

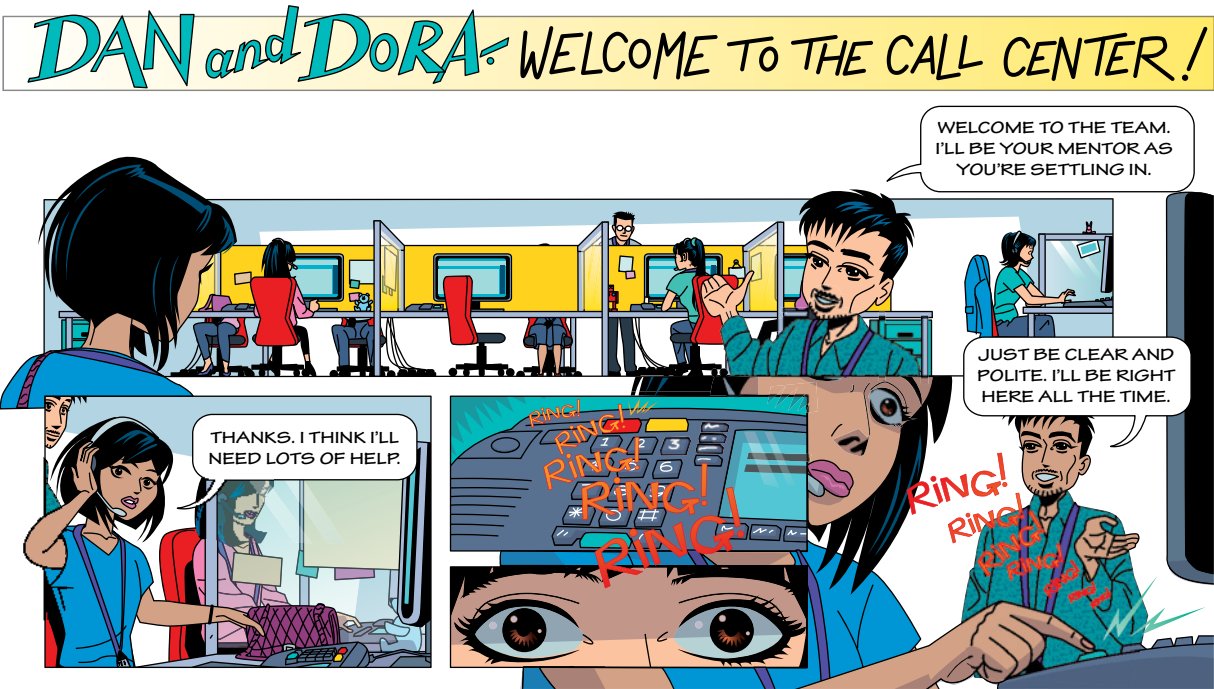
1 Being clear and polite



What you will learn!

At the end of this unit, you will have covered:

- A The call:** listening to understand the purpose and details of the call, as well as the feelings of the caller
- B Focus on language:** asking questions ♦ common idioms in American English
- C Soft skills:** putting customers on hold and responding to emotional cues
- D Pronunciation:** intonation patterns when questioning ♦ stresses and vowel sounds.
- E Read and explain:** reading, analyzing and synthesizing information in order to give clear explanations
- F Intercultural matters:** USA geography ♦ cultural issues related to retirement
- G Role-play:** simulating a call center transaction




A The call

1 Pre-listening activity

The caller says “I’ve always wanted to open an Atlantic coffee shop.”
What do you think the call will be about?

Focus on language


2 Global listening activity

 **Now listen to the call. As you listen to it for the first time, note down information about:**


- 1. Who is talking to whom?
- 2. What is the main purpose of the call?

Discuss your answers in groups.

3 Detailed listening activity

 **Listen to the call again. Then look at the statements below and decide whether they are true (T) or false (F).**


- 1. The caller is feeling very anxious about opening a coffee shop. ☐
- 2. The caller already owns a coffee shop and has been operating it for two years. ☐
- 3. The agent says he needs to contact a rep to get an application form. ☐
- 4. The agent is helpful and polite. ☐
- 5. The agent is efficient. ☐
- 6. There is no website available for the caller to find out about Atlantic Aroma coffee shop franchises. ☐
- 7. The agent says the caller will make a success of opening a coffee shop. ☐
- 8. The rep will explain the details of the Atlantic Aroma coffee shop franchise when he/she calls. ☐

 **Compare your answers with your partner/group. Your trainer will provide the correct answers. Listen again for those answers that were not correct.**



B Focus on language

1 Forming questions in spoken English

 In spoken English, we take a lot of “short cuts.” For example, when we ask questions, we often rely on rising intonation (when your voice pitch gets higher) to show that we are asking questions, rather than using the full grammatically correct question form. These short cuts make speaking efficient and help communication.

1 Write in the full grammatically correct version of each question. Compare your answer with your partner.

Short-cut question form	Full grammatical question form
Or you already have one?	<u>Do you already have one?</u>
And you just want to brand it Atlantic?	_____
OK, you wanna do that?	_____
Your first name?	_____
Your phone number?	_____
You get it?	_____

Focus on language

2 Open and closed questions

It is important in call center transactions to be able to ask the right questions in the correct way, particularly when the caller has a complicated problem that needs resolving. There are three main types of questions:

- Open questions:** These require a response that contains information or details. Open questions are sometimes called *wh* questions because they start with *what, where, when, who, as well as how*. These questions are useful on the phone when you are probing for information. *wh* questions are formed with WH(AT) + auxiliary + subject pronoun + main verb: *What + did + you + say?*
- Closed questions:** These questions require a “yes” or “no” answer. They are useful on the phone for checking information. They are formed with AUXILIARY (*do / did / can*, etc.) + subject pronoun + main verb: *Did + you + say + that ... ?*
- Question tags:** Another form of a closed question is the question tag: *You said that ... didn't you?* These questions are useful also for checking and confirming information with the caller. They are formed with the subject pronoun and auxiliary (*isn't, haven't, can't*, etc.) or *don't / didn't*.

1 Complete the dialog below by using open or closed question forms.

Martha is feeling a little anxious!

Agent: Good evening. This is Ken,

Caller: Yes, I've lost my credit card and maybe someone has stolen it. I was out shopping and I used it yesterday, but ...

Agent: *OK, let me take a few details and I'll do my best to help you. Can I take your name and Social Security number?*

Caller: Yes, my name is Martha Lewis and my Social Security is 378 59 2300.

Agent:?

Caller: Well, it might have been stolen and that's what I'm afraid of ...

Agent:?

Caller: Yes, I've just been looking in the normal places. You know – bedroom, under the bed. That's where I always keep my money, you know.

Agent:?

Caller: Just a couple of days ago when I went to the supermarket. I spent about \$125 on groceries.

Agent:?

Caller: Oh, I hadn't thought about that. Perhaps I should go back and check there.

Agent:?

Caller: Oh, you never know, and last night I went out with a couple of friends and my bag zipper was open when I left the bar. It was a bit strange, but I didn't think anything was stolen. But now I'm worried, I think I should report it stolen, just in case. You know, be on the safe side.

Agent:?

Caller: No, I'll go back to the supermarket and if it's not there I'll give you another call.

Agent:?

Caller: OK, that sounds like a good idea. A temporary stop would be good. Just so no one can run up my credit!

Agent:?

Caller: 84692672057

Agent:?

Caller: Social Security is 378 59 2300.

Agent:?

Caller: April 10th, 1969.

Agent: OK, that's all done, it's on temporary hold. And give me a call tomorrow. I really hope you find it, Martha. Thank you for calling.

Caller: Thanks, bye.

2 Look at your answers to Activity 1. Discuss which ones you think can be shortened. Write five full questions and five shortened questions.

Short-cut question form	Full grammatical question form

3 American idioms (1)

1 Look at the idioms below and match them to the best meaning. Some of them are taken from the call you have just listened to.

Idiom	Meaning
1. just bear with me for a sec	a) good at business
2. to go under	b) to assist or help
3. and stuff like that	c) getting involved
4. to get a feel for	d) to understand
5. to bite off more than you can chew	e) to take on too much
6. getting yourself into	f) and other things
7. to give a hand	g) to be unsuccessful in business
8. an old hand at this	h) to be experienced
9. to have a business head	i) to wait for a moment

2 Now list any idioms you know that include the word “head”. What do they mean?

Idiomatic expression	Meaning
heads up	warning
head over heels in love	very much in love

Soft skills



C Soft skills

1 Explaining information clearly

- Many call center interactions are focused on explaining policies or procedures and providing information about services and products. If a customer calls with a problem or is confused about a product or service, giving him/her clear explanations is a vital part of providing good service.
- Agents often have difficulty in providing clear explanations because they need to give the customer information in a way that is often different to the agents’ first language. English speakers from the Western world tend to speak in a *linear* and *logical* manner. They also expect questions to be answered directly and instantly. They dislike answers which are seen as avoiding the question or “beating about the bush.”
- If a customer calls up and is upset that his/her book order has not arrived yet and wants to know the reason, he/she will expect the agent to tell him/her immediately what has happened, and then follow it up with reasons or explanations.
- Practicing direct logical explanations is a very useful skill to help you to attain customer satisfaction!

1 Read this agent’s clear explanation of how to apply for a franchise and the notes below:

OK, well the way that it works is that we take down your information, we email you a template, you have to fill it out and then fax it to the number at the top, and then the rep contacts you within seven days.

Notes:

1. Words which show the order things are done, such as *then*.
 2. Use of parallel structures: *we do this, you do that*.
 3. Use of present simple tense to show the information is an established fact or procedure: *we take down your information*.
 4. Stress of important content words, such as *template*.
- 2 Work with a partner and choose one of the topics below. Spend two minutes planning on your scratchpad and then sit back-to-back and make your explanations to each other as clearly as possible.
- ◆ Why education is important for society.
 - ◆ Why pet animals should be vaccinated against rabies.
 - ◆ What are the most important qualities for a good leader to have?

2 Putting the customer on hold

How do customers feel when they are put on hold? The more time that passes where they are left completely unattended, the less confidence they have that their problem will be dealt with. Here are some simple guidelines:

- Tell the customer that you will put him/her on hold. Say why and for how long:
Mr. Thomas, I'm going to put you on hold for a short time to find out the answer to your question.
OR
Mr. Thomas, would it be OK if I put you on hold for a minute so I can go and find out the answer to your question?
- If it is taking longer than you anticipated, go back to the customer and let him/her know you are still there and working on the problem:
Hello, Mr. Thomas, are you still there? I just need another minute.
- When you return, thank the customer for holding on and deliver your message:
Thank you very much for holding, Mr. Thomas. I'm pleased to be able to say ...

In pairs, practice the following two scenarios. Take turns being the agent and the customer.

Scenario 1

Your customer has asked you a very complicated question about a product. There is nothing on your system that explains it, so you need to talk to your supervisor. This customer is feeling frustrated at the beginning of the call because his problem has meant he cannot use the product.

Scenario 2

Your customer is angry and wants his/her call escalated to the supervisor. You try to placate the caller, but without much success. You decide to put the caller on hold in order to locate a supervisor, although your real agenda is to give the customer time to “cool down”, as the problem does not warrant escalation.



D Pronunciation

Rising and falling intonation: what they tell you

Often in English when we ask a question, we raise our intonation (our voice pitch gets higher) at the end of the question. This invites the listener to respond. Generally speaking, rising intonation will invite a response and will keep the interaction going. Falling intonation, on the other hand, will close the conversation.

1 Rising intonation: asking questions and opening up interaction

1 Look at the questions below and practice rising intonation with your partner.

- 1. **A:** It's not working. I've wasted about three hours trying this.
B: Really? How many times have you tried to log on this morning?
A: About 10 times. It's frustrating.
- 2. **A:** Did you get that?
B: I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that. What is your name and address?
A: It's Bill Hudson, 55 Oakwood Drive, Phoenix, Arizona.
- 3. **A:** When are you going to Houston?
B: The day after next. Why do you ask?
A: Oh, OK. Then you'll be able to come to the conference tomorrow.
- 4. **A:** It's been sent already. You should have it now.
B: Really? No, I don't have it yet. When did you send it?
- 5. **A:** You need to get here right away.
B: Oh, no! What time is the meeting?
A: In about 30 minutes.



2 Now listen to the call again. Write down five questions you hear that use rising intonation.

2 Falling intonation: closing down an interaction

1 Look at the sentences below and practice using falling intonation with your partner.

- 1. So that's settled then.
- 2. Please accept my apologies about this.
- 3. I hope this doesn't happen again.
- 4. We look forward to it.
- 5. I'm sure you understand.




2 Now go back to the transcript and listen to the questions. Write down five more statements that use falling intonation.

Pronunciation

3 Syllable stress

■ An important part of speaking clearly is using the correct syllable stress in words. To be accurate, you must first be sure that you are able to identify the number of syllables in a word before the stressed syllable can be identified:
[A|ME|ri|ca](#) has four syllables and the second syllable is stressed.
[BA|si|cly](#) has three syllables (although it is commonly mispronounced with four syllables). The first syllable is stressed.

 1 Listen to the state names in Additional Listening and identify the number of syllables and the stressed syllable in that word.

STATE	Number of syllables	Stressed syllable
1. Arkansas	3	AR kan sas
2. California	4	Cal i FOR nia
3. Connecticut		
4. Florida		
5. Georgia		
6. Illinois		
7. Louisiana		
8. Massachusetts		
9. Michigan		
10. Mississippi		
11. Missouri		
12. New Jersey		
13. New York		
14. North Dakota		
15. Ohio		
16. Pennsylvania		
17. Tennessee		
18. Texas		
19. Virginia		
20. Wisconsin		

4 Consonant clusters

■ Consonant clusters are consonant sounds that appear next to one another. Pronouncing one consonant sound and immediately following it with another can be difficult. Look at this example:
[Alaska](#) The consonant cluster here is /sk/. The two sounds blend together, and there is no pause or break: [Ala-ska](#). The /s/ sound here blends into the /k/ like in the word [sky](#) or [ski](#).

1 Now go back and look at the American states again and underline all the consonant clusters. Read them aloud.

 2 Now choose part of the call and listen to it for consonant clusters. Write down ten examples.



E Read and explain

○ Spend one minute skimming the text below, then complete the paired activities.



FRANCHISE INFORMATION
Day Spa Dreams

10 STEPS TO YOUR DAY SPA DREAMS

1. Complete the Franchise Application Form (FAF) and send it to Spa Horizon, P.O. Box 7445, Arizona, 75031, USA.
2. Once your application has been approved, you will be invited to a full-day seminar to discuss the benefits of owning a Spa Horizon franchise. At that seminar, we'll assign you a "franchise mentor," who will assist you with every step of the franchise development.
3. On completion of the seminar and the assignment of your own mentor, we will send a **Franchise Offer Circular (FOC)**, which outlines all the rights and obligations of the franchisee.
4. You then sign the **Acknowledgment of Receipt (AR)** and send it back in the envelope provided.
5. You visit a Spa Horizon of your choice and spend a full day experiencing the products and services. You will also meet key management personnel for a 60-minute question-and-answer forum.
6. You will then be asked to send a short video presentation into our headquarters in New York outlining your vision statement and presenting your business plan.
7. The Board of Spa Horizons will then let you know within 2 weeks if you will be awarded the franchise opportunity.
8. If you are awarded the franchise, you will sign the **Spa Horizon Franchise Agreement (SHFA)** and pay the initial Franchise Fee. We recommend that you get your lawyer to go through the document.
9. You then start looking for a location for your Spa Horizon, and you work with your mentor to begin the start-up process.
10. All publicity materials need to be cleared with Spa Horizon head office, and then you are free to open your doors!

Regular annual forums are held in all states to ensure all franchisees can get together and share the experience of being part of the Spa Horizon family!

1 Student A is the agent. Explain to the caller clearly and concisely in your own words how to apply for a franchise without reading directly from the text.

2 Swap roles. The agent answers the following inquiry.

Caller: Is franchising a long and complicated process? How much support do I get, and do I get a chance to use my own ideas?

Intercultural matters



F Intercultural matters

1 Geography of the United States

- 1 Have any of you ever traveled to the United States? What were your impressions? If you haven't, where would you like to go?

2 In pairs, decide on a listener and a speaker, then sit back-to-back. The listener closes his/her book and looks at a blank map your trainer will give him/her. The speaker looks at the map in the book and describes to the listener the position of each of the U.S. states in alphabetical order. After five minutes, check how many are correctly labeled.
-

- 3 Was the size or geographic position of any of the states surprising to you?

2 Retirement in the United States

- 1 Think about retirement in your country. How do retired people expect to be treated? What do they expect to do with their lives?

2 In pairs, look at the table below. Read the information on retirement in the United States and compare it with your own country.

Aspects of retirement	United States	Your country
Age	Typically 65. The average range is 55–70.	
Pensions	When U.S. citizens retire, they receive a monthly income (pension) from Social Security deposits. This income is created because every year of employment a contribution is made to Social Security. It is returned to them upon retirement, plus interest. The larger their contribution is, the larger their retirement package will be.	
Where is home?	Generally, when people retire, they remain financially independent because they have a retirement income. This means that they continue to live alone or with their spouse. Retirement homes are another option for those who need nursing or other kinds of day-to-day care. In less common cases, the retired person who needs care will live with family members who will provide financial support and physical care themselves.	

Aspects of retirement	United States	Your country
Being a “burden”	There is a commonly held belief and fear among retired people in the U.S. that if they need help from their families at this point in their lives, they will be a “burden”. This is considered a very bad thing, and it is typical for elderly people who are in need of care and support to refuse such help for this reason.	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
Realizing dreams	Some people consider retirement to be an opportunity to realize dreams or aspirations that were not possible when they were working to support their families. This is an empowering feeling and is linked to the American Dream. The American Dream is the belief that an average person can achieve extraordinary things. Many pursue their ambitions during retirement. This can mean that they do not really retire from work!	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div> <div></div>

3 Discussion:

1. What do you think are the most important differences between the U.S. and your country?
2. Are there any other aspects of retirement that you think should be added to the table?
3. What would you like to do when you retire?
4. Has your understanding of Americans changed after learning about retirement there?



4 Listen to the call again. In pairs, brainstorm adjectives to describe the caller. Include what you think the caller's attitude toward retirement is.



G Role-play

Read through the following scenario and rolecards carefully. Then act out the role play.

Scenario

A young graduate is inquiring about the possibility of opening a health spa under a brand based in the United States called Spa Horizons. This brand is extremely well known and provides high-quality beauty treatments to mainly middle-class women, although there appears to be a growing market for men, particularly in West and East Coast cities. The checks on prospective franchisees are thorough. They are required to give full details on the amount of investment, location, qualified staff, and previous experience.

ROLECARD 1

The customer (prospective franchisee)

You are a young graduate in business management, and hospitality and tourism. You are very interested in the health tourism and in beauty treatments like spa, massage, and cosmetic treatments. You want to start up your own business and have just inherited an investment amount (US\$250,000) from your grandmother. You did an internship with Spa Horizon in Los Angeles in your final year of college and enjoyed it. You are thinking of starting up a branch in Boston and have already been looking for sites to rent. You want to know what criteria you must fullfill in order to get a franchise and open up.

ROLECARD 2

The agent dealing with Spa Horizon franchises

You have received an inquiry from a prospective franchisee. You need to fill out the form on the next page and make an evaluation of whether this caller is worth following up. Comments on the suitability of this prospective franchisee are important for the head office so they know whether it is worthwhile pursuing an application.

Self-evaluation

Spa Horizon INQUIRY FORM

Name:

Gender: Age:

Address:

Phone: Email:

Qualification:

Relevant experience:

Investment prospect:

Recommendation: Yes ☐ No ☐



H Self-evaluation

Tasks	Check	Comments (areas for self-improvement)
<div>A The call</div> <div>Did you understand the purpose of the call and the detailed information with particular reference to the caller’s emotion?</div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div>B Focus on language</div> <div>Can you ask different kinds of questions and use more American idioms?</div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div>C Soft skills</div> <div>Do you feel more confident about making clear explanations? How do you feel about putting your caller on hold?</div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div>D Pronunciation</div> <div>Do you feel your intonation has improved when asking questions? How confident are you with pronouncing American state names?</div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div>E Read and explain</div> <div>Can you read, synthesize, and then clearly explain to someone what you have read?</div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div>F Intercultural matters</div> <div>Do you feel more confident about the geography of the USA? Do you feel you have learned something about how Americans view work and retirement?</div>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>
<div>G Role-play</div> <div>For this unit overall, what were your strengths and weaknesses?</div>		<div></div> <div></div> <div></div>