

**Speaking Effectively**  
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**Lecture 23**  
**Conversation Skills (Continued)**

Hello again. In this lecture we are going to talk about how to make request and how to respond to request. This is one major problem area in some cultures like our culture. I often have my students come up to my office and demand, rather than request. They would say, 'I want to see my answer script. Show me my answer script'. In an exam hall somebody's pen runs out of ink and he or she demands, I want a pen. So how do you make request? We will show you how to do it.

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The slide is titled "BASIC CONCEPTS – CULTURAL DIFFERENCES". It is divided into two columns: "Direct Culture" (orange background) and "Indirect Culture" (yellow background). The "Direct Culture" column lists three points: 1. In some cultures, it is possible to be very direct without being impolite while asking people to do things. 2. People in direct cultures tend to use the imperative sentences and simple statements. 3. They may also use 'please' and 'thank you' less often. The "Indirect Culture" column lists three points: 1. In indirect cultures, if people are direct while making requests, they are considered rude and aggressive. 2. People in indirect cultures prefer to use question forms and wordy expressions to make a request. 3. They also use 'please' and 'thank you' more often.

We will have three points again. One is how to make request? How to answer request? How to do it in the formal way? And how to do it in the informal way? Now remember there is a difference between cultures. Some cultures are direct cultures and some cultures are indirect cultures. In direct cultures, we tend to be very direct without being impolite while asking people to do things. People in direct cultures tend to use a imperative sentences and simple statements. So, they would not use thank you and please.

So in India for instance, suppose I want someone to fetch me a cup of coffee I would say, 'Bhaiyya, coffee le aao', which literally translates as, 'get me a cup of coffee'. Now this if I

would to ask him, 'could you please get me a cup of coffee', as one would ask in a request, it would translate as, 'Aap kya mere liye coffee la sakte hai?' and he would be extremely confused because he is used to getting more direct request. In indirect cultures, if people are direct while making request they are considered rude and aggressive. So in the west if you say, 'get me a cup of coffee', it would sound very rude if this exact translation was used. People in indirect cultures prefer to use question forms and word expressions to make a request.

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BASIC CONCEPTS – CULTURAL DIFFERENCES	
Direct Culture	Indirect Culture
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ In some cultures, it is possible to be very direct without being impolite while asking people to do things.</li><li>□ People in direct cultures tend to use the imperative sentences and simple statements.</li><li>□ They may also use 'please' and 'thank you' less often.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ In indirect cultures, if people are direct while making requests, they are considered rude and aggressive.</li><li>○ People in indirect cultures prefer to use question forms and wordy expressions to make a request.</li><li>○ They also use 'please' and 'thank you' more often.</li></ul>

They also use please and thank you and it is very irritating I must tell you for Indian parents when they (ofs) now we have number of families and have rich middle class family, you would have at least one member of the family staying abroad and the members of the family who are living get into the habit of thanking everybody, even family members for everything say, 'Oh mom you cooked a very nice meal for me, thank you.' And Indian (moth) mothers are extremely surprised and sometimes irritated. Do you have to thank me for every little thing? So that is the difference of cultures.

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## USEFUL EXPRESSIONS

Direct VS Indirect	What would you say?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Get me those figures.</li><li>□ Can you get me those figures?</li><li>□ Could you please get me those figures?</li><li>□ Do you think you could possibly get me those figures, please?</li><li>□ I am so sorry to trouble you. I wonder if you would mind getting me those figures?</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Read aloud the expressions again.</li><li>□ What kind of expression do you often use while asking people to do things?</li><li>□ <u>Can you use a polite form of language to request people to do things?</u></li></ul>

So in direct cultures with would say, get me those figures, but in indirect cultures we would, say can you get me those figures? Or it is a range like I said. Could you please get me those figures? Do you think you could possibly get me those figures please? I am so sorry to trouble you but I wonder if you would mind getting me those figures? So, you see the difference? The direct is, get me those figures, can you get me those figures? Could you please get me those figures? Do you think you could possibly get me those figures? I am so sorry to trouble you. So, there is more tentativeness, more indirectness depending on the phrase you use. And we are going to share some of these phrases to you to show you how you can make commands into request.

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## Use the imperative form

- We use the imperative form to give orders, warnings and advice:
- Be quiet!
- Take care!
- Listen!
- Sit down.
- Get me something to drink.
- You should soften the imperative form with **let's or please** while talking to an adult.
- Let's go now, shall we?
- Let's take a break, shall we?
- Please listen to what I'm saying. (More polite than 'Listen to what I am saying.')

If you use the imperative to make a request, it sounds like a command. So if you say, be quiet, take care, listen, sit down, get me something to drink, (shou) you should always soften the imperative form when, let us go now shall we? Let us take a break shall we? Please listen to what I am saying. So the moment you say let us do it, it becomes softer. The other way to make it softer or to make it sound like a request is to use a modal verb. If you use a modal verb, you can turn an order into a request.

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## Use a modal verb to turn the order into a request

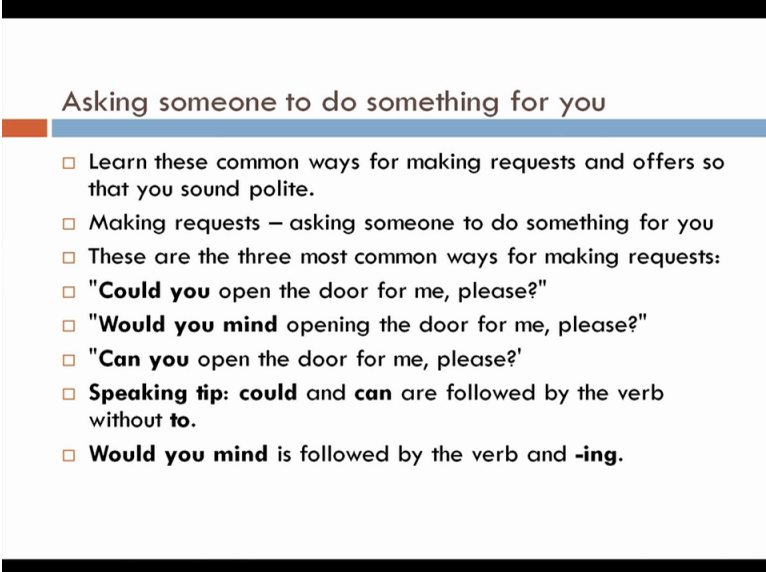
- Modal auxiliary verbs can make orders and instructions sound more polite. For example, 'Could you help me?' is more polite than 'Help me!'
- More examples are given below.
- Could you make me some tea?
- Could you post this letter?
- Could you lend me 50 dollars, please?
- Could you bring me that file, please?
- Could you pick up the kids from school, please?
- Can you come here please?
- Can you do something for me?
- Can you do this for me?
- Can you wait a minute?
- Can you give me a lift?
- Can you fetch Mary from the airport?
- Will you keep quiet please?
- Would you wait here until I'm back?
- **Could** is more polite than **can**. Both **can** and **could** are followed by a verb without to.



So auxiliary verbs can be used to ask they can be used to give instructions, to give orders and to be more polite so you could say, could you help me? Instead of saying help me. could you make me some tea? Could you post this letter for me? Could you lend me 50 dollars? Could you bring me that file please? Could you pick up the kids from school please? Can you come here please? Can you do something for me? Can you do this for me? Can you wait a minute? Can you give me a lift? Can you fetch Mary from the airport? Will you keep quiet please? Would you wait here until I am back?

So remember 'could' is more polite than 'can'. Both 'can' and 'could' are followed by a verb without to. Now let us move on to asking someone to do something for you. Requesting, asking someone to do something for you.

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Asking someone to do something for you

- Learn these common ways for making requests and offers so that you sound polite.
- Making requests – asking someone to do something for you
- These are the three most common ways for making requests:
  - "Could you open the door for me, please?"
  - "Would you mind opening the door for me, please?"
  - "Can you open the door for me, please?"
- **Speaking tip:** could and can are followed by the verb without to.
- **Would you mind** is followed by the verb and -ing.

Learn these common ways for making requests and offers so that you sound polite. Making request, asking someone to do something for you. Could you open the door for me please? Would you mind opening the door for me please? Can you open the door for me please? this happens to me every day because due to certain reasons I am not able to open the heavy door as I enter the studio, but I find nobody is opening the door for me so I would have to, suppose let us do a role play. You have bags in your hands and you cannot open the door.

You requesting someone in the shopping mall or in the classroom you have something in your arms. How would you do it? Let us see how they do it.

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Student 1: Excuse me.

Student 2: Ya.

Student 1: Do you mind if you could open the door for me?

Student 2: Ya, sure.

Student 1: Thank you so much.

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Making request, asking if you can do something for someone.

(Refer Video Start Time: 07:15)



Student 1: Hello Divya.

Student 2: Hello.

Student 1: You look completely tensed. Do you mind if I can get you some coffee? You can relax for a while.

Student 2: Ya please, thank you so much.

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Now there different ways of making a request. We will move from the less formal to the more formal. in the less formal request you can use, 'can'.

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## Less Formal

**LESS FORMAL**

**Can** and other expressions are used informally in speech to request permission.

**Can I leave early?**

**Is it a problem if I leave early?**

We're leaving early, **you don't mind, do you?**

I need to leave, **do you mind?**

**Is it OK if I leave early?**

Can I leave early? Is it a problem if I leave early? We are leaving early you do not mind, do you? I need to leave do you mind? Is it ok if I leave early? So these are some of the ways in which you can make an informal request.

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## Expressing, Granting and Denying Requests by Using the Modals Can/Could

- When you make a request, you ask someone for something or ask them to do something. The simplest way to ask for something is to say 'Can I have...?' You can also add the word 'please' to be more polite.
- • A: *Can I have my book back, please?* B: Yes, of course you *can*.
- • A: *Can you help me lift this chair?* B: Sure I *can*.
- If you want to make your request more polite, use the modal 'could'.
- • A: *Could I have another cup of tea?* B: Yes, you *can*. / No, you *can't*. (NOT ...Yes, you *could*.)
- Remember: Do not use 'could' to grant or refuse a request. To grant requests, use the modal verb 'can'. To refuse requests, use 'can't'.

try expressing, granting and denying request by using the modals, can/could. When you make a request you ask someone for something or ask them to do something. The simplest way to ask for something is to say, 'can I have?' You could also add the world 'please' to be more polite. Can I have my book back please? Yes of course you can. Can you help me lift this chair? Sure I

can. If you want to make your request more polite use the modal, 'could'. Could I have another cup of coffee? Or, could I have another cup of tea? Yes, you can. No, you cannot. Remember, do not use the word 'could' to grant or refuse a request.

To grant request use the (wor) (veb) (mo) modal verb 'can'. To refuse request use cannot. Now let us watch a role play. In formal between friends.

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Student 1: Hey Divya.

Student 2: Hey Zeniya.

Student 1: How are you?

Student 2: I am fine.

Student 1: Divya, I was just wondering if I can ask you to do the proxy for me because you know I like to skip tomorrow early going to department. I have to meet Jagdish actually.

Student 2: Oh, that is...

Student 1: Please do not say no. You gotta do this for me.

Student 2: Ok, I will do it.

Student 1: Sure?

Student 2: Ya.

Student 1: Thank you so much.

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Between acquaintance. How to request an acquaintance? So here we have her requesting another student to cover up for her class.

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Student 1: Hello Divya, good morning.

Student 2: Good morning Zeniya.

Student 1: Divya I was wondering if I could ask you to take my Friday class because I have some work and I will be leaving early.

Student 2: Friday...

Student 1: And there is nobody around.

Student 2: By what time?

Student 1: That is at 3 'o' clock.

Student 2: I am afraid I have got a class I think. I have to check.

Student 1: Okay, if you could just let know whether if you could be able to take the class because there is nobody around. So I though I would ask you to do that.

Student 2: Ya, ok. Let me see.

Student 1: Thank you.

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How to ask a messy roommate to help you clear up the room?

(Refer Video Start Time: 10:25)





Student 1: Not again. Divya, Divya.

Student 2: Hmm ya.

Student 1: Divya could you please clean the table and everything around so that we can study (ass) in a clean environment?

Student 2: Ya, but later.

Student 1: Okay.

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How to request a messy husband.

(Refer Video Start Time: 10:50)



Student 1: Not again. Angad, what is this? You do this every day but today you want to clean this mess because my friend is coming. And you know she is on her way. Now let me tell you, you cannot give me this reaction. Because she is on her way. So please clean this mess.

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Let us look at some more formal structures. How do you make requests in formal settings and in a more formal manner?

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## More Formal

**MORE FORMAL**

*Would, could, please + verb* are used to request permission.

**May I leave** early?

**Might I leave** early? (excessively formal)

**Would you mind if I left** early?

**Would you mind my leaving** early?

**I would like to ask you if I might leave** early? (formal)

You could use instead of can, you could use could, would, could, may may I leave early? Or might, which is the most formal. So as I said in each case there is a range. From the very informal to the most informal and might is on the other side of the range, the formal side of the range. Would, would you mind if I left early? Would you mind my leaving early? I'd like to ask you, if I might leave early?

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### Expressing, Granting and Denying Requests by Using the Modals May/Might

- You can also make requests with the modals 'may' and 'might'. Requests with 'may' or 'might' sound very polite and formal. In less formal or casual situations, you should use 'can' or 'could'.
- • Excuse me, *may* I have a look at your newspaper? (very polite, formal)
- • *Can* I look at your newspaper for a moment? (casual, informal)
- • Excuse me, I wonder if I *might* have a look at your newspaper for a moment? (very polite, formal)
- • *Might* I have something to eat? (very polite, formal)
- Requests with 'might' sound a little bit old-fashioned. Some English speakers find 'might' to be too distant for making requests.
- 'May not' is used to deny a request.
- • A: *May* I borrow your car? B: No, you *may not*.
- • A: Excuse me, I wonder if I *might* have a look at your newspaper for a moment? B: No, you *may not*.

Expressing, granting and denying request by using the modals may and might. You can also make request with the modals, may and might. Request with may or might sound very polite and

formal. In less formal or casual situations you should use can or could. So I will not read these, instead of that we could have some role plays on making formal request using may and might. We have a person asking her subordinate to come to her office.

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Student 1: Hello. Do you mind if you could come to my room? I have some work for you.

Let us look at a second situation.

Student 1: Could I have a word with you, if you could come to my room?

A third situation.

Student 1: I got some (ss) I got stuck in some work. I was wondering if you could come to my room.

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How to ask your boss for leave?

(Refer Video Start Time: 13:19)



Student 1: Good morning sir.

Student 2: Good morning.

Student 1: Sir actually I am going home for weekend. So I just thought I will ask you if you could allow me to take a day off and come back on Tuesday instead of Monday? Because it is my parent's anniversary.

Student 2: I am really sorry but like you know there is two deadlines coming on, so you can not take a leave.

Student 1: Okay, so do I have to come back then?

Student 2: Yes, sure you have to.

Student 1: Okay, I will be back to the office on Monday then.

Student 2: Okay.

Student 1: Thank you.

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How to ask your supervisor for permission?

(Refer Video Start Time: 14:00)







Student 1: Good morning mam.

Student 2: Good morning.

Student 1: Mam for tomorrow's class I was wondering if you could take the rest half of the class. I will take the first half, if you could take the rest half, I have some bank work.

Student 2: Of course.

Student 1: Thank you so much mam.

Student 2: I will be happy to take your second half of the class.

Student 1: That you so much.

Student 2: No problem.

Student 1: Thank you.

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Asking your mother for another night out.

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Student 1: Hey mom.

Student 2: Yes Zeniya.

Student 1: What are you doing?

Student 2: Cooking, what else?

Student 1: You look very pretty in this yellow color.

Student 2: Zeniya, what do you want from me?

Student 1: Just another weekend night out.

Student 2: Zeniya!

Student 1: I was just wondering if you could allow me to just take the weekend off to my friend's place.

Student 2: You are begging me to ask you to let you out?

Student 1: I am just making...

Student 2: You are begging me?

Student 1: Ya, if I could beg you to (le) allow me to be there. Just last night out.

Student 2: And what do I tell your dad?

Student 1: I am sure you will be (up) able to handle the situation at home.

Student 2: Okay, this one last time Zeniya. I am not gonna do it next time.

Student 1: Thank you so much mom, thank you so much.

Student 2: This girl!

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Might is a most formal way and might sound very little old fashion. But people do use it. They say, you might want to go to the library and check out the latest collection of books.

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### Expressing, Granting and Denying Requests by Using the Modals May/Might

- You can also make requests with the modals 'may' and 'might'. Requests with 'may' or 'might' sound very polite and formal. In less formal or casual situations, you should use 'can' or 'could'.
- • Excuse me, *may* I have a look at your newspaper? (very polite, formal)
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- • Excuse me, I wonder if I *might* have a look at your newspaper for a moment? (very polite, formal)
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- Requests with 'might' sound a little bit old-fashioned. Some English speakers find 'might' to be too distant for making requests.
- 'May not' is used to deny a request.
- • A: *May* I borrow your car? B: No, you *may not*.
- • A: Excuse me, I wonder if I *might* have a look at your newspaper for a moment? B: No, you *may not*!

May not, is used to deny a request. may I borrow your car? No you may not. Excuse me, I wonder if I might have a look at your newspaper for a moment? You do not deny request by saying you might not, you say, you may not, no you may not.

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### PRACTICE AND READ ALOUD THE FOLLOWING PHRASES TO MAKE POLITE REQUESTS

- Is there any way you can...?
- I don't suppose you could ...?
- Would you do me a favor and...?
- I wonder if you could...
- Would you mind...(+V-ing)?
- Do you think you could possibly ...?
- Would it be possible for you to ...?
- I'd really appreciate it if you could...?

Now let us move on to practicing and reading aloud the (phr) following phrases to make polite request. Let us see you do it. Is there any way you can? I do not suppose you could? Would you do me a favor? And I wondered if you could. Would you mind doing this for me? Do you think

you could possibly? Would it be possible for you? I'd really appreciate if you could? And now let us see them being used in sentences, complete sentences.

Is there any way you can get me a vehicle to get to Kolkata? I do not suppose you could take my class? Would you do me a favor and get me a cup of tea? I wondered if you could bring me something from Big Bazaar when you go shopping. Would you mind giving me a ride? Do you think you could possibly take my classes because I need to go? Would it be possible for you to bring me this book from overseas? It is not available in India. I would really appreciate if you could complete your task in time.

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**Asking for help**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Can you give me a hand with this?</li><li>□ Could you help me for a second?</li><li>□ Can I ask a favour?</li><li>□ I wonder if you could help me with this?</li><li>□ I could do with some help, please.</li><li>□ I can't manage. Can you help?</li><li>□ Give me a hand with this, will you?</li><li>□ Lend me a hand with this, will you?</li><li>□ Could you spare a moment?</li><li>□ I need some help, please.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Phrase 1 is quite a direct question to use with friends and people who you know quite well.</li><li>□ Phrase 2 is more polite. We include the words 'for a second' to show that we don't need a lot of help and that it will not be difficult.</li><li>□ Phrase 3 is a general way of introducing a request for help.</li><li>□ Phrase 4 is polite and can be used with people you don't know very well, or with your boss.</li><li>□ Phrase 5 is quite direct, and the focus is that you really need help. It's quite strong.</li><li>□ Phrase 6 shows you have a big problem. You are desperate for help, you often hear this phrase when somebody has too much work to do.</li><li>□ Phrases 7 and 8 are similar and are direct requests for help. 'Lend a hand' is a little more polite and old-fashioned than 'give me a hand.'</li><li>□ We use phrase 9 to show that we respect that the other person is really quite busy and to say that they will only need to help you for a short time.</li><li>□ Phrase 10 is a direct question and the asker does not expect the listener to say no. This is often used by people in authority e.g</li></ul>
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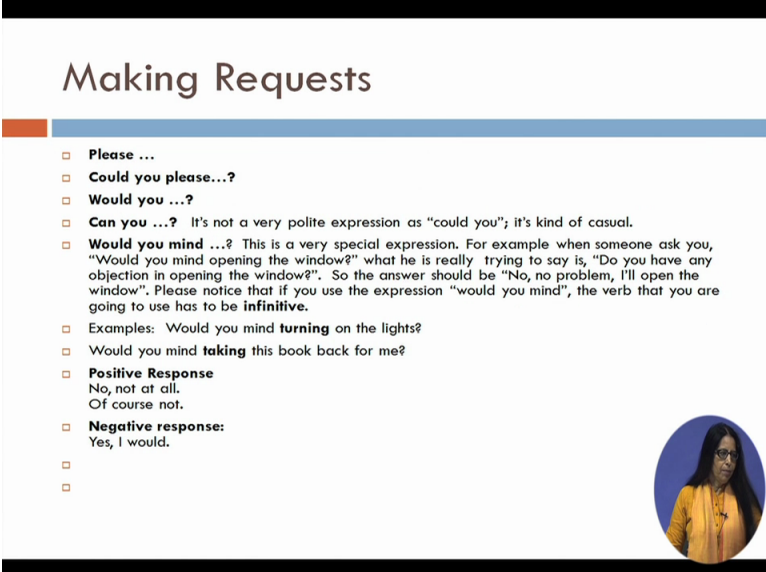
Asking for help. When you ask for help also you can not ask people directly for help. You have to make it sound like a request if you really want people to help you out. You do not say help me unless you are in a emergency situation when you say, Help! Help! But otherwise you have to ask in a polite way. Can you give me a hand with this? Could you help me for a second? Can I ask you for a favor? I wondered, if you could help me with this? I could do with some help, please. I cannot manage, can you help? Give me a hand with this, will you? Lend me a hand with this, will you? Could you spare moment? I need some help.

Now let us see how using or substituting one word with another makes a hell of a difference. Phrase one is quite a direct question to use with friends and people you know very well. Phrase two is more polite. We include the words for a second to show that we do not need a lot of help

and that'll be difficult. It will not be difficult. Phrase three is a general way of introducing a request for help. Phrase four is polite and can be used with people you do not know very well, with your boss. Phrase five is quite direct and the focus is that you really need help. It is quite strong. Phrase 6 shows that you have a big problem, you are desperate for help. You often hear this phrase when somebody ask too much work to do.


Phrase seven and eight are similar and are direct (req) request for help. 'Lend me a hand', is a little more polite and an old fashioned than 'give me a hand'. We use phrase nine to show that we respect that the other person is really quite busy and to say that they only need to help you for a short time. Phrase ten is a direct question and the asker does not expect the listener to say no. This is often used by people in authority.

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## Making Requests

- **Please ...**
- **Could you please...?**
- **Would you ...?**
- **Can you ...?** It's not a very polite expression as "could you"; it's kind of casual.
- **Would you mind ...?** This is a very special expression. For example when someone ask you, "Would you mind opening the window?" what he is really trying to say is, "Do you have any objection in opening the window?". So the answer should be "No, no problem, I'll open the window". Please notice that if you use the expression "would you mind", the verb that you are going to use has to be **infinitive**.
- Examples: Would you mind **turning** on the lights?
- Would you mind **taking** this book back for me?
- **Positive Response**  
No, not at all.  
Of course not.
- **Negative response:**  
Yes, I would.
- 
- 



Making request instead of you can use please. You can say, could you please? Would you? Can you? Is not a very polite as polite as could you. It is a kind of casual. Would you mind is very special expression for (ex) example, when someone ask you, would you mind opening the window? What he is really trying to say is, do you have any objection in opening the window? So the answer should be no, no problem, I will open the window. Please notice that if we use expression 'would you mind', the verb that you are going to use has to be infinitive.




Examples, would you (tur) mind turning on the light? Would you mind taking this book back for me? And then responses to this would be, no, not at all. Of course not. Negative response would be, yes, I would.

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## COMMON BUSINESS SITUATIONS

- When do you need to request people to do things for you?
  - You ask your co-worker for help
    - ▣ You request a colleague in the same department to help you with your work.
    - ▣ You request a colleague in other department to help you with your work.
    - ▣ You ask an executive, supervisor, manager for help or further information in order to do your job well.
  - You need someone outside the company to help you get things done.
    - ▣ Suppliers
    - ▣ Clients/customers
    - ▣ Business partners

*No matter whom you talk to, you can't afford offending them!*



now we have tried out some of these business situations already. You asking a coworker for help which we had in the role play earlier. You are requesting a colleague in another deartment to help you with your work. You ask a supervisor for help. Now these situations I would like you to try out yourself.



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## Offering Something to Someone

- There are several ways of offering something to someone in English. A polite way of offering something that most learners are familiar with is to use the expression 'Would you like...?' For example:
  - • Would you like a cup of tea? / Would you like a biscuit or something?
- When you're talking to someone you know well, you can use the less polite form 'Do you want...?' For instance:
  - • Do you want a cup of tea? / Do you want a biscuit?
- When you know the person well, and you want to be more persuasive, you can use the imperative form have:
  - • Have some more coffee. / Have another slice of cake.
- In very informal situations you can also use just a noun group, making it sound like a question:
  - • A: Black coffee? B: Yes, please. / A: Tea? B: No, thanks.
- A note: British people often use the verb *fancy* as a way of informally offering something. For example:
  - • Fancy a drink? *meaning* Do you want a drink?
  - • Fancy some coffee? / Fancy a biscuit?

We stop with this.