

TEACHING ENGLISH VIA TELEPHONE CALLS

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Introduction

In very low-resource contexts, where learners have very limited or no access to the internet, computers or smartphones, basic phones can be used to teach and support learners to learn English. There are various ways you can use telephone calls to teach, using a project or activity approach and using the environment around the learners. You will need to think about who you are planning to teach, their environments and their motivation levels as you plan your input.

Getting started

- You will need to find out how many of your learners have access to a basic telephone or a mobile phone. You will also need to seek their parents' or caregivers' permission for learners to use the telephone at specific times.
- Before you start teaching via telephone, it will be useful to do a small introduction or orientation call or send a written message to help parents and learners understand your plans and approach.
- You can use the phone to give one-to-one lessons, communicate about tasks you want them to do or as a helpline – or do all of these! Planning will be very important.
- Draw out a programme for one week to begin with. Clearly identify the outcomes you want your learners to achieve. At the end of the week you can reflect on how the process has worked and then make changes.
- You may also want to consider using a bilingual approach while doing lessons via telephone. This will help learners feel comfortable and help you teach more effectively without any visual aids.

Providing input

- Telephones work quite well for one-to-one lessons. Learners from higher grades, e.g. secondary level, are likely to benefit more. You will need to keep the lessons short – especially if you have many students to call each day – and plan lessons in detail. Setting some tasks at the end of each lesson provides more practice and gives a focus to the next phone call.
- If you have too many students to do one-to-one lessons, you can do very short phone calls just to set up the tasks you want them to do. You can put the class into groups, with a group leader who is responsible for calling the other members of their group to explain the task. Your learners can then use the telephone as a helpline to report back to you on the task or ask you questions.
- If your learners have some access to the internet, you can send the lesson and tasks via email and then use the phone to follow up and as a helpline.

Setting practice tasks and activities

- You can plan lessons based on the textbook. However, bringing your learners' environment into the lesson can work really well. Set tasks which encourage them to explore and describe their surroundings.
- You can also choose a daily theme for your lessons, e.g. the environment, friendship, family, etc. Choose three to five new words to teach. Then set a task to practise using them – the students do the task in a notebook and report back next time you speak.
- Reading, listening and speaking tasks will work well, so songs and stories can be included to a great extent in your lessons. Read or sing something short to your learners, then ask them some comprehension questions. You can also set them a reading task (e.g. in their textbook) before each phone call, then use the call to talk about what they have read.
- You can also set up practice speaking tasks that in real life require learners to be on the phone, e.g. a phone conversation between friends, ordering something on the phone, booking a ticket, etc.

Receiving work from students and giving feedback

- You can set tasks for learners to do in their own time, but it will be important for you to be available at specific times to help and support them.
- If your learners have access to email, they can send their work to you this way – perhaps once a week if it is difficult for them to access a computer.
- Ask learners to maintain a notebook to record important words and phrases they learn.
- Don't forget to build in some review and revision of things you have covered earlier.

Things to consider

- **Permission and privacy:** For kids and teenagers you'll need to make sure parents know about the phone lessons. You will need their permission, especially for the one-to-one lessons.
- **Phone bills:** Check how much it is going to cost to make the phone calls, for you and your learners. Make sure your learners and their parents know how much they will need to pay, if anything.

Useful links

- Some ideas for telephone role plays: <https://tinyurl.com/y75flp2z>
- Short texts you can read to your learners as listening practice, with activities: <https://learnenglishkids.britishcouncil.org/reading-practice>