

Subject background

The phrase 'customer service' refers to pre-sales (enquiries), sales itself (including order processing) and post-sales (returns, complaints, etc.). The phrase 'customer support' is usually limited to post-sales only.

Customer support is important because:

- in an age when many competing goods and services don't differ greatly from each other, the quality of customer support can make all the difference.
- good customer support leads to repeat business.
- a 'silent complainer' tells all their friends.
- customers have expectations of good service set by other companies.

Customer support staff are usually given pre-defined 'performance standards' which serve as guidelines in their day-to-day work. Here are some typical examples of such standards.

- Get it right first time.
- Only make promises that are realistic.
- When you 'inherit' an error from elsewhere in the organization, do not pass it on again (instead refer it to your supervisor if you cannot deal with it).
- Make all written work clear and simple (use standard formats where available).
- Treat customers with the maximum courtesy and helpfulness at all times.
- Leave all records and files in a state that they can be easily dealt with by someone who does not normally handle them.
- Answer all telephone calls within three rings, then give a name and a friendly greeting.
- Direct the conversation so that you identify the needs of the customer as soon as possible, then provide that information at the time it is needed.

Most customers are satisfied if their complaint is dealt with quickly and helpfully. They only get irritated or angry when their attempts to complain lead them nowhere.

Many modern companies see complaints as an opportunity. They are an excellent way of discovering problems, and once the cause of the complaint has been eliminated it should never happen again. So an efficient complaints procedure leads directly to constantly improving quality.

In addition, customers whose complaints have been resolved satisfactorily tend to become strong, long-term customers. The reason is simple: they are impressed with the care and attention given to their complaint – and how that contrasts with the indifference they have met in other companies.

A key skill for customer support staff is active listening. This means:

- let the customer fully explain the problem with no interruptions (except for clarification questions). Only move to the problem-solving part of the conversation when they have 'let off steam'.
- pay full attention while the customer is speaking. From time to time give a brief summary of what they have been saying. This shows that you are listening and are on common ground.
- resist the urge to argue, defend or excuse. Apologize sincerely and acknowledge any inconvenience caused.
- use the other person's name.
- make written notes of key points.
- if the conversation is face-to-face, then maintain frequent eye contact and an open body posture leaning slightly towards the other person.
- as the conversation progresses, focus on positive action for the future.

Useful websites

The UK's professional body for customer service has a website:

<http://www.instituteofcustomerservice.com>

Follow the links for 'Information Centre' and then 'Glossary of terms' for useful teaching material.

These two sites have useful background information:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Customer_service

<http://money.howstuffworks.com/customer-service.htm>

2.1 About business

Call centres

This module examines the use of call centres in India by a wide range of companies and the global impact on employment practices.

Internet research

An Internet search for *call centre racist abuse* will yield articles on the abuse experienced by Indian call-centre employees from their customers in the UK and USA. They often experience shouting, swearing, and racist comments from angry customers. Some customers resort to this kind of abuse when they are not happy with the service, but some are also angry because the call centre jobs have been outsourced and employment has been lost in their own countries. Call-centre employees are taught to remain calm and polite and not to respond to the abuse, but some are leaving their jobs because they find the abuse difficult to take.

Possible solutions for combating this type of abuse: allow staff to warn customers that this behaviour is not acceptable; allow them to hang up on abusive customers.

You could ask students to do this search as preparation for the first exercise in this module or as a follow-up to the lesson.

LEAD-IN ACTIVITY

Establish that students know what a call centre is (a call centre provides customer service by telephone, e.g. for water, gas and electricity companies; mail order shopping; airlines; insurance companies, etc.).

Get students to talk about their own experiences of call centres, if they have any, and what impressions they got of them. Prompt with questions like:

How long did you have to wait for a response?

Was the operator pleasant and helpful?

Was your problem solved?

How long did it take?

Did your experience influence your opinion of the company?, etc.

Discussion

1 Get students to discuss the reasons why someone would or would not want to work in a call centre. Take whole-class feedback and make two lists on the board. Refer back to the lists once students have done exercises 1–7 to see how their views match those presented in the article and the interview.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

Positive aspects:

a satisfying job with fun people; physically undemanding; clean, modern environment; flexible hours; promotion prospects; steady income

Negative aspects:

a boring, dead-end job; stressful, humiliating sweatshops; inhuman conditions; unsociable hours; staff are under-trained and overworked; poorly-paid

Summarizing

- 2** Read the introduction and the first paragraph aloud with the whole class. Elicit from students:
- the reason Sir Keith Whitson gives for using call centres in India (workers in India are smart, enthusiastic, efficient and well educated)
 - and the reason given by the writer of the article (wages in India are much lower).

Ask students which opinion they agree with or if they think there is truth in both.

Then give students a few minutes to read the first five paragraphs of the article silently and match the correct headings to the paragraphs. Remind them to use the *Wordlist* on page 149 in their books. Check answers with the whole class.

ANSWERS:

Paragraph A: Smarter Indians

Paragraph B: Call of the East

Paragraph C: UK jobs leak

Paragraph D: Unions strike back

Paragraph E: More Britons concerned

3 Students could do this exercise with a partner, and then compare their answers with another pair. With lower-level classes you could first get students to read each paragraph in turn and tell you in one or two words what each one is about, e.g. paragraph F (call centre employees and their training), paragraph G (experiences / feelings of call centre employees), paragraph H (protection of call centre employees wherever they are). Students then use these prompts to help them write the summarizing sentences.

Get two or three pairs to tell you their sentences and write them on the board. Look at the strengths and weaknesses of each one.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

Paragraph F: It's not as easy for Indians to get a job in a British call centre in India as one might think.

Paragraph G: Coming into contact with the wealthy Western world is a hard learning experience for Indian employees.

Paragraph H: Call centre employees need to be protected from redundancy and exploitation wherever they are.

4 Students could do this exercise with a partner. Get students to give you their reason for rejecting the wrong answers.

ANSWER:


3 Trade unions are worried about job losses, poor working conditions and exploitation of workers worldwide in a growing industry where work is stressful.

Discussion

5 Get students to scan the article for references to the trade union viewpoint (paragraphs C, D, and H) and discuss the pros and cons of the trade union argument (i.e. betrayal of workers in the UK; strike action; exploitation of workers, wherever they are located).

Give students time to explore their ideas, then take whole-class feedback.

Predicting and listening

6  1:10 Read the topic headings with the whole class. Remind them to use the *Wordlist* on page 149 in their books and explain any other vocabulary that might be new to them, e.g.:

employee profile (a description of the kind of person who works somewhere)
prospects (opportunities).

Play the recording and allow students to check their predictions.

RECORDING SCRIPT

 1:10

Host: Good evening, and welcome back to Career Choices.

Tonight's programme looks at one of the fastest growing businesses in India today – customer care.

Call Delta Airlines, American Express, Citibank or IBM from almost anywhere in the world, and there's a good chance you'll be talking to an Indian. With more than a million English-speaking college graduates entering the job market each year, India is the ideal location for American call centres: low labour costs for highly competent staff mean savings of around 50% over the equivalent operation in the States. Attracted by good money, comfortable working conditions and genuine promotion prospects, Indian graduates are queuing up for jobs in call centres. Only five applicants out of every 100 are accepted. Nevertheless, staff turnover in many call centres is high and critics talk about dead-end jobs in sweatshops where staff are routinely monitored and humiliated. So before you rush out to join the queues for jobs in customer care, Career Choices has invited two experts to give us the facts about call centres. With me in the studio are Lavanya Fernandes, who is a Customer Relationship Management expert with a New Delhi consultancy, and Tashar Mahendra, a Call Centre Manager from Mumbai. Lavanya, call centres have had a lot of bad publicity recently: how much truth is there in the sweatshop stories?

Lavanya: Well, first of all, I think it's important to say that call centres have now largely been replaced by contact centres. Customers' problems and queries are no longer handled just by telephone, but also by email, SMS, online chat and even browser sharing – this is where the operator actually takes control of the customer's computer and shows them how to resolve their problem. This means that the operator's job has become more complex and, at the same time, more satisfying. Now, it is certainly true that in the past there were cases of abuse, you know, where employees were closely monitored, and so on ...

H: Yes, only three seconds between each call and being timed when they went to the toilets!

L: Yes. Of course this kind of intimidation can still happen. But, on the whole, contact centres now realize that forcing operators to deal with customers as quickly as possible is not in their interest. One long conversation which solves the customer's problem is obviously much better than several short calls which leave the customer feeling dissatisfied. So in fact most centres are trying very hard to respect their staff and make their lives more pleasant.

H: Yes, I see. Tashar, I've heard that you pay for taxis to bring your staff to work.

Tashar: Yes that's right. More than 60% of our customer care executives are young women between 20 and 35 years old, many of them working part-time. As in Mumbai we are almost 11 hours ahead of New York, most of the work is at night. Taking a taxi to and from work means their husbands or their families don't have to worry about them.

H: Yes, I see. Tell us about some of the other ways you look after your staff. I believe you also supply drinks and cakes?

T: Yes, that's right. Our customer care executives spend about

80% of their time communicating with customers. We want them to be energetic and happy because we know that happy staff make satisfied customers. So, for the rest of the time, they can enjoy fresh fruit, drinks, cakes, subsidized meals, on-site massage, air conditioning, competitions, meetings at the beach ...

H: At the beach?!

T: Yes, that's right. We have a meeting area with real sand, deckchairs, parasols and the sounds of the seaside. It feels just like being on the beach!

H: Wow, that sounds great! Lavanya, we know that salaries are six to ten times the average wage, so it's not surprising that these jobs are so popular. But what sort of profile are the call centres, sorry, the contact centres, looking for?

L: Well, the most important thing is very good English. And then computer literacy, good typing speed, marketing skills ... these are all a plus. But, basically, good communication and listening skills are essential. You need to be patient, polite, good-natured and reasonably intelligent. In some jobs, persuasion skills are needed when you have to collect debts from customers or encourage them to use your client's products.

H: And Tashar, I suppose you give your new staff special training?

T: Yes, that's right. Usually between two weeks and three months, depending on the project. This training includes accent training and neutralization, listening skills, slang training, telephone etiquette, telesales etiquette and customer relationship management skills, and call centre terminology.


H: And I believe your staff all have American names, Tashar, is that right?

T: Yes, that's right. For our customers it's easier to talk to Sharon, Julia or Alison than to Jayashree, Suhaila or Kanjri, and it helps our customer care executives to slip into an American identity.

H: And what about promotion prospects?

T: Yes, that's ... Oh, yes, after about three or four years, depending on your skills and results, you can become a supervisor, and then eventually a manager. And, if you decide to work in another sector, experience in a contact centre is very valuable, especially in sales, insurance or other customer relations jobs.

Listening for detail

7  1:10 again. With lower-level classes you could pause the recording after the host's introduction and then after each speaker's turn to allow students more time to write their notes.

When they have finished, you could check students' understanding of the main ideas of the radio discussion by asking them quick questions on the topics covered, e.g.:

- 1 *Why are Indian graduates queuing up to join call centres?* (They offer good money, comfortable working conditions, and genuine promotion prospects.)
- 2 *In what way is work in call centres more interesting than it used to be?* (Operators can use a variety of means to help customers solve their problems; they can spend more time with each customer.)
- 3 *Why are the operators now allowed to spend more time on each phone call?* (Because the outcome is more satisfying for customer and employee.)
- 4 *Why are taxis provided to bring staff to work?* (Because most of the staff are women and they work late at night – this makes them feel safer.)
- 5 *What are some of the perks provided for workers?* (Fruit, drinks, cakes, subsidized meals, on-site massage; air conditioning; competitions and a 'beach' area.)

- 6 What is the employee profile of people working at call centres? (Good English, computer literate, good typing speed, marketing skills, good communication skills, polite, good natured and intelligent.)
- 7 What kind of special training and instructions do they get? (Accent training, listening skills telephone etiquette, telesales etiquette, customer care, etc.)
- 8 What other sectors could call centre operators work in? (Sales, insurance and other customer relations jobs.)

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

Why India?

- ... one million English-speaking college graduates enter job market every year.
- Low labour costs for highly competent staff.

Changes to call centres:

- New technology: email, SMS, online chat, browser sharing.
- The operator's job has become more complex and more satisfying.
- Centres are trying hard to respect their staff.

Perks of the job:

- Transport: by taxi to and from work.
- Good working conditions with fruit, drinks, cakes, subsidized meals, massage, air conditioning, competitions, the beach.

Employee profile and training:

- Good communication skills: English, listening, patience, persuasion.
- Technical skills: computer literacy, good typing speed, marketing skills.
- Special training: 2 weeks – 3 months, accent, listening, slang, etiquette, telesales, CRM, terminology.

Promotion prospects:

- Can become a supervisor after 3 or 4 years, and eventually a manager.
- Experience in a contact centre is valuable in other jobs.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Point out that the interviewees do not really address the less positive aspects of working at a call centre. Given what they now know from the article and the interview, get students to brainstorm aspects of the job that might make it unattractive or unappealing to Indian graduates in the long term, e.g. the work is monotonous and repetitive; the abuse from customers is too much to tolerate; always working at night becomes unacceptable, etc.

Debate

- 8 Give students time to read the information in their roleplay and prepare their arguments. Circulate and assist where necessary. Remind students to look back at the article and the notes they made in exercise 7.

You could use the following procedure to structure the debate:

- You open the debate by briefly introducing the topic and explaining the procedure.
- One speaker from each group gives the opening speech, without interruption. This should take around 3–4 minutes.
- A different speaker responds to the opposing side's argument – around 1–2 minutes.
- The discussion is open to the whole group, with individuals making comments as they wish.
- You summarize the discussion briefly.
- The whole class votes for or against.

2.2 Vocabulary**Customer service and telephoning**

This module explores a range of vocabulary and expressions for describing problems and dealing with customer service.

Internet research

An Internet search for “golden rules of customer service” will reveal a number of listings. After students have done exercise 10, they can carry out their Internet search and look for ideas to add to their own.

Adjectives

- 1 Give students a few minutes to read the adjectives in the box and check that they know the meanings. Allow them to use their dictionaries to look up any new words. Students' answers to this exercise may vary from those given below – in that case, accept any answers that students can justify.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

abusive (C), annoyed (B), appreciative (C), cheerful (H), competent (H), difficult (C), frustrated (B), grateful (C), helpful (H), irritated (B), knowledgeable (H), patient (H), persuasive (H), pleasant (H), reassuring (H), rude (C), satisfied (C), sympathetic (H), understanding (H), upset (C)

- 2 You could do this as a whole-class activity. Write the words on the board. Point to each one in turn and get students to tell you where the stress lies in each case. Then circle the ones with the stress on the first syllable and underline the ones with the stress on the third syllable.

ANSWERS:

Stress not on first syllable: abusive, annoyed, appreciative, frustrated, persuasive, reassuring, sympathetic, understanding, upset

Stress on third syllable: reassuring, sympathetic, understanding

To explore the meanings of the adjectives further, get students to divide them into two groups:

positive emotions: *appreciative, cheerful, competent, grateful, helpful, knowledgeable, patient, persuasive, pleasant, reassuring, satisfied, sympathetic, understanding*
negative emotions: *abusive, annoyed, difficult, frustrated, irritated, rude, upset.*

This will also help students to prepare for exercise 3.

Listening for attitude

- 3 1:11–1:20 Play the extracts one by one and have students identify the appropriate adjectives or play all the extracts and check answers at the end. Point out that there is usually more than one possible answer in each case. When you check the answers, ensure that students are putting the stress in the correct place in each word.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

- reassuring, pleasant, sympathetic, understanding
- abusive, frustrated, annoyed, irritated, rude, upset
- knowledgeable, competent, helpful
- appreciative, grateful, satisfied
- frustrated, annoyed, irritated, upset
- sympathetic, understanding, patient
- persuasive, pleasant
- upset, frustrated, grateful, appreciative
- cheerful, helpful, pleasant
- difficult, irritated

RECORDING SCRIPT

1:11–1:20

- 1 Operator: Now, don't worry, Madam. This is just a minor problem that a few customers experience at first. It will only take a few minutes to resolve.
- 2 ... or if you would like more information about our products, please press four.
Customer: All I want is to speak to a human being, not a stupid, condescending, brainless piece of ... silicon!
- 3 Operator: All right sir. Yes, it is an unusual problem, and it's a little complicated, but you'll be pleased to know there is a solution.
- 4 Customer: Oh, that's wonderful. You're so clever! Thank you so much!
- 5 Customer: It's just so annoying. I thought your product would solve all my problems, but it just seems to be creating new ones!
- 6 Operator: I fully understand your position, sir, and I would feel exactly the same way myself.
- 7 Operator: Alternatively, the simplest solution is to upgrade to the professional version of the software. The extra cost is only around one euro per month. I think you'd agree that that's excellent value, wouldn't you?
- 8 Customer: Oh, thank you so much. You're so patient. I bet nobody else has these problems. I just feel so stupid!
- 9 Operator: A very good morning to you, and thank you for calling the helpline. How I can help you today?
- 10 Customer: Well, that's all very well. You say you've sorted out the problem and it's working now, but how can I be sure it won't break down again tomorrow?

Describing problems

4 Students work with a partner to match these ten sentences to the appropriate devices. Check answers.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

- 1 When I switch it on, nothing happens. (fax, photocopier, PC, mobile phone)
- 2 It broke down on the way to work. (car)
- 3 It keeps crashing. (PC)
- 4 There's something stuck inside. (fax, photocopier)
- 5 I can't switch it off. (photocopier, PC, mobile phone)
- 6 It's not working properly. (car, fax, photocopier, PC, mobile phone)
- 7 It won't start. (car, PC)
- 8 It's out of order. (fax, photocopier, PC)
- 9 I think it's a complete write-off. (car, fax, photocopier, PC, mobile phone)
- 10 The battery's dead. (car, PC, mobile phone)

FURTHER PRACTICE

Give students a few minutes to look at the sentences again. Then get them to close their books and reconstruct the sentences from one-word prompts that you give them: *stuck* (There's something stuck inside.) *order* (It's out of order.), etc.

Collocations, Antonyms and Phrasal verbs

5, 6, 7 and 8 Exercises 5–8 bring together a number of useful words and phrases for talking about customer service problems. Students could complete these exercises individually or with a partner. Circulate while they are working and assist where necessary. Check answers with the whole class.

When students have finished, get them to pick out any words or phrases which are new to them or that they are unsure of, and review their meaning and use.

ANSWERS:

Exercise 5

- 1 identify the symptoms
- 2 diagnose the fault
- 3 sort out a problem
- 4 talk the customer through the process
- 5 escalate the problem to the supervisor
- 6 arrange a visit from our technician
- 7 exchange the product
- 8 give a full refund

Exercise 6

- 1 a) 2 d/e) 3 c) 4 b) 5 d/e) 6 g) 7 f)

Exercise 7

- 1 switch off 2 disconnect 3 unscrew 4 remove
5 release 6 Lift out 7 insert 8 push into
9 Fasten 10 Replace 11 screw in 12 turn on

Exercise 8

- 1 Could you hold on a moment, please? = b) I'm in the middle of an interesting conversation.
- 2 We tried to contact you, but we couldn't get through.
= c) We lost your phone number.
- 3 I'm going to put you through to my supervisor. = d) Heh, heh, let's see how *she* likes your ridiculous questions.
- 4 Could you hang up, and I'll call / ring you back?
= a) Maybe. If I have nothing else to do.
- 5 I'll just take down your details. = f) I'll pretend to do something useful.
- 6 I can't hear you very well. Could you speak up please?
= g) They're playing my favourite song on the radio.
- 7 We'll get back to you as soon as we solve the problem.
= h) We might ring next week if we remember.
- 8 The engineer is out at the moment. Please call / ring back later. = e) We don't know what you're talking about.

Listening for detail

9 1:21 Read the words and expressions in the box. Remind students that they have already met some of them in previous exercises in this module.

Before students listen for the words and expressions, ask them to listen to the conversation and answer the following questions:

What complaints does the woman have about customer service today? (You can't speak to a human being; you can't get your problems sorted out; they don't call you back; you are put on hold.)

How do you think the interviewer feels? (Frustrated, irritated.)

What might the interviewer have done to improve this interview? (Possibly nothing! Or he could have tried to interrupt her or pick up on one of the points she was making.)

Then play the recording again so that students can listen for the word or expression that is not spoken. Check answers with the whole class.

ANSWER:

It doesn't work.

RECORDING SCRIPT

1:21

- Interviewer: Excuse me, madam, I see you've just been to the bank. We're doing a survey about customer service, and ...
Old Lady: Ooh, don't talk to me about service! Now, in the old days, the customer was always right! You could telephone the bank and there was always a pleasant young man or woman, you know, who would listen to your problems, and they used to provide a solution in no time. Nowadays, you're lucky if you even get to speak to a human being, let

alone get your problems sorted out.

I: Yes, now, could I just ask you ...

OL: And if you want to actually see someone, you can't just walk in, oh no, you have to phone the bank to make an appointment. And they have these machines now, you know, if you want this, please press one, if you want that, please press two, if it's the second Thursday in January, please press three ... dear, oh dear. I just get so annoyed!

I: Yes, of course, but ...

OL: So, then you have to wait for ages and when you do finally speak to someone, either they say they'll call you back and then you never hear from them again, or they tell you they'll have to escalate the problem to their supervisor. Huh! 'Escalate the problem!' They're supposed to be so competent and knowledgeable and all that, but really they just don't want to take any responsibility these days.

I: Yes, but could I ...

OL: So, then they tell you to hold on again and you get another machine playing the same twenty seconds of Vivaldi again and again, and then finally you go back to the beginning again ... 'If you would like to speak to an adviser, please press four.' What is the world coming to, I ask you?

I: Well, yes, I see what you ...

OL: And now they want me to use that interweb thingy with all those viruses, as if we didn't have enough trouble already! Anyway, I haven't got time to stand here and talk. I must be getting on. Goodbye!

Discussion

10 Set students a time limit to write down as many rules as they can. Then get students to call out their ideas and write them on the board or flip chart, until you have a comprehensive list of ideas. Get students to expand on what they mean by each statement, if necessary. Keep this list for reference in the modules that follow.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

The customer is always right.
 Make the customer feel valued and important.
 Be courteous and friendly at all times.
 Give customers what they want.
 Always deliver what you promise.
 Pay attention to detail.
 Deal with problems quickly and efficiently.
 Choose the right people to do the job.
 Train your customer service staff to the highest standards.
 Don't stand still – keep reviewing what you do and how you do it.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Students work in groups. They are a team of consultants with the task of improving customer relations in the following businesses:

- a beauty salon
- a dry-cleaning service
- a coffee shop
- a car repair shop.

They should think of ideas for each business that will attract and keep new customers.

Give students a time limit and circulate and assist where necessary. When students have finished, get each group to present their ideas, explaining why they think they will work.

2.3 Grammar

Asking questions and giving instructions

This module focuses on different ways of asking questions, making requests and giving instructions.

Internet research

An Internet search for *FAQ learning English* reveals that the most frequently asked questions are usually about how to improve the four skills (reading, writing, listening, speaking), grammar and vocabulary. Other questions refer to studying abroad, examinations, learning English for work purposes, and how to study online.

Students could be asked to choose one question that particularly interests them and search for the answer to it on several different websites.

Test yourself: Asking questions and giving instructions

1 Start by reading the *Refresh your memory* box with students. Write a few examples on the board and get students to match them to the rules given in the box:

Are you listening? (auxiliary verb + subject + main verb)

When will he arrive? (question word + auxiliary word + subject + main verb)

Who telephoned? (*who* is the subject so no auxiliary verb is needed)

Check answers with the whole class. Accept all correct answers.

ANSWERS:


- 1 can I / may I 2 Is it / Is that 3 would you mind
 4 do I / can I / will I 5 Did you 6 was it 7 have you
 8 Do I 9 you don't 10 could you / can you / would you
 11 can you / could you / will you
 12 Will I have / Do I have / Do I need
 13 You needn't / You don't have to / You don't / You won't
 14 you might have / you might need / you may have / you may need / you'll have / you'll need / you have / you need

FURTHER PRACTICE

Ask students to comment on the tone of the conversation, using some of the adjectives they practised in 2.2, exercise 2. Possible answers are: *appreciative, reassuring, patient, pleasant, helpful*. Get students to practise the conversation with a partner using an appropriate tone.

If you think students need more practice of questions before they continue, work through the exercises in the *Grammar and practice* (page 120 and 121 in the Student's Book, answers on page 116 in this book).

Listening

2  1:22 Play the recording, pause at the beep, and ask students to summarize the features of the product (it's found in every office; it's small enough to put in your pocket; it uses electricity; it is connected with computers, but you don't use it to speak to people. It isn't expensive; it has replaced the floppy disk). Accept all guesses about what the mystery product might be, but don't confirm the correct answer yet.

Play to the end of the game so that students can check the answer.

ANSWER:

a USB memory stick

RECORDING SCRIPT

1:22

- A: Welcome back to *Guess the Product*. Our next mystery product is a very clever and very practical piece of technology. Panel, you've just ten questions to help you 'guess the product'!
- B: OK. Is it advertised on TV?
- A: No, it isn't.
- C: Do you use it for work?
- A: Yes, you do.
- D: Would you find one in every office?
- A: Yes, you would.
- C: Can you put it in your pocket?
- A: Yes, you can.
- D: Did it exist ten years ago?
- A: No, it didn't.
- C: Does it use electricity?
- A: Yes, it does.
- B: Do you use it to speak to people?
- A: No, you don't.
- C: Is there a connection with computers?
- A: Yes, there is.
- B: Does it cost more than \$30?
- A: No, it doesn't.
- D: Has it replaced the floppy disk?
- A: Yes it has.
- [beep]
- A: All right, that's ten questions. Now, have you 'guessed the product'?
- D: We think it's a USB memory stick.
- A: Yeesss! Well done! You have correctly 'guessed the product'!

3 Get students to try to complete the questions before they listen again. Then play 1:22 again so that they can check or complete the answers. Draw attention to the formation of questions using auxiliary verbs.

ANSWERS:

- 1 Is it advertised on TV?
- 2 Do you use it for work?
- 3 Would you find one in every office?
- 4 Can you put it in your pocket?
- 5 Did it exist ten years ago?
- 6 Does it use electricity?
- 7 Do you use it to speak to people?
- 8 Is there a connection with computers?
- 9 Does it cost more than \$30?
- 10 Has it replaced the floppy disk?

4 To help students with this activity, you could bring in some pictures of products or simply write the name of some products on cards. You could match the products to students' areas of interest or the work they are involved with.

Making requests

5 Give students a few minutes to complete the sentences and put them in order. Then elicit which words need to be followed by the *-ing* form of the verb (in sentence 2 *mind* is followed by the *-ing* form; in sentence 6 *to* is used as a preposition so needs to be followed by the *-ing* form).

Ask students what features the most direct sentences have (they're shorter and less complex) and what features the most polite sentences have (they're longer, with introductory phrases leading up to the request).

ANSWERS:

Ordered from most direct to most polite:

- 4 Fax me the details, will you?
- 1 Can you fax me the details?
- 5 Could you fax me the details, please?
- 2 Would you mind faxing me the details?
- 3 Do you think you could possibly fax me the details, please?
- 6 I was wondering if you would have any objection to faxing me the details?

6 With a partner, students say each request aloud and reply with the responses given here. They should be able to hear what works and what doesn't work and identify the inappropriate ones.

ANSWERS:

- e) No, no problem.
The negative is appropriate for 2 and 6, but not for the others.

Roleplay

7 Read the list of requests with students and get them to comment on how 'big' each one is, i.e. how much trouble will it cause the person you are asking? Is the request fairly simple / undemanding or is it more substantial? Point out that this will influence how direct or indirect the request will be. Remind students about appropriate tone of voice – the more demanding the request, the more tentative their tone might need to be.

Circulate while students are speaking and assist where necessary. When they have finished, ask some pairs to present their requests and responses.

If students need more practice with making requests, work through the exercises in *Grammar and practice* (page 121 in the Student's Book, answers on page 116 in this book).

Giving instructions

8 If students are uncertain about the six modal verbs here, work through exercises 13 and 14 which provide simple definitions of each one in *Grammar and practice* (page 121 in the Student's Book, answers on page 116 in this book).

Students could work alone to complete Steve's side of the conversation, then compare their answers with a partner. Check answers with the whole class, referring to the definitions given on page 121 in the Student's Book.

ANSWERS:

- 1 don't
- 2 'll have to / 'll need to
- 3 needn't / don't have to
- 4 Don't
- 5 might have to
- 6 'll need to / 'll have to
- 7 don't
- 8 needn't / don't have to
- 9 don't
- 10 needn't / don't have to

9 1:23 With a partner, get students to try to complete Pete's side of the conversation. You might want to point out that not all of his lines are questions. Ask students to note down what he says. Then play the recording. Get students to dictate their lines to you and write them on the board. Take whole-class feedback on the versions they wrote themselves – some of them may be perfectly acceptable.

RECORDING SCRIPT

1:23

Steve: OK, Pete. First of all, you open the printer. No, wait a minute, don't just open it, select 'change cartridge' from the menu.

Pete: From the menu? Do I have to switch the printer on?

S: Er, yes, of course you have to switch it on, otherwise you can't use the menu!

- P: Oh, right. What about the computer?
 S: No, that's all right, you needn't switch the PC on, just the printer.
 P: All right. So, the printer's on, select 'change cartridge', OK, and open the printer. What now?
 S: So now you gently remove the old cartridge. Don't force it. If it's difficult, you might have to pull it back first, then upwards.
 P: Backwards, then upwards. All right, I've got it.
 S: OK, so now you can install the new cartridge. You'll need to remove the adhesive tape first, but be careful you don't touch the printed circuits – they're very fragile.
 P: You needn't worry. I'm being very careful. OK, that's it.
 S: Right. It'll ask you if you want to align the new cartridge, but you needn't bother. Usually it's fine as it is.
 P: OK; what about the old one? Can I just throw it in the bin?
 S: Oh no, don't throw the old cartridge away. You can recycle them.
 P: Oh yes, right. Listen, that's great. I really appreciate your help. Is there anything I can do for you?
 S: No, that's all right, Pete. You needn't worry. Just buy me a beer some time!

10 Read through the list of topics with students. Give them a few minutes to come up with at least two ideas of their own, if necessary. Remind students to start by making a request – refer them back to the language in exercise 5. They should also try to use the modal verbs and reformulate their answers to show understanding, if they can.

Conversations should begin something like this:

A: *Would you mind explaining how to change the oil in a car?*

B: *No, no problem.*

FURTHER PRACTICE

Give students a list of answers and get them to write the questions. Do the first one with the whole class. Then ask students to work with a partner and write questions. Some of the examples below are deliberately quite open-ended, and there are many possible answers.

Yes, that's fine. (Possible questions: *Could I call you tomorrow? / Can I leave early today? / I was wondering if I could borrow your laptop?*)

I'll finish the report tomorrow.

I'm sorry, but I'm not in the office on Wednesday.

I never work on Sundays.

I'm afraid I can't do that.

She's not here at the moment. Could you call back later?

I'll do it straight away.

I'd be happy to help.

Yes, we can deliver on Friday.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Get students to write three requests on three separate slips of paper, using the phrases practised in the unit, e.g.:

Can you ...

Would you mind ...

I was wondering if you could ...

The requests could be work-related or on a general topic; the request could be to a colleague, customer, friend, etc. They may need to write an extra sentence to set the context for the request, e.g.:

I forgot to go to the bank today. I was wondering if you could lend me some money for lunch?

You haven't got the printer I want. Can you sell me the next model up for the same price?

Students circulate, making their requests and responding to each other. The responses could be positive or negative.

2.4 Speaking

Dealing with problems by telephone

This module deals with appropriate language and intonation for a telephone helpline conversation, and focuses on explaining problems, diagnosing causes, giving instructions, and promising help.

Internet research

The BBC World Service radio programmes typically include news, business, science and nature, health, technology, entertainment, sports, etc. so students should be able to find something to interest them. Lower-level students might prefer to choose a short programme.

Remind students that they are listening to get the general meaning of the programme and to pick out three interesting points. They may need to listen to the programme two or three times to do this. Students could make a note of any new vocabulary they learn connected with the topic.

Giving instructions

1 To prepare students for this task, ask them to draw a 3x3-square grid like this and to number it as shown.

1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

Ask them to do the following without letting anyone else see: *Draw a small circle in the middle of square 1, and a slightly bigger circle in the middle of square 9.*

Join the circles with a straight line that goes diagonally through square 5.

Draw small crosses in the middle of squares 3 and 7.

Join the crosses with a curved line that goes through squares 4 and 2 and which touches the top left-hand corner of square 5.

Ask students to compare their drawings with each other.

Tell them they are now going to give similar instructions to their partner so that their partner can draw the sign they are describing. The signs are typical signs that you might see on public transport or on road signs.


Before they begin, you could check that students know the following words that may be useful: *square, triangle, semi-circle, corners, curved, straight, along (the line), the middle of, diagonal, vertical, horizontal.*

ANSWERS:

Student A will describe a 'no mobile phones allowed' / 'switch off mobile phones' sign.

Student B will describe a 'disabled access' / 'disabled toilets' sign.

Listening

2  1:24 Read the questions and get students to predict the kind of things that might be said, given that this is a telephone conversation on a software helpline.

Play the recording and check answers with the whole class.

Ask students:

Did the helpline operator handle the call well?

Was the customer satisfied?

ANSWERS:

1 The customer can't import spreadsheets into a Superword document.

2 The operator promises to ask the spreadsheet specialist to call back in a few minutes.

RECORDING SCRIPT

1:24

- Helpline: Thank you for calling the Superword hotline. Please hold the line.
- Dean: Good morning. Dean speaking. How can I help you?
- Customer: Oh, good morning. Yes, I'm afraid your programme isn't working properly.
- D: Oh, I'm sorry to hear that. What exactly seems to be the problem?
- C: Well, the thing is, I can't put those automatic table thingies in my documents.
- D: I'm sorry, it's not a very good line. Could you speak up a little?
- C: Yes, sorry. I'm on my mobile. Is that better?
- D: Yes, that's much better, thank you.
- C: All right. Anyway, I was just saying, I can't insert those tables.
- D: Oh, I see. You're having trouble importing spreadsheets into a Superword document?
- C: Yes, that's right.
- D: All right, I'll put you through to our spreadsheet specialist.
- C: Thank you.
- D: Hello?
- C: Yes?
- D: I'm sorry, the number's engaged. Could I ask her to get back to you in a few minutes?
- C: Yes, that's fine.
- D: OK, then. So, you're on 0680 425232?
- C: That's right.
- D: And could I have your name please?
- C: Wyndham. Delia Wyndham.
- D: Is that Wyndham with a 'y'?
- C: That's right. W-Y-N-D-H-A-M.
- D: Thank you, Ms Wyndham. I'm sure we'll be able to sort it out.
- C: Thank you very much.
- D: Not at all. Goodbye.

3 Play 1:24 again. Pause from time to time to allow students to write down the expressions they hear. Check answers with the whole class.

ANSWERS:

- 1 Please hold the line.
- 2 Dean speaking.
- 3 How can I help you?
- 4 What exactly seems to be the problem?
- 5 It's not a very good line.
- 6 Could you speak up a little?
- 7 I'll put you through to ...
- 8 The number's engaged.
- 9 Could I ask her to get back to you?
- 10 So, you're on ...
- 11 Could I have your name please?
- 12 Not at all.

Improving a conversation

4 You could get a student to read the part of the customer, while you read the part of the helpline operator so that you can exaggerate the negative tone of the operator. Ask the rest of the class:

How does the helpline operator sound? (e.g. rude and aggressive)

How would you feel if a helpline operator spoke to you in this way? (e.g. annoyed).

With lower-level classes, get students to first tell you how they could improve the conversation (make the sentences less direct / longer; use a more polite tone of voice).

During the activity, circulate and assist where necessary. Choose one or two pairs to present their conversations to the class.

Get students to turn to the second conversation on page 112 in the Student's Book. This time get two students to read the conversation aloud. Ask students:

How does the hotline operator sound? (e.g. bored / uninterested).

Repeat the rest of the procedure as above.


SUGGESTED ANSWER:**Conversation 1**

- Helpline: Superword helpline. Hold the line, please ... Thank you for holding. May I help you?
- Customer: Yes, I'm afraid I'm having a problem with your program.
- Helpline: I'm sorry to hear that. Let me sort that out for you.
- Customer: Yes, I'd appreciate that.
- Helpline: All right. What sort of problems are you having?
- Customer: Well, I can't print PDF files.
- Helpline: Sorry? I'm afraid it's not a very good line. Could you speak up a bit?
- Customer: Oh sorry, yes. Is this better? I was just saying that I can't print PDF files.
- Helpline: I see. In that case, I think it would be best to speak to our PDF expert.
- Customer: All right, can you put me through?
- Helpline: Well, I'm afraid he's not available at the moment, but I can ask him to call you back. When would be convenient for you?
- Customer: Tomorrow morning?
- Helpline: That would be fine. On this number, Ms, er...?
- Customer: Gearhirt. Jamila Gearhirt.
- Helpline: Could you spell that please?
- Customer: Yes, of course. That's G-E-A-R-H-I-R-T.
- Helpline: All right, Ms Gearhirt. Tomorrow morning at about 9 o'clock, then?
- Customer: Yes, that's perfect. Thank you very much.
- Helpline: You're welcome. Goodbye.

Conversation 2

- Helpline: Good afternoon. May I help you?
- Customer: Oh, hello. Is that Autosales?
- Helpline: Yes, sir. Pamela speaking. How can I help you?
- Customer: Oh, good. Well, I'm calling about the new car I bought last week. It won't start.
- Helpline: Oh, I'm very sorry to hear that. It must be very annoying for you.
- Customer: Well, can you do something about it?
- Helpline: I'm afraid the mechanics are all out to lunch right now, sir.
- Customer: Well, can I leave a message?
- Helpline: Yes of course. Could I have your name please?
- Customer: It's McCready. Alistair McCready.
- Helpline: Ah, yes, Mr McCready. All right, I'll make sure someone calls you back first thing after lunch.
- Customer: All right. Well, I'll be expecting your call. Goodbye.
- Helpline: Goodbye, Mr McCready.

Handling problems

5  1:25 Read the questions with the students and then play the recording. You could pause the recording after the customer's question, *What do I tell them?*, and see if students can predict what the operator says, before playing through to the end.

ANSWERS:

- 1 The customer can't use WordPerfect because there is a power outage.
- 2 The operator tells the customer to take his computer back to the store because he is too stupid to own a computer.

RECORDING SCRIPT

 1:25

Operator: Customer support. May I help you?

Customer: Yes, well, I'm having trouble with WordPerfect.

O: Well, let me sort that out for you. What exactly seems to be the problem?

C: It doesn't work. It won't accept anything when I type.

O: I see. How long have you been having this problem?

C: Well, about ten minutes.

O: And was it working properly before that?

C: Sure. I was just typing away, and all of a sudden the words went away.

O: You mean they just disappeared?

C: Yes. Just like that.

O: Hm. So what does your screen look like now?

C: Nothing.

O: Nothing?

C: It's a blank. Like I said, it won't accept anything when I type.

O: Uh-huh. Have you tried hitting 'Escape'?

C: Yes. Nothing happens.

O: OK. Did you quit WordPerfect?

C: I don't know. How do I tell if I quit?

O: Can you see the toolbar on the screen?

C: What's a toolbar?

O: OK, never mind. Can you move the cursor around on the screen?

C: There isn't any cursor. I told you, I can't type anything.

O: I see. Does your monitor have a power indicator?

C: What's a monitor?

O: It's the thing with the screen on it that looks like a TV. Does it have a little light that tells you when it's on?

C: I don't know.

O: Well, could you look on the back of the monitor and find where the power cord goes into it? Can you see that?

C: Yes, I think so.

O: Great. Now you just have to follow the cord to the plug, and tell me if it's plugged into the wall.

C: Er, yes, it is.

O: All right. Now, when you were behind the monitor, did you notice that there were two cables plugged into the back of it, not just one?

C: No.

O: Well, there are. I need you to look back there again and find the other cable.

C: ... OK, here it is.

O: Good. Could you tell me if it's plugged securely into the back of your computer?

C: I can't reach.

O: Uh-huh. Well, you don't have to touch it. Can you just see if it's plugged in?

C: No. It's too dark.

O: So, you mean the lights are off?

C: Yes.

O: Well, couldn't you just turn on the light?

C: I can't.

O: No? Why not?

C: Because there's a power outage.

O: A power ... A power outage? Ah, OK. I can handle this now. Listen, for the power outage, I'll have someone call the electricity company. For your WordPerfect problem, do you still have the boxes and manuals and packing stuff your computer came in?

C: Well, yes. I keep them in the closet.


O: Good. I'd like you to go and get them, to unplug your system and to pack it up just like it was when you got it. Then I want you to take it back to the store you bought it from.

C: Really? Is it that bad?

O: Yes, I'm afraid it is.

C: Well, all right then, I suppose. What do I tell them?

O: Tell them you're too stupid to own a computer.

6  1:25 again, pausing at appropriate places to allow students time to complete the expressions. Get students to read the expressions aloud and check for pronunciation.

ANSWERS:


- A** Explaining the problem
I'm having **trouble** with WordPerfect.
It doesn't **work**.
It **won't** accept anything when I type.
Nothing **happens**.
I **can't** type anything.
- B** Diagnosing the causes
Was it **working properly** before that?
What does your screen **look like** now?
Have you **tried hitting** 'Escape'?
Did you **quit** WordPerfect?
Can you move the cursor around?
Does your monitor have a power indicator?
- C** Giving instructions
Could you look on the back of the monitor?
Now **you just have to** follow the cord to the plug.
I need you to look back there again.
I'd like you to go and get them.
Then **I want you to** take it back to the store.
- D** Promising help
I'll have someone call the electricity company.

7 Get individual students to read the expressions aloud one by one. Ask the rest of the class to say which category they belong to.

ANSWERS:

- B** Have you installed any new software?
D I'll get our technical expert to help you.
A I'm having difficulty connecting to the Internet.
A It keeps crashing.
C You'll have to adjust the settings in the control panel.
D We'll get back to you in a couple of hours.
B What happens if you press 'Control' - 'Alt' - 'Delete'?
D I'll have a technician call as soon as possible.

Pronunciation

8  1:26 Play the recording and ask students to note down whether the intonation rises or falls at the end of each question. Ask if they can see the pattern, i.e. intonation falls at the end of the *wh-* questions and rises at the end of the *yes / no* questions.

While students are practising reading the questions with a partner, circulate and check intonation.

ANSWERS:

- 1 a) down b) down c) up d) up e) up
f) down

RECORDING SCRIPT

1:26

- What does your screen look like now?
- What's a toolbar?
- Did you quit WordPerfect?
- Does your monitor have a power indicator?
- Can you see the toolbar on the screen?
- What do I tell them?

FURTHER PRACTICE

Ask students to provide answers to the questions, to turn them into simple exchanges.

Roleplay

9 Read through the instructions with students. Make sure they understand all the technical problems listed. For their own ideas, students could use a real problem that they have experienced themselves. Remind students to use the language they practised in exercises 6–8 and to use the appropriate intonation.

With lower-level classes you may like to construct a conversation using one of the problems as a whole-class activity.

To consolidate the language work, get students to write down one or two of the conversations for homework.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Finishing a telephone call can often be difficult to do. Brainstorm the kinds of things that students might need to do at the end of a call, and suggest some useful phrases or expressions for each one, e.g.:

- Signal that you would like to end the call
Well, it's been good talking to you.
Is there anything else we need to discuss?
I'm afraid I have to go – I have a meeting in five minutes.
- Confirming action
Can we just go over what we've agreed to do?
Could you put that in an email for me?
I'll put that in writing and send it to you later today.
- Promising action
I'll take care of that.
I'll get back to you about that.
- Closing statements
It's been very nice talking to you.
See you at the meeting next week.
Have a good weekend.
Well, I really must go now.

Students should practise saying these expressions with the appropriate intonation. Then, with a partner, they use them in the closing stages of some telephone conversations, e.g.:

A: *That's been a very helpful conversation. We've covered a lot today. Thanks a lot.*

B: *You're welcome.*

A: (Finish the call.)

A: *I think that's everything I wanted to ask you. Do you have any more questions?*

B: *Not right now, no.*

A: (Finish the call.)

A: *I really appreciate your help with the sales report. I've made a lot of notes about what we've discussed.*

B: *That's great. I'm glad I could help.*

A: (Finish the call.)

2.5 Writing**Formal and informal correspondence**

This module explores aspects of formal and informal style in different kinds of business correspondence.

Internet research

Email risk policy refers to the range of issues that companies need to be concerned about in their use of email. It covers, for example, privacy issues, sexual harassment, bullying, online libel, theft of confidential information, etc. This can lead to losses in productivity, financial loss, and damage to a company's reputation. Companies may find themselves involved in costly legal proceedings as a result of email misuse or abuse. Companies should have a clear policy in place to cover these eventualities.

Students could also be asked to search news or business websites for items about the misuse or abuse of email, and report back to the class on any interesting stories they find which illustrate the risks involved.

Discussion

1 Remind students to think about grammar, vocabulary, style, opening, closing, etc. when they are discussing the differences between formal and informal correspondence.

Give pairs a few minutes to discuss and note down their answers, then take feedback from the whole class. Make a list on the board of all the points they raise. Keep this list, and add to it throughout the lesson as other points come up.

SUGGESTED ANSWER:

Depending on the language, typical features which distinguish formal from informal or neutral styles are: use of titles or specific form of address; use of polite / familiar 2nd person pronoun; absence / use of 1st person pronoun; absence / use of conventional polite expressions; use of indirect / direct style; use of formal / informal vocabulary; absence / use of contractions; use of references; reference to previous correspondence; length of sentences; layout constraints.

Skim reading

2 Remind students what skim reading is (see page 7).

Question 1: Ask students to skim read the emails quickly to identify who the emails are from.

ANSWERS:

4 a customer service department

3 a senior colleague

1 a junior colleague

2 a customer

Question 2: Students can work with a partner to decide which two emails are formal and which two are neutral / informal. Ask them to give reasons for their answers.

ANSWERS:

Formal messages: 1, 2

Neutral / informal messages: 3, 4

Reading for detail

3 Students should re-read the emails in exercise 2 more closely to complete the grid.

With lower-level classes, you could do the first email as a whole-class activity. When the grid has been completed, elicit from students the differences between the two columns, i.e. in the formal column, the expressions are usually longer and more complex; in the informal column, they are shorter; unimportant words are omitted; vocabulary is less formal/more colloquial, etc.

ANSWERS:

	Formal	Neutral / Informal
Greeting	Dear Ms Reckett,	Hi James,
	Dear Sir or Madam,	Dear Miss Roebottom,
Opening	I am writing with regard to ...	Thanks for your mail.
	I am writing to enquire about ...	Re your email ...
Requests	I was wondering if you could ...?	Give me a ring ...
	I would be very grateful if you could ...	Can you just ... ?
Closing	I would very much appreciate any help.	Hope this helps.
	Thank you for your help.	Don't hesitate to get back to me.
Salutation	Yours sincerely,	Cheers,
	Yours faithfully,	Regards,

Skim reading

4 Get students to read each pair of emails and refer back to the emails in exercise 2 to decide which two writers have changed style and why.

Point out that it is usually good practice to write a first email to someone in a fairly formal style, and then to adjust (or retain) this style according to the response that you receive.

ANSWERS / SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

Question 1

James has adapted to Margaret's informal style after confirming that she remembers him from the party. Max has switched to Miss Roebottom's formal style after discovering that she is not in fact an old friend.

Question 2

Email 5

Thanks → Thank you ...

Cheers → Yours sincerely

Email 6

I would be very grateful if you could → Can you ...

I would like to express my gratitude for → Thanks for ...

Email 7

I've attached ... → Please find attached ...

Hope this helps. → Do not hesitate to contact us again if you need any further information.

Email 8

I was wondering if you would mind coming ... → Could you come / Why don't you come ...?

Yours sincerely → Best wishes

Writing

5 Before students start this activity, explain the context to the whole class, i.e. Students A and B work for Relopharma, a pharmaceuticals company. Student A works in the Accounts Department and Student B in the Information Systems Department. Student C works for Nakisoft, a software company specializing in accountancy software, and one of Relopharma's suppliers. The task is for students to write and reply to a number of emails.

Get students to predict the kinds of things they might be asked to write about. It doesn't matter if they don't get the right answers – the idea is simply to get them thinking about the topic.

To help students focus on the task, ask them to tell you the style they will use (this will depend to some extent on the contents of the emails, but as they are all colleagues a fairly neutral style would be most appropriate). Remind them that the emails should be fairly short and to the point, but still polite.

Give students time to read the instructions and circulate to assist with understanding them, where necessary. Remind students that they have already practised much of the language needed to do the task in earlier parts of the unit, i.e. explaining the problem giving instructions, making requests, etc. Once students are sure what to do, get them to start writing. Higher-level students could be asked to write within a time limit.

To simulate reality, students should not ask their partners to clarify or explain anything in the email – if something is unclear, they should 'email' back for clarification.

While students are writing, circulate and assist where necessary. When they have finished the task, ask groups of students to read a string of emails aloud. Get the rest of the class to comment on the following questions:

Is the correspondence effective?

Is the style appropriate? If not, can you (either the person who wrote it or a classmate) suggest ways of improving it?

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Use this matching exercise to extend students' formal vocabulary. For lower-level classes, give both the informal and formal words. You could dictate the words or write them on the board. With higher-level classes, you could give just the informal words, and get them to work out the formal words for themselves, possibly with the help of a dictionary. (The informal / formal words are presented in the correct order. You will need to mix up one list of words so that students have to match them to the correct equivalent.)

Informal	Formal
to say sorry	to apologize
enough	sufficient
secret	confidential
quickly	promptly
to tell	to inform
late	overdue
to get in touch	to contact
to move	to relocate
to ask	to enquire
help	co-operation

2.6 Case study

Cybertartan Software

This case study examines the problems faced by a contact centre – customer dissatisfaction, staff recruitment and retention, rising costs – and how they might be tackled.

Internet research

FLSA stands for *Fair Labor Standards Act*. This is a law in the USA which deals with employment issues, including minimum wage, overtime pay, record-keeping, and working conditions for children. It covers full-time and part-time workers in the public and private sector. Employers who violate the Act may be fined or prosecuted.

The FLSA does not require employers to give employees meal or rest breaks, but if they do, they should usually be paid for short breaks (up to about 20 minutes), but not for longer breaks (usually lasting at least 30 minutes).

According to the FLSA, employees should be given bathroom breaks, but there are no federal laws that refer to the number and duration of bathroom breaks. This is covered by regulations issued by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the USA.

Students can research these issues in the employment laws of their own countries and report back to the class. Possible discussion questions are:

Did they find out anything that surprises them?

What effect do they think these laws might have on productivity and morale among workers?

Do you disagree with any of the regulations?

What would you change?

Discussion

1 Read the list of customer problems with the whole class and ask them to give you some real-world examples of each one. This could be things they've experienced themselves or things they've heard about.

With lower-level classes you could give one or two examples of your own to get them started, e.g. you got poorly translated instructions with an electronic product you bought; you were put on hold for a long time by a bank or insurance company and the call cost you a lot of money; the waiter / waitress in a coffee shop was very unfriendly and the service was slow, etc.

With a partner, get students to pick the three things that annoy them most. Take whole-class feedback, asking students to raise their hands for each problem listed in the box. Ask individual students to say why the problem annoys them.

Give students a few minutes to discuss what a customer could do about these problems. The solutions could be realistic or imaginary, i.e. what would you really like to do, even though it might be very difficult or impossible to achieve, but would be very satisfying!

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

Customers can make a complaint; send a product back to the manufacturer; refuse to buy specific products or use specific shops, etc.

Scan reading

2 Remind students what scan reading is (see page 7).
Question 1: Get students to read the email silently and look for the four problems. Ask individual students to tell you what the problems are.
Question 2: Answer this as a whole-class activity. Ask individual students to explain the links in their own words.

ANSWER:

Question 1
customer satisfaction, recruitment problems, high staff turnover, need to reduce costs

Question 2
Customers are dissatisfied because there aren't enough advisers and because they are kept on hold to increase call charges; more money rather than less is required to recruit and keep good staff.


Reading for detail

3 Ask students to read the statements silently. Then read the email aloud. Get students to raise their hands when they hear the answer to the statements. Tell them that they will need to look at the email and the pie charts to find the answers. Ask them to give the words from the email which match the true statements, correct the false statements, and explain the 'it depends' statements.

ANSWERS:

- 1 T
- 2 F (employees and customers are dissatisfied)
- 3 F (average call 12 minutes @ £0.50 / minute = £6: cost of call = £4.50)
- 4 D (it depends – perhaps not if hold time is reduced)
- 5 T
- 6 F (only 'very dissatisfied' tripled)
- 7 T

Listening for detail

4  1:27 Play the first two lines of the interview – the interviewer's question and Laurie McAllister's response – and elicit the answer to the question. Ask:

What other problem does she mention? (salaries)

How does the problem with salaries affect the contact centre? (The salaries haven't kept pace with the cost of living and the company can't attract workers to the area.)

Get students to discuss briefly why they think working conditions and job satisfaction are more important to the workers than salary. Do they feel the same way about their own jobs?

ANSWER:

The shift system

RECORDING SCRIPT

 1:27

Interviewer: So, Laurie, these recruitment and turnover problems we're having – is it just a question of money?

Laurie McAllister: Well of course salaries are not terribly attractive these days. They were quite good a few years ago when the centre opened, but they haven't really increased with the cost of living, especially now house prices are so expensive here, so we're finding it more difficult to attract people from outside the area. But, actually, salaries are not the biggest problem. Basically there are two reasons why our turnover is high: working conditions and job satisfaction.

I: I see. What's the matter with working conditions? We give them free coffee, don't we?

LM: Well, things are very different now from when we started. In the past, the volume of calls was much lower, so things were more relaxed. Advisers had time to chat or have a cigarette between two calls. Now, the workload is much heavier, and the supervisors have to be very strict about breaks. Two bathroom breaks per day, and twenty minutes for lunch. There's a lot of unhappiness about that. And

punctuality, well, the bus service here is totally inadequate. A lot of advisers can't afford a car, so transport is a real problem, especially at night.

I: Yes, I can see why that's a problem.

LM: And there are little things, you know, like having your own personal space. When you share your desk with your colleagues on the other shifts, you can't really personalize anything.

I: Hm. Maybe there are things that can be improved there. What's the problem with job satisfaction?

LM: Time, mostly. Our software products have become so complex that customers need more and more help. There are more calls than we can answer, so advisers have to keep them as short as possible. That's frustrating because there isn't time to build a relationship with the customer; sometimes there isn't even time to explain the solution properly. And then of course they say if they can't spend longer on the phone, they would like to send out instructions by email.

I: Yes, well, the customers would like that too, but we can't charge them for it like we can phone calls!

LM: Exactly. And we really need to give the advisers more training, especially the new people, but there just isn't time. They often have to read out instructions from the manual; it's not much fun answering questions when you don't really understand the answers yourself!

I: No. I can see that.

LM: Of course the thing they really don't like is the shift system. They work one week in the morning, from 6am to 2pm, one week in the afternoon from 2pm to 10pm, and one week nights, 10pm to 6am. I mean, it's OK for young, single people, but it's impossible for women with children, so that's a whole category of the population we have virtually no chance of employing. And some people actually like working nights, so they would happily swap their day shifts with other colleagues who don't want to work nights — but the company won't let them. It's company policy, but it's too rigid, it's just not realistic ... Anyway, perhaps you should talk to the advisers themselves — get it straight from the horse's mouth, as they say.

5 Read the statements aloud or get students to read them aloud and predict what effects they might have on the workers at the contact centre. Then play 1:27 again. Pause the recording after the answer to each statement and allow students a few minutes to make notes. Check answers with the whole class.

ANSWERS:

- 1 This leads to high staff turnover.
- 2 Supervisors have to be strict about punctuality and breaks.
- 3 Punctuality is a problem.
- 4 Advisers can't personalize their work space.
- 5 Customers need more help; there are more calls than the centre can answer, so advisers have to make calls as short as possible.
- 6 Advisers have to read out instructions from the manual; explaining things they don't understand themselves is not satisfying.
- 7 There is no chance of employing women with children.

Solving problems

6 Read through the instructions and the agenda with the whole class. As a reminder, you could get students to list the problems experienced at the Kirkcaldy contact centre. Students then use this list to prepare their presentations. Then in groups, students should brainstorm solutions and make recommendations.

Writing presentation slides

7 Before students prepare their slides, brainstorm what makes an effective slide (use only short phrases or sentences; use headings and bullet points to make the text easier to read and remember, etc.). Don't go into too much detail at this stage as Unit 7 deals with this in more depth.

Remind students that the slides are just about their recommendations, and each recommendation should have three parts — what it is, why it's a good idea, and what the expected results will be.

Circulate while students are working on their slides and assist where necessary.

Presentations

8 To help students with their presentations, you could give them a list of useful phrases, e.g.:

First of all, I'd like to ...

Let's look at the problem of ...

That's all I have to say on ...

Now let's move on to ...

That brings me to the end of my presentation.

Are there any questions?

The presentation should be fairly short and concise. One student in each group could be nominated to give the presentation, or each student could present one recommendation.

FURTHER PRACTICE

Get students to write a short report from the consultants to Hamish Hamilton, consisting of a summary of the situation and the recommendations they have made in their presentations.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Students rank these factors related to job satisfaction from most important to least important. They could do this individually first, and then discuss their answers in small groups.

- *good interpersonal relationships with colleagues*
- *job security*
- *promotion prospects*
- *interesting, challenging work*
- *a good salary and bonuses*
- *independence / autonomy to act*
- *good communications and information flow within the organization*
- *opportunities for personal growth and development*
- *a good manager*
- *benefits package (healthcare, gym membership, etc.)*
- *company pension scheme*