

SOFTENING YOUR LANGUAGE

Warm Up Task

Write a list of the most common situations you deal with by email. Which ones do you find the most challenging and why?

Language Input

If you have a bank of key phrases for different situations, it saves a great deal of time and ensures you are accurate. These phrases cover the most common situations.

Reason For Writing	Phrases
Asking someone to do something simple	Could / can / will / would you ... please? Would you mind ...?
Requesting permission to do something	I was wondering if I could ... Could I possibly ...? Would it be okay if I ...?
Asking for a favour or a complex demand	I was hoping you could ... I was wondering if you could ... Do you think you might be able to ...? Would it be at all possible for you to ...?
Changing an appointment or meeting	I am afraid I will have to postpone our meeting tomorrow. I apologise for the inconvenience. I am very sorry, but I need to re-schedule our appointment.

Suggesting an alternative proposal	<p>What about ... instead?</p> <p>I was thinking we could ...</p> <p>Shall / should we...?</p> <p>What if you were to...?</p>
Rejecting a proposal	<p>I am afraid this really wouldn't work.</p> <p>We are unable to accept this</p>
Getting a status update	<p>Have you had a chance to finish / work on ...?</p> <p>Are you in a position to update me on ...?</p> <p>Could you tell me where we are on ...?</p>
Apologising for your mistake	<p>I am writing to express my sincere apologies for ...</p> <p>I can only say how sorry we are for the trouble this has caused.</p> <p>Please accept my sincere apologies for ...</p> <p>I must apologise for ...</p>
Pointing out someone else's mistake	<p>It seems that ...</p> <p>We have noticed that ...</p> <p>It has come to our attention that...</p>
Making a complaint	<p>I would like to complain about ...</p> <p>I wanted to bring to your attention ...</p>
Giving bad news	<p>It is with regret ...</p> <p>Sadly, I have to tell you ...</p> <p>Unfortunately,</p>

Task 1

Match the two halves of the sentences to create the most suitable phrase. Insert the correct matching number in the red box:

Shall we		1	not getting back to you sooner.
I would like to complain about		2	proposal as it stands.
I must apologise for		3	the slow response times from your Help Desk.
Could you tell me where we are on		4	send you the report tomorrow instead of today?
We are unable to accept this		5	re-schedule our meeting to next Friday?
I was wondering if		6	you would write a customer review for us?
Could I possibly		7	implementing phase one of construction?

Task 2

The words in the box are used to soften the message in sensitive situations. They make your email sound less direct and more acceptable to the reader. Choose the most suitable word (s) to complete the following sentences from the dropdown list. In some cases, more than one word is possible.

<i>a little</i>	<i>a slight</i>	<i>minor</i>
<i>fairly</i>	<i>quite</i>	<i>not quite</i>
<i>partially</i>	<i>rather</i>	<i>more or less</i>

- There are still a few bugs to be fixed before we can launch the product.
- Their market share is growing rapidly. We need to find ways to be more competitive.
- The sound quality could have been better. In fact, it's poor.
- There is issue with the packaging. We will need to make some small changes.
- Your idea is as watertight as you had hoped. The R&D team have identified some flaws in it.
- We found their website difficult to navigate. It's not very user-friendly.
- The report is finished. I just need to read through it again.
- Our progress has been slow in recent months. Unfortunately, the building is only finished.

Culture Tip

If you come from a culture which is comfortable using a direct style of communication, you may find people from cultures which prefer indirect communication are offended. Consider how you can use softening language to modify your message and make it seem more diplomatic.

Task 3

We also use words and phrases at the beginning of sentences to soften the message.

Examples of introductory words and phrases are:

Actually,	To be honest,	It seems like
It looks like	Frankly speaking,	

Use these words and phrases to make these sentences sound more acceptable:

1. there will be a delay in processing your order.
2. I disagree with you.
3. there is a mistake in this invoice.
4. the price you quoted is not realistic.
5. his behaviour is not acceptable.

Task 4

Some cultures – in particular the British – find that a polite communication will elicit a more positive and constructive response.

Take these rather direct sentences and re-word them to make them more polite and indirect. Of course, being less direct does not mean being less clear!

1	You haven't replied to my email.	
2	Your presentation is really poor.	
3	I need to take holiday next week.	
4	You are continually late for meetings.	
5	I don't like your idea at all.	
6	The invoice is too much.	
7	Bring me a coffee please.	
8	You talk too much.	
9	The contract is cancelled. You have lost the business.	
10	The advertising concept is wrong.	

Task 5

Write a suitable email for each of the following situations:

- 1.** A supplier has sent you an invoice, but the discount is 5% less than he quoted in your meeting last week. Query this figure.

- 2.** You have scheduled a meeting with a client and now realise that you are double-booked. Ask your client to move to an earlier time in the day. He works in a time zone four hours behind you.

- 3.** One of your colleagues promised to send you a report on Monday morning. You need this report urgently. It is now Tuesday afternoon.