



Phone problems

Lesson code: 11EN-L469-R3HK

INTERMEDIATE

British English

1 Warm-up

Read the pairs of sentences. Complete each pair with the same verb, choosing from the verbs below.

break

call

cut

hang

speak

- A: He's in his room. I'll _____ him. James? James? Your friend is here!
B: Can you _____ back in half an hour? I'm a bit busy at the moment.
- A: Are you sure you want me to _____ your hair? I've never done it before and I don't want to make a mistake.
B: That was my dad on the phone, but we got _____ off, so I don't know when he's arriving.
- A: Can I _____ to Angela please? It's Dean.
B: You'll have to _____ up when you talk to my aunt, she's a bit deaf.
- A: Did you _____ the window? I told you not to play soccer in the house!
B: Every time you ring me from the beach, your voice seems to _____ up. It's really annoying.
- A: The gallery manager wants to _____ the big picture on the wall here and the small one over there.
B: If that salesman rings you again, just _____ up. We don't want to buy anything.

How are all the B sentences different from the A sentences? What do the verbs in the B sentences mean?

Which sentences relate to communication problems? Have you had any of these communication problems recently on your phone?



2 Technical difficulties

Match phrases 1-10 with the situations A-F.

1. You're breaking up.
 2. I need to charge my phone.
 3. Can you speak up?
 4. The signal is very weak here.
 5. I'm nearly out of credit.
 6. My battery is almost dead.
 7. I think there's a problem with the network.
 8. Sorry about that. I just went through a tunnel.
 9. I think we got cut off.
 10. I can't hear you very well.
- a. You are talking on the phone when you start to lose the connection.
 - b. You call your friend back after losing the connection.
 - c. Your friend's voice does not sound very clear on the phone.
 - d. You are in the basement of a building.
 - e. You are talking on the phone and you hear a "bleep" indicating that your phone is out of power.
 - f. You have used almost all the minutes you've paid for on your contract.

3 Listening

You are going to listen to three mobile phone calls between Tom and Sophie, who are both work colleagues and friends. The first time you listen, decide if each sentence is true or false.

Audio 1



- a. In call 1, Tom's phone is running out of credit.
- b. In call 1, Tom is going to send Sophie a message.
- c. In call 2, Tom has already sent Sophie a text.
- d. In call 2, Sophie can't hear Tom.



Audio 2



- e. In call 3, Tom's battery is low.
- f. At the end of call 3, Sophie and Tom have the same idea.



Audio 3



Now listen to the three phone calls again with the transcript on the next page and cross out three extra words in each dialogue.



- CALL 1**
- Sophie:** Hi Tom.
- Tom:** Hi. Listen, I'm calling you about tomorrow, but I need to be quick. My phone needs charging.
- Sophie:** **I'm afraid I didn't catch that.**
- Tom:** I said, my battery's very nearly dead.
- Sophie:** Speak up, I really can't hear you!
- Tom:** Never mind. I'll text you.
- CALL 2**
- Tom:** Hello?
- Sophie:** Hi Tom.
- Tom:** Did you get my text? I sent it in a big rush yesterday, before my phone ran out of credit.
- Sophie:** Yeah, I got it.
- Tom:** So, are we all set for today?
- Sophie:** **I don't quite follow you.**
- Tom:** I thought we were meeting later on today with the client about the designs for the new products.
- Sophie:** I'm sorry, you're much too fast for me. Can you say that more slowly?
- Tom:** Your text said we were having a meeting later on today with the clients from Italy about the customer focus group response to the new product range.
- Sophie:** I'm sorry, my English isn't very good. Can you explain it another way?
- Tom:** Sorry, I'll slow down. You know the clients from Rome? Well, they want to know ...
- CALL 3**
- Sophie:** Hi Tom. What's up?
- Tom:** Hi Sophie. Just calling to say hi. I'm sitting on the train. How's your day going?
- Sophie:** Oh, you know, OK, I guess. And yours?
- Tom:** Well, actually, I've got some exciting news. You know my uncle? The one with the boat? He said that he was going to do one last trip to France before he sells it and he wants us to ...
- Sophie:** I can't hear you Tom. Are you going through a tunnel?
- Tom:** No. I can't hear you either. The signal is very weak here. Hang on, I'll move somewhere else. Is that any better?
- Sophie:** Yeah, a bit. Go on.
- Tom:** Well, my uncle with the boat says that he's going to do one last trip to France before he sells it and he wants us to ..
- Sophie:** **Hang on.** I still can't hear you properly. We keep getting cut off. Why don't we hang up and I'll try calling you back in a minute.
- Tom:** I can't hear you Sophie. I'm just going to hang up and call back when I get off the train.

What do the three phrases in bold in the dialogues mean? Which one is the most informal?



4 Role play

Work in pairs. Read the dialogues out loud with your partner, copying the stress and intonation from the recording.

Now see what you can remember about the phone calls. Work in A/B pairs:

- CALL 1**
- Student B:** Hi Tom.
- Student A:** Hi. Listen, I'm calling about tomorrow, but I need to be quick. My phone needs charging.
- Student B:** afraid catch that.
- Student A:** I said, my battery's nearly dead.
- Student B:** up, can't!
- Student A:** Never mind. I'll text you.
- CALL 2**
- Student B:** Hello?
- Student A:** Hi Tom.
- Student B:** Did you get my text? I sent it in a rush yesterday, before my phone ran out of credit.
- Student A:** got ...
- Student B:** So, are we all set for today?
- Student A:** follow
- Student B:** I thought we were meeting later on today with the client about the designs for the new products.
- Student A:** I'm sorry, too fast Can slowly?
- Student B:** Your text said we were having a meeting later on today with the clients from Italy about the customer focus group response to the new product range.
- Student A:** sorry, ... English Can way?
- Student B:** Sorry, I'll slow down. You know the clients from Rome? Well, they want to know ..
- CALL 3**
- Student B:** Hi Tom. up?
- Student A:** Hi Sophie. say hi. the train. ... your day?
- Student B:**, I guess. And ...?
- Student A:** ..., actually, news. my uncle? the boat? He said trip to France sells us to ...
- Student B:** hear you Tom. a tunnel?
- Student A:** hear you The weak here. Hang on, move Is ... better?
- Student B:** bit. Go
- Student A:** uncle boat last trip to France sells us to ...
- Student B:** Hang ... I properly. We off. Why up and I'll back in a minute.
- Student A:** hear you Sophie. I'm up and call off the train.



3 Listening

PHONE CALL 1

- Sophie:** Hi Tom.
Tom: Hi. Listen, I'm calling about tomorrow, but I need to be quick. My phone needs charging.
Sophie: I'm afraid I didn't catch that.
Tom: I said, my battery's nearly dead.
Sophie: Speak up, I can't hear you!
Tom: Never mind. I'll text you.

PHONE CALL 2

- Tom:** Hello?
Sophie: Hi Tom.
Tom: Did you get my text? I sent it in a rush yesterday, before my phone ran out of credit.
Sophie: Yeah, I got it.
Tom: So, are we all set for today?
Sophie: I don't follow you.
Tom: I thought we were meeting later on today with the client about the designs for the new products.
Sophie: I'm sorry, you're too fast for me. Can you say that more slowly?
Tom: Your text said we were having a meeting later on today with the clients from Italy about the customer focus group response to the new product range.
Sophie: I'm sorry, my English isn't very good. Can you explain it another way?
Tom: Sorry, I'll slow down. You know the clients from Rome? Well, they want to know ...

PHONE CALL 3

- Sophie:** Hi Tom. What's up?
Tom: Hi Sophie. Just calling to say hi. I'm on the train. How's your day going?
Sophie: Oh, you know, OK, I guess. And yours?
Tom: Well, actually, I've got some exciting news. You know my uncle? The one with the boat? He said that he was going to do one last trip to France before he sells it and he wants us to ...
Sophie: I can't hear you Tom. Are you going through a tunnel?
Tom: No. I can't hear you either. The signal is very weak here. Hang on, I'll move somewhere else. ...
Is that better?
Sophie: Yeah, a bit. Go on.
Tom: Well, my uncle with the boat says that... ..he's going to do one last trip to France before he sells it and he wants us to ...
Sophie: Hang on. I still can't hear you properly. We keep getting cut off. Why don't we hang up and I'll try calling you back in a minute.
Tom: I can't hear you Sophie. I'm going to hang up and call back when I get off the train.



1 Warm-up

5 mins. This exercise introduces students to some useful phrasal verbs for phone calls. Explain the task and demonstrate with the first sentence. Students can continue in pairs, and then check answers. Then ask the class to compare the A and B sentences in each pair to establish that the B sentences are phrasal verbs related to telephoning and elicit/explain the meanings. Finally, ask the class which of the B sentences refer to communication problems. Students can speak in pairs about their recent experiences.

The verbs in the B sentences are followed by prepositions and so are phrasal verbs, related to telephoning - call back, cut off, speak up, break up, hang up; call back = return a call later; cut off = lose a connection suddenly; speak up = talk louder; break up = when a voice is difficult to hear because the sound is not continuous; hang up = end a call. Cut off, break up and speak up all refer to communication problems.

1. call 2. cut 3. speak 4. break 5. hang

2 Technical difficulties

10 mins. Go over the ten phrases and check students can pronounce them. Then explain the task and clarify that some situations can match two phrases. Students can work in pairs to complete the exercise. Check answers. Follow this up with a quick pair quiz activity in which students take turns to read out a situation to their partner, who must remember one (or both) phrases and say them accurately. This language is not especially complicated, but accuracy (including pronunciation) is important so that students are confident on the phone in English.

1. a 2. e 3. c 4. d 5. f
6. e 7. a 8. b 9. b 10. c

3 Listening

15 mins. Students will work with three short phone calls in this exercise. First, they will listen for main idea - go over the questions before you play the recording once. Students can check answers in pairs first and then check answers with the whole class, including an explanation. For the second task, students can see the text in the exercise. Working in pairs, they can predict/recall which 3 words are extra in each conversation. Explain that none of the extra words in the exercise are grammatically incorrect, it's simply that they are not necessary to complete the sentences and are not included in the recording. Play the recordings a second time for them to check and complete the exercise and then go over the answers with the class. You can reassure students that it is still possible to complete the listen for detail exercise even though there are communication difficulties in the calls. Then, working with the whole class, call attention to the three phrases in bold, and elicit what they mean and which one is the most informal.

True or false - 1-F Tom's battery is the problem. 2-T Tom is going to send Sophie a text. 3-T Tom sent Sophie a text yesterday. 4-F Sophie's English isn't very good. 5-F There's a weak signal. 6-T Sophie and Tom both suggest hanging up and calling back later.

The extra words are: phone call 1 - I'm calling you about tomorrow / I said, my battery's very nearly dead / Speak up, I really can't hear you! Phone call 2 - I sent it in a big rush yesterday / I don't quite follow you / you're much too fast for me. Phone call 3 - I'm sitting on the train / Is that any better? / I'm just going to hang up. The three phrases in bold mean - I'm afraid I didn't catch that = I didn't hear/understand that; I don't (quite) follow you = I don't understand you or the point you're making; Hang on = stop, wait - there's a problem. Hang on is the most informal.



4 Role play

15 mins. This stage of the lesson provides an opportunity to practise the dialogues and key phrases that students are now familiar with from the listening. They can begin by reading the dialogues out loud in pairs, paying special attention to fluency, stress and intonation. Some drilling might be helpful here. Then the pairs follow the instructions to reconstruct the three phone calls. You might want to model the activity with a student so they get the idea: students work in A/B pairs and take turns seeing the full text (to keep the dialogue on track and prompt each other) and working with key words to reconstruct the text. The third phone call is the most challenging, as neither student can see the full text - they both are working with key words only.

