



**Rob:** Hello, I'm Rob, welcome to 6 Minute English. With me in the studio today is Feifei.

**Feifei:** Hi Rob.

**Rob:** The star of today's programme is not Feifei. But an item of office equipment, which normally doesn't get much attention – it's the **landline telephone**.

**Feifei:** I guess we don't really give much of a thought to landline phones. Before mobile phones, we didn't even call them 'landlines'. They were just phones.

**Rob:** They were just phones – phones with a curly wire coming out of them, plugged into the wall. Millions of people had them. Millions more couldn't afford one, or didn't live near a phone network - or were on a waiting list to have one installed. In India even today, in the age of the mobile phone, there are still 50,000 people on the waiting list for a landline. But now, all over the world, the number of people with a landline is falling, because people prefer to use mobile phones. Worldwide, four in every five phone numbers are mobile phone numbers. In India, that means there are 614 mobile phones for every thousand people. But how many landlines do you think there are, for every thousand people?

- a) 2.9
- b) 29
- c) 290

**Feifei:** I'll go for b) 29.

**Rob:** We'll find out if you're right at the end of the programme. Now, the landline might disappear one day, but it hasn't gone yet. A big landline phone sits on many office desks round the world. For decades, a landline phone came with a **white collar job**.

**Feifei:** A white collar job, meaning an office job.

**Rob:** Exactly. English journalist Lucy Kellaway has a landline phone on her desk. It's big, grey and it doesn't ring very often. And even when it does ring, she doesn't answer it.

**Feifei:** A lot of people don't answer their landlines these days. You can leave a message as a **voicemail**, but you don't know whether it will be listened to.

**Rob:** Well I think maybe it won't. Lucy Kellaway hasn't answered her landline phone for a year, or checked her voicemail. And she told the BBC what happened when she found her password, and checked her voicemail after all that time:

**Lucy Kellaway:**

*Until about a decade ago, the office phone was the symbol of white collar work. It was the most important thing on any desk. But now these clumping phones sit largely silent. My own large grey telephone sits quietly on my desk and when it occasionally decides to ring I don't usually answer. Just now I decided to see what I'd been missing. It took a while as I couldn't remember my password, and then I found more than 100 messages were waiting patiently to be heard.*

**Rob:** Lucy Kellaway checking her voicemail messages after 12 months.

**Feifei:** She had 100 messages. That's bad, all those people must wonder why she didn't reply to them.

**Rob:** Well, actually she found none of the messages were important – they were all duplicates or copies of messages she'd also received by email or **text**.

**Feifei:** Text as in text message – or SMS.

**Rob:** That's right. Let's hear what she found. Here's Lucy again:

**Lucy Kellaway:**

*The first voicemail went like this: 'Hi Lucy this is Marcia – just following up on an email I sent.' I pressed delete. The second: 'Hello Lucy, just a quick call, I'm from such-and-such, we just wanted to update our contact details'. And on it went. All either useless or duplicates of information I got by email or text. By not answering the phone for a year I'd lost nothing and*

*gained much in terms of efficiency and control. It has allowed me to talk only to the people I want to talk to, at a time that suits me.*

**Feifei:** Hmm, so people were just emailing her and then following up on the emails with a call to her landline. Sometimes if people don't answer an email, I **follow it up** with a phone call as well.

**Rob:** So maybe Lucy doesn't answer her emails either! She says not answering her landline means she's gained in **efficiency** and **control**.

**Feifei:** She's more efficient because she says it doesn't interrupt her work.

**Rob:** And in control because she only talks to people she wants to talk to, at a time when she wants to talk.

**Feifei:** I agree with her, I like to screen calls.

**Rob:** **Screening calls** – you like to check who's calling and decide whether to answer? I hope you don't do that to me!

**Feifei:** You'll never know! But really, email and texting is more private. I don't like talking on the phone in a busy office.

**Rob:** Well lots of people agree with you, Feifei. But although she doesn't answer hers, Lucy Kellaway misses the atmosphere of a busy office. She explains why.

**Lucy Kellaway:**

*The death of the landline may be better for us individually but it's worse for the bonds between us. The saddest thing is what the decline has done to the atmosphere in offices. There are no noisy phones creating buzz and urgency. Once upon a time I found these calls annoying but now the door into the private lives of my workmates is closed. I wish I could open it again.*

**Feifei:** She's a journalist, so I imagine her newspaper office used to be very noisy, with lots of phones ringing and urgent phone conversations. That must have been an exciting atmosphere.

**Rob:** Yes, you heard she used the word '**buzz**' for that exciting atmosphere. But she also says some of the calls were annoying.

**Feifei:** And it sounds like they weren't all about important newspaper business, because she mentioned hearing about her colleagues' private lives.

**Rob:** Okay so now to our question. Earlier I asked you about landline phones in India. How many landlines are there for each thousand people?

**Feifei:** And I said 29.

**Rob:** And you were right. The answer is 29 landlines for every thousand people. Well, we're out of time. Please join us again soon for 6 Minute English from [bbclearningenglish](http://bbclearningenglish.com).

**Both:** Bye.

## Vocabulary and definitions

<b>landline telephone</b>	a fixed line, or wired phone
<b>white collar work</b>	office or other work where people dress smartly
<b>voicemail</b>	voice messages left on a phone
<b>text</b>	SMS
<b>following up on</b>	following a message with another message or call
<b>efficiency</b>	fast, effective working
<b>control</b>	the power to decide
<b>screening calls</b>	checking who is calling before deciding whether to answer
<b>buzz</b>	busy, exciting atmosphere

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