

Mass-Observation Autumn/Winter Directive 1996

Part One

Using the telephone

Please remember as always to start with a brief (2-3 line) autobiography: M-O number (NOT name) town or area where you live, age, occupation or former occupation.

This is both a serious and a light-hearted look at something that most of us do at least some of the time, and some of us do a great deal - communicating by telephone. This is one of those directives where you can take it however far you like. It isn't a commissioned or collaborative directive theme - it is one that interests me personally, so please write as much or as little as you feel able.

NOTE: If you do not own a telephone, please still write about your experience of the phone, and just adapt the questions as far as you can to your use of public phones and your observations of other people's phone behaviour.

AT HOME

Your phone at home: please describe whether you have a telephone in your home at the moment. Where do you keep it? Describe where you sit when you use it - if you sit that is! Do you have extensions? If so, where are they? What kind of handset do you have? Do you have a cordless phone - if so how do you find it? Drawings, plans of your house/rooms or photos welcome.

Can you describe how you use the telephone? Are you are a great chatterer on the phone or do you keep calls brief? Do you welcome calls in general or do you find them intrusive?

Do you call **long-distance or abroad**? Are there people you talk to often on the phone? Are there differences between you and other members of household in how you use the phone?

Do you have a **"phone voice"**? Does anyone else you know? Please describe.

What do you say when you first pick up the phone? (PLEASE NO NUMBERS OR NAMES IN YOUR REPLY!!)

What do you mostly use your phone to do?

Answering machines: do you have one? If so, why did you get it? Do you have it on all the time (even when you are at home?) Please write out the **message** that is on your machine at the moment (*no real numbers or names though*). Do you change it much? Who records the message? If you don't have an answering machine, is this because you don't like them, or you feel they are too expensive? Please explain.

What do you think of other people's answering machine messages? If any come to mind that you liked or disliked, please describe them.

Special services: do you use any special services offered by the phone companies? Please provide details. Please also mention any special facilities including phone banking that you have had installed.

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The cost: how are you billed? Do you receive itemised bills and, if so, is this important for you? Do you think of your phone as a luxury or an essential item? Any thoughts on what you spend on your phone calls and how this relates to your household budget generally would be welcomed.

Your telephone history: can you remember when you first used a phone? (Specify year if you can, place and purpose). When did you first acquire a phone? Have your phone calling habits changed over the years? If so, please say how.

Phones at work (if there is one)

Some of you, I know, work from home, and may have already answered this above, but please check over this section to see if you have covered everything.

Do you have a phone at work? How are phones allocated in your place of work? How are they used? For example, do some people have other people to answer their phones for them? Does your place of work have a phone call answering policy about what to say?

Do you have answering machines? What is their purpose? Please describe any special facilities which you may use such as conferencing, or call waiting, or "camping on" or special phone links. (Please be sure to mention what kind of place you work in).

Car phones and mobile phones

What do you think about them in general? Do you own one of these? If not, would you consider buying them? General experiences and opinions please!

Phone services

Which kinds of services have you used and found useful (or not)? For example, you may use the electronic booking system which is used by some cinemas, or the selection of services by pushing buttons which you often get for train times. How do you feel about these relatively new developments?

What about **Help Lines and Chat Lines**? Have you, or anyone you know, used these services? Have you or your friends ever used sex lines?

Do you ever use 1471 to find out who called when you were out?

Nuisances calls: The most serious nuisance of course is the obscene caller. Have you been unfortunate enough to have had experience of this? If you can, please describe.

But a milder hassle is the "cold caller". How do you feel about phone advertising and market research? Maybe you like it and have benefited from it? Maybe you have done it yourself? Stories please. Please mention if you are ex-directory and why.

Public phones: Thoughts, experiences, opinions of phone boxes please.

Phone cards: do you use them? Which kinds? Do you have a BT card?

What have I left out? Please write in anything that YOU think I should have mentioned. For example, I'd like to ask about **electronic mail** too as I know a very few of you have begun using it regularly. If you have the time to write about your use of e-mail, and whether it has replaced the use of the telephone for you, I would be most interested.

Part Two

Unpaid work

Please remember as always to start a new page for Part 2 and repeat your brief (2-3 line) autobiography: M-O number (NOT name) town or area where you live, age & occupation.

It is especially important in this part of the directive for us to have your current paid occupation or former occupation.

YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE

Everyone who participates in Mass-Observation already does this, but we are interested to find out about anything else you do in a voluntary capacity.

Types of work: please describe anything you do which you regard as unpaid work, whether or not it is arranged through an organisation (such as being a special constable, a school governor, a councillor, a churchwarden, selling in a charity shop, flag selling, or work-based/street collections) or whether you arrange it yourself informally (such as doing shopping regularly for an elderly neighbour). If in doubt, please include it.

Time spent: could you please describe how much you do in a typical month and give an estimate of how much time it takes up.

Getting started: why did you start working in a voluntary capacity? Where did you find out about the need for the unpaid work that you do? How long have you been doing it for?

What you feel you get out of it: what benefits do you gain from your volunteering? Why do you carry on? Tell us about any drawbacks or difficulties.

Other people: how do you think that others might be encouraged to be volunteers?

No unpaid work: if you don't do any unpaid work for community benefit (other than your M-O work) please say why. Or if you used to do unpaid work but have stopped, please let us know about this.

YOUR GENERAL OPINIONS AND THOUGHTS

The meanings of words: how you would define the words '**voluntary organisation**' and '**charity**'?

Voluntary work in our society: do you feel the work *should* be left to voluntary effort or that it should be taken over by the State or some other body? Does a society with voluntary workers show it is a caring society?

Voluntary workers: what you think about them? Do you think voluntary workers are less efficient than paid professional workers, on the whole? Do you think voluntary workers are taking away opportunities for paid employment for others?

Traditionally voluntary workers have tended to come from the better-off sections of society. Would you say this still remains true, or have you observed changes?

All comments you would like to make on the subject of unpaid work will be very welcome.

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Part three

The Next General Election

A few years ago during the period of the Gulf War, several hundred of you kept occasional diaries to record your reactions to events during that war. This has proved to be one of most valuable collections in the Archive so far.

Could I now ask you to do the same sort of diary in the run up to the General Election? It can be as long or short as you wish, it can be daily or monthly. It should include your reactions to the political situation, the issues which are being debated, the media, the performance of politicians, your opinions of the campaigns, and wherever appropriate, your own involvement.

You can send a first instalment in with your reply to Part 1 and 2 to this directive if you wish, or you can wait until after the Election and send it all in at once, perhaps with your reply to the Spring 1997 directive (which will most likely also cover the Election). If you prefer to send it in instalments, please bear in mind that this costs more in postage, and also creates more work for us at the Archive as each item must be separately recorded and acknowledged.

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