

POLITE PRINCIPLE 6 - The Avoid Direct Commands Principle

In general, commands and orders should be avoided if you want to sound polite.

Direct commands are sometimes necessary (soldiers, parents, bosses) but if you don't know someone very well and you don't have a close relationship with them, it's probably best not to use orders and commands, especially if you want to do something for you.

Direct commands impose, do not give options and don't make the other person feel good!

Let's imagine you have a heavy suitcase and you want to put it on the luggage rack on a plane or a train. It's too heavy to lift by yourself.

You could order somebody: *Help me with this suitcase!*

This might work with a friend, especially if you said it with a smile on your face, but it's unlikely to work with a stranger.

Generally, we need to ask people for help in a polite way. Remember that adding 'please' always helps.

Here are some ways we can do that:

Certain Modal verbs

Could / Would you help me with my suitcase please?

Could is more polite and formal than Can.

Would you be able to help me?

I wonder if you could help me with my suitcase?

Do you think you could (possibly) help me with my suitcase?

Question Tags

It's very common to use **negative statements with positive tags**.

You wouldn't help me with my suitcase, would you?

Indirect questions

I don't suppose you could help me, could you?

(This sounds extremely polite).

Is there any chance you could help me?

Hint that you need help

Sometimes you can be really polite and people don't understand that you are asking for help. They don't realise you are giving them an 'indirect' command.

If all else fails, give them a hint (something that you say or do that shows, but not directly, what you want).

My goodness. This suitcase is so heavy. I'm going to break my back lifting it.

This is an obvious hint so you might decide to say something more subtle!

SUMMARY

Avoid direct commands unless you really have to use them.

Use modal verbs (can, could, would).

Use indirect questions.

Use hints.

