When we know somebody well, such as a family member, a friend or a classmate, we can communicate in a direct way and don’t have to worry about saying the wrong thing and causing offence.

But, when we don’t know somebody very well, we have to think carefully about how we communicate with them, which words or phrases to use, so we don’t cause offence.

In these situations, we may need to use polite English:

- job interviews
- meetings at work or with clients
- appointments with professional people such as doctors or lawyers
- when requesting help or information
- at formal events

Most of us know how to communicate politely in our first language. We know that certain phrases are appropriate when we are chatting with friends but are inappropriate in other situations when it is essential that we speak in a more formal and polite way.

In this short course, you will discover:

- The 3 Golden Rules of Politeness
- Why Saving Face is so important
- The 6 Principles of Polite Speaking in English

By the end of the course, you will be able to communicate more politely in English and get better results in formal situations.

The course consists of 8 short videos. Each video is accompanied by lesson notes which summarise the key points.

So, if you are ready, why not watch the first video and learn why is it so important to know how to speak polite English.
An Introduction to Politeness

- What is Politeness
- Why is Politeness Important
- The 3 Golden Rules of Politeness
- The Concept of Face: Saving and Losing

What is Politeness?

*Politeness is having or showing behaviour that is respectful and considerate of other people.*

Oxford Dictionary.

Politeness is basically about treating people with respect.

Why is Politeness important?

There are many reasons why politeness is important in life but one of them is that if you’re polite, you are more likely to achieve your objectives and get what you want, and people are more likely to take your ideas, views, opinions and arguments seriously and you are more likely to get the results you want.

As the 19th century American writer Josh Billings said:

*Politeness is better than logic. You can often persuade when you cannot convince.*

However, speaking in a polite way in another language can be quite difficult.

We may have excellent grammar, clear pronunciation and a large vocabulary but we may have problems if we don’t know how to communicate politely in English.
What we do naturally in our first language may have to be learned in another language.

The good news is that the 3 Golden Rules of Politeness are found in most cultures so you probably know them already!

**The 3 Golden Rules of Politeness**

1: **Don’t Impose**

People have their own personal space. They don't want you to invade their personal space and they don’t want to be forced or pressured into doing something they don’t really want to do.

They want to be treated as individuals and, if you impose, if you invade their personal space, and try to get them to do things they don’t want to do, they might reject you, they might not want to deal with you, and respond to you in a positive way.

So, don’t order, don’t command.

2: **Give Options**.

If you ask someone to do something, give them options. Give them the option to refuse or accept. To do what you want or to say ‘I’m sorry, I’d rather not do that.’

If you have a suggestion, give people the option to accept it, refuse it, or think of a suggestion of their own. It’s really important to give people options so they don’t feel trapped.

3: **Make the other person feel good**

This doesn’t mean that you have to make people feel really happy. It means that you want them to feel positive and in control of the situation. They want to know that you respect them: their opinions, ideas and their
status as an individual.

What do most people really want in social interactions?

- Most people want to be accepted and respected

Most adults want to be accepted and respected as intelligent, mature, successful person and professional people. They also want to be treated fairly

- They also want to be independent and free to make their own decisions.

Free will, the ability to do what you want in life and choose what you want to do, is really important for most people. By treating people politely, you’re giving them the option to take their own decisions and to have some control over their own life and their own actions.

**The Concept of Face**

**Saving and losing face**

Most people want to present a positive image to the public - their PUBLIC FACE. They want other people to see them in a positive light and treat them with respect.

We all want to keep this positive public image. This is known as ‘Saving Face’.

Nobody wants to lose this positive public image. This is known as ‘Losing Face’.

Speaking politely to people helps save their positive public face, especially in more formal situations.
How to behave in different social situations

We don’t always need to use polite language. Using polite language depends on the situation.

Ask yourself these 4 questions:

1. What is your objective in each situation?

If you meet someone in a bar, your objective will be different to meeting somebody at a business conference.

2. What is the objective of the other person?

Do they want to do business with you or do they want to relax with you and enjoy your company?

3. Will polite language help you achieve your objective?

This is a very important question. If we’re too polite, the other person may feel a little uncomfortable if it’s not appropriate for this particular situation. If you’re in a café with a friend, do you really need to speak with polite language? Maybe, you need to speak with more relaxed language.

4. Will polite language have a positive effect on the other person?

Do you need to be polite and formal or should you tell jokes, relax, maybe even make fun of the other person, because you know each other very well and being polite means you do not appreciate the fact that you have a close relationship?
Example of different situations

If you are in a bar with friends, you can probably say more or less what you like. You don’t need to be polite. If you’re having a drink, you don’t need to say:

Would you perhaps be interested in having another beer?

You just need to say:

Fancy another beer? How about another beer?

However, if you are in a more formal setting, such as a business meeting with people you don’t know very well, you should use polite language.

So, is it OK to move onto point number 2?

Would you like to say anything here? Would you like a few minutes to look at my proposal?

KEY POINTS

What are the Golden Rules of Polite Speaking?

1. Don’t …………………
2. Give …………………
3. Make the other person …………………

Remember:

1. People generally want to keep their positive public image (face)
2. Polite language is suitable in formal situations, especially when you don’t know your conversation partners very well. It may not be appropriate for informal situations with friends or family.