

LANGUAGE OF REQUESTS

In a busy everyday life it is easy to forget some basic rules of etiquette when it comes to requesting and asking for favours. Therefore when asking somebody for help, some people find no time for beating around the bush ('Excuse me, I was wondering if you could help me with...'), and they use the straightforward approach ('Help me with this'). This may sound rude and abrupt, and very often it is not a bad idea to use more polite ways of requesting somebody's help. Here are several examples of how to make people answer your request without making them feel as if they were your servants:

Instead of saying...	Say...
Give me your paper clips. Mail this letter for me.	<u>Can you please</u> give me your paperclips? <u>Could you</u> mail this letter for me?
Turn down that music.	<u>Would you please</u> turn down that music?
Help me fix my computer.	<u>Would you mind</u> helping me fix my computer?
Come and help me with this.	<u>Can you spare a few minutes</u> and help me with this?
Send this report to Jim.	<u>Can I ask you to</u> send this report to Jim?

In most cases, when you ask someone to do something for you, it is important to use an introductory phrase to soften the request. Some phrases are very formal, while others are informal:

Formal	Informal
<i>Could I ask you to ...</i>	<i>Please ...</i>
<i>Would you mind if I asked you to ...</i>	<i>Would you ...</i>
<i>Would you be so kind as to ...</i>	<i>Could you ...</i>
	<i>Would you please ...</i>
	<i>Could you possibly ...</i>
	<i>Would you mind (helping me) ...</i>
	<i>Could you do me a favor?</i>

Answering somebody's request also follows certain etiquette. Depending on your willingness to help, choose between phrases such as:

<i>Okay, no problem.</i>	<i>Sure, I'd be glad to.</i>
<i>Here you are.</i>	<i>Sorry, I'm (kind of) busy now.</i>
	<i>I'm sorry. I don't have time right now.</i>

A) Can you guess who would make the following requests?

- Could you tell me how much it costs?
 - a boss to a secretary
 - a customer to a sales person
 - a visitor to a company
- Would you mind opening that suitcase?
 - a customs officer
 - a visitor to a company
 - somebody whose English is not perfect

- Could you say that again please? I didn't understand.
 - a boss to a secretary
 - a visitor to a company
 - somebody whose English is not perfect
- Could you tell me if you have any in stock?
 - a boss to a secretary
 - customer to sales person
 - a visitor to a company
- Would you mind telling me who your present supplier is?
 - a boss to a secretary
 - somebody whose English is not perfect
 - sales person to potential client
- Would you mind spelling your name please?
 - somebody answering the phone
 - a visitor to a company
 - a customs officer
- Could you fix us two black coffees please, Barbara?
 - a boss to a secretary
 - a visitor to a company
 - somebody whose English is not perfect
- Could you tell me where Mr Brown's office is?
 - customer to sales person
 - a visitor to a company
 - somebody whose English is not perfect

Key: 1b, 2a, 3c, 4b, 5c, 6a, 7a, 8b

B) Choose the best answer to these requests.

- Would you mind moving our meeting to Tuesday?
 - Sorry, I can't make Tuesday. How about Wednesday?
 - Sorry. I'm in the middle of something.
 - Of course. I'll pick you up at about eight.
- The phone's ringing. Could you get it?
 - Sure. It's ten o' clock.
 - Of course. I'll pick you up at about eight.
 - Sorry. I'm in the middle of something. Do you mind getting it yourself?
- This printer is jammed again. Could you give me a hand?
 - Of course. Dreadful things, these printers. Always going wrong.
 - Sorry. I'm in the middle of something. Do it yourself.
 - It's my office too, you know, but I'll try to be quieter.
- Could you come back at 3.00?
 - Sorry, I can't make Tuesday. How about Wednesday?
 - Sorry, I have another appointment at 3.00.
 - Of course. I'll pick you up at about eight.
- Could you tell me the time?
 - Of course. I'll pick you up at about eight.
 - No, I can't.
 - Sure. It's ten o' clock.
- Could you give me a lift? My car has broken down.
 - No.
 - Of course. I'll pick you up at about eight.
 - Sure. It's ten o' clock.
- Could you phone me tomorrow?
 - Of course. I'll pick you up at about eight.
 - Nope.
 - Sorry, I can't. I'm tied up all day.

Key: 1a, 2c, 3a, 4b, 5c, 6b, 7c



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