
A scam telephone call.

My phone rings. A Young Lady claims that Microsoft Technical Support Department has identified a problem with my computer.

**The aim of the game is to make them waste as much of their time as possible.
Here are rules:**

- 1. If you keep them on the phone for five minutes, you get one point for every full minute thereafter.**
- 2. If the first caller passes you to a manager or supervisor you get five bonus points.**
- 3. If you make them use foul language before they hang up, you get twenty five bonus points.**

Hint: a good trick is to keep asking *wh*-questions.

YL. Good morning, I am ringing from Microsoft because we have identified a problem with your computer.

Me. Guten Tag! Was kann ich für Sie tun? Wie kann ich Ihnen behilflich sein?

YL. Do you speak English, sir?

Me. Yes, a little bit. But please speak slowly.

YL. Certainly, Sir. We are receiving critical warnings from your computer. Your Microsoft licence has expired. You have to renew your licence, or we will have to block your computer tomorrow morning.

Me. Oh dear! Where are you ringing from?

YL. From Microsoft in California.

Me. Gosh California! What's the weather like there today?

YL. It is not my job to tell you the weather, Sir.

Me. I suppose not. But it's the middle of the night, isn't it, in California? Do they make you work all night?

YL. This is urgent. We will block your computer if you do not renew your licence.

Me. My brother told me that Microsoft never contact their customers direct.

YL. That is correct, Sir, but we are from the Technical Support Department. We have identified a problem in your computer.

Me. You say you are ringing from California? That's odd. Why does my phone tell me that you are ringing from a number just north of Berlin?

YL. Please do not waste my time, Sir. Our calls are transferred automatically to anywhere in the world.

Me. Gosh, is that possible? How does that work?

YL. I don't understand you. Please pay attention, Sir, this is very serious.

Me. By the way, where are you from? You have a very strong Indian accent.

YL. I'm ringing from California.

Me. No, I mean where are **you** from? You don't have an American accent.

YL. I'm from Malaysia.

Me. Oh, I do apologize. I used to have a friend from India: she sounded just like you. From Malaysia? I've always wanted to go there. Another friend was recently in Kuala Lumpur. Is that where you come from?

YL. This is very serious. Your computer is illegal because you have not renewed your Microsoft licence.

Me. Oh, I'm sure my driving licence is still valid.

YL. No, no. Your Microsoft licence has expired.

Me. You mean I need to pass a test before I can use my computer? How do I arrange that?

YL. Please listen. If you do not do what I say, the police will come and arrest you. Please do not waste any more of my time. Sir, we have identified a problem with your computer.

Me. I tell you what. I'm not very good with computers. I've switched on the loudspeaker on my phone so that I can audio-record your call. Is that OK? Then I'll take screen shots of what you ask me to do. Then I'll have a record of your call. Later I can upload it all to YouTube to help all the other people who get these calls. Do you think that will help other people to waste your time?

YL. I don't understand you. Just a moment, I will transfer you to my manager.

[... A Young Man takes over the call. Five bonus points!]

YM. Good morning, I am ringing from Microsoft because we have identified a problem with your computer.

Me. Bonjour, monsieur. Je vous prie de m'expliquer brièvement en quoi je pourrais vous être utile. Comment puis-je vous aider? Qu'est-ce que je peux faire pour améliorer la qualité de votre vie et de votre santé?

YM. Do you speak English, sir?

Me. A leettle leettle.

YM. A little little. I will speak slowly. We have identified a problem with your computer. Your Microsoft licence has expired and we will have to block your computer tomorrow morning. Is your computer switched on?

Me. Where has the Young Lady gone? Can I speak to her again? I liked her accent. And she wanted to recommend to me restaurants in Kuala Lumpur.

YM. Is your computer switched on, Sir?

Me. I have a laptop. I left it in another room: should I go and get it?

YM. Yes, Sir. You must switch on your computer and then do what I say.

Me. OK. Just a moment. Don't hang up, I'll be back in a moment.

[... A few minutes pass. Remember: one point for every minute.]

Me. Now, where were we? You were trying to sell me car insurance. Oh, no, I know ... OK, I've got my laptop. It's new, but my brother explained to me how to switch it on, I'm not much good with machines, you know mobile phones, electric kettles, micro-waves and so on. OK, it's switched on, and I can see a screen which says Boogle. My brother showed me how do that too.

YM. Perhaps you mean Google, Sir.

Me. Yes, that's right. How did you know?

YM. Now you see a little window. Please type in “www”.

Me. How do you spell that? D-O-U-B-L-E-Y-O-U?

YM. Just the letters “www”.

Me. Oh, yes, my brother explained that means “World-Wide-Web”, doesn’t it?

YM. Yes, Sir, “www”, then “dot”.

Me. Spelled D-O-double-T?

YM. Just a dot, like a full-stop. Please pay attention, Sir. I am helping you to fix a problem with your computer.

Me. Yes, it’s a terrible problem. You people ring me up and tell me my computer has a problem. I think we are stuck in a recursive loop.

YM. I don’t understand you.

Me. Well, it’s a kind of vicious circle. You ring me up and say, “Sir, your computer has a problem.” And I say, “Yes, the problem is that you keep ringing me up and saying, ‘Sir, your computer has a problem’.” And then I say, “Yes, that’s the problem.” And then you say, “Sir, your computer has a problem.” You see what I mean?

YM. I don’t understand you.

Me. I’ll try again.

You ring me to tell me that
my computer has a problem.

I tell you that
your phone call
telling me that my computer has a problem
is itself the problem.

You tell me that
you don’t understand.

I tell you that
your failure to understand
that your phone call
telling me that my computer has a problem
is a second problem.

You tell me that
you don't understand.

I tell you that
your claim not to understand
that you don't understand
that your phone call
telling me that my computer has a problem
is a third problem.

You tell me that
you don't understand.

I decide to get out of the loop. So I tell you
that what you are telling me
is complete and utter tosh, a load of old codswallop, balderdash,
baloney, garbage, nonsense, twaddle, ...
that these phone calls are scams
and that you must have realised by now
that I don't believe a word of what you say
that this could go on for ever
that I'm getting hungry and it's time for lunch
and that the problem now is
that you (claim that you) don't understand recursion.

Or is it just an endless loop? With self-embeddings? Or self-
reference? You should know. You said you were the computer
expert.

[... YM says something very rude and hangs up. 25 bonus points!]