

## 4.5.2: Telephone/VoIP Communication

### Learning Objectives

1. Demonstrate the five stages in a telephone conversation.
2. Understand delivery strategies to increase comprehension and reduce misunderstanding.

Talking on the phone or producing an audio recording lacks an interpersonal context with the accompanying nonverbal messages. Unless you use vivid language, crisp, and clear descriptions, your audience will be left to sort it out for themselves. They may create mental images that don't reflect your intention that lead to miscommunication. Conversations follow predictable patterns and have main parts or stages we can clearly identify. While not every conversation is the same, many will follow a variation of a standard pattern composed by David Taylor and Alyse Terhune:

1. Opening
2. Feedforward
3. Business
4. Feedback
5. Closing

Table 4.5.2.1<sup>1</sup> provides an example of how a conversation might go according to these five stages.

Table 4.5.2.1 A Five-Stage Telephone Conversation

Stage	Subevents	Example
Opening	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both parties identify themselves</li> <li>Greetings are reciprocated</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>[phone rings]</li> <li>Ken: Hello, Ken Reilly.</li> <li>Val: Hi, Ken. This is Val Martin from [company or department]. How are you?</li> <li>Ken: Fine, and you?</li> <li>Val: Fine, I'm doing great.</li> </ul>
Feedforward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Purpose and tone of conversation are established</li> <li>Permission is given to continue (or not)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Val: I hate to bother you, but I wonder if you have five minutes to give me some advice.</li> <li>Ken: Sure, Val. What's happening?</li> <li>[or: I'm tied up right now. Can I call you back in an hour?]</li> </ul>
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Substance of conversation</li> <li>Parties exchange roles</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Val: Here's the situation. [explains] I know you are good at resolving these kinds of issues, so I was wondering what you think I should do.</li> <li>Ken: Wow, I can understand how this has you concerned. Considering what you've told me, here's what I think I would do. [explains]</li> </ul>
Feedback	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Signal that business is concluded</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Val: Hmm, that makes sense. I'll certainly keep your ideas in mind. Thank you so much, Ken!</li> <li>Ken: Hey, you're welcome. Let me know how it turns out.</li> </ul>

Stage	Subevents	Example
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Both parties say goodbye</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Val: Yes, I will. Have a good weekend, Ken.</li> <li>Ken: You too, Val. Bye.</li> <li>Val: Bye.</li> <li>[they hang up]</li> </ul>

Cell phones are a part of many, if not most, people's lives in the industrialized world and, increasingly, in developing nations as well. Computer users can also utilize voice interaction and exchange through voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) programs like Skype. With the availability of VoIP, both audio and visual images are available to the conversation participants. But in our discussion, we'll focus primarily on voice exchanges.

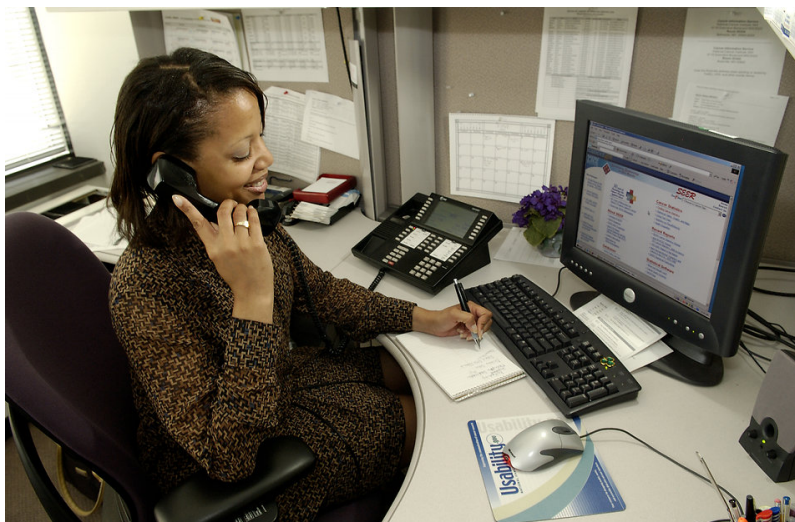


Figure 4.5.2.1: Telephone conversations in business require skill and preparation. Bill Branson – [Business Woman](#) – public domain.

Since you lack the nonverbal context, you need to make sure that your voice accurately communicates your message. Your choice of words and how you say them, including spacing or pausing, pace, rhythm, articulation, and pronunciation are relevant factors in effective delivery. Here are five main points to consider:

1. Speak slowly and articulate your words clearly.
2. Use vivid terms to create interest and communicate descriptions.
3. Be specific.
4. Show consideration for others by keeping your phone conversations private.
5. Silence cell phones, pagers, and other devices when you are in a meeting or sharing a meal with colleagues.

You don't have to slow down your normal pattern of speech by a large degree, but each word needs time and space to be understood or the listener may hear words that run together, losing meaning and creating opportunities for misunderstanding. Don't assume that they will catch your specific information the first time and repeat any as necessary, such as an address or a phone number.

Feedback, the response from the receiver to the sender, is also an essential element of phone conversations. Taking turns in the conversation can sometimes be awkward, especially if there is an echo or background noise on the line. With time and practice, each "speaker's own natural, comfortable, expressive repertoire will surface" \*Mayer, K., 1980).

### Key Takeaway

A telephone conversation typically includes five stages: opening, feedforward, business, feedback, and closing. Because telephone conversations lack nonverbal cues, they require additional attention to feedback.

## Exercises

1. Write an outline of a script for a telephone conversation that introduces a new product or service to an existing client. Partner with a classmate to role-play the conversation and note points that could use improvement. Compare your results with classmates.
2. Think of a phone conversation you had recently. Write a brief summary and include at least one example of what worked or what did not. Share and compare with classmates.
3. Take notes during a telephone conversation and write a brief description, labeling the parts of the conversation and providing examples. Share and compare with classmates.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Taylor, D., & Terhune, A. D. (2000). Doing e-business: Strategies for thriving in an electronic marketplace. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons. Retrieved from [www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0471380652.html](http://www.wiley.com/WileyCDA/WileyTitle/productCd-0471380652.html).

## References

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