



Being tactful

Lesson code: 1162-E6CF-KES2

UPPER INTERMEDIATE

 American English

1 Describing words and actions

Study the adjectives, and put them in the correct categories below.

<i>tactful</i>	<i>offensive</i>	<i>rude</i>	<i>diplomatic</i>	<i>subtle</i>	<i>personal</i>	<i>civil</i>
<i>vulgar</i>	<i>blunt</i>	<i>respectful</i>	<i>polite</i>	<i>impolite</i>	<i>politically correct</i>	

Causing offense: _____

Not causing offense: _____

Read the dialogue below in pairs. Describe the speakers using the adjectives above. How could you improve the customer's part?

- Sales lady:** Can I help you?
- Customer:** Yes, my friend bought this shirt for me yesterday, but I don't like it.
- Sales lady:** Would you like a different shirt?
- Customer:** No, I want a refund.
- Sales lady:** We have other models and colors in stock.
- Customer:** No, just give me the money.
- Sales lady:** OK, no problem. Do you have the receipt?
- Customer:** Yeah. Here it is.

2 Listening

Audio

Watch or listen to the 6 dialogues. In which dialogue does the speaker...



Video



1. make a complaint?
2. interrupt someone who is busy?
3. speak his/her mind?
4. make a request to a friend?
5. make a request to a stranger?
6. have a problem that needs urgent attention?



3 Useful expressions

Look at the following expressions from the dialogues. They are all used to say things more carefully so that you don't upset anyone. Put them in the correct categories below:

a bit
 Can this wait till later?
 Don't you think ...?
 I don't mean to disturb you, but ...
 I seem to (have + PAST PARTICIPLE)
 I was wondering if I could ...
 ... seems to be ...

a little
 Could you ...?
 I don't mean to be rude, but ...
 I'm afraid ...
 It looks like ...
 really (in negative sentences)
 Would it be possible to ...?

1) A word or phrase used to 'soften'
 an adjective, verb, or adverb:

a little (less noise)

2) A question used to politely
 disagree or argue with someone:

3) A polite request:

4) A 'softening' phrase used to
 introduce a problem, complaint,
 negative remark, etc.:

I don't mean to disturb you, but...



Now complete the dialogues with the expressions. Listen again to check your answers.

Dialogue 1 Store assistant: Can I help you?

Mark: Yes, I bought a digital camera from your website.

Store assistant: OK. Is something wrong with it?

Mark: Yes, _____¹ you sent me the wrong camera. As you can see from the order confirmation, I didn't order this model.

Store assistant: Oh, I'm very sorry. We'll replace it immediately.

Dialogue 2 Alice: Excuse me, _____² make a little less noise, please? I'm trying to sleep.

Hotel guest: OK, sorry. We'll turn the music down.

Alice: Thank you.

Dialogue 3 Sam: Were you looking for me, Mary?

Mary: Yes, I was. _____⁴ misplaced my textbook, and I have a lecture in 30 minutes. _____⁵ borrow your copy.

Sam: Ok, I can lend you mine for the day, but I'll need it back by 5 o'clock.

Dialogue 4 Emma's boss: Come in!

Emma: Hello Mr. Johnson, I don't mean to disturb you, but could I have a quick word?

Emma's boss: _____⁷ ? I'm in a meeting at the moment.

Emma: Well, unfortunately that isn't _____⁸ possible. I'm leaving for Paris this afternoon. It'll only take a minute I promise.

Emma's boss: Oh, Ok then.

Dialogue 5 Emma: Mark, I've made up my mind. I'm going to take my driving test next week.

Mark: Next week? _____⁹ you need _____¹⁰ more time?

Emma: What do you mean?

Mark: Well, _____¹¹ I've seen your driving. You're just not ready yet.

Dialogue 6 Landlady: Hello.

Mark: Hello, this is Mark from apartment 14. I'm calling about the shower in my bathroom. It _____¹² leaking.

Landlady: Oh really? I'll send the plumber over tomorrow afternoon.

Mark: _____¹³ I'm going away tomorrow afternoon for a few days. _____¹⁴ send someone over to fix it later today?

Landlady: OK, I'll call the plumber and get back to you in an hour.

Mark: Thank you. I'll be waiting.



4 Practice

Rephrase the following sentences using the techniques from the previous exercise:

1. I've lost your phone number.
2. Can I borrow your phone for this afternoon?
3. You are too tired to go out tonight.
4. I need more time to finish my homework.
5. You gave me the wrong change.
6. You're too fast for me. Can you speak more slowly?
7. The price is expensive. Can you give me a discount?
8. I'm busy right now. Call me later.

5 Role play

Role-play each of the situations below with your partner. Try to be tactful.

1. You return a faulty television to the store where you bought it.
2. You need to cancel a meeting with your boss for the second time.
3. You have a problem and need to ask an acquaintance for an important favor.
4. Your roommate is very messy and you need to talk to him/her about it.
5. Your friend invites you to his birthday party, but you don't want to go.



2 Listening

DIALOGUE 1

- Sales lady:** Can I help you?
Mark: Yes, I bought a digital camera from your website.
Sales lady: OK. Is something wrong with it?
Mark: Yes, it looks like you sent me the wrong camera. As you can see from the order confirmation, I didn't order this model.
Sales lady: Oh, I'm very sorry. We'll replace it immediately.

DIALOGUE 2

- Alice:** Excuse me, could you make a little less noise, please? I'm trying to sleep.
Hotel guest: OK, sorry. We'll turn the music down.
Alice: Thank you

DIALOGUE 3

- Sam:** Were you looking for me, Mary?
Mary: Yes, I was. I seem to have misplaced my textbook, and I have a lecture in 30 minutes. I was wondering if I could borrow your copy.
Sam: Ok, I can lend you mine for the day, but I'll need it back by 5 o'clock.

DIALOGUE 4

- Emma's boss:** Come in!
Emma: Hello Mr. Johnson, I don't mean to disturb you, but could I have a quick word?
Emma's boss: Can this wait till later? I'm in a meeting right now.
Emma: Well, unfortunately that isn't really possible. I'm leaving for Paris this afternoon. It'll only take a minute, I promise.
Emma's boss: Oh, OK then.

DIALOGUE 5

- Emma:** Mark, I've made up my mind. I'm going to take my driving test next week.
Mark: Next week? Don't you think you need a little more time?
Emma: What do you mean?
Mark: Well, I don't mean to be rude, but I've seen your driving. You're just not ready yet.

DIALOGUE 6

- Landlady:** Hello.
Mark: Hello, this is Mark from apartment 14. I'm calling about the shower in my bathroom. It seems to be leaking.
Landlady: Oh really? I'll send the plumber over tomorrow afternoon.
Mark: I'm afraid I'm going away tomorrow afternoon for a few days. Would it be possible to send someone over to fix it later today?
Landlady: OK, I'll call the plumber and get back to you in an hour.
Mark: Thank you. I'll be waiting.



1 Describing words and actions

Causing offense: offensive, rude, personal, vulgar, blunt, impolite

Not causing offense: tactful, diplomatic, civil, respectful, polite, politically correct

The customer may be described as offensive, rude, blunt, and impolite. The store assistant is civil, respectful, and polite. Suggested improved version:

Sales lady: Can I help you?

Customer: Yes, my friend bought this shirt for me yesterday, but I don't really like it and would like to return it.

Sales lady: Would you like to choose a different shirt?

Customer: Well, I would prefer a refund.

Sales lady: We have other models and colors in stock.

Customer: Could I just have the refund, please?

Sales lady: OK, no problem. Do you have the receipt?

Customer: Yes, of course. Here it is.

2 Listening

Play the audio or video file. You can also use your mobile device to scan the QR codes (make sure you have an installed QR code reader app and can access the internet on your device).

1. 1

2. 4

3. 5

4. 3

5. 2

6. 6

3 Useful expressions**A word or phrase used to 'soften' an adjective, verb, or adverb:**

a little

a little bit

really (in negative sentences)

...seems to be...

A question used to politely disagree or argue with someone:

Can this wait till later?

Don't you think...?

A polite request:

I was wondering if I could...?

Would it be possible to...?

Could you...?

A 'softening' phrase used to introduce a problem, complaint, negative remark, etc.:

It looks like ...

I don't want to disturb you, but ...

Actually, I...

I don't mean to be rude, but ...

I seem to have (+ PAST PARTICIPLE)

1. It looks like
2. could you
4. I seem to have
5. I was wondering if I could
7. Can this wait till later
8. really



9. Don't you think
10. a little
11. I don't mean to be rude, but
12. seems to be
13. I'm afraid
14. Would it be possible to

4 Practice

Suggested answers:

1. I seem to have lost your phone number.
2. Would it be possible to borrow your phone for this afternoon?
3. I don't mean to sound negative, but you're a bit too tired to go out tonight. / Don't you think you're a bit too tired to go out tonight?
4. I'm afraid I need a bit more time to finish my homework.
5. You seem to have given me the wrong change./ I'm afraid you gave me the wrong change.
6. I'm afraid you're a little too fast for me. Could you speak a bit more slowly?
7. I'm afraid the price is a bit expensive. I was wondering if you could give me a discount.
8. I'm a bit busy right now. Would it be possible to call me back later?

