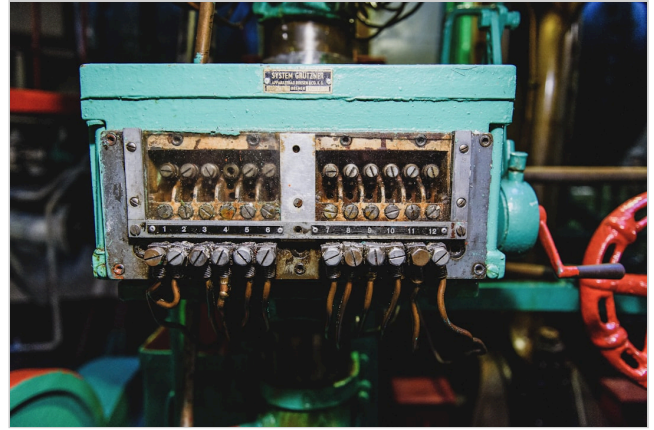


Switchboard Operators

Reading Worksheet — Level C | tahricteaches.com

Long ago, phones could not **connect** calls by themselves. People called switchboard operators to help them. These workers sat at big boards with hundreds of holes and **wires**. When someone wanted to call a friend, the operator would plug wires into the right holes to connect the two phones.



Most switchboard operators were young women.

Phone companies liked to hire women because they had nice voices and were patient with customers. The women would say "Number please?" when people called. Then they would quickly find the right connection and plug in the wires. This was one of the first jobs that let women work outside their homes.

The work was hard and required fast hands. Operators had to **reach** across big boards and plug in many wires very quickly. They helped connect all kinds of calls - people **talking** to friends, businesses calling customers, and emergency calls to the police or fire department. Sometimes people shared phone lines, and operators had to make sure everyone could use them.

This job was very important from about 1880 to 1960. At the busiest times, millions of operators worked all around the world. They were the only way people could make phone calls to other cities or countries. Without these workers, the **telephone** system could not work.

Everything changed when new **machines** were invented. These automatic systems could connect calls without human help. People could **dial** numbers directly and the machine would make the connection. Today, computers and robots do this job. Call centers and voice assistants are like the modern version of the old switchboard operators.

A. Vocabulary

- | | |
|--------------------|--|
| 1. connect _____ | a. to stretch your arm to touch something far away |
| 2. wires _____ | b. devices that do work automatically |
| 3. operators _____ | c. a device used to talk to people far away |
| 4. plug _____ | d. to push numbers on a phone to make a call |
| 5. reach _____ | e. to join two things together |
| 6. talking _____ | f. thin metal strings that carry electricity |
| 7. telephone _____ | g. people who work with machines or equipment |
| 8. emergency _____ | h. to put something into a hole to make a connection |
| 9. machines _____ | i. speaking to someone |
| 10. dial _____ | j. a dangerous situation that needs quick help |

B. True or False

1. Old phones could connect calls by themselves. ____
2. Switchboard operators were mostly young women. ____
3. Operators said "Number please?" to customers. ____
4. The job required fast hands and good reaching ability. ____
5. Only men were allowed to be switchboard operators. ____
6. Operators helped connect emergency calls. ____
7. The job was important from 1880 to 1960. ____
8. New automatic machines replaced human operators. ____
9. All telephone calls still need human operators today. ____

C. Fill in the Blanks

Word Bank: connect, wires, plug, reach, talking, machines, dial

1. Operators would _____ wires into holes to connect calls.
2. The workers had to _____ across big boards quickly.
3. People used phones for _____ to friends and family.
4. Automatic _____ replaced human operators.
5. Today people can _____ numbers directly.

D. Comprehension Questions

1. Why did phone companies prefer to hire women as operators?
2. What did operators say when people called them?
3. What kinds of calls did operators help connect?
4. When was this job most important?
5. What replaced human switchboard operators?

E. Discussion Questions

1. Would you like to have worked as a switchboard operator? Why or why not?
2. How do you think people felt when phones became automatic?
3. What jobs today are similar to the old switchboard operator job?

Answer Key

Switchboard Operators — Teacher Reference Only

A. Vocabulary: 1-e, 2-f, 3-g, 4-h, 5-a, 6-i, 7-c, 8-j, 9-b, 10-d

B. True/False: 1-F, 2-T, 3-T, 4-T, 5-F, 6-T, 7-T, 8-T, 9-F

C. Fill Blanks: 1-plug, 2-reach, 3-talking, 4-machines, 5-dial

D. Comprehension:

1. Companies thought women had nice voices and were more patient with customers.
2. Operators said "Number please?" when people called.
3. They connected calls between friends, business calls, and emergency calls to police or fire departments.
4. The job was most important from about 1880 to 1960.
5. Automatic machines and direct dial systems replaced human operators.