

POLITENESS PRINCIPLE 1 - The Uncertainty Principle

This principle states that when giving your opinion, show some uncertainty.

If you seem certain and 100% sure when you speak, you may sound as though you are imposing your opinions, ideas, knowledge and intelligence on other people.

Remember Golden Rule Number 1: Don't Impose!

For example, if you say: *This is the best restaurant in town*, you are not giving the other person much of an opportunity to disagree with you, to share their opinion.

It sounds very **dogmatic**, which means that you are saying that your opinion is the only correct one and there are no other possible options.

So, if you want to sound more polite, sometimes it's a good idea to sound a little bit uncertain, unsure, not 100% convinced by your own opinion or your own view.

Even if you are 100% convinced of your own view, it's often a good idea to *pretend* to show some uncertainty.

Let's say that we are talking about somebody we don't know particularly well.

Maybe I could say:

She works in a bank.

Now, if I'm 100% sure, that's fine. But, if I'm not 100% sure, I'll sound very confident in my own knowledge. So, it might be a good idea to show some uncertainty.

I think she works in a bank.

Example phrases we can use:

I think.....

I believe

I guess

I suppose

I expect.

All the verbs make you sound a little less certain and probably more polite.

Can you think of any other 'uncertainty' verbs?

Here are some tips for using sounding less certain

- Remember to stress and extend the uncertainty verb.
- It's also common to pause a little bit after the verb.

Uncertainty phrases can come at the beginning or end of the sentence

Sometimes we say something and we sound very confident. Then, maybe we realise we want to sound more polite, so we add the phrases at the end.

That means the other person has the opportunity to disagree with us or express a slightly different view.

This opens up the conversation, gives options to the other person and makes us sound less imposing.

SUMMARY

Use uncertainty verbs / phrases at the beginning or end of your statements so you don't impose on the other person.