



10 Communication Reminders

when English is your second
language

MANY CONTACT CENTER AGENTS AND FRONT-LINE employees have learned English as a second language (ESL). For the most part, minor slips in language won't affect the overall customer experience. However, when a customer is frustrated, confused or angry, proper use of English can make a difference.

This job aid identifies some regularly heard challenges with pronunciation, grammar and phrasing to help practice and improve clarity in speaking with callers.

1 Pronunciation

Sometimes, it's a matter of pronunciation. The words used are correct, but when the emphasis is put on the wrong syllable of key word, it can quickly confuse the listener.

Here is a list of words that come up on a regular basis that often are mispronounced. The word in question is on the left. The middle shows a phonetic spelling (how it sounds) when pronounced incorrectly. The right side shows how the word is correctly pronounced.

WORD	✗	✓
Request	REE-quest	re-KWEST
Refer	REE-fur	re-FUR
Deferred	DEE-fur	de-FUR
Deposit	DEE-poh-sit	de-PAH-zit
Hover	HOH-vur	HUH-vur
Mature	MAH-ture	mah-TUR
Forward	for-WARD	FOR-ward

2 International Radio Code

International Radio Code is great for confirming things like spellings of names, email addresses, or street addresses. You can find a listing of these at: <http://www.alphabravocharlie.info/alphabet.php>

Mastering pronunciation of these words is key! Two that are often mis-pronounced are 'L for LEE-mah (not LYE-mah) and 'Q for Keh-BECK, not KWEE-beck'. Pay particularly close attention to those two... especially if talking with a caller from Quebec!



If you want to use a substitute word, make sure there is already a context in the conversation for it. For example, if you are talking with someone named Sarah, you could easily say 'S as in Sarah' and be understood. But if there is no context, the best practice is to use the standardized code below as it is widely used and more familiar to the majority of North Americans.

3 Singular or Plural?

Like most languages, English has rules... and exceptions to rules! Some words don't follow the same pattern as others. For example:

- Paperwork
- Information.

No matter how many *pieces of paperwork* need to be filled out and no matter how many *pieces of information* were given, there is no such word as "paperworks". "Informations" also doesn't exist in English. No matter the context, these two commonly used words are always singular.

✗	"You will need to submit your <u>paperworks</u> ."
✓	"You will need to submit your paperwork."
✗	"Thank you for those <u>informations</u> ."
✓	"Thank you for that information."

When something is singular or plural, it affects the entire sentence. In the example above, you see that when we replace the incorrect "informations" to say it correctly as "information", we also had to change another word - "those" moved to "that". Now the whole sentence is singular - just as it should be!

This is always true of nouns in English. When they are singular, the whole sentence will reflect this. If they are plural, they will be plural throughout your sentence. For example:

✗	"Do you know what the tax <u>implications</u> is?"
✓	"Do you know what the tax implications are?"
✗	"There won't be a <u>deductions</u> ."
✓	"There won't be any deductions."

4 Positive or Negative?

Things can get very confusing very quickly when negatives and positives get mixed up together. Here's why:

Me: "I was told I had to call someone in our HR department for this form because it isn't available online, is that right?"

You: "Yes, it's not."



"Yes" is a positive response, but "it's not" indicates a negative response. These two are in conflict and it makes it unclear to the listener whether the response they are getting is affirmative or negative. For clarity, "No, it's not" or "Yes, it is" should always be used.

Another tricky rule is the double negative. Just like in math,

two negatives actually make a positive. This means that if you use two negatives in a sentence... you are actually saying the opposite of what you mean! For example:

- **"You cannot never tell"** actually means **"You can always tell"**
- **"There won't not be any deductions."** actually means **"There will be deductions."**

This confusion can be avoided by having only one negative in a sentence always.

5 Extra Words

Callers have to work harder to understand when sentence structure isn't quite accurate. Sometimes adding extra words that are not needed can make the sentence grammatically incorrect. Sometimes, fewer words lead to clearer and better communication.

Regarding: Regarding already indicates that you are about to identify something specific. Often, people add a preposition right after and say *"Regarding to*

your application", *"Regarding with your PIN"* or *"Regarding for your claim"*. In English, "regarding" stands alone. It should always be followed immediately by the thing you are talking about.

- "Regarding your application"
- "Regarding your PIN"
- "Regarding your claim"

For to: This is a great example of a place where adding an extra word makes the sentence less accurate. Often, ESL CSRs use *"For to take out these funds..."*, *"For to submit that claim..."* or *"For to access your account online..."*. The "for" doesn't belong. The correct phrasing here is:

- "To take out these funds..."
- "To submit that claim..."
- "To access your account online..."

This one, that one: A habit often heard is the addition of "one" after "this" or "that". While it is not explicitly incorrect, it rings strange to the North American ear. The "one" doesn't belong and can be eliminated to improve clarity and directness in communication.

✗	"I can help you with that one ."
✓	"I can help you with that."
✗	"For this one , you will need to download a form..."
✓	"For this, you will need to download a form..."

6 Missing Words

Just like adding unnecessary words can cause confusion, so can leaving out important words. While callers can usually understand what is meant, omitting words makes the caller work harder. This stands out most in those phrases that come up frequently. No shortcuts here! The whole sentence should be spoken to ensure it is correct and appropriate.

✗	"Is there anything else I can help you today?"
✓	"Is there anything else I can help you with today?"
✗	"Is it fine if you hold?"
✓	"Is it alright if I place you on hold?"
✗	"I understand how important to check the status."
✓	"I understand how important it is to check the status."

7 Dollar Amounts

Dollar values are more easily understood when expressed in dollars rather than decimals. When talking about money, speaking in dollars and cents is easier for callers to understand.

✗	"The balance is two thousand twenty one point one four."
✓	"The balance is two thousand twenty one dollars and fourteen cents."

8 Dates

Callers will more easily hear specific date information being offered when it is correctly phrased. In English, this is the way dates are correctly phrased.

✗	"It was sent on two October."
✓	"It was sent on October the 2 nd ."

9 Not Quite the Same Meaning

Some expressions may not mean exactly what you think they do. These are a few to watch out for:

"For a while"

This is often heard when placing a caller on hold. "May I place you on hold for a while?" sounds like an undefined... and long period of time. It is much better to say "May I place you on hold briefly?" or "May I place you on hold for one to two minutes?"

"Fill up"

This is often heard when talking about forms, for example "You'll need to fill up sections 1 to 8." In North America, we fill up our cars with gas... we might fill up our glass with some more water, but we don't fill up a form. You can be clearer and more accurate by saying "You'll need to fill **out** sections 1 to 8."



Because some callers will need help with things online and others will need help with paper forms, you can also avoid confusion by using the word 'click' only when talking about online services and using 'check' or 'select' when talking about boxes on a paper form.

"Going on"

This is often heard in the context of something that is ongoing or in progress, such as the assessment of a claim, or the processing of a withdrawal request, as in "Your claim is now going on" or "Your request is going on and will take two to three business days." This phrasing is not used in English. It is better and clearer to offer "Your claim is now being processed" or "Your withdrawal request is in progress and will take two to three business days".

"By the way"

This expression is used in English to change the direction of a conversation, for example if we are talking about weekend plans, and I suddenly remember that your sister was ill last week, I might say "Oh, by the way, how is your sister feeling?" I'm changing the topic to steer the conversation to something else. 'By the way' is not used when we are staying on the same subject.

If a caller has asked for their balance, for example, it would not be appropriate after verifying them to offer "By the way, your balance is...". This expression only rings naturally to the North American speaker when it is changing the topic or introducing a new subject.



10 Run On Sentences

A run on sentence is a sentence that is too long to be understood with clarity. Instead of trying to cram everything into one sentence, it would be clearer to break it into smaller pieces of information. Sometimes, this just means you're trying to communicate too much at one time. Here's an example:

Caller: Hi, I think I'm locked out of my account again.

CSR: I'm very sorry to hear that you are locked out and I understand that is very frustrating and inconvenient but not to worry because I'll be able to help unlock your account right now.

That's quite a mouthful! Instead of trying to offer it all at once, break the sentence into smaller, simpler pieces like this:

Caller: Hi, I think I'm locked out of my account again.

CSR: I'm very sorry to hear that. I'll unlock your account right now.

This helps the listener appreciate each piece of what you are offering, whether it is empathy and an assurance of help, like in the first example, or when offering directions on next steps,



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