

6

'How does that sound?'

STARTER

Work with a partner. Answer the questions first for yourself, then interview your partner and make a note of his or her answers.

YOU

YOUR PARTNER

What kind of things do you make agreements about (e.g. prices, delivery times, conditions)?

How often do you make agreements on the telephone?

What problems do you have when discussing business on the telephone?

Give an example of a successful (or an unsuccessful) agreement you have made on the telephone.

AUDIO



- 1 Carlos Ferran works for a small company in Barcelona. He is calling a British supplier about a possible order and to get details about delivery times and prices. Listen and complete his notes.

Possible supplier: _____¹ Semiconductors
 Order _____² chips from them?
 We need chips by the _____³ of next month
 at the latest.
 Possible solution: introduce _____⁴ at the factory
 Problem: would be more expensive - _____⁵ to
 _____⁶ per cent?
 They will send _____⁷ by email, then we can talk
 again tomorrow.



2 Match the two parts to make sentences from the dialogue. Listen again to check your answers.

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1 We need them | a if we're going to meet our project deadlines with our customer. |
| 2 We really need them by then | b then we would probably be able to manufacture the chips faster. |
| 3 If you weren't able to deliver by then, | c in order to get them faster? |
| 4 However, if we introduced shift work at the factory, | d by the middle of next month at the latest. |
| 5 Would you be prepared to pay more for the chips | e it would be feasible. |
| 6 Well, that sounds like | f we would have to go to another supplier. |

TALKING ABOUT POSSIBILITIES

When negotiating, it is common to use conditional forms to show that we are talking about possibilities. Read the examples.

***Would you be** prepared to pay more for the chips in order to get them faster?*

*If you **weren't able to** deliver by then, we **would have to** go to another supplier.*

*If we **introduced** shift work at the factory, **then we could** manufacture the chips faster.*

Note that in *if*-sentences the simple past form of the verb (and not *would*) is used in the *if* part of the sentence.

*If we **introduced** shift work at the factory, then we **could** manufacture the chips faster.*

NOT: *If we **would** introduce ...*

3 Complete the conference call dialogue using the correct form of the words in brackets. Use *could* or *would* where appropriate, as in the examples. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

- A ... OK, so the next point is our British office. It's far too expensive and we urgently need to reduce our costs. Do any of you have ideas how we could do ¹ (do) that?
- B Well, if they moved ² (move) into a smaller office, we would save ³ (save) a lot of money on rent.
- A Yes, but the move itself _____ ⁴ (cost) a lot of money. And it _____ ⁵ (cause) a lot of disruptions to our business.
- C What if we _____ ⁶ (reduce) the number of staff?
- B That _____ ⁷ (cause) a lot of bad feeling among the rest of the staff. And paying people off _____ ⁸ (be) expensive.
- C What about if we _____ ⁹ (give) the sales staff laptops and _____ ¹⁰ (ask) them to work from home? Most of the time they're travelling anyway. Then we _____ ¹¹ (rent) out that office space to other people.
- A That _____ ¹² (work). Let me think about it ...

HEDGES

Hedges (phrases which express doubt or make a statement sound less certain) are useful when making suggestions or tentatively agreeing to something. Native speakers of English often use words like *probably* and *might* or expressions like *I would say* and *I think I can provisionally say* when trying to reach an agreement.

*We could **probably** work with that.*

*We **might** be able to work with that.*

***I would say** (it would be) between 5 to 10 per cent more expensive.*

***I think I can provisionally say** that we could work with that.*

Note that the use of hedges is more common in British English than American English.

4 Rewrite the sentences to make them more tentative. Use the word in brackets. Sometimes more than one answer is possible.

- 1 We can give you a discount. (provisionally)
I think I can provisionally say that we will be able to give you a discount.
- 2 We can deliver by the end of the week. (might)
- 3 We can solve the problem. (would)
- 4 It will be difficult. (probably)
- 5 We can change the specifications of the product. (provisionally)



5 Viktor Klein is calling a supplier to negotiate some prices. Listen and complete the email.



Hi Alex

Just wanted to let you know that I've spoken to Francesca _____¹ at Hineman Pharmaceuticals about the saline solution order. You remember there was a problem with their _____², which was roughly _____³ higher than the competition. I asked if there was any chance of a _____⁴, and they said they can give us a _____⁵ reduction on orders over _____⁶ cases. I said I would check with you, then contact them if we want to place the order.

Let me know what you think.

Regards
Viktor

6 Now listen again and complete the dialogues.

- 1 *Viktor* I'm calling because I wanted to _____¹ our conversation from yesterday.
Francesca That's right. You said you wanted to compare products and prices from different suppliers, _____²?
.....
- 2 *Francesca* Wonderful. Shall I fax you the order form? We could ...
Viktor Sorry, can I _____³ you there? There's actually one small problem.
.....
- 3 *Francesca* Well yes, that _____⁴, but I think you'll find our quality is higher and ...
Viktor Yes, yes, but can I just say _____⁵? I wanted to ask ...

TURN-TAKING

It can be difficult on the telephone to know when to speak yourself and when to let your partner speak. Since you and the person you are talking to cannot see each other, you have to use verbal instead of non-verbal techniques. Here are some suggestions.

- Ask questions and use question tags to show your partner that it is his or her turn to speak.

Questions

How does that sound?
What do you think?
Is that OK?

Question tags

You'll be in the office tomorrow, **won't you?**
You said you wanted to compare prices, **didn't you?**

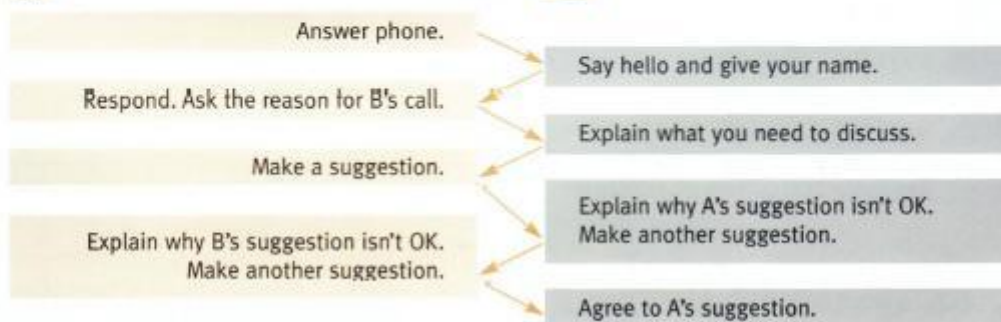
- Avoid silences – they can make the person you are talking to feel uncomfortable. (See the **Active listening strategies** box on page 14 for more advice.)
- Use a combination of the following phrases to interrupt politely if your partner won't let you speak.

Yes, yes, but	can I just say something?
Sure, but	can I interrupt you there (for a second)?
Sorry, (but)	can I stop you there?
Of course, but	

7 Work with a partner. First, think of something that you have to discuss on the telephone (e.g. a price, a delivery date, a project deadline). Then follow the steps below to practise a dialogue. Note: both partners should talk without stopping, so the other person has to (politely) interrupt!

A

B



8 Match the two parts to make expressions that are commonly used when negotiating.

- | | |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 to follow | a figure |
| 2 room | b schedule |
| 3 a tight | c a quotation |
| 4 to meet | d of my head |
| 5 time | e to say |
| 6 that | f a deadline |
| 7 that's difficult | g up our conversation |
| 8 a ballpark | h to manoeuvre |
| 9 off the top | i frame |
| 10 to prepare | j depends |

9 Now complete the mini-dialogues using the phrases above. You may need to change the form of the expressions slightly.

A Hello Fred. What can I do for you?

B I'm actually calling to _____¹ from yesterday.

A Why do you want to change the delivery date?

B We have a very _____² on this project. If we don't get the goods by next week, we won't _____³ we agreed with our customer.

A Would you be prepared to pay more for higher quality?

B _____⁴. I would need to talk to my boss about that.

A What sort of _____⁵ were you thinking about for the project?
I mean, when would you need our services exactly?

B _____⁶ at the moment. We haven't made any decisions yet.

A I can't say exactly how much it would cost.

B Well, can you give me a _____⁷?

A Sorry, I would need to check the spreadsheet. I can't give you an answer
_____⁸.

A Well, I'm pleased that we managed to reach an agreement.

B Me too. So, I'll _____⁹ and send it to you by email later today.

A Can you give us a discount?

B I'm afraid we don't have much _____¹⁰ on price.

10 Work with a partner to make a phone call. Look at the Useful Phrases below before you read your role card in the Partner Files.

PARTNER FILES

Partner A File 8, p. 49
Partner B File 8, p. 51

USEFUL PHRASES

Making proposals

I wanted to ask if there was any possibility of ...
Would you be prepared to ...?
What if we ...?

Reacting to proposals

That sounds like it would be feasible.
That sounds reasonable.
That depends.
I don't think that would be possible.

11 Put the words in the right order to make sentences with expressions from this unit.

- 1 you I pleased if could would with work be we .
- 2 reasonable that sounds .
- 3 know head I don't off top the my of .
- 4 second a can interrupt I there for you ?
- 5 meet can deadline we the ?

OUTPUT

Look at what these people say about negotiating on the telephone. Which opinion(s) do you agree with?

With some of my business contacts, I only speak to them on the telephone – we never meet face to face. That makes it more of a challenge when you need to reach agreements on things. That's one reason why I always try to make small talk before we discuss business. I find small talk helps to build a personal relationship and makes discussions easier.



I find it easier to discuss things face to face than on the telephone. You can't see the other person, so it's difficult to know exactly what they are thinking. There's no body language to help you and if the other person is silent it can mean different things. Maybe they are angry with you, or maybe they are just thinking about what you have said. It's difficult to tell.



Before I make a phone call where I have to negotiate something, I think about what I want exactly. What is the minimum I am prepared to accept? What is my best alternative if we don't manage to reach an agreement? That way I know before I begin how much room I have to manoeuvre.



I don't enjoy trying to reach agreements on the telephone. I find it difficult to say no to people and to stand up for what I want. Often I hang up the phone and am not happy with the agreement I've made, but then it's too late to change anything.



OVER TO YOU

What are your strategies for reaching agreements on the telephone?
How is discussing business on the telephone different from meeting face to face, in your opinion?
What could you personally do to improve your telephone negotiating skills?