

# UNRAVELLING SOME OF THE MYSTERIES OF CALL CHANGES

## INTRODUCTION

Call changes are a form of team ringing where the bells begin in rounds (e.g. 1-2-3-4-5-6) and this order/sequence of bells is altered by the 'conductor' speaking (calling) out instructions.

Call changes are a foundation level form of bellringing that causes the sequences to change. In many towers it is the bread-and-butter ringing. However making the change happen following a call needs to be crisply performed to make them sound good, but this is not always done well. The transition can often take several pulls before the bells settle into ringing at the correct time after the right bell.

The secret is to understand what is happening when a call is made; to be aware of the bells ringing before or after you; to plan ahead to think what would happen if a specific call was made that will affect you; and to listen carefully to the calls made by the conductor.

There are also several 'systems' that can be used to call changes which can make it difficult to explain, but more of that later. For now be reassured that at the heart of the matter, whatever the 'system', the fundamental change is the same as described in the next section.

For now, it is worth understanding that it is worthwhile settling into some evenly spaced well struck rounds, before starting to make any changes. This will allow each ringer the opportunity to become comfortable with their bell, adjust the position of their hands on the tail end and catch point on the sally and be confident about the balance point, and to sense the speed and rhythm of the bells.

gap	Handstroke...						Backstroke...						gap	Handstroke...						Backstroke...					
	1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6		1	2	3	4	5	6	1	2	3	4	5	6

Well struck rounds and call changes are evenly spaced, and the 'leading' bell (first bell in the sequence) must ensure there is a 'handstroke gap' to clearly separate the sequences, and show where it begins.

## THE FUNDAMENTALS

1	2	3	4	5	6
1	2	4	3	5	6

In most systems, calls are made by the conductor to swap one pair of adjacent bells in the sequence at each call. In the above example bells 3 and 4 are swapped. These bells have to smartly change their position in the overall sequence.

The 3 in this case has to ring later in the sequence than it had previously, so has to wait for the other bell to ring before it. The ringer has to make sure the bell reaches the balance point and wait longer, watching for the new bell it has to follow, and pull their rope after and follow the new bell.

Conversely the 4 has to ring earlier in the sequence than it had previously, so has to avoid waiting for the old bell it followed previously, and ring earlier. This usually means you need to stop the bell rope rising as high up by *resisting* the rise of the rope as your hands rise above your head holding the sally. This is referred to as 'checking the bell'.

When you 'check' the bell you take energy out of the swing of the bell and it will not rise as high at the end of the next swing (backstroke), causing the bell to ring early again, and this time it would be too early. The way to overcome this is to not just 'check' the bell, but to 'check *and* pull' a bit more firmly.

In other words you pull the rope/sally slightly more firmly as soon as you have checked the bell to give back some energy you have taken out. The added energy from the stronger pull will help the bell rise all the way to its balance point on the next stroke (backstroke) allowing you to steady the bell.

The last bell affected is the bell highlighted in green background (number 5 in this example). This bell is following the bells that have swapped, and is barely affected because it must continue to ring steadily without needing to wait longer, or ring earlier – i.e. ring at the same time as the previous sequence. The difference is that this bell must ring after a different bell number. The 5 in our example was ringing after the 4, but after the bells swap it is ringing after (following) the 3.

Bells 1, 2, and 6 in the above example are unaffected and continue to ring after the bells they were following before. Only 3 bells are affected in any shape of form for a single call. Every other bell is unaffected whether ringing on 4, 6, 8 or more bells!

So in summary, most systems involve 2 adjacent bells swapping, with one ringing earlier, and the other later than in the previous sequence, and one other bell is affected by ringing after (following) a different bell while continuing to ring at a steady speed.

## **THE CALLING SYSTEMS**

There are a number of different calling systems. The most common are ‘Calling Up’ and ‘Calling Down’, but there are also ‘Calling Pairs’, and there are others too, and variations. Don’t panic, I’ll explain the main three systems one-by-one, and then mention the other systems at the end.

First and foremost it is best to become familiar with the system used at your home tower.

Visits to other towers (e.g. on a ringing outing, a branch ringing meeting, or a visit when on holiday) may present you with call changes being called in a different way to the one you are used to. It is worthwhile at least understanding other systems and ideally learning them so you can ring at any tower you visit without any fear they are going to use an unfamiliar system.

## **WHEN TO CHANGE**

One fact common to all systems is that when a call is made, it is called during your handstroke. The bells that are swapping do not change position in the sequence until the next handstroke. This gives you the whole backstroke to work out if you are affected and plan what to do.

If you are bell number 3 in the example on page 1, you would catch you sally and let it rise to the balance and wait.

If you are bell number 4 in the example on page 1, you would resist the sally going up slightly and pull it earlier to follow the number 2 bell in this example.

The backstroke after this move you ring back in the steady (rounds) speed again to maintain your new position in the sequence, and avoid moving again until the conductor asks you to.

## CALLING UP

Example the conductor calls “**Three to Four**” from rounds (illustrated below)

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Three to Four”	Handstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Handstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6

The two bell numbers called are the bells that are being swapped in the sequence.

**The first number called is the bell that must wait and ring later (after the second number called)**

“Three to Four” means bell *three* must wait and ring after (follow) bell *four* at the *next handstroke*.

**The second bell number called is the bell that must ring earlier at the next handstroke.**

This is the trickiest one to work out what to do. Even if you realise you need to ring earlier, you have not been told which bell to follow (the 2 in the above example) and must work it out for yourself.

The bell you had been following is now waiting to follow you, and you must slot your bell quickly into the place vacated by them.

The key to knowing which bell you should follow is to know *two bells* in front of you and not just the one bell you had been following. This means in the example above that bell 4 needs to know they are following the 3, and that the 3 is following the 2. The next paragraph gives some tips.

Try and look at the ringer of the bell you are following, and see if you can work out who they are looking at. In this case three should be looking at two. Even if you can’t work out exactly who they are looking at, they should be looking in the right general direction. When you get more adept, you will start keeping track of which bells are ringing ahead of you in the sequence, and which bells are ringing after (behind/following) you in the sequence.

If you don’t know which bell to follow, rely on your sense of rhythm and ring a bit earlier (check the bell) and look for a bell rope being pulled just before your own. The biggest mistake is to think I don’t know who to follow and hold up/wait while you figure it out, because you will be changing position in the wrong direction in the sequence and a big gap will appear in the middle of the sequence.

Finally note that if you are ringing in second place in the sequence, there is only one bell in front of you in the sequence, and they must be leading. So if the conductor makes a call where you are the second bell number called, you swap with the bell you are following by ringing early and start to lead. Often the conductor will call a bell to lead e.g. “Two lead”, instead of (or as well as) calling the leading bell up into second place. This is a bit inconsistent as it uses the ‘calling down’ system but common practice, and helps make sure there is no hesitation to lead.

**The bell following the swapped bells now follows the first number called.**

The only other ‘affected’ bell is the bell following the bells that are swapping. If your bell number is not called, but the bell you are following is called, then the two bells in front of you are swapping, and you will continue to ring steady, but follow a different bell (the first number called instead of the second).

In this example 5 was following 4, but 3 has just been called to swap and ring after 4.

Both 5 and 3 cannot follow the same bell, so bell 5 must instead follow bell 3.

## CALLING DOWN

Example the conductor calls “**Four to Two**” from rounds (illustrated below)

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Four to Two”	Handstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Handstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6

The first number called is one of the bells being swapped and is ringing ‘down’ (earlier) in the sequence. The other number is the new bell the first bell number call will follow.

**The first number called is the bell that must ring earlier (to follow the second number called).**

“Four to Two” means bell *four* must ring earlier (check the bell) and follow bell *two* at the *next handstroke*.

**The bell following the second number called is the bell that must wait and ring later (to follow the first number called).**

The bell that had been following the second number called, is being swapped with the first number called, and has to wait and ring after the first number called.

In the above example, 3 had been following 2, but the call means 4 will be following 2 at the next handstroke instead of the 3. Bell 3 is forced to wait and ring after the 4 (i.e. 3 swaps with 4).

**The bell following the first number called, rings after a different bell at the next handstroke.**

The bell that had been following the first number called will continue to ring steadily, but will ring after a different bell. Unfortunately this new bell to follow is not mentioned in the call, and you have to work it out by yourself.

If you know both (a) which bell you are following, and (b) which bell they are following, then the new bell to follow is the bell in (b).

In the above example, bell 5 was following 4, but bell 4 has been called to ring earlier in the sequence after bell 2. Bell 4 was following and is swapping with bell 3. So bell 5 should follow bell 3 at the next handstroke following the call.

Similar to the tips described in calling up section:

Try and look at the ringer of the bell you are following, and see if you can work out who they are looking at. In this case four should be looking at three. Even if you can’t work out exactly who they are looking at, they should be looking in the right general direction. When you get more adept, you will start keeping track of which bells are ringing ahead of you in the sequence, and which bells are ringing after (behind/following) you in the sequence.

If unsure, continue ring steady and try and spot and ring after the bell that is now ringing after the bell you had previously been following.

## CALLING PAIRS

Example the conductor calls “**Three Four**” from rounds (illustrated below)

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Three Four”	Handstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Handstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6

This is very similar to Calling Up because the two bell numbers called are the bells that are being swapped. However the difference is that the first number is always the numerically smaller number.

So the bellringers need concentrate and be aware *if your bell number is called*, ask yourself whether

- a) The other number is the bell you had been following.

In this case you need to ring early and slot into the place vacated by the other bell number.

Again you need to know 2 bells in front of you, so that you can follow the other bell (see earlier tips).

- b) The other number is different to the bell you were following.

In this case the other number is the bell number of the bell that was following you, and you need to wait and follow that bell on your next handstroke.

If your number is *not* called, but the bell you have been following *is* called, the bells in front of you are swapping, and you should follow the other bell number called.

To illustrate the difference from calling up, let us call the example change back into rounds:

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Three Four”	Handstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6
	Handstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6

Here “Three Four” is repeated even though 3 is after/following 4. If this was called up, it would have been “Four to Three”.

Similar to calling up, it is common to call a bell to lead rather (or in addition to) calling the two bells on the front to swap.

## CALLING THE WHOLE SEQUENCE

In some places the whole sequence is called out “One Two Four Three Five Six” and this tells everybody which bell they are ringing after. However you must work out whether the new sequence means you don’t need to change speed, or whether you need to wait or ring early.

## JUMP CALLS

This is where predefined sequences are called, and successive calls may involve a bell moving more than 1 place away from their current position, by waiting for multiple additional bells to ring ahead of you, or ring much earlier. It normally means multiple bells (possibly every bell) being affected. For example:

Example the conductor calls “**Queens**” from rounds (illustrated below)

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Queens”	Handstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Backstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Handstroke	1	3	5	2	4	6
	Backstroke	1	3	5	2	4	6

## VARIATIONS

**Quantity of bells.** The above examples have been given for 6 bells, but can be done for other numbers of bells e.g. 8 or 10 bells. Typically only 2 bells swap and one is affected in that it rings steady but after a different bell, and all other bells are unaffected.

**Bell numbering.** Some towers (such as Dalton) use the bell number of the bell in the tower, rather than numbering starting at 1 for the treble. For example on 10 bells, if ringing on the front 6 bells, the numbers used is the same as described above, however if the back 6 is called the numbering would be from 5 to 10.

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Seven Eight”	Handstroke	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Backstroke	5	6	7	8	9	10
	Handstroke	5	6	8	7	9	10
	Backstroke	5	6	8	7	9	10

**Multiple calls.** Some towers may call more than one pair to swap in a single call. This is normally reserved for more confident bands that have mastered call changes.

CALL	Stroke	Place (position) in the sequence					
		First Place	Second Place	Third Place	Fourth Place	Fifth Place	Sixth Place
“Two to Three, Four to Five”	Handstroke	1	2	3	4	5	6
	Backstroke	1	3	2	5	4	6
	Handstroke	1	3	2	5	4	6
	Backstroke	1	2	4	3	5	6

**Extra information.** This is sometimes used for less confident bands where a conductor will add information into a call to fill in the ‘missing information’. For example:

- Calling Up or Calling Pairs, the missing information is who to follow for the bell that has to ring earlier. This can be added by telling the less confident ringer who they are ringing over.  
“Three to Four; Four down to Two” or “Three Four; Four follows Two” or similar examples.
- Calling Down, the missing information is the bell to follow for the bell following the swapping bells:  
“Four to Two, Five is following Three”