

Skills 360 - Teleconferences (Part 1)

Discussion Questions

1. What do you find difficult about teleconferences or phone meetings?
2. How do you behave differently during a phone meeting than an in-person meeting?
3. What do you usually say at the end of a teleconference when it's time to finish?

Vocabulary

Teleconference: a meeting among people in different locations, using electronic communications such as telephone or videoconferencing software; "Hey Dave, can you text me the dial-in information for this morning's teleconference? And let the others know I might call in 15 minutes late?"

VOIP: voice over Internet protocol, or technologies that use the Internet to transmit voice messages; "Skype and Google Talk rely on VOIP technologies to enable digital telephone conversations."

To be mindful: to pay attention or be aware of something; "When you travel to another country for business, you should be mindful of the way you dress, behave, and speak in public."

For starters: firstly or to start with; we say "for starters" to introduce the first of several ideas; "This new software has several advantages. For starters, it's half the price of the competition."

To take steps: to take action or do something in order to achieve a goal or result; "With sales decreasing slightly, we're going to have to take steps to reduce costs so profits aren't impacted."

Clanking: the sound of metal or other loud objects hitting each other; "Factory workers must wear ear protection to prevent damage from the loud clanking of the machines."

Background noise: extra noise you can hear when listening to something else; "I'm sorry Joan, but there's too much background noise for me to hear you. How about giving me a call once you're back at the office?"

Mute button: a button you can press to stop the sound on a telephone, television, computer, or other device; "If you need to cough or sneeze during the webinar, just hit the mute button first."

Distractions: something that takes your attention away from something else; "Many companies restrict access to popular social media sites because they present an easy distraction for employees."

To pay attention: to watch, listen, or consider something; "Maybe if we made these warning signs larger, more people would pay attention to them and we'd have fewer accidents."

Verbal/visual clues: information that helps you understand meaning or a situation; verbal clues are those that we say or hear, while visual clues are those that we can see; "I couldn't hear my co-workers' conversation, but there were visual clues that suggested they were talking about me."

To go on: to use in order to understand or make an opinion or decision; "One environmental report isn't really much to go on when deciding whether I support or oppose the proposed mine."

To suffice: to be enough; "You don't need to sign every page of the contract. Just your initials will suffice."

To jump in: to interrupt someone or join a conversation; "I'm going to lay out my plan for the new office, and if you have any questions feel free to jump in at any time."

Forecast: a prediction or statement about what might or will happen, based on evidence; "The government is basing its new revenue forecasts on expectations that oil will average \$55 / barrel this year."

Handy: useful; "The WhizCut 2000 is a handy kitchen tool that transforms any fruit or vegetable into fun shapes."

Signposting: using words or expressions of transition to help listeners understand what you are going to say next; "The report was pretty good, but there was no signposting so it was a bit hard to follow the logic."

The flow of discussion: the stream of continuous conversation; "At the start of the interview, ask a few easy personal questions to get a nice flow of discussion going."

To follow: to understand something that is said or written; "Angela spoke so fast during her presentation that I couldn't really follow what point she was trying to make."

Chaotic: being very confusing, disorganized, or without order; "To an outsider, the stock trading floor can appear totally chaotic, but there is actually a method in the craziness."

"After you:" we say "after you" to tell someone to speak or go somewhere first; "Well, I really think... oh sorry Vera, I didn't realize you wanted to say something. Please, after you."

Active listening: listening carefully and thoughtfully to what someone is saying and to show we are listening with our words and body language; "I appreciated having Brian in the room because he's good at active listening, but Randy... well, he never nods or even looks at me."

To nod: to move your head up and down to say "yes" or to agree; "If you see the audience nodding, you'll know that they understand what you're trying to say."

To throw in: to add something to a conversation; "Excuse me, I think the idea for the new platform is great, but can I just throw in a comment about cost?"

Engaged: interested, involved, and paying attention; "Jerry speaks so slowly and softly that it was really hard to stay engaged for his entire speech."

To duck out: to leave a place quietly or without being noticed; "The party was pretty fun, but I had to duck out early because I had to drive all the way back to Jersey."

Dead air: silence; "I asked everyone during the meeting if they had any questions, but all I got was dead air in response."

Phone hub: a piece of technology with a speaker and a microphone that helps groups have telephone meetings; "We're having trouble hearing you guys there in London, so could you all sit a bit closer to the phone hub?"

Chit chat: friendly or informal conversation; "Okay everyone, let's finish the chit chat and get this meeting started, shall we?"

Chatter: friendly or informal conversation, especially continuous or fast; "I don't know how Todd can actually get work done in the café with all the chatter going on."

To a minimum: if you keep something "to a minimum," you try to reduce it as much as possible; "Our cash flow situation is not so good right now so let's try to keep office costs to a minimum."

To wrap up: to finish something; "If we can wrap this proposal up by Friday, then we can all relax for the weekend!"

To sign off: to end a conversation or broadcast; "Sorry everyone, but I'm going to have to sign off 20 minutes early today because I need to catch a flight to LA."

To hang up: to end a telephone conversation; "Listen, the reception is really horrible and I can't hear you well, so I'm going to hang up and try calling again, okay?"

Transcript

Hello and welcome back to the Skills 360 podcast. I'm your host, Tim Simmons, and today I want to look at how to participate in a [teleconference](#).

With modern technology, you don't have to be in the same room to have a meeting with other people. Teleconferencing tools allow us to connect by phone, [VOIP](#), or video from across the country, or around the world. You can even join a meeting from home, your car or on plane at 30,000 feet in the air. Sure, it's amazing, but teleconferencing brings special challenges, and we have to be [mindful](#) of things that real-life meetings don't require.

[For starters](#), you need to [take steps](#) to ensure clear and clean sound. You've probably been on a teleconference before and become annoyed by the sound of someone typing away at their keyboard. Or you've heard someone's music or the [clanking](#) of cups and plates in a busy coffee shop. It's not just irritating; it makes it difficult to hear people. So minimize this kind of [background noise](#). Find a quiet place and use your [mute button](#) wisely. And try to avoid [distractions](#). Some people think a teleconference is a good chance to get other work done, or check Facebook, but there's nothing worse than getting asked a question when you weren't really [paying attention](#).

Now, there are several other ways that you can be a good teleconferencer. One of the keys is giving good [verbal clues](#) to other participants, because they don't have any [visual clues](#) to [go on](#). When you join the call, announce that you've arrived and let everyone know who you are. For example, a simple "Hello, it's Dave here" should [suffice](#) if it's an internal call. And if you join in the middle of the call, wait for a good time to introduce yourself rather than [jumping in](#) right away.

Besides introducing yourself at the beginning, you can say your name when you start speaking about something, like "Dave here. And I'd just like to add that we did even better than our original [forecasts](#)." In fact, that example shows another [handy](#) technique that we might call "[signposting](#)." Basically, signposting is when we announce what we're about to do. It could be "I just want to add something," or "I have a question," or "I'd like to make a comment about that." This helps manage [the flow of discussion](#) and makes it easier for people to [follow](#) you.

Sometimes the discussion gets [chaotic](#). For example, it often happens that two people begin talking at the same time. In this case, it's polite to let the other person go first, with a simple "please, go ahead" or "[after you](#)." And being a polite and active participant also means demonstrating [active listening](#) techniques. In person, you can see someone [nod](#) or smile. But on a teleconference, you don't have that kind of visual feedback, so you need to [throw in](#) a few "yeahs" and "rights" and "mm-hms" to show that you're [engaged](#), or that you're even still there.

Of course, there are times when you might need to [duck out](#) mid-call. In that case, it's best to just let everyone know, and to briefly announce when you're back. You don't want people asking you questions and getting [dead air](#) in response.

Now, sometimes it happens that you've got several people in a room crowded around one [phone hub](#). It's usually pretty obvious, because you get a lot of background [chit chat](#). That can be really distracting, so keep that [chatter to a minimum](#). And explain what's going on in the room if necessary, like if people are laughing because of a joke.

If everyone can take steps to reduce background noise and be active participants in the ways I've described, you can have a great teleconference. And when it's time to [wrap up](#), don't forget to officially [sign off](#) rather than just [hanging up](#). Something like "Thanks everyone. I look forward to the minutes," or "Great work everyone. Chicago signing off."

Speaking of signing off, that's all for today. If you'd like to test yourself on what we've just covered, have a look at the www.BusinessEnglishPod.com website. There you'll find a quiz about today's show as well as a complete transcript.

So long. And see you again soon.

Review Quiz

1. What are some of the ways that we can ensure clear and clean sound during a teleconference? [choose all that apply]
 - A Use your mute button wisely.
 - B Join the meeting from a coffee shop.
 - C Tell people you are annoyed by background noise.
 - D Find a quiet place to join the call.
 - E Avoid distractions during the meeting.
 - F Be sure to check emails during the meeting.
2. Teleconferencing requires you to give good verbal cues to the other participants because you don't have _____ to help you understand each other.
 - A Email
 - B Visual clues
 - C A facilitator
 - D PowerPoint
3. If you join a teleconference partway through the meeting, what should you do?
 - A Make a noise to let people know someone new has joined.
 - B Announce your presence and state your name immediately.
 - C Begin with some informal conversation.
 - D Wait for an appropriate time to introduce yourself.
4. Which of the following are examples of "signposting?" [choose all that apply]
 - A "I have a question..."
 - B "Please go ahead..."
 - C "Hi, it's Brad here."
 - D "Can I just add something here?"
 - E "Would you mind repeating that?"
 - F "I'd just like to make a comment."
 - G "Great work everyone."
5. Comments such as "yeah," "right," and "mm-hm" are examples of...
 - A Polite interrupting expressions.
 - B Active listening techniques.
 - C Irritating background noise.
 - D Ways of signing off.
6. Which of the following is a good idea if you have several people in a room joining a call together? [choose all that apply]
 - A Ask for more time to speak.
 - B Allow one speaker to represent the whole group.
 - C Explain what is happening in the room.
 - D Take turns holding the teleconferencing device.
 - E Avoid casual conversation among each other.

Review Answers

1. What are some of the ways that we can ensure clear and clean sound during a teleconference? [choose all that apply]

- A Use your mute button wisely**
- D Find a quiet place to join the call**
- E Avoid distractions during the meeting**

2. Teleconferencing requires you to give good verbal cues to the other participants because you don't have _____ to help you understand each other.

- B Visual clues**

3. If you join a teleconference partway through the meeting, what should you do?

- D Wait for an appropriate time in the meeting to introduce yourself**

4. Which of the following are examples of "signposting?" [choose all that apply]

- A "I have a question..."**
- D "Can I just add something here?"**
- F "I'd just like to make a comment."**

5. Comments such as "yeah," "right," and "mm-hm" are examples of...

- B Active listening techniques**

6. Which of the following is a good idea if you have several people in a room joining a call together? [choose all that apply]

- C Explain what is happening in the room**
- E Avoid casual conversation among each other**

Online Practice

Click the "Launch" button to open the **online practice**:

Launch Quiz