

Leaving a message

General advice

When you phone a person in English it's always a good idea to prepare for the call. Write down some ideas on a piece of paper.

Introduction

Leaving a message on a person's voicemail is difficult. We need to speak clearly, not too quickly and we are under pressure to say everything in about one minute. This is difficult for Irish people so it's very difficult if you don't speak English.

Leaving a good message

When you leave a voicemail message, there are five pieces of information you should give.

1. Give your name	Hi, this is... Hello, this is...
2. Say the time and day	It's 9:30 on Wednesday morning. It's about 2:15 on Friday.
3. Say why you are phoning	I'm phoning because... I'm phoning to ask you about... I'm phoning about...
4. Say what you want the other person to do or Say what you will do	Can you phone me back, please? My number is... Can you pass on this message to...? Can you call me before Wednesday, please? Can you send me an email, please? My address is... I'll call you again later. I'll call you at about 4:00. I'll try to contact you on your landline.
5. Say goodbye	Thanks very much and speak to you later. Thanks, bye.

Practice

Choose one of the situations and leave a message on a person's voicemail. Remember, you only have a minute and you need to speak clearly.

1. It is Saturday morning at 11:45. You can't go to your friend's house for dinner tonight because your partner is sick and you need to look after the children. Invite your friend to your house next weekend and ask her/him to call you back.

2. It's Friday afternoon at 2:20p.m. You did not get your social welfare payment this week and you telephone the social welfare office to ask why this happened. Leave your name, telephone number and PPS number on the voicemail message. Spell your name.

3. It is Monday morning at 7 o'clock. You can't go to school for the week because you are moving house. Leave a voicemail message for your teacher. Spell your name and give your telephone number.

4. It is Thursday morning at 10:20a.m. You can't go to the cinema to see *Blood Diamonds* with your friend in the afternoon because you must take your mother to the dentist. But the film is on at the Savoy Cinema at 8:30p.m. if it's suitable for your friend. Ask her/him to call you back.

5. It's 7:45a.m. The ceiling in the children's bedroom is leaking and the central heating isn't working. The house is freezing. Leave a voicemail message with your landlord and ask her/him to call you back as soon as possible.

Leaving a message – Teacher's notes

Note This activity requires a cassette recorder and a blank tape.

Make a class set of copies for page 1.

Make 3 copies of page 2 and cut out the individual situations.

Ideas for introduction

Preface the activity by asking the groups to work in groups to discuss the following questions.

Why is telephoning difficult?

What can you do to make it easier?

Get feedback from the groups and add your own thoughts.

Ask them about leaving a voicemail message. Is that difficult?

Leaving a message – 1

Put the students into pairs and give each pair one of the situations. Give the students 2/3 minutes to prepare. The task is to leave an appropriate voicemail message for the situation. Help students with vocab and to clarify the task.

Ask for volunteers. Set up the tape recorder and blank tape and record the students as they leave their voicemail message. It is important to get volunteers for this part of the activity as it's a high focus task (i.e. all eyes are on them). If you want to, take the volunteers out of the class for the recording. It's not necessary to have a person from each pair. Two or three volunteers will suffice.

After each person, rewind and play back and ask the rest of the class if the message is clear.

- Did the person leave all the required info?
- Is it clear what s/he wants the other person to do?
- What's her/his phone number?

N.B. This may be the first time the students have heard their own spoken voices in English and they can often be surprised at their lack of clarity – this awareness, and the need to speak clearly, is one of the key points of the activity.

Page 1

Hand out page 1 of the activity and read through it with the class.

Leaving a message – 2

Give each pair a different situation, and give them 2/3 minutes to prepare.

If they want they can write ideas and phrases down, but discourage them from writing a script as reading from a page can hinder effective interpersonal communication.

Repeat the earlier process.

Give each pair a different situation and repeat.

Ask for feedback, reflections and impressions. Play the 'before' and 'after' tapes to see the difference when messages are prepared.

Ask them if they need to phone anyone in the near future. Get them to explain the situation and then practise leaving a message.