

Activity Type

Reading, matching and writing exercises

Focus

Politeness

Aim

To learn how to achieve different levels of politeness in various situations.

Preparation

Make a copy of the two-page worksheet for each student.

Level

Intermediate (B1)

Time

30 minutes

Introduction

This being polite worksheet helps students develop a sense of how to achieve different levels of politeness in various situations.

Procedure

Give each student a copy of the two-page worksheet. First, students group variations of the request 'Open the window' according to the approximate level of politeness.

Exercise A - Possible answers

Very Polite: g, i, k Polite: a, f, h
Normal: d, e, j Impolite: b, c, l

After that, students find examples of different politeness strategies in the requests from the first exercise.

Exercise B - Possible answers

1. a, l 2. d, h 3. e, f, g, h, i, j, k 4. g, h, i, k
5. f, g, i 6. k 7. f, g 8. f, g, h, i, j, k

Next, students complete polite request frames with their own ideas and share their answers with the class.

Students then move on to rewrite requests to make them more polite and appropriate for each situation.

Exercise D - Possible answers

1. Would you mind making me a cup of coffee?
2. Can I ask you to help me with my homework? I'm stuck.
3. It's a pain, but would you mind feeding my dog while I'm away?
4. I'm sorry to ask, but do you think you could lend me ten dollars? I left my wallet at home. I'll pay you back tomorrow.
5. If you're free this weekend, I'd appreciate it if you could help me move into my new apartment. It would be a huge help.
6. I'd appreciate it if you could send me the report as soon as possible. I need it right away.

Finally, students write requests that are appropriate for different situations.

Exercise E - Possible answers

1. Could you pass me the salt?
2. I'm sorry, but would you mind speaking a little more slowly?
3. Excuse me, can I ask you the way to the train station? I'm lost.
4. I know it's my turn, but can you take out the trash this time? I'd really appreciate it.
5. Do you think you could talk quietly? I'm doing my homework.
6. Can I borrow your phone for a couple of minutes? Mine's dead.

Note: This resource can be edited using a PDF editor.

A. There are many ways to make the same request. Group these versions of 'Open the window' according to the approximate level of politeness. Note that intonation matters—different intonation can change the politeness of a phrase dramatically.

- a. Please open the window.
- b. Open the window you lazy slob.
- c. You should open the window.
- d. Open the window. I'm feeling hot.
- e. Can you open the window?
- f. Can I ask you to open the window? Thanks!
- g. Sorry to ask, but would you mind opening the window?
- h. Could you open the window? It's hot in here.
- i. Do you think you could open the window?
- j. Open the window, will you? (said casually)
- k. If it's not too much trouble, could you open the window?
- l. *Please* open the window. (with emphasis on *please*)

Very Polite
g, k
Polite
a, f, h, i
Normal
d, e, j
Impolite
b, c

B. The requests above use several strategies to achieve politeness. Find examples of these strategies in the sentences above and write the corresponding sentence numbers in the spaces.

1. Use the word 'please'.
2. Give a reason why you are making the request.
3. Use a yes-or-no question. This gives the other person a chance to refuse.
4. Use the past tense or subjunctive mood. This makes the request less immediate.
5. Make the request less direct.
6. Give the other person a ready-made excuse for refusing.
7. Show your appreciation or apologize to the other person.
8. Combine two or more of the above strategies.

C. A useful technique is to frame a request with a show of appreciation and a ready-made excuse. Complete these frames with your own ideas.

1. I'd appreciate it if you could, if you're free this weekend.
2. If you aren't too busy, could you It would be a huge help.

D. Rewrite the requests to make them more polite and appropriate for each situation using the phrases and techniques from Exercises A, B and C.

1. Make me a cup of coffee, will you?

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2. Help me with my homework.

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3. Would you mind feeding my dog while I'm away?

.....

4. Lend me ten dollars. I'll pay you back tomorrow.

.....

5. Please help me move into my new apartment.

.....

6. Send me the report as soon as possible. I need it right away.

.....

E. Write requests which are the appropriate level of politeness for each situation.

1. You are at a restaurant with your friend and would like the salt, which is closer to them.

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2. A stranger is speaking too quickly and you can't understand them.

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3. Ask a policeman for directions to the nearest train station.

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4. You want your roommate to take out the trash even though it's your turn.

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5. Your parents are talking loudly while you're trying to do your homework.

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6. Your phone's battery is dead. You want to borrow your friend's phone for a short time.

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