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? – Use these questions to elicit more details from learners.
- Scenarios – Give the students different scenarios to describe (car accident, injury, insurance problem, housing problem, etc.) They can use their imagination to create details for the situation.
- Movies – See Lesson Plans p. 24 for an idea on using movie clips in class to practice event descriptions.
- Journals – Have students write about an event from their own lives with as much detail as they can. Try to emphasize one of the key description areas: visual, event, reported speech and/or feelings.
- 5 Senses – *Purple Cows and Potato Chips* has several activities for language development using the 5 senses. (See Resources p. 9)
- Conversation Groups – Each student talks to a partner about some topic. Then students switch partners. Now the new partners tell each other the stories that their previous partners had told them. Emphasize the forms “he said that...” and “she told me that...” etc. for reported speech. *Discussion Strategies* also has activities for practicing reported speech. (See Resources p. 9)

Negotiations

Sometimes telephone conversations finish successfully with relative ease. The caller accomplished the goal that he/she set out to accomplish. Sometimes it's not so easy for the caller to accomplish that goal. We must be assertive to get the service we deserve. This can be frustrating for native speakers of English and traumatic for non-natives. Working on negotiation skills in the classroom helps our students feel more confident in those difficult situations.

OBJECTIVES: Effective telephone users should be able to:

- Understand the other point-of-view – to see the issue from the other side's perspective; Why does the insurance company say my claim isn't valid?
- Speak up for oneself and others – stand up for one's rights and voice one's opinion
- Compromise – to work out problems with a win/win solution
- Know when to give in – recognize when further negotiation won't work; when a company has a good policy, they probably won't change it because someone doesn't like it
- Know when to take the next step and how – ask to talk to a manager or supervisor, write a letter of complaint
- Remain polite – don't yell at the receptionist because the doctor has too many patients

ACTIVITIES:

- Pros & Cons – Have the students debate the different sides of an issue. At the end, discuss the pros and cons of each side and try to see the issue from various perspectives.
- Problem Solving – Present the class with a conflict and show both sides of the issue. In groups, ask the students to develop a solution to the problem. For example: A worker needs to take the day off for a funeral. The supervisor needs everyone to work because so many people are on vacation that day.
- Role Plays – Develop a telephone role play with a conflict for the students to work out in pairs. See Lesson Plans p. 26.
- EFF – The EFF Interpersonal Skills can help the instructor determine what points to emphasize with negotiation skills. Specifically, the standards for “Advocate and Influence” and “Resolve Conflict and Negotiation” offer some helpful guidance. See <http://www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff.html> for more information.
- Movies – Find movie clips that show conflict. Discuss the ways that the conflict was resolved. Determine if the conflict was resolved well or poorly. Discuss other ways that the characters could resolve their conflict. In the *Crossroads Café* video series, each episode deals with some type of conflict. (See Resources p. 10)
- Local News – Watch or read the local news as a class. Find examples of conflict and negotiation: local school issues, company strikes, legislation, etc.
- Scenarios – Ask students what problems they have encountered on the telephone in their real lives. Use these examples as scenarios for partner work. In pairs, the

students look at the different perspectives of the issue and develop a telephone conversation to address the issue. Have the pairs perform their conversations for the class and then discuss each situation afterwards.