

Introduction

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<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-podcasts-themes.htm>

This support pack contains the following materials:

- the article that you can listen to in the podcast
- an optional comprehension activity based on the article
- links to other activities on the LearnEnglish website on this theme (Telephony).

Read the article

Mobile phones

by Craig Duncan

When Scotsman Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone in 1876, it was a revolution in communication. For the first time, people could talk to each other over great distances almost as clearly as if they were in the same room. Nowadays, though, we increasingly use Bell's invention for emails, faxes and the internet rather than talking. Over the last two decades a new means of spoken communication has emerged: the mobile phone.

The modern mobile phone is a more complex version of the two-way radio. Traditional two-way radio was a very limited means of communication. As soon as the users moved out of range of each other's broadcast area, the signal was lost. In the 1940s, researchers began experimenting with the idea of using a number of radio masts located around the countryside to pick up signals from two-way radios. A caller would always be within range of one of the masts; when he moved too far away from one mast, the next mast would pick up the signal. (Scientists referred to each mast's reception area as being a separate "cell"; this is why in many countries mobile phones are called "cell phones".)

However, 1940s technology was still quite primitive, and the "telephones" were enormous boxes which had to be transported by car.

The first real mobile telephone call was made in 1973 by Dr Martin Cooper, the scientist who invented the modern mobile handset. As soon as his invention was complete, he tested it by calling a rival scientist to announce his success. Within a decade, mobile phones became available to the public. The streets of modern cities began to feature sharp-suited characters shouting into

giant plastic bricks. In Britain the mobile phone quickly became synonymous with the "yuppie", the new breed of young urban professionals who carried the expensive handsets as status symbols. Around this time many of us swore that we would never, ever own a mobile phone.



But in the mid-90s, something happened. Cheaper handsets and cheaper calling rates meant that, almost overnight, it seemed that everyone had a mobile phone. And the giant plastic bricks of the 80s had evolved into smooth little objects that fitted nicely into pockets and bags. In every pub and restaurant you could hear the bleep and buzz of mobiles ringing and registering messages, occasionally breaking out into primitive versions of the latest pop songs. Cities suddenly had a new, postmodern birdsong.

Moreover, people's timekeeping changed. Younger readers will be amazed to know that, not long ago, people made spoken arrangements to meet at a certain place at a certain time. Once a time and place had been agreed, people met as agreed. Somewhere around the new millennium, this practice started to die out. Meeting times

became approximate, subject to change at any moment under the new order of communication: the Short Message Service (SMS) or text message. Going to be late? Send a text message! It takes much less effort than arriving on time, and it's much less awkward than explaining your lateness face-to-face. It's the perfect communication method for the busy modern lifestyle. Like email before it, the text message has altered the way we write in English, bringing more abbreviations and a more lax approach to language construction. The 160-character limit on text messages has led to a new, abbreviated version of English for fast and instantaneous communication. Traditional rules of grammar and spelling are much less important when you're sitting on the bus, hurriedly typing "Will B 15min late - C U @ the bar. Sorry! :-)".

Mobile phones, once the preserve of the high-powered businessperson and the "yuppie", are

now a vital part of daily life for an enormous amount of people. From schoolchildren to pensioners, every section of society has found that it's easier to stay in touch when you've got a mobile. Over the last few years mobiles have become more and more advanced, with built-in cameras, global positioning devices and internet access. And in the next couple of years, we can expect to see the arrival of the "third generation" of mobile phones: powerful micro-computers with broadband internet access, which will allow us to watch TV, download internet files at high speed and send instant video clips to friends.

Alexander Graham Bell would be amazed if he could see how far the science of telephony has progressed in less than 150 years. If he were around today, he might say: "That's gr8! But I'm v busy rite now. Will call U 2nite."

After reading

Exercise 1: For each of the 6 questions below choose the correct answer.

- 1) Modern mobile phone technology is based on:
 - a) two-way radio
 - b) the internet
 - c) global positioning devices
 - d) yuppies
- 2) More people bought mobile phones in the 1990s because:
 - a) traditional phones didn't work anymore
 - b) they wanted to take photographs
 - c) they were bad at timekeeping
 - d) mobile phones became a lot cheaper
- 3) The first mobile phone call took place between:
 - a) two schoolchildren
 - b) two scientists
 - c) two Scotsmen
 - d) two yuppies
- 4) Mobile phones are sometimes called cell phones because of:
 - a) a technical term for telephone masts
 - b) a technical term for mobile handsets
 - c) a technical term for text messages
 - d) the number of mobile phones used in prisons
- 5) The first commercially available mobile phones looked like:
 - a) small, pocket-sized objects
 - b) telephone masts
 - c) giant plastic bricks
 - d) Alexander Graham Bell
- 6) A text message saying "Gr8! Will call U 2nite" means:
 - a) Great! I'll call you tonight.
 - b) Great! Please call me sometime in the next 2 days.
 - c) Good grief! Please call William tonight.
 - d) I'll be 15 minutes late.

More activities on this topic

You'll find links to all the following activities connected to the theme of telephony at:

<http://www.britishcouncil.org/learnenglish-central-themes-telephony.htm>

- **Word game: Telephone reading game.** Each person in this reading puzzle is talking on the phone to another person in the puzzle. But who is speaking to who?
- **Story: Promotion:** Don Jenkins works for an international telecommunications company. But things aren't what they seem!
- **Science: cubed. Pocket cursor:** Is it a phone? Is it a mouse? Mobile phones get even smarter.
- **Science: cubed. Shake and talk:** Technology allows mobile phones to connect to each other easily and securely.
- **Trivia:** Everything you (n)ever wanted to know about telephony.
- There is also a telephony-related cartoon, a poll, and some carefully selected external links.

Answers to comprehension activity: 1. (a); 2. (d); 3. (b); 4. (a); 5. (c); 6. (a)

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