



Telephone Protocols & Guidelines

Issued by: VP of Administration and Finance

Applies to: All University Employees

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Introduction

NJCU staff make and receive hundreds of telephone calls each day. Regardless of who initiates the call, telephone contact with NJCU is one of the most important touch points for the university and critical for business success. The reputation of the university is contingent upon the quality of service provided. It is therefore essential that telephone interaction be as professional and consistent as possible.

Purpose

This document defines protocols and establishes guidelines for all employees who conduct business through the telephone for NJCU.

Guidelines

Part A: Telephone Answering Protocols

Initial Answering

Ringling phones are everyone's responsibility and should ideally be answered on the first ring and within 5 rings. Initial greetings should aim to be welcoming and positive in tone.

- All calls should be answered in a pleasant and professional manner.
- The initial greeting should include the name of the department and the full name of the person answering.
- If the phone is answered after more than 5 rings, apologize for the delay.
- Telephones should not be left to ring out.
- Where a telephone is unattended, arrangements should be made to activate Voicemail or call forwarding.
- Every effort should be made to assist the caller at the time of the initial call. Avoid bouncing callers from phone to phone.

Use of Voicemail

Although Voicemail is an essential feature of modern telephone systems, callers can become frustrated where messages left on Voicemail systems go unanswered or where referral to another number ends in another Voicemail message.

- Every university telephone voice extension should have voicemail activated.
- Voicemail messages should be retrieved regularly and at least daily.
- The voicemail message should be changed to advise callers that a staff member will be away for a specific period of time.
- Voicemail greetings should be changed regularly to reflect the different circumstances and be kept up to date.
- Departmental/service-oriented voicemail messages should include the name of the department and hours of operation.
- Lengthy or complex messages should be avoided.
- Voicemail should not be used for call screening.

Transferring Calls

All NJCU telephones have the capacity to redirect an incoming call to another telephone manually.

- Where calls are being intentionally forwarded to another department or staff member, the name of the staff member/department and telephone extension should be provided to the caller prior to forwarding.
- Announce the caller to the transferred person.
- Where the intended recipient of the call does not answer, the caller should be given the option of leaving a message on Voicemail.
- If a staff member receives a call that has come to them in error, every effort should be made to properly assist the caller.
- Avoid transferring a call over and over again without resolution.

Forwarding Calls

All NJCU telephones have the capacity to forward an incoming call to another telephone automatically.

- Call forwarding should be used in instances where answering calls is required and forwarding to voicemail is unacceptable.
- When using call forwarding, alert the forwarded party to ensure their availability and willingness to accept the calls.

Placing Calls on Hold

All NJCU telephones have the capacity to place calls on hold.

- Ask permission to place the caller on hold.
- Do not leave a caller on hold for an extended period of time.
- Place caller on hold when notified of another incoming call so as not to miss the call.

Part B - Role of the Switchboard Operator

The role of the switchboard operator is to answer the incoming calls made to the university's main number. The switchboard assists both external callers and NJCU staff and students with general telephone inquiries.

- All calls should be answered in a positive and informative manner

- Where applicable, calls should be referred to the appropriate departments/individuals within the University.
- To facilitate calls, the operator should be aware of important events/dates.
- There a special interest issue has arisen that is likely to prompt increased calls to the University the switchboard should be briefed on the appropriate forwarding of the calls.

Part C - High Volume Calls

Supervisors are responsible for managing high volume telephone call situations so that staff can cope effectively with the situation and continue to provide a welcoming and professional service. That may involve technical telephone call management systems and rotation of staff.

- Departments with high volume of calls should utilize Automated Call Distribution (ACD) systems to help in call routing. Call the University Helpdesk to request this service.

Part D - Responsibilities of Supervisors and Staff

- Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that all staff who have significant telephone answering responsibilities comply with the university's telephone protocols and guidelines.
- Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that procedures are in place to manage calls, particularly where staff are absent from the workplace.
- Use of University telephones for personal purposes should be limited and brief.
- Individual staff members should make arrangements for telephone coverage during brief or extended absences.
- Supervisors and individual staff members have a responsibility to ensure that entries in the NJCU Telephone Directory are accurate. Corrections should be sent to the Department of Human Resources.

Additional Resources

- About.com: Phone Answering Tips To Win Business
<http://sbinfocanada.about.com/cs/management/qt/telephonetips.htm>
- Phone Answering Skill: How to Make a Great First Impression
<http://www.sideroad.com/Sales/phone-answering-skill.html>

Acknowledgements

Content for this document was borrowed from the following sources:

- Telephone Protocols Policy, University of Western Sidney (UWS)
- Telephone Answering Policy, North Easter Worchestershire College (NEW College)
- Telephone Courtesy Protocol, Center for Disease Control (CDC)