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## UNIT 4 TELEPHONE CONVERSATION

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### 4.0 OBJECTIVES

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After you complete this unit, you will be able to:

- differentiate between telephone conversation and face to face conversation; and
- strengthen your skills in the use of the telephone so that you can effectively engage in formal and informal conversation; talk politely to strangers and make emergency business calls.

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### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

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In the previous units of this block you studied various types of face-to-face conversations. Now we are going to discuss telephone conversations. The fact that one cannot see the speaker or the listener on the other side of the telephone line makes a lot of difference to the language we use. In face-to-face conversation we can see each other's reactions. Our facial expressions and gestures help to reinforce the ideas we express. These extra-linguistic features of face-to-face communication are missing when we speak on the telephone. To overcome this disadvantage we try to be very careful in our speech on the phone so that nothing is missed by the listener. We can't see the listener's reactions, so we can't be sure s/he has heard or understood us. We, therefore, repeat certain sentences. We are careful with our stress and intonation and lay emphasis on the important words. Telephone conversation also have various functions which we generally don't like to perform through direct face-to-face conversation. In the busy world of today we use the telephone for a variety of purposes — both formal and informal. We shall consider several of these uses in this unit.

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### 4.2 FACE-TO-FACE AND TELEPHONE CONVERSATION COMPARED

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There are obviously situations in which a face-to-face conversation would be more effective, and others in which a telephone conversation would save a lot of time and bother. Let's consider this face-to-face conversation first. Notice that the descriptions of things or objects familiar to the two speakers are kept to the minimum.

#### Conversation

Jack's dog is wagging his tail in front of his master and then goes to Jack's friend, Jill, who is sitting on the grass nearby. The dog plays with Jill.

Jill: Nice dog! A labrador?

Jack: Oh, mixed breed.

Jill sees that the dog hurriedly brings back a ball thrown by Jack into a bush.

Jill: Hm. A retriever, isn't it?

Jack :Yes.

(The dog scratches itself and reveals a patch of skin with loss of hair.)

Jill watches the patch curiously.

Jack: Don't know where he got it. Must have eaten oily stuff somewhere.

Jill : I think he's also got ticks. Better take him to a vet.

(The dog whines in a peculiar manner)

Jack: Does that sometimes.

### Vocabulary

*Wagging*: shaking (a part of the body) from side to side

*Labrador*: a kind of large dog

*Retriever*: a hunting dog trained to bring back shot birds

*Vet*: short for veterinary surgeon (a trained animal doctor)

Notice how quickly information is conveyed with a bare minimum of words. Jill's looking curiously at the patch on the dog is a type of question which Jack answers. Notice the short sentences. 'A labrador'? 'A retriever, isn't it?'

and the clipped sentences without a subject — 'Don't know where he got it', 'Must have eaten oily stuff,' 'Does that sometimes.'

Now let's make the same dog the subject of a conversation between Jack and Jill on the telephone. Jill hasn't seen the dog.

### Conversation

The phone is ringing in Jill's bedroom. Jill answers the phone.

Jill : 670321. Jill Harden speaking.

Jack : Oh hello, Jill. I'm Jack here.

Jill: Oh hello, Jack. How are you?

Jack: I'm fine. Thank you.

Jill: Well, what is it?

Jack: I rang to tell you that I've finally bought a dog.

Jill: Oh, when was this? This calls for a celebration.

Jack: Last week.

Jill: What breed is it?

Jack: A mixed breed

Jill: And does it guard the house well?

Jack: It does. But it's meant to be a retriever. When I play golf, he brings back the ball when it's out of my range.

Jill: Lucky, Jack. Must be a strong dog.

Jack: Yes, but I noticed a hairless patch on his skin two days back. Don't know where he got it from.

Jill: Better take him to the vet before it gets worse.

**Vocabulary**

670321 Jill Harden speaking: It is proper to give one's phone number and name at the outset, so that the speaker on the other side can be certain he's/she's speaking to the correct person. One is usually formal to begin with because it may be a business call or a call from a stranger. One, therefore, gives one's surname also.

The two conversations above differ in a number of ways. Let's set out the differences clearly in the two columns and see the changes.

**Conversation 1**

Nice dog!

(Jill makes a good guess)

A labrador ?

(Jill makes a guess)

A retriever. (a good guess because she sees it retrieving the ball.)

(Jill watches the patch curiously without saying anything.)

Jill: I think he's also got ticks.

(Jill sees him scratching the skin.)

Jill looks silently on as the dog whines.

'Does that sometimes,' Jack explains.

**Conversation 2**

I've finally bought a dog

(Jack has to introduce the topic to make Jill aware of it.)

What breed is it?

(Jill has to enquire.)

But it's meant to be a retriever.

(Jack has to inform her.)

But I noticed a hairless patch

on his skin...(Jack has to inform her.)

Jack doesn't notice it.

So Jill can't say anything on this point.

Jack says nothing about the whining.

No context for it.

You will notice that more description is necessary in a telephone conversation. This is obviously necessary since the object cannot be seen on the telephone. The face-to face conversation conveys almost the same amount of information in about half the number of words.

**Check Your Progress 1**

- 1) Here's face-to-face conversation. Convert it into a telephone conversation.

**Inside an office: The Manager's Room**

Manager: Just bring the file.

P.A.: Here it is, Sir.

Manager: (quickly looking through it, then throwing the file on the table): Where is our letter confirming the dispatch of the consignment?

P.A.: Sir.....Sir.

Manager : You people just won't work unless..... (Draws a sheet of paper angrily to himself and writes) Come back after an hour and pick up your dismissal letter after it's typed out.

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- .....
- .....
- 2) Here's a conversation on the telephone. Convert it into a face-to-face conversation. Imagine that the object described here can be seen by the speakers during the face-to-face conversation.

**Telephone conversation**

Police Inspector: And what did the box look like?

Mrs. Dhani Ram: The colour was chestnut and the lid had ivory inlay work on it.

Police Inspector: Now wait a minute. Let me write it down. Please repeat.

Mrs. Dhani Ram: I said the colour was chestnut and the lid had ivory inlay work on it.

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### 4.3 FORMAL CONVERSATION

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The telephone is especially useful for various conversations of a formal nature, as it saves us the trouble of going personally to make the enquiry. For instance, when we wish to enquire from the railways about the timings of train, or to inform the police about a crime, we first try to ring up.

Let's take a telephone conversation in which someone is making enquiries to get some information from the railway enquiry counter.

**Conversation**

Railway Enquiry Clerk (at Bangalore Station): Yes, Railway Enquiry.

Mr. Panda: I'd like to know what trains there are for Hyderabad?

Enquiry Clerk: 86 Hyderabad and 127 Karnataka Express

Mr. Panda: What time do they leave Bangalore?

Enquiry Clerk: Hyderabad Express at 17-00 hours and Karnataka Express at 16-15.

Mr. Panda: Every day?

Enquiry Clerk: Hyderabad Express goes every day and Karnataka Express on Wednesdays and Sundays.

Mr. Panda: Thank you.

Enquiry Clerk: You're welcome.

Notice there is no difference in this case between an enquiry on the phone and a face-to face enquiry except the fact that the man at the Enquiry Counter introduces himself on the phone as 'Railway Enquiry.'

**Check Your Progress 2**

- 1) You want some information from a travel agent because you are going to Darjeeling with your family. This face-to-face conversation takes place. Change it into a telephone conversation.

Travel agent (looks up from his desk): Yes, sir. What can I do for your?

You: Er. I'm planning to go to Darjeeling with my family for a fortnight. Can you arrange a package tour for us — 2 adults and 2 children.

Travel Agent: Yes. We have a number of package tours offering different types of accommodation and transport. Now here's..... Please sit down. Now here's a brochure. This gives the details of all the tours.

You: Let me see. Travel by air, accommodation at 3-star hotel with breakfast for 15 days at 9,500 per head. This seems to suit me. I suppose the rate for children under 12 will be half.

Travel Agent: Yes. When would you like to make the trip?

You: From 6th September onwards.

Travel Agent: Please fill in the necessary details in this form.

**Vocabulary**

*Package tour:* a holiday tour arranged by a travel company in which transport, accommodation, food and sight-seeing are all taken care of for a certain sum of money that include the commission.

*Brochure:* a small thin book giving details of a service offered for money.

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2) Say whether the following conversation is being made on the phone or in a face-to-face situation. How do you know? Say what office is being contacted.

'Yes?'

'Can you tell me the conversion rate for the dollar today?'

'It's Rs. 47.50.'

'And can I get a demand draft made payable to your Howrah branch?'

'Yes. Just fill in this form.'

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If you had to book rooms at a hotel, you would normally ring up and do so. Let's take a conversation in which someone reserves accommodation for himself.

**Conversation**

Receptionist : Good Afternoon. Raj Hans Hotel. Reception.

Ashok Bajaj : I'm Ashok Bajaj speaking from Agra.

Receptionist : Yes, Mr. Bajaj? What can I do for you?

Ashok Bajaj : I'd like to book a single room for myself.

Receptionist : Would you like a room with an attached bathroom?

Ashok Bajaj : Yes. What is the charge?

Receptionist : Rs. 500 per night.

Ashok Bajaj : O.K. Please book it for me.  
 Receptionist : From what date, sir?  
 Ashok Bajaj : The 16th of January.  
 Receptionist : For how many days, sir?  
 Ashok Bajaj : 16th to 18th January. What is the check-out time?  
 Receptionist : 12 noon.  
 Ashok Bajaj : Thank you.  
 Receptionist : You're welcome. We'll wait for you, Sir.

**Vocabulary**

*Check-out time:* The time at which a guest must leave a hotel room or be charged for another day

**Check Your Progress 3**

1) What sentences prove that the receptionist is polite?

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2) Write a conversation in which you ring up a travel agent to book air tickets for you. Mention the flight, and the date you prefer. (about 100 words)

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**4.4 EMERGENCY CALLS**

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We realize that telephones are a great boon when an emergency call has to be made. If a doctor, an ambulance, or the fire brigade has to be called suddenly, or the police have to be informed of a crime, the telephone is the first thing we look for. Let's study this emergency call to a hospital.

**Conversation**

'S.L.N. Hospital. Emergency.'

'We need an ambulance immediately. My son has met with an accident and is bleeding profusely.'

'Your address, please?'

'6, Kalibari Lane, Kanchrapara.'

**Vocabulary**

*Profusely*: in large amounts

Telephone operators are busy and often hard pressed people. Occasionally they answer so quickly that the beginning of an announcement is lost. For example, the operator might have said S.L.N. Hospital, Emergency but the listener only heard .....pital, emergency. In such a case the listener does not know if he or she has got through the right number. That may cause a communication breakdown.

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) Say whether you would use the telephone in these cases or not:
  - a) You want to submit your income tax return to the income-tax office .....
  - b) You want to buy some postal stamps and envelopes .....
  - c) You want to know whether the university results are out .....
  - d) You have some recent information to share with the police .....
  - e) You want to get some information from an office .....
  - f) You want to book a table at a restaurant .....
- 2) a) Your neighbour's house is on fire. Ring up for the fire brigade.
 

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- b) Your child's fever has suddenly shot up in the night. Request your family doctor to come on a house visit.
 

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**4.4 BUSINESS CALLS**

People who are in business make use of the telephone very frequently. In fact, most businesses would be paralyzed if telephone communication failed. Orders can be lost and dispatches can be delayed without phone calls. Let's see how conversations take place in business. Let's take an example.

**Conversation**

PBX Operator : 305662. Global Medicare. Good morning.

R.K. : Good morning, I'm speaking from Matson Surgicals, Bombay.

PBX Operator : Yes?

R.K. : I'd like to speak to the Managing Director.

PBX Operator : May I know who's calling?

R.K. : Ramesh Kannan

PBX Operator : Just hold on, please. I'll see if the Managing Director is free.

PBX Operator : Yes, Mr. Kannan. I've put you through to the Managing Director.

Managing Director : Yes, Mr. Kannan. What can I do for you?

R.K.: You remember we discussed a proposal a few weeks back for a deal in adjustable hospital beds? You might recall we met at the Lodhi Hotel and....

Managing Director: Yes, yes. I remember. You want to sell our products on a consignment basis.

R.K.: That's right.

Managing Director : Well, have you sent your proposal in writing?

R.K. : Oh, yes. Last week.

Managing Director : Hm. Well, can you give me the date and reference number of the letter?

R.K : Er... Yes... Ref. BE

Managing Director : Just a minute. Let me put that down. Yes?

R.K. : Ref BE 602. Dated 10th July, 2002

Managing Director : Ref BE 602? Dated 10th July 2002?

R.K. : That's right.

Managing Director : Well look, Mr. Kannan. I'll check and put the proposal before the managing committee. Right?

R.K. : Thank you very much.

Managing Director: Bye!

R.K. : Bye.

### **Vocabulary**

305662: Three nought five double six two.

*PBX*: Private branch exchange (private telephone switchboard). Many firms have a private exchange or switchboard where an operator connects incoming calls to individual officers

*Who's calling*: Who is speaking?

*Ramesh Kannan*: Notice it is wrong to prefix Mr. or Mrs. while giving one's own name

*Hold on*: Wait on the line without disconnecting it

*Put through*: Connect a telephone caller

*Proposal*: A plan

*Deal*: An arrangement in business

*Recall*: Remember

*Consignment basis*: When goods are sent 'on consignment', it means that the person or shop that receives them pays only for what is sold and returns what is unsold.

*Reference number*: A number on top of a business letter that is mentioned when somebody replies to it.

### **Check Your Progress 5**

- 1) a) It is sometimes thought that business conversation has to be very impersonal, i.e. it does not show one's feelings. In fact, the term 'business like' has come to mean 'doing things calmly'. In the conversation above, we notice the speakers carry on their conversation in a polite manner. The trend in business now is to attract people to the business you are running with courteous manners.



**Speaking Skills**

In the conversation above how does the operator at the PBX show courtesy to the caller? What words in her speech indicate this?

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b) What sentence at the beginning shows that the Managing Director is a pleasant man? How does he show that he's interested in considering business relations with Mr. Kannan?

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2) Here's a business letter. Give the same message through a telephone call.

6th August, 2002

From

Senior Purchase Officer,  
S.B.P. Medicare System,  
Bhopal

To Matson Surgicals  
Bhopal

Dear Sirs,

Kindly recall our letter reference Pur XZ25 dated 20th July, 2002 placing an order for various items of surgical instruments for a small nursing home to be set up.

We would like to cancel the order because the client for whom the items were required has expressed his inability to invest so much capital at the moment.

We're sorry to have given you the trouble, and assure you of continued dealings with your firm.

Yours sincerely,

(S.Roy Choudhury)

Sr. Purchase Officer

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3) Here's a conversation held on the intercom in an office. An intercom is a system which connects the different rooms in an office building and is meant for internal communication. Read the conversation carefully and do the exercise given after it.

**Conversation**

**Telephone Conversation**

The intercom in Lalit Sharma’s room makes a sound, Sharma picks up the receiver.

‘Sharma here’

Manager : ‘Sharma, do you remember that case about reservation for Scheduled Castes which was raised at last month's meeting?’

Sharma recognizes the Manager’s voice.

‘Yes, sir.’

Manager : ‘What was it exactly?’

Sharma : ‘Sir, if you could wait a minute, I’ll see the file.’

Manager: Yes.’

Sharma: ‘Sir, Sri Raju Munda had complained that the reservation provided for Scheduled Castes was inadequate. He requested that it should be raised to 25% at least.’

Manager: ‘Hmm, Bring the file.’

Sharma: ‘Yes, sir.’

The conversation above is between a superior officer and his subordinate. The officer’s manner is distant, i.e. he shows social distance rather than friendliness. Now imagine the same topic was the subject of a conversation between colleagues or officers of equal rank in an office. Write the conversation suiting the language to the changed situation.

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4) Here’s a brief conversation. Read it carefully and answer the question below:

‘5380221.’

‘I’m Amit Khanna from Atul Traders speaking. May I talk to Mr. Prabhat Chawla?’

‘I’m sorry, Mr. Chawla isn’t here. Is there any message for him?’

Hmm. Who’s speaking?’

‘I’m his P.A.’

‘Well. When is he coming back?’

‘At about four.’

‘I’ll ring back at about 4.15.’

‘O.K.’

How would the P.A. inform Mr. Prabhat Chawla about this conversation when he returns? (25 words)

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### Conversation with the Telephone Exchange

Many people need to learn to speak to the staff at the telephone exchange in order to get various services and assistance. Here's how to lodge a complaint when the telephone is out of order.

#### Conversation

'Hello. Telephone Exchange.

'My number is 7310052. My telephone has been dead for the last two days.'

'Your complaint number is 142.'

'When will it be set right?'

'We will try to set it right as soon as possible, sir'

'O.K. Thank You'

Notice the conversation is short and crisp. There is no time to waste as the telephone staff has to serve a large number of subscribers.

#### Check Your Progress 6

- 1) You don't get your connection even after three days. You ring up Telephone Exchange and a conversation takes place. The end of the conversation is given here. Fill in the conversation that comes before it.

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'I'm sorry the cable line is disturbed owing to extensive repair work.'

- 2) Write a conversation between yourself and the section called 'Enquiry' at the Exchange. You want to know the new number of a certain subscriber.

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## 4.5 INFORMAL CONVERSATION

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Although the telephone is used extensively for business dealings and official work, it is very convenient even for conversation between friends and relatives. Let's study this informal talk on the phone:

#### Conversation

*A voice:* 'Yes?'

*Pallavi:* 'May I speak to Meenakshi?'

*Voice:* 'Hold on please. Let me call her. Who's calling?'

*Pallavi:* 'Pallavi. Pallavi Nair.'

*Voice:* 'Mrs. Ghosh! A certain Pallavi Nair is on the line. She wants to speak to you.'

(after a while)

Mrs. Ghosh: 'Hi! Pallavi. How are you?'

Pallavi: 'Fine. Thanks. You haven't forgotten, have you?'

Mrs. Ghosh: 'What?'

Pallavi: 'It's my birthday today!'

Mrs. Ghosh: 'How could I forget it? Many happy returns of the day!'

Pallavi: 'Thanks. Remember you're coming to the party at our house at 7 this evening.'

Mrs. Ghosh: 'But.....'

Pallavi: 'No buts. I'll be very angry if you don't make it. Now look, I'm in such a hurry and must ring off now. Bye!'

Mrs. Ghosh: 'Bye.'

**Vocabulary**

*Is on the line:* Wants to speak to you. It could also be expressed this way. 'There's a call for you from.....'

*Make it:* Arrive on time

*Ring off:* End the telephone conversation

**Check Your Progress 7**

- 1) a) How does Pallavi express her friendly relations with Meenakshi?  
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  - b) 'You're coming to the party.' Is this an order or a way of insisting?  
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  - c) 'No buts.' Say this in a more formal way.  
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- 2) Except for the standard phrases used in telephone talk, most informal telephone conversations would be like informal face-to-face talk. But the telephone should be used sparingly out of consideration for other subscribers. Most lines are busy and we must not use the telephone for rambling discussions which can be left for get-togethers. Which of these functions would you perform on the telephone?
- a) Your baby has fallen ill and is vomiting. You want your friend's advice. ....
  - b) You feel that the educational system is deteriorating. You want to discuss this with a friend .....
  - c) You have to catch a flight this evening. You want to know whether tickets are available .....
  - d) As a housewife you have lots of problems in your daily life. You want to cry your heart out to a friend .....
  - e) You want to narrate to a friend the story of a movie that has impressed you. ....

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## 4.7 LET US SUM UP

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In this unit, you learnt how to take part in a conversation on the telephone in

- formal situations like making enquiries and transacting business, and
- informal situations like exchanging greetings, making polite enquiries about one's health, and asking for advice.

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## 4.8 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

- 1) Manager: Is that Laxman?

Laxman: Yes, Sir.

Manager: Can you bring me the file that has our letter to B.E. and Sons, confirming the dispatch of the consignment.

Laxman: Right, Sir. I'll just take a few minutes to look for the file.

Manager: O.K. (after 10 minutes)

Laxman: Sir, I can't find the letter.

Manager: Can't find the letter? You know how important that letter is. This is not the first time such a thing has happened. You can come and pick up your dismissal letter. It's being typed by Poonam.

- 2) Inspector: Show me the box, please.

Mrs. Dhani Ram: Here it is.

Inspector : Hmm (notes down details of colour and design).

### Check Your Progress 2

- 1) Travel agent : Continental Travels

Mr. Chhabra: I'm B.L. Chhabra speaking from Punjab National Bank, Hauz Khas. I'd like to have some information about your package tours to Darjeeling.

Travel Agent: Well, we have a number of package tours offering different types of accommodation and transport. Now let me see..... Travel by air, accommodation at 3-star hotel with breakfast for 15days—this package tour costs Rs. 9,500 per head. Then the second one is travel by deluxe coach, accommodation at small lodge with breakfast, for 15 days. This tour costs Rs. 2,500 per head.

Mr. Chhabra: The first package seems to suit me.

Travel Agent : When would you like to make the tour, Mr. Chhabra?

Mr. Chhabra: From 6th September onwards.

Travel Agent : I'll send you a form to fill in some details we would want.

Mr. Chhabra: Thank you.

Travel Agent : You're welcome.

- 2) The fact that someone is asking the client to fill in a form right there shows it's a face-to-face conversation. The conversation takes place in a bank where both these types of services can be obtained — information about the foreign exchange rates and issue of demand drafts.

**Check Your Progress 3**

- 1) 'What can I do for you?'  
 'Would you like a room with.....' (the use of the 'modal')  
 'For what date, sir' (use of 'sir')  
 'You're welcome. We'll wait for you, sir.'
- 2) 'Hello! Is that Magna Travels?'  
 'Yes, please. What can I do for you?'  
 'I'd like two Indian Airlines tickets for the morning flight to Hyderabad on 6th .. April.'  
 'In what names please?'  
 'Prem Budhwar and Bharati Budhwar.'  
 'Your phone number, sir?'  
 '6430521'  
 'O.K. Sir. We'll let you know when the tickets are ready.'  
 'Thanks'  
 'You're welcome.'

**Check Your Progress 4**

- 1) a) No  
 b) No  
 c) Yes  
 d) Perhaps it's bit unsafe to use the telephone in this case  
 e) Yes  
 f) Yes
- 2) a) & b) Open-ended question

**Check Your Progress 5**

- 1) a) The operator at the PBX shows courtesy to the caller by wishing the caller 'Good Morning.'  
 'May I know who's calling?' — the use of the modal may.  
 'Just hold on, please' — the use of 'please.'
- b) The Managing Director begins on a welcome note 'What can I do for you?' He seems interested in being helpful.  
 He says he remembers Mr. Kannan and the discussion they had. This gives the impression that he has given importance to the deal. He then asks for the date and reference no. of the letter so that he can pursue the matter.
- 2) S. Roy Choudhury: Is that Matson Surgicals?  
 Bharat Singh: Yes.  
 S. Roy Choudhury: May I speak to Mr. Bharat Singh?  
 Bharat Singh: Yes. Speaking  
 S. Roy Choudhury: Oh hello, Mr. Singh. This is S. Roy Choudhury from SBP Medicare System.

## Speaking Skills

Bharat Singh: Yes, Mr. Roy Choudhury. We've received your order for the different items for the new nursing home.

S. Roy Choudhury: You see Mr. Singh. I have to cancel the order because the clients for whom we needed the items have suddenly changed their minds. They think that they cannot afford to block so much capital right now.

Bharat Singh: That's all right.

S. Roy Choudhury: I'm sorry for the trouble.

Bharat Singh: No trouble at all.

S. Roy Choudhury: We'll let you know when we need some more items next time.

Bharat Singh: O.K.

S. Roy Choudhury: Bye.

Bharat Singh: Bye

3) 'Sharma here.'

'This is Pandit.'

'Yes, Pandit?'

'Do you remember that case about reservation for scheduled castes which was raised at last month's meeting.'

'Yes.'

'What was it exactly?'

'Err. Just hang on a second. I'll see the file.'  
(after a minute)

'Look, Pandit. Raju Munda complained that the reservation provided for scheduled castes was inadequate. He requested that it should be raised to 25% at least. I think we should look into the matter.'

'Could you send the file across?'

'O.K.'

4) 'Sir, a certain Mr. Amit Khanna rang up from Atul Traders. He wanted to speak to you and said he would ring back at about 4.15.'

### Check Your Progress 6

1) 'Yes, Telephone Exchange.'

'Kindly check the position of complaint number 142.'

2) 'Namaste, Enquiry.'

'Can you give me the new number for 605331?'

'Yes. It's 6044331.'

'Thank you.'

### Check Your Progress 7

1) a), b) & c) Open-ended questions

2) Open-ended question