

Telephoning phrases the same or different game

Without looking below for now, listen to your teacher and show if you think the phrases you hear have the same meaning or different meanings by raising one of the two cards that your teacher gave you. Only think about the meaning, don't worry about differences in formality yet. If there are more than two phrases, the phrases all have the same meaning or all have different meanings (i.e. not two the same and one different).

Label each line below with S for the same or D for different. Even a small difference in meaning is D, but ones with different levels of formality but the same meaning are S. Ones on the same line are all the same or all different. If you get stuck, it is worth looking at the next line or two to see if there are similar or contrasting groups of words.

Check your answers as a class or with the answer key. Then find some examples of the same meaning but different levels of formality.

Test each other on the phrases below by:

- Playing the same holding up cards game
- Reading out two which have a different meaning and ask your partner to explain the difference
- Reading out one which has one or more phrase with the same meaning next to it and helping your partner make phrases with the same meaning
- Reading out one which needs a response and seeing if your partner can reply (making sure that they didn't use a reply to a different phrase than the one you used)
- Reading out one which needs a response, listening to your partner's response, then roleplaying the rest of the conversation together

Cards for students to hold up

The same	Different
The same	Different
The same	Different

The same	Different
The same	Different
The same	Different
The same	Different
The same	Different
The same	Different
The same	Different

Starting phone calls the same or different

Answering the phone

- Hi./ Hello.
- Good evening./ Good night.
- Alex Case speaking./ This is Alex Case speaking.
- How can I help you?/ How may I help you?
- How can I help you?/ Can I help you?

Saying who you are (caller)

- Alex Case speaking./ This is Alex Case.
- This is Alex Case./ My name is Alex Case.
- This is Alex./ It's Alex.
- This is Alex Case, from ACB Limited./ This is Alex Case, calling from ACB Limited.

Small talk/ Being friendly at the beginning of the phone call

- How are you?/ How are things?/ How's life?/ How's it going?
- How's work?/ How's business?
- Good, thanks./ Not bad, thanks./ Very well, thanks./ Fine, thanks.
- Not bad./ Okay./ So-so.
- And you?/ What about you?/ How about you?
- What time is it over there?/ Do you have time to talk?

Being polite at the beginning of the phone call

- Thanks for your message./ Thanks for calling me back./ Thanks for calling ABC Ltd.

Ending the small talk/ Smoothly getting down to business/ Moving to the topic

- So, how can I help you today?/ Anyway, what can I do for you today?
- Do you have time to talk?/ Have you got a minute (to talk)?/ Are you free to talk?

Talking about the reason for the phone call

- I got a message that I should call you./ I'm returning your call.
- I'm calling in connection with.../ I'm phoning about...
- I'm ringing to.../ I'm calling in order to...

Asking to speak to someone

- Can I speak to Devan Kerry, please?/ Can you put me through to Devan Kerry, please?/ Could you connect me to Devan Kerry, please?
- Speaking./ That's me.

Asking about the caller's name

- Can I have your name?/ Can I take your name, please?/ May I ask who is calling?

Asking about the receiver

- Is that the HR department?/ Is this the right number for the HR department?
- Sorry, who am I speaking to, please?/ Sorry, who is calling, please?

Ending phone calls the same or different**Ending taking messages**

- I'll make sure she gets your message./ I'll pass your message onto her.

Checking that the other person has finished, and responding to that

- Is there anything else (that I can help you with today)?/ Was there anything else (that you'd like to ask)?
- No, that's all, thanks./ Actually,...

Smoothly ending a phone call (giving reasons for finishing the call, etc)

- I have a call on another line, so.../ I have someone on another line, so...
- I think that's all (that I needed to ask), thanks./ That seems to have about covered it, thanks.
- It's been great talking to you, but.../ It's been nice to talk, but...
- Of course. I won't keep you any longer./ No problem. I'll let you get on.

Talking about the next contact between you/ Talking about the future

- Can I call you back a little later?/ Can I call you back in a minute?
- Can I call you back in a while?/ Can you call again a little later?
- I look forward to hearing from you./ I look forward to your call.
- I look forward to hearing from you./ I hope to hear from you soon.
- See you then./ Speak to you then.
- Speak to you later./ Speak to you tomorrow./ Speak to you soon.
- Speak to you later./ Bye for now.

Polite and/ or friendly language at the end of the call

- It was great speaking to you./ It was nice to speak to you.
- Thanks for your help./ Thanks for your call.
- Thanks for your help./ Thanks for your understanding./ Thanks anyway.
- Thanks for your help./ Thanks for your cooperation.
- Thanks for your call./ Thanks for calling.

Body of the phone call the same or different

Connecting the caller to the right person

- I'm putting you through./ I'm connecting you./ I'm transferring your call.
- I'm putting you through./ I'm putting you on hold.
- Can I ask who is calling?/ Can I ask what it is concerning?

Negative answers to requests to speak to someone

- I'm afraid.../ I'm sorry but...
- He's on another line./ He's not answering his phone.
- He is on another line./ His line is busy./ His line is engaged.
- He's out of the office./ He isn't in today./ He's away from his desk.

Taking and leaving messages/ Dictating

- Can I leave a message?/ Can you take a message?
- Can I take a message?/ Would you like to leave a message?
- Can I take a message?/ Can I leave a message?
- Can you ask her to call me back?/ Can you tell her to call me back?
- Can you tell her to...?/ Can you tell her that...?

Asking people to wait

- Just a moment./ Just a minute./ Just a second./ Please hold on.
- Please hold./ Please hold the line./ I'm putting you on hold.
- Please hold the line./ Please hold on.

Checking/ Clarifying/ Dealing with communication problems

- Sorry, could you say the last part again?/ Sorry, can you repeat the last part?
- Sorry, can you repeat the last part?/ Sorry, can you repeat the last part again?
- Can you repeat that?/ Can I check that back?
- Can I check that back?/ Can I read that back?
- How do you spell that?/ Can you spell that for me, please?
- Can you speak up?/ Can you speak a little louder?
- I see./ I understand./ Got it.
- Okay./ Right./ Got it./ I've got it.

Requesting

- Can you...?/ Could you...?/ Could you possibly...?/ I'd be very grateful if you could...
- Can you send me...?/ Please send me...

Enquiries (= Asking for information)

- Can you tell me...?/ Can I ask...?/ I'd like to know.../ I have a question about...
- Can you tell me...?/ Please tell me...

Responding to complaints/ Apologising

- I'm sorry about that./ I'm sorry to hear that.
- I'm sorry about that./ I do apologise.

Suggested answers – Starting phone calls

Answering the phone

- Hi./ Hello. – S
- Good evening./ Good night. – D (“Good night” only means “Goodbye”, so isn’t suitable)
- Alex Case speaking./ This is Alex Case speaking. – S
- How can I help you?/ How may I help you? – S
- How can I help you?/ Can I help you? – D (“Can I help you?” can be answered with “No, that’s okay, thanks” and so doesn’t make sense on the phone)

Saying who you are (caller)

- Alex Case speaking./ This is Alex Case. – D (receiver/ caller)
- This is Alex Case./ My name is Alex Case – D (in the first they know each other)
- This is Alex./ It’s Alex. – S
- This is Alex Case, from ACB Limited./ This is Alex Case, calling from ACB Limited. – S

Small talk/ Being friendly at the beginning of the phone call

- How are you?/ How are things?/ How’s life?/ How’s it going? – S
- How’s work?/ How’s business? – D (the former means “your work” and so is about busyness etc. The latter is about the company and business conditions more generally)
- Good, thanks./ Not bad, thanks./ Very well, thanks./ Fine, thanks. – S
- Not bad./ OK./ So-so. – D (“so-so” is negative and “not bad” is “good”, “OK” is between)
- And you?/ What about you?/ How about you? – S
- What time is it over there?/ Do you have time to talk? – D

Being polite at the beginning of the phone call

- Thanks for your message./ for calling me back./ for calling ABC Ltd. – D

Ending the small talk/ Smoothly getting down to business/ Moving to the topic

- So, how can I help you today?/ Anyway, what can I do for you today? – S
- Do you have time to talk?/ Have you got a minute (to talk)?/ Are you free to talk? – S

Talking about the reason for the phone call

- I got a message that I should call you./ I’m returning your call. – S
- I’m calling in connection with.../ I’m phoning about...– S
- I’m ringing to.../ I’m calling in order to...– S

Asking to speak to someone

- Can I speak to Devan Kerry, please?/ Can you put me through to Devan Kerry, please?/ Could you connect me to Devan Kerry, please? – S
- Speaking./ That’s me. – S

Asking about the caller’s name

- Can I have your name?/ Can I take your name, please?/ May I ask who is calling? – S

Asking about the receiver

- Is that the HR department?/ Is this the right number for the HR department? – S
- Sorry, who am I speaking to, please?/ who is calling, please? – D (caller/ receiver)

Suggested answers – Ending phone calls

Ending taking messages

- I'll make sure she gets your message./ I'll pass your message onto her. – S

Checking that the other person has finished, and responding to that

- Is there anything else (that I can help you with today)?/ Was there anything else (that you'd like to ask)? – S
- No, that's all, thanks./ Actually,... – D ("Actually,..." is the unexpected answer, which in this case means that there are actually more questions)

Smoothly ending a phone call (giving reasons for finishing the call, etc)

- I have a call on another line, so.../ I have someone on another line, so... – S
- I think that's all (that I needed to ask), thanks./ That seems to have about covered it, thanks. – S
- It's been great talking to you, but.../ It's been nice to talk, but... – S
- Of course. I won't keep you any longer./ No problem. I'll let you get on. – S

Talking about the next contact between you/ Talking about the future

- Can I call you back a little later?/ Can I call you back in a minute? – S
- Can I call you back in a while?/ Can you call again a little later? – D
- I look forward to hearing from you./ I look forward to your call. – slightly different ("hearing from you" doesn't have to be a phone call)
- I look forward to hearing from you./ I hope to hear from you soon. – D ("hope" has some doubt to it)
- See you then./ Speak to you then. – D ("See you" means face to face)
- Speak to you later./ Speak to you tomorrow./ Speak to you soon. – D ("later" means later today, and "soon" has no special meaning but probably means nothing has been arranged)
- Speak to you later./ Bye for now. – S

Polite and/ or friendly language at the end of the call

- It was great speaking to you./ It was nice to speak to you. – S
- Thanks for your help./ Thanks for your call. – D (caller/ receiver)
- Thanks for your help./ Thanks for your understanding./ Thanks anyway. – D
- Thanks for your help./ Thanks for your cooperation. – D ("Thanks for your cooperation" is used after a command/ instructions, and so is very rare in a phone call)
- Thanks for your call./ Thanks for calling. – S

Suggested answers – Body of the phone call

Connecting the caller to the right person

- I'm putting you through./ I'm connecting you./ I'm transferring your call. – S
- I'm putting you through./ I'm putting you on hold. – D
- Can I ask who is calling?/ Can I ask what it is concerning? – D (about the person/ topic)

Negative answers to requests to speak to someone

- I'm afraid.../ I'm sorry but...– S
- He's on another line./ He's not answering his phone. – D
- He is on another line./ His line is busy./ His line is engaged. – S
- He's out of the office./ He isn't in today./ He's away from his desk. – D

Taking and leaving messages/ Dictating

- Can I leave a message?/ Can you take a message? – S
- Can I take a message?/ Would you like to leave a message? – S
- Can I take a message?/ Can I leave a message? – D (receiver/ caller)
- Can you ask her to call me back?/ tell her to call me back? – D (the 2nd is a command)
- Can you tell her to...?/ Can you tell her that...? – D (the latter is just info)

Asking people to wait

- Just a moment./ Just a minute./ Just a second./ Please hold on. – S
- Please hold./ Please hold the line./ I'm putting you on hold. – S
- Please hold the line./ Please hold on. – D ("hold on" means wait more generally)

Checking/ Clarifying/ Dealing with communication problems

- Sorry, could you say the last part again?/ Sorry, can you repeat the last part? – S
- Sorry, can you repeat the last part?/ Sorry, can you repeat the last part again? – D ("repeat" means "say again", so "repeat again" means the third time and is rarely used)
- Can you repeat that?/ Can I check that back? – D (the caller repeats/ receiver repeats)
- Can I check that back?/ read that back? – S (but "read" means definitely written down)
- How do you spell that?/ Can you spell that for me, please? – S
- Can you speak up?/ Can you speak a little louder? – S
- I see./ I understand./ Got it. – D ("I see" is often a negative reaction, and "I understand" can mean disappointment or resigned acceptance, so "Got it" is often more useful)
- Okay./ Right./ Got it./ I've got it. – S

Requesting

- Can you/ Could you/ Could you possibly...?/ I would be very grateful if you could...– S
- Can you send me...?/ Please send me...– D (request/ command)

Enquiries (= Asking for information)

- Can you tell me...?/ Can I ask...?/ I'd like to know.../ I have a question about...– S
- Can you tell me...?/ Please tell me...– D (request for information/ command or offer)

Responding to complaints/ Apologising

- I'm sorry about that./ I'm sorry to hear that. – D (apology/ only being sympathetic)
- I'm sorry about that./ I do apologise. – S

Brainstorming phrases with the same meaning – Starting phone calls

Without looking above, brainstorm at least one phrase meaning the same as each of the phrases below. All have alternative versions above, but other answers are also possible.

Answering the phone

- Hi.
- This is Alex Case speaking.
- How may I help you?

Saying who you are (caller)

- It's Alex.
- This is Alex Case, calling from ACB Limited.

Small talk/ Being friendly at the beginning of the phone call

- How's it going?
- How's your work?
- Fine, thanks.
- How about you?
- What is the time over there?

Ending the small talk/ Smoothly getting down to business/ Moving to the topic

- So, how can I help you today?
- Have you got a minute (to talk)?

Talking about the reason for the phone call

- I'm returning your call.
- I'm calling in connection with...
- I'm ringing to...

Asking to speak to someone

- Could you connect me to (name), please?
- That's me.

Asking about the caller's name

- May I ask who is calling?

Asking about the receiver

- Is this the right number for the HR department?

Brainstorming phrases with the same meaning – Ending phone calls

Without looking above, brainstorm at least one phrase meaning the same as each of the phrases below. All have alternative versions above, but other answers are also possible.

Ending taking messages

- I'll pass your message onto her.

Checking that the other person has finished, and responding to that

- Was there anything else (that you'd like to ask)?

Smoothly ending a phone call (giving reasons for finishing the call, etc)

- I have someone on another line, so...
- That seems to have about covered it, thanks.
- It's been great talking to you but...
- No problem. I'll let you get on.

Talking about the next contact between you/ Talking about the future

- Can I call you back a little later?
- I look forward to your call.
- Speak to you later.

Polite and/ or friendly language at the end of the call

- It was nice to speak to you.
- Thanks for your call.

Brainstorming phrases with the same meaning – Body of the phone call

Without looking above, brainstorm at least one phrase meaning the same as each of the phrases below. All have alternative versions above, but other answers are also possible.

Connecting the caller to the right person

- I'm transferring your call.

Negative answers to requests to speak to someone

- I'm afraid...
- His line is engaged.

Taking and leaving messages/ Dictating

- Can you take a message?
- Would you like to leave a message?

Asking people to wait

- Just a second.
- Please hold.

Checking/ Clarifying/ Dealing with communication problems

- Sorry, can you repeat the last part?
- Can I read that back?
- Can you spell that for me, please?
- Can you speak up?
- Right.

Requesting

- Could you possibly...?

Enquiries (= Asking for information)

- I'd like to know...

Responding to complaints/ Apologising

- I'm sorry about that.
- I do apologise.

Compare your answers with those on the first worksheets. Many other phrases with the same meanings are possible, so please check if you wrote something different.