

Unit 3: Conference calls

Getting started

1. Write the quotation on the board.
2. Ask your learners to discuss it in pairs and then report back for a whole class discussion. (Investigate with them what it means to 'listen'. Is it enough to listen and then say or do what you were originally going to say or do anyway?)
3. Ensure that learners understand what a *conference call* is (a phone call with three or more participants, each using their own phone or computer, sometimes going through an automated service – as the introduction to this section points out). Ask learners who have experience of conference calls a) what they use them for and b) what their advantages are in relation to other forms of communication, such as emails. (Some people prefer personal 'live' contact for certain activities like decision-making.)
4. Ask them what the differences are between a conference call and a normal phone call. Is one potentially more difficult to take part in than the other? Why? (Already in a normal phone call it can be difficult because you don't have the clues from gestures, body language, etc. that you get in face-to-face conversation. This problem is much worse in conference calls because you have the added difficulty of listening out for different people's contributions, identifying who is speaking, etc. This can be partly solved by using video-conferencing where participants can see each other, but this is harder to set up than an audio-only conference call.)

Part A

Exercise 1

1. Your learners should read the questions and play the recording.
2. Elicit the answers and clarify any difficulties.
3. Ask your learners whether they would have a similar 'small talk' section at the beginning of their conference calls, or whether they would just start the main part of the call straight away. Ask them why small talk is sometimes important. (to 'break the ice'; to allow people who don't know each other to be introduced; for participants to get used to each others' voices and to be able to identify each other, etc.)

Useful vocabulary and phrases: telephone and computer commands

Get your learners to read through the phrases, explaining any difficulties. (For the final item, explain, if relevant, that in British English 'tick' is used instead of 'check'.)

Part A continued

Exercise 2

1. Play the recording again and elicit the answers.
2. Clarify any difficulties.

Clear usage: a conference call

1. Go through the phrases in the panel.
2. Get individual learners to say them with the correct stress and intonation.
3. As an additional speaking activity, you could divide your learners into groups of three or four. Using their own names and with their backs towards each other, tell them to start up a (non-automated) conference call together, saying who they are, asking if other people have joined the call, etc.
4. Once learners have got the idea, get them to do the activity in parallel groups. Circulate, monitor and assist if necessary, but don't interrupt if they are working well.
5. Call the class to order, make any necessary corrections, and then ask one of the small groups to perform the activity again for the whole class.
6. Explain any outstanding difficulties and make any final corrections, getting your learners to incorporate these.

Part B

Exercise 1

1. Explain the situation by taking learners through the rubric and asking them to read through the comprehension questions.
2. Tell learners to be prepared for the moment when the call 'drops'. Play the recording once right through, and then again, stopping at appropriate points for learners to answer the questions.

Exercise 2

1. Get learners to look at the phrases and then play the recording again. Ask learners to raise their hands when they hear each phrase, and stop the recording each time.

2. Work on any remaining difficulties, for example *outstanding*. Ask your learners to look at the entry in the Mini-dictionary on page 84. If there is time and interest, get them to look, perhaps for homework, at the entry in the online *COBUILD Advanced Dictionary* (www.collinsdictionary.com/COBUILD), and to report back on the various senses and examples for *outstanding* in the next class.
3. After looking at the panel at the top of page 14, you could also ask your learners to look up *status* online in the *COBUILD Advanced Dictionary* and report back on what they find.

Useful vocabulary and phrases: dealing with a bad connection

1. Ask your learners to say the phrases with the correct stress and intonation.
2. As an additional speaking activity, get learners in pairs to have mini-exchanges containing these expressions, for example:

A: *Sorry, I didn't catch that.*

B: *I'll say it again.*

Show your learners what you have in mind and then get them to have exchanges in parallel pairs, followed by whole class performances.

3. In addition, or alternatively, you could ask your learners do an activity of the type described in Unit 2: *Useful vocabulary and phrases: checking understanding*, point 3.

Part B continued

Exercise 3

1. Ask your learners to look at the sentences. The learners may already be able to say what is in some of the gaps. Play the recording again. Tell the learners to raise their hands when they hear each phrase, and to say what the missing word or words are.

English for Business: Listening

2. For the note in the box, you could point out that people might have a tendency to say 'there is a pair' because 'pair' is singular, even if it refers to two people or things.

COBUILD CHECK: conducting business on the telephone

1. Go through the examples with learners, and work on any difficulties, e.g. the pronunciation of *query*.
2. Get learners to look at the definitions and examples online in the *COBUILD Advanced Dictionary*, perhaps as homework, and report back in the next class.

5 tips for a better telephone conference.

1. Explain any difficulties. Ask your learners to work in pairs and to add one more tip if they can. Discuss their tips with the whole class.
2. Round off by asking what can be achieved in conference calls that would be difficult to do in an exchange of e-mails. Is 'live' communication always better?

Part B continued

Exercise 4

Do this exercise as a quick-fire whole class activity, and as a follow-up to the above. In the case of items 1, 2, 5 and 6, you could ask which words were used in the recording as nouns, and which as verbs.

Further study

Learners can listen to the extra recordings on the website for homework and report back in the next lesson.

Homework task

Ask your learners to do one of the dictionary-related tasks above, and to report back in the next lesson.