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Conference calls

Silence is golden, except in conference calls.

Aims

- How to chair and participate in a telephone conference call
- How to chair and participate in a video-conference call
- Conference call etiquette
- How to express your opinions in writing

A

Taking part in telephone conference calls

Quiz

How often do you take part in telephone and video-conference calls?
What are the challenges?

Read the sentences and choose Yes or No.

	Yes	No
1 I find phone conference calls more difficult than video ones.		
2 I prefer face-to-face meetings to conference calls.		
3 I find it difficult to understand people in conference calls.		
4 I'm always nervous the technology is going to break down.		
5 I prefer small group conference calls.		
6 I'm never sure when to speak in conference calls.		
7 It's difficult to interrupt in conference calls.		
8 I don't know how to disagree politely in conference calls.		
9 I think conference calls are good for information.		
10 I think conference calls are good for action.		



Briefing

Telephone conference calls pose special problems for non-native speakers. You have two main problems:

- You can't see people.
- It's difficult to identify people's voices.

Here are nine pieces of advice to overcome these two problems in order to have successful conference calls.

- 1 Always greet people and check who is online. Make sure you say your name clearly.
- 2 Always identify yourself when intervening.
- 3 Check you have no noisy accessories.
 - Don't tap your keyboard when your microphone is on.
 - Don't click your pen.
 - Don't tap your fingers on the table.
 - Turn off your mobile / cell phone or put it on mute.
 - Take off noisy jewellery.
- 4 Avoid 'dead air' time. Complete silence can make people think you are offline.
- 5 Be careful of heavy breathing. It can sound very loud in a conference call.
- 6 Find ways to ask people to repeat or speak more slowly when you don't understand something.
- 7 If you are the Chair, find ways of asking people to speak succinctly so that you keep to time.
- 8 If you are the Chair, summarize contributions and at the end of the conference call summarize action points. This way you ensure there are no misunderstandings.
- 9 If you are the Chair, thank everyone for their participation.

Listening

**1**

Listen to part of a conference call involving four people: the Chair, Bill, Jess and Nina. Tick the things that go wrong.

Problem	
1 Speaker(s) too fast	
2 Speaker(s) too quiet	
3 Silence on line	
4 Interference on line	
5 Speaker(s) too long	
6 Speaker(s) unidentified	



2

Listen again and complete these sentences.

- 1 Please yourself when you intervene.
- 2 And also make sure you speak clearly and so we can all understand.
- 3 Keep me in the on that, please.
- 4 I think it would be good, Jess, to that list internally ...
- 5 Nina, can you us on progress on your project?
- 6 Please either press your button or ...
- 7 ... or get the line.
- 8 I think we need a contingency plan in things go wrong.

Business practice



1

Listen and repeat these sentences.

Greet people and check who is online

Let's check who is online. Bill, are you online?

Hi, everybody. Bill here.

Identify yourself when intervening

(It's) Bill speaking.

Jess here.

Ask people to identify themselves

Could you identify yourself, please?

Who's speaking?

Ask people to be quiet

Please be quiet.

Please press your mute button.

Please stop tapping your keyboard.

Avoid 'dead air' time

Are you there?

Yes, I'm here.

Is Nina online?

Ask people to be slower or repeat

Sorry, could you slow down a bit, please?

Sorry, I didn't catch that. Could you say it again, please?

Ask people to hurry up

We're running out of time.

Could you come to your point, please?

Could you sum up briefly, please?

Summarize action points

Thanks, just let me summarize that.

Before we end, let me summarize the key points as I understand them.

Let me sum up.

To sum things up, ...

Thank everyone for participation

That's the end of the conference call.

Thanks to everyone for participating.

Bye for now.



2 Test yourself. Cover the sentences opposite and then complete these sentences.

- 1 Let me up.
- 2 We're running of time.
- 3 Sorry, I didn't that.
- 4 Could you come to your, please?
- 5 It's Sam
- 6 Thanks for



3 You have just joined a conference call. Think about your current project. Use PAPO (see Unit 1) and make notes about it. Introduce yourself and describe your project. Follow the instructions. Then listen to the model conversation.

Chair: Have you joined the call?

You: *Say hello, introduce yourself.*

Chair: Hi, glad you could join us. Tell us what you're working on right now.

You: *Say the title of your project and what its aim is. Describe how you are doing it and what the outcome will be.*

Chair: Great. Thank you. Let me open up to questions. No? OK. Thanks very much.



4 You are in the same conference call. This time you are the Chair. Summarize and close the call. Follow the instructions. Then listen to the model conversation.

You: *Say that time is almost up and you want to summarize the key points of the meeting. Ask if there are any questions first.*

Harry: Yes, is there a central contact point we can use if we need to get in touch?

You: *Say that you will be the central contact point and that you will circulate your contact details. Ask if there are any other questions.*

Harry: No.

You: *Summarize the key points of the meeting: Bill is getting recommendations about providers on the Brazil project in two weeks; Jess will circulate a list of suppliers they don't recommend; Nina is interviewing suppliers on the Guangzhou project; Harry is contacting sub-contractors for the Abu Dhabi airport terminal project. Check you haven't missed anything.*

Harry: No, I don't think so.

You: *Thank everybody, fix the date of the next meeting and say goodbye.*

Business culture

See page 108 for points of etiquette which you need to pay attention to during a conference call.



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