



POLITE ENGLISH FREE ON-LINE COURSE

Lesson 8:

Learn how to express necessity and obligation in a polite way.

version without a key

WARM UP



THINK



“Nature is the source of all true knowledge. She has her own logic, her own laws, she has no effect without cause nor invention without necessity.”

Leonardo da Vinci

→ Give examples that illustrate the quote?



Expand your vocabulary!

REMEMBER!

to feel obliged to do something

Example: They helped us when we moved so I feel obliged to do the same.

the need for something

Example: Sewing is something I do out of necessity, not for pleasure.



SPEAKING

- Express the fact of obligation using the structure: “we are obliged to...”.

– *you have to wear uniforms at school,*

We are ...

– *you have to do your homework,*

We are ...

– *you have to pay your bills,*

We have to ...



Podcast

LISTENING AND WATCHING

Watch the video and answer the questions below.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fm2m4CHEWnc>

1. What English speaking countries does James mention at the beginning of his talk?

2. What verb, that James suggests, is used in English speaking countries more often than *must* or *should*?

3. What is the main difference between “*need to*” and “*have to*”?

4. What does James want to say when mentioning the association of: “*ne = me*”?

5. What is the story that James is telling at the end of the talk? Explain it.



THINK:

- What verbs do we usually use to express necessity and obligation?
- Do you think the usual verbs that express the obligation and necessity sound polite?
- How can you make the obligation sound more polite?



READING. Read the text below.

Would you mind reading this, please?

by Kate Woodford

It's often said that native English speakers use a lot of 'softeners' in their language – those words and phrases which make us sound nicer and more polite, (even if they have very little actual meaning). This week we're taking a look at softeners and the sort of situations in which we often use them.

An obvious place to start is requesting – asking politely for things or for help. (It's obviously a good idea to sound polite and pleasant if you want something from someone!) There are several ways to make it clear to someone that you are *requesting* something and not *demanding* it. *Could I take this chair, please?* sounds just a little bit nicer than *Can I take this chair, please?* The meaning is the same in both sentences, but with 'could' the speaker sounds a little less sure of the answer and this makes the request sound more polite. If you add the word 'possibly' to this phrase, you sound even more polite:

Could I possibly borrow this umbrella?

Another way of 'softening' (= making nicer) a request for something is to use the slightly more complicated phrase, *Do you mind...?:*

Do you mind if I turn the music down?

Do you mind taking these downstairs, please?

To be even more polite, you might say, *Would you mind...?* ('Would' sounds a little less sure than 'do'):

Would you mind if I turned the music down?

Would you mind helping me with these boxes, please?

Note the past tense 'turned' in the first example. (*Do you mind if I turn...?/Would you mind if I turned...?*)

Another softener that is often used when requesting something is the word *just*. 'Just' makes a request sound as if it is only a little thing that you are asking for:

Could I just ask you to move your chair, please?

Could I just take this book, please?

People at work who are asking customers/patients, etc. to do things obviously need to sound polite. A softener often used with requests in this type of situation is the phrase 'for me'. It comes at the end of the sentence:

Nurse: *Could you just roll your sleeve up for me?*

Person in a bank: *Could you sign your name there for me?*

‘At all’ is another ‘softening’ phrase used in work situations. People often use it when making enquiries of the ‘Have you got x?’ type. The phrase has absolutely no meaning used in this way, but seems to make the speaker less embarrassed about asking a complete stranger a direct question:

*Have you got a yearly pass **at all**?*

*Do you have a members’ card **at all**?*

Of course, people also use softeners to politely refuse requests. The most common softener when saying no is an apology. It usually comes at the start of the reply:

I’m sorry, we’re using that chair.

I’m afraid we need those books.

Two other softeners that people often use in this situation are ‘Actually...’ and ‘If you don’t mind...’. Again, they have little real meaning, but they do ‘soften’ the refusal, making it sound a little nicer:

Q: Have you got a moment, Ian – I need to ask you about something.

*A: **Actually**, I’m a bit busy at the moment. Could we speak this afternoon?*

*A: **If you don’t mind**, I’m a bit busy at the moment. Could you manage this afternoon at some point?*

This week we have looked at softeners used in requests and refusals. Next week we will look at softeners used when disagreeing.

Source: <http://dictionaryblog.cambridge.org/2014/04/30/would-you-mind-reading-this-please/>



THINK and ANSWER.

After having read the text, what are your ideas for softening an obligation?

■ Read one of the possible answers below:

In order to sound more polite while expressing the obligation make a request out of an obligation. It is as simple as that 😊!

Have a look at possible ways of requesting.

1. USE: the modal auxiliary verbs **would**, **could** and **might** to make orders and suggestions more polite.

Examples:

- I think it **would** be better to paint it yellow. (More polite than ‘It will be better to paint it yellow’.)
- **Could** you help me? (More polite than ‘Can you help me?’)
- I was wondering if you **might** be interested in watching a movie.

2. USE: the expressions:

Is it all right if you...?

Do you think you could...?

Will you...?

3. USE: the expressions:

Would you mind ...?

Do you mind ...?

Could you possibly ...?

Do you think you could ...?

I think it would be advisable for you to ...?



SPEAKING

Paraphrase the obligations, imperatives and necessity into requests. Use the phrases from above.

You should stop smoking.

Open the window!

Pass me the salt, please!

You have to pay this tax!

You need wear this at work!



Work with your friend/colleague and practise the phrases in situations above.

Try to keep the conversation going for a bit longer. Improvise.