Telephone Purchase and Repair

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I am currently renting a phone. Should I buy one instead? You will probably save money in the long run if you buy a phone. Let's say you pay $2 a month to rent your phone; in just one year you have paid $24. You may be able to buy a similar phone for that amount and save $2 a month on your phone bill. Keep in mind that you may have other costs if you buy a phone. For instance, all new phones use modular jacks that plug into the outlet. If you have to convert your phone outlets to accept modular jacks, this will be an added cost of buying a phone. Also, when you own a phone, you are responsible for repairs.

I have been renting my phone for years. Do I own it now? No. Just as you will never own a house or apartment by paying rent, you do not automatically own your phone by paying rent. When you rent, you are paying for the use of someone else's property — it belongs to them until you buy it (unless the company decides to give you the phone).

Can I buy the phone I am renting? Yes, most companies will allow that. However, if you have had the phone for several years, ask if you can exchange it for a newer one. After you have used the new phone at home to make sure that it works, buy that phone.

If I buy a phone, how often will it need repairs? Standard phones are designed to last 25 to 30 years and require servicing on an average of once every seven years. The newer one-piece electronic phones may be more likely to need repairs and repair bills may be higher than the price of the phone. Reconditioned phones should last about as long as a new phone.

What are reconditioned phones? Reconditioned phones have had all defective parts replaced with new parts by a professional. They usually cost less than new phones.
What should I look for when I shop for a phone? Look for a phone that seems sturdy and would be comfortable to use. You should test the phone in the store so that you can hear the ring. You should also make a call from the store so you can hear how voices sound on it. If you cannot test the phone in the store, be certain that you can return it if you are not pleased after you have tested it at home.

Some other items to consider are:
- Is it easy to hang up the receiver in the correct position?
- How easily could you accidentally disconnect your caller (for example, could your chin bump the hang-up button as you talk)?
- Do the lines between the phone and outlet and the receiver and phone unplug? If so, you could easily replace a broken cord or change to a different length.
- Does the dial seem sturdy? If it is a push-button model, do the buttons have enough spring action? Are they wobbly? Are they large enough? How are they arranged (square, circular, linear)? Are they well spaced?
- If the phone has additional features such as a hold button, would you use these features?
- If you or a member of your family has a hearing problem, is the phone hearing-aid compatible?

What is the difference between a tone phone and a pulse phone? Tone phones are push-button models that produce different musical tones when you push the buttons. Their use requires that you have tone phone service from your local company (which costs extra). A tone phone is required to use some long-distance services and to bank by phone.

A pulse phone makes a series of clicks when you dial. Older models were rotary dial but many pulse phones are now push-button. Pulse phones are universal; they will work on either pulse or tone lines. There are also phones that can be used as either a pulse or a tone phone.
Is the warranty important? Yes. Always read the warranty before buying a phone. If there is no written warranty or guarantee, you will have to pay for all repairs yourself. If there is a warranty, the seller may pay for part or all of the costs of repairing or replacing the phone for a certain period of time.

Items to look for in a warranty include:

- What period of time does the warranty cover? Warranty coverage may be for only 30 days or it may be for several years. After that time you will have to pay for repairs.
- Where will repairs be made? Will you have to mail the phone to a repair center? Will the phone be repaired in the store? Could you borrow a phone to use while yours is being fixed?
- How much will you have to pay for repairs? Some warranties promise repairs will be made at no charge. Others require you to pay a specific amount regardless of the problem. With still other warranties, the charge depends on the type of repair needed.

Is a warranty different from a service contract? Yes. A warranty is provided at no cost. With a service contract, you pay a fee in return for the repair of all or specific defects within a given period of time. Stores and some telephone companies also sell service contracts for the phones they sell. Before buying a service contract, ask about the period of coverage, where repairs will be made, and whether there is a charge for repairs. Ask what the service contract covers that the warranty does not cover.

What should I do if my phone is not working? First, find out whether the problem is in the phone itself or in the wiring. If you have a newer telephone that plugs into a wall jack, you can check the system yourself. Unplug the phone that seems to have the problem. Then plug another phone into the same jack. (Ask to borrow a neighbor's phone if you do not have two phones.) If the second phone seems to be working, the problem may be in the first one. If the problem does not stop no matter what phone you use, the inside or outside wiring may need to be repaired.
If you do not have the kind of phone that can be unplugged from a jack, call the local telephone company and ask them to test the line. They may be able to find out from the test whether the problem is in the phone or in the wiring.

Testing the phone yourself or having it tested can save you money. So can knowing who to call if your phone does need repair. Unless you rent your phone from the local phone company or have a service contract with them on a phone you own, you will be charged for a service call to your home. However, the phone company's repair person is not allowed to repair a phone unless it is a rental or is covered by a service contract. So even if the problem is in the phone, you might have to pay service charges and still have a phone that does not work.

**What should I do if the problem is in my phone?** If you are renting the phone, read the rental agreement you signed. If you bought your phone, read the warranty. Either the agreement or the warranty should tell you where to call or where to take the phone for repairs. If not, call the company or store from which you obtained the phone and ask for information.

**What should I do if the problem is in the wiring?** Your local phone company is usually responsible for outside wiring. You are responsible for inside wiring repairs. You can make those repairs yourself or you can hire the local phone company or an independent repair service to do the work. Most local phone companies now sell maintenance agreements or service contracts for inside wiring. With a service contract, needed repairs are usually made at no charge. The cost of the service contract is most likely to be worthwhile if you frequently need repairs or if you live in a home with older wiring.
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