

3. Telecourse Hang-ups

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Abstract

This practical article describes a thorough method for teaching English which enables students to retain what they have learned. Although the examples given are taken from a telecourse, the techniques used could be applied to many other situations.

Telephone courses have come into their own over the past few years. Obviously, they are a good way to get our students to speak English a little more than they ordinarily would, in a different, more extemporaneous context, where sound distortion increases their understanding difficulties and challenges their hearing acuity. However, is that enough? Does it fulfill our objective of making sure that the information and corrections they have heard will remain with them ten minutes after they get off the phone?

The way I see it, this is the major drawback with telephone courses: how to make sure that when your students *ring off*, they don't totally *hang up* on all the vocabulary you've covered, the corrected pronunciation you've worked so hard at and the new expressions discovered. In most cases, the trainer has lost his/her function of teacher and has become merely another party to whom one speaks on the telephone.

I've been called overly professional, which I take as a compliment despite the sneers that go along with this comment, but I would like to share a few ideas with you about how I go about making sure my students *hold on* to the new information, whether it's by *conference call*, *person to person* using a camera or just plain *direct dialed*.

A Four Point Lesson Plan:

1) *The lesson: The pay phone*

Most of what I call my telecourses take no more than half an hour once or twice a week. The reasons are primarily cost, the student's lack of time, motivation and maintaining a pace that keeps interest strong throughout the lesson. The way I

work it is to have a good old dictation on odd weeks and a practical theme topic on evens. For the dictations, students have nothing to prepare beforehand, but after the course, they do get a faxed or e-mailed copy of the entire text from which the dictation was taken. (They sometimes call me back later to discuss vocabulary that was not part of the lesson.)

When we do dictations, I read the text three times: the first for listening skills, the second to write the text and the third for corrections. Then the student reads the text back to me. We go over pronunciation, including stress, liaisons (yes, I do believe we make them in English!), phraseology and what I call sound waves. Punctuation rules and spelling are next, then any vocabulary that is new. I usually have them create a sentence of their own with the new vocabulary, so they are sure they understand how it is used and when. Then we take the text apart for phrasal verbs and expressions, common or colloquial. If we still have time, they transform the text they have just written into a reported speech summary.

For the theme text weeks, they have a list of topics for the entire year, received at the beginning of the year. They must prepare the texts beforehand for vocabulary, structure and pronunciation. Because I sometimes lead them on a merry chase as the bulldog secretary or the bureaucratic clerk, they learn that being flexible is important. Oftentimes, I don't have what they want or I try to sell them something more than they bargained for! As we converse, each of us makes notes (I sometimes tape the conversation for exactitude).

2) *The homework: The paper trail*

Students are asked to send me a written summary of our conversation or of the dictation text, along with the actual dictation, within the week. This has an added advantage of giving them a chance to use their past tenses, paraphrasing and reported speech. They sometimes prefer to *transfer the call* topic to a similar, personal situation, which allows them to use the same vocabulary and expressions in a different context. They are also asked to cut the words into syllables and mark the stressed syllable, as well as any long or short vowel problems they encountered. This reinforces their understanding and pronunciation of the new vocabulary and helps keep it in *call waiting mode*, maintaining it in their brain's active file.

3) *The reinforcement: The return call*

I correct their "homework" and send it back for another reinforcement. Along with the corrected homework I send the full, actual text, if it was a dictation, and my notes on listening and pronunciation problems, vocabulary and expressions, as well as any other stray problems (in structure or grammar, for example) I picked up during our conversation. Only English is used, even in definitions of words that were new.

This is also my chance to give them grammar rules in context (for example, certain verbs which take the subjunctive [I suggest he go home immediately after the meeting.], those which require an ING on the verb which follows [I favor behaving like a professional at all times.], etc.). I have always felt that grammar should not be separated from the living language, though there are those who would have my head for my beliefs!

4) *The reminders: Total recall*

The vocabulary we worked on is either general or technical. I have created a forum computer site that is interactive, and students and trainer alike add the new vocabulary and expressions to either the general or the technical vocabulary lists. This is the only time we translate vocabulary. Its eventual purpose is to help them when they have to make translations of working documents or presentations in foreign countries where the only language used is English. Having a forum site is also a means for us to get others interested in what we have done - many of my trainees send me e-mail to tell me that they have benefited from another student's lesson. We also use this site to discuss topics of mutual interest, summarize presentations made by students and play grammar and vocabulary games. In the future, we shall be using a point system to determine the student who gets a prize for the best and most active participation on the forum site. I shall probably give the person an English-English dictionary.

Taking the notes and typing them up takes quite a bit of time. If you don't have time to do the entire lesson nearly word for word as I do, then you can at least jot down any errors you have noticed and send those along as a reinforcement.

The following is a sample of an actual "topic" lesson including my notes and

corrections, with a student whose level I consider lower intermediate. The names of the student and his company have been changed to ensure privacy. Words in boldface, or words in parentheses, are those that are either corrections or new vocabulary and expressions that are common or colloquial, phrasal verbs, etc. The topic for this particular week was "Making Flight Reservations". The student had the right to choose the circumstances.

Notes by trainer during class: he had prepared

R Good morning, Air France Reservations.

S I like to talk to international flight reservations (**I'd** like to...)

I want to go to New York next month, but I don't know exactly the dates because I expect the dates, but I prefer to reserve now. (I don't know **the exact dates** yet, / I'm **waiting to hear** about the exact dates, but I'd prefer to reserve now.)

Note: watch the **position of your adverbs**; they are sandwiched if there are 2 verbs. (**I don't** exactly **know** the dates yet.)

R Can you tell me how you plan to do that without the exact dates?

S I think my departure will be in the morning, the 14th of May; the return Wednesday on 23 on May. (I'd like to leave **on** the morning of the 14th of May and return **on** Wednesday, the 23rd of May.)

R How many are you?

S I'm alone (just me) or (I'm traveling alone).

R What class do you wish to travel in?

S First class, if it's possible.

R I'm sorry, I don't have any more **room** in First Class; I do have a seat or two left in **business class**, if that's all right.

S Business Class? What's the difference?

R Well, to start with, First Class is more expensive and you have better food and complimentary champagne...

S Well, I guess business class will be all right... do you give the hour? (Can you tell me the departure time?)

R Excuse me? It's 11:30 at the moment.

S No, I mean the departure times!

R Do you wish to travel **at** night or **during** the day? Remember that the States **is** 6 hours earlier than we are here, so if you leave here at 2 p.m., you'll arrive there at 1 p.m.

- S OK. Well then, that flight is good. (That flight would be fine) can you tell me what airport? (**Which** airport does it **take off from**?)
- R From Roissy. Remember, you have to be at the airport two hours before take-off for **check-in**. Do you want an **aisle** seat?
- S I prefer a window seat. (No thank you, **I'd** prefer a window seat.)
- R In the front or... just a minute, let me check what I have left. I have a window seat, but it's in front of the emergency exit. That means you would be responsible for opening the door if there **were** an accident.
- S That's all right. I have many place for my leg. (I'd have a lot of room for my legs.) (It's plenty wide enough for my legs, at least!)
- R **That you would!** Good then, I'll just **jot down** a bit of information...
- S I have some questions! (Just a moment, I still have a few questions!) Do you tell me when we arrive in New York? (**Can** you tell me our **ETA** in New York?)
- R Well, let's see... you'll arrive at JFK airport at 1:30 p.m.
- S Do I need passport? (Do I need a passport?)
- R Yes, you do. It must be up to date and **valid** throughout your stay.
- S Must I have a visa? (Do I **have to have** a visa?)
- R No, you **needn't have** (don't need) a visa, as you're not staying over 3 months.
- S Oh good, then it's not necessary I go the embassy? (...Then I **don't have to** go to the embassy?)
- R No.
- S And some vaccinations for diseases? (And do I need to be **vaccinated** against any diseases?)
- R No, we have no exceptional diseases; the only thing you have to **watch out for** is rabid policemen in New York!
- S What is the price of the tickets? (How much is the ticket?) You see, I'm going for a WANO conference... is there a special group price?
- R Oh, I'm glad you mentioned that. We **do** have a **group rate** for WANO participants, but the flight leaves on Sunday the 13th in the evening, not on Monday the 14th.
- S Do you still have place on Sunday? I go with the group. (Do you

have any room left on Sunday? **If so**, I'll go with the rest of the group.)

- R** Yes, I have 2 seats left, but I don't have any more window seats I'm afraid...
- S** Not important. I prefer to go on Sunday. All are non-smoking? (That's not important. I'd **prefer going** on Sunday. Are all the seats non-smoking?)
- R** Yes, they are. Now to come back to the price of the seats. The group rate is 2,500 francs round trip. Will the company be paying?
- S** That sounds expensive! What I do to make agree to pay the travel? (**What do I have to do to make sure that** my company agrees to pay for the trip?)
- R** You need to send me a corporate approval number indicating our reference number 013 01 05 WC. It must be signed by a **recognized authorizing agent** and include your payment reference, whether it'll be paid by corporate credit card or by **such and such** an order number. I'll need your name and your passport number now, however.
- R** Jean Peloquin. My passport number is 195 4900 78 AZ, and it's valid to 2005. (It's valid until **2005**).
- R** That's French passport number 195 4900 78 AZ, under the name of Jean Peloquin, is that correct?
- S** It's an international passport.
- R** If you're talking about the French national identity document, which is valid throughout Europe, that's not acceptable to get into the states. You need a passport.
- S** It's a passport.
- R** Fine. And **which** company are you from?
- S** _____
- R** And your position?
- S** Is this necessary? Do you want my telephone number, too?
- R** No, sir, just your position, which serves to make sure that someone else doesn't try to take your seat...
- S** I'm safety advisor. (I'm a safety advisor)
- Note:* professions are preceded by an article, unless you're the only one, in which case "the" may be used.

- R** Thank you. That's all. Just to make sure you have all the necessary information, I'll repeat it for you... your departure is now on Sunday, May 13th at 7 p.m. Your flight leaves from Charles DeGaulle airport. Check-in begins at 4:30 p.m. You will be **met on arrival** at the airport by a WANO representative who will bring you to your hotel.
- S** What hotel? (What's the name of the hotel?) Is everyone going there?
- R** The Kensington Gardens, and yes, all the participants will be at the same hotel. It's a suite hotel with a bedroom, a reception area and a small kitchen with a one-person fridge, **stocked** with beverages. Each time you take something from the fridge, you'll **be billed for it**, and the fridge will be **restocked**.
- S** I see. Is there a phone?
- R** Yes, there's a phone and a fax line **both**.
- S** And the return? (And when is the return flight scheduled?)
- R** The program finishes **on** the 23rd at 11 p.m. If you don't wish to leave just after, and arrive **in** Paris at 6 a.m., Then you may leave on the 24th at 11 a.m.
- S** And if I want to stay longer?
- R** Well, if you do, you won't **benefit from** the group rate on the return trip. There's a **supplement of** \$120 for last minute changes, and you must inform us at least 24 hours **beforehand** (before) to be sure we still have room.
- S** That's interresant. (Interesting) it will (would) be interresant (interesting) for me to visit some museums, Manhattan and other things. (I think it would be interesting to visit...) When I receive the tickets? (**When can I expect to** receive the ticket?)
- R** You'll receive your **round trip** (Amer.) / **return** (Eng.) ticket one week in advance.
- S** Will I get it at Penly? (Will you send it to me at Penly?)
- R** Yes. If you have a problem, and you don't receive your ticket by the expected date, your are to call 01 52 34 65 65 and ask for Mrs. Fischer who is responsible for the WANO group.
- S** And can I send the information by fax?
- R** Yes, you can. Our fax number is 01 52 34 65 63. Make it to the

attention of Mrs. Fischer. You should also know that you **have the right to** only one **carry-on** and up to 70 lbs. of additional luggage.

S And if it's more?

R If you **exceed the limit** you'll have to pay a **supplement**.

S That's all right. I don't have many, many baggages. (I don't have much luggage). I have all the information. You want me send it now? (Do you want me to send it to you now?)

R That's not necessary. You'll need to send it all to Mrs. Fischer when you have the proper authorization, reference and order numbers.

S Thank you (for your help). Good-bye.

R Good-bye and thank you for flying with Air France.

Other notes:

Please watch your question structure.

There are often two verbs involved: is, can or do, along with another, primary verb.

Example: do you want to go? Can I sit at a window seat? Do I have to pay a supplement?

Use of pronouns and direct and indirect objects.

Example: do you want me to send it to you now?

Must/need to – must has an imperative feeling to it.

You must have a passport to enter the country.

But you need to bring an umbrella when you come to New York in the springtime. Here, there is a need expressed, not an imperative obligation.

Do used to reinforce an answer.

Example: yes, we do have a group rate for WANO participants.

The use of the conditional to indicate a possibility or a polite request.

Examples: I'd like to visit the city. Would you have a special rate?

I'd like a bottle of champagne and plenty of leg room! Would you like me to open the window?

Possible new vocabulary/expressions from class:

To expect = similar to anticipate.

Examples: I'm expecting to receive the dates any day now! I can't expect to find out in time to make reservations, so I'd like to book a flight now and change the dates later if necessary.

A round trip ticket (Amer.) / In English, a return ticket

Travel/trip = to travel (v), a trip (n).

A voyage has the connotation of taking a long time, and is often used for an overseas voyage to many places in many parts of the world.

An aisle seat = a seat on the walk-way between the seats
(from front to back)

To have a lot of room for (my legs).

You have room for something, not place. But you put something in its place (position/location it's supposed to be in).

Example: I put the carry-on in its place under the seat.)

Watch out for the word space as well.

Example: I have space left in my bag for one of your shirts. / often used as a synonym for room.

Note the use of the word space when talking about the baggage space (area) in a plane, or when discussing a parking space (not place, in general).

It's plenty wide enough – colloquial.

It's wide enough. Plenty wide means with extra room to spare!
(More than enough room)

Eta = estimated time of arrival

It's not necessary that I = I don't **have to**, or I don't **need to**,

depending on the situation and how much obligation is indicated.

What is the price of = **How much** is/are...

To watch out for = to be careful of

Luggage/baggage/bags/suitcases/briefcases, etc.

A bit of information: luggage is a general term and is both singular and plural. The same is true for baggage. A bag or bags, the short form for baggage, does have a singular and a plural. Suitcase can be used in both the singular and the plural (suitcases) and means the same thing; briefcase is normally used for a document holder, such as the one you carry to work daily.

A supplement = an additional amount, in weight or money, for example.

Class: from 11h15 to 12h00/ CREDIT: prep _ h/ class: 0h45/

**E-mail/fax return: _ h: total # hrs. 1h15 for student: summary
returned 03/04/01**

Anaïs Laurent has an eclectic background, including 20 years in curriculum development, ESL and management training in Universities, public and private enterprises. She has also been a real estate broker, the owner of an advertising agency and a fine arts and performing arts gallery, as well as a hospitality industry marketing specialist (luxury and destination hotels and spas). She is also a published poet and translator... In short, she has had many a life in two countries, all of which has given her tons of vocabulary and a need to share it.