

Teacher's notes

LEVEL: Elementary / A1

TIME: 50 minutes

SKILLS: speaking, writing

AIM: to practise appropriate language for asking for and getting help around the office

MATERIALS: one copy of the worksheet per student; one set of cut-out cards per pair of students

Grammar and functions

modals: *can, could*

question making (for polite forms)

Useful words and phrases

operating equipment; voicemail; code; ill; to hold; paper jam; panel; maintenance; forward; put on hold; put through; transfer; press; extension; collect (a customer from reception); downstairs

Procedure

1. As a warm-up activity, ask the students about their office.

Write the questions below on the whiteboard or flipchart and note the answers down as they give them:

What kind of equipment do you have in the office?

computer

printer

photocopier

phones

scanner

How many colleagues are there in your office?

Is your office open-plan, shared or private?

2. Ask the students how often they need to ask for help in the office. What are the things that they most need help with? On the whiteboard or flipchart, write up the things or procedures in the office that they need help with.

*I need help with ...
operating equipment
using a new laptop or phone
taking phone calls*

*I need to know what to do when ...
a colleague is busy, ill or on holiday
the boss is busy
customers or clients come to the
reception for a meeting*

A

Get students to complete Activity A in pairs. Go over the answers as a whole class. Follow up by asking if they've needed any of this kind of help in the office.

Key:

1. *need a code; 2. set up voicemail; 3. fix a paper jam; 4. take a message; 5. put someone through; 6. put someone on hold; 7. check his or her emails; 8. collect the customer; 9. take calls*

B

1. Get students to complete Activity B in pairs. Either check the answers as a class or use the audio and ask students to check their own answers.

Key:

b. 3; c. 1; d. 6; e. 2; f. 9; g. 8; h. 5; i. 4

2. Check their understanding of *put through* and *put on hold*. Explain that *put through* is the same as *connect*, or sometimes *transfer*. It is especially important to teach the expression *put on hold*. Explain to students that it sounds impolite to say *wait* on the phone; instead, they should use forms of *hold*, for example: *Can you hold, please? Please hold just a moment* etc.

Teaching tip:

With stronger students, see if they can add any other information to the answers in Activity B. For example, for reply a: (*Yes, please go through his or her emails and check for important messages.*) *You can also ask your colleagues to set up an auto reply email message which includes when they will be back in the office and who to contact while they are away.*

Teacher's notes

C

1. Ask the students to do the practice in Activity C. You can use the audio as a model for pronunciation. Make sure they switch roles within each pair and then change to a different person. Ask them to repeat the procedure.
2. Explain to the students that asking for help around the office always needs friendly, polite language. Write these impolite examples on the whiteboard or flipchart.

Show me how to set up my voicemail.
Tell me how to scan something.
I want you to show me how to use my new laptop.
Answer my calls while I'm in the meeting.
Check my emails while I'm on a business trip.
Someone collect the customer at reception.

3. Ask if the students can make the above examples more professional and polite. When they have completed the task, write the sentences below on the whiteboard or flipchart with the impolite phrases highlighted.

Unprofessional

1. ~~Show me how to set up my voicemail.~~
2. ~~Tell me how to scan something.~~
3. ~~I want you to show me how to use my new laptop.~~
4. ~~Answer my calls while I'm in the meeting.~~
5. ~~Check my emails while I'm on a business trip.~~
6. ~~Someone collect the customer at reception.~~

Professional

1. What do I do to set up my voicemail?
2. How can I scan something?

3. Please could you show me how to use my new laptop?
4. Please could someone answer my calls while I'm in the meeting?
5. Please could you check my emails while I'm on a business trip?
6. Please could someone collect the customer at reception?

4. Explain to the students the use of *can* (for the person asking for help) and *could* (asking the person to do something) and other question phrases, such as:

Do I ...?

How can I ...?

What do I ...?

Please could you ...?

Tell the students that *can* / *could* and the question phrases create a polite impression. The intonation of these questions is also important: again you could use the audio as a model.

5. Ask students to practise the polite questions you have just explained with a partner. For each question, a standard or simple answer could be:

Of course, I'd be glad to do it.

Tell the students to try the polite questions again with these typical signal expressions. Write the examples on the whiteboard or flipchart.

Excuse me, how can I scan something?
I'm sorry to bother you, but could you show me how to set up my voicemail?
Can I ask you a favour? Could you check my emails while I'm on a business trip?

Explain that *to bother someone* is to make problem for someone or irritate them.

Explain that *to ask a favour* is a friendly way to ask someone to help you.

Teacher's notes

D

1. Review the topics on the cards on the card cut-out page with the students. Elicit from them two or three other office activities and situations where people need to ask for help in the office and add them to the blank cards.

Possible topics your students might think of could include:

offering coffee or tea

checking over a report

suggesting a good restaurant for an important business lunch

looking up something on the internet

taking minutes at a meeting

setting up a meeting or video conference

2. Distribute the cards and ask the students to work in pairs to ask each other questions and answers on their example topics. Then, tell the students to exchange their cards with another pair and repeat the exercise with the new topics.

Follow-up

Ask the students to write two emails to a partner asking for help in the office. Write up the email format on the whiteboard or flipchart. Select two topics from the activities. The emails can be simple, with two or three sentences each. Ask students to address their emails to their partners. Have them refer back to the phrases in Activities A and B and the polite language forms when writing their emails.

Hello John,
(Need help with finishing my report and sending it to colleagues in Italy.)
Best wishes,
David

Hi Barbara,
(Need help with organizing a meeting and taking the minutes.)
All the best,
Rosalind

Get the students to give their emails to their partners. Ask them to reply with an answer.

Worksheet

A

Complete the questions with the expressions from the box below.

check his or her emails
collect the customer
fix a paper jam
need a code
put someone on hold
put someone through
set up voicemail
take a message
take calls



1. Do I _____ for the photocopier?
2. How can I _____ in a new mobile phone?
3. Could you help me _____ in the printer?
4. Do I always need to _____ when someone isn't available?
5. What can I tell the caller if she needs to speak to my manager and how do I _____ to my manager with the desk phone?
6. When the caller wants to wait, how do I _____?
7. When one of my colleagues is ill or on holiday, do I _____?
8. Do I _____ at reception when he or she arrives?
9. Do I _____ for my colleagues or the boss while they're in a meeting or at lunch?

Worksheet

B

Match the answers below to the questions in Activity A. The first one is done for you.

a. (7)

Yes, please go through his or her emails and check for important messages.

b. ()

Just open the front panel to pull the paper out. If it's still a problem, we can call the maintenance department.

c. ()

Yes, the HR department will give you a special code number. This will work on any machine in the company.

d. ()

Ask the caller if he or she would like to hold for a minute or two. Press 'hold' at the bottom left of the phone set. Then get back on the line to ask if the caller wants to continue holding or call back. If not, offer to take a message.

e. ()

Can I see what model you've got? Yes, it's really easy to set that up. Let me show you step by step.

f. ()

Yes, it's always really helpful to do that. Press the 'star' key and your extension number on the desk set to forward the calls to your phone.

g. ()

That's right. Please meet the customer downstairs and bring him or her to the office.

h. ()

Tell the caller you're putting her through to your manager. Then press the 'star' key and your manager's extension number.

i. ()

No, but the main thing is that you must always get his or her full name and phone number.

C

With a partner, practise the questions and answers from Activities A and B. Then, change partners and repeat.

D

sending documents by email

sorting the post

helping to organize a meeting



Transcript

1.

A: Do I need a code for the photocopier?

B: Yes, the HR department will give you a special code number. This will work on any machine in the company.

2.

A: How can I set up voicemail in a new mobile phone?

B: Can I see what model you've got? Yes, it's really easy to set that up. Let me show you step by step.

3.

A: Could you help me fix a paper jam in the printer?

B: Just open the front panel to pull the paper out. If it's still a problem, we can call the maintenance department.

4.

A: Do I always need to take a message when someone isn't available?

B: No, but the main thing is that you must always get his or her full name and phone number.

5.

A: What can I tell the caller if she needs to speak to my manager and how do I put someone through to my manager with the desk phone?

B: Tell the caller you're putting her through to your manager. Then press the 'star' key and your manager's extension number.

6.

A: What do I say when the caller wants to wait? How do I put someone on hold?

B: Ask the caller if he or she would like to hold for a minute or two. Press 'hold' at the bottom left of the phone set. Then get back on the line to ask if the caller wants to continue holding, or call back. If not, offer to take a message.

7.

A: When one of my colleagues is ill or on holiday, do I check his or her emails?

B: Yes, please go through his or her emails and check for important messages.

8.

A: Do I collect the customer at reception when he or she arrives?

B: That's right. Please meet the customer downstairs and bring him or her to the office.

9.

A: Do I take calls for my colleagues or the boss while they're in a meeting or at lunch?

B: Yes, it's always really helpful to do that. Press the 'star' key and your extension number on the desk set to forward the calls to your phone.