

How to Ask Questions more Politely in English

Two things to consider:

1. **Power** of the listener and the speaker.
2. **Imposition** of the request.

A: classmate - classmate - imposition high / imposition low

B: student - teacher - imposition high / imposition low

C: boss - employee - imposition high / imposition low

Let's do an example together.

You're a follower of a teacher on Instagram. You have never spoken to this teacher directly, and you'd like to ask them to check to see if your sentence is correct. Which is the best option in your opinion?

A: Hi Teacher John. I've written a sentence and I don't know if it's correct, would you be able to check it for me, please? Here's the sentence, "how is you?"

B: Hi Teacher John. Please check this sentence. "How is you?"

C: Hi Teacher John, I know you're extremely busy and you probably receive lots of messages per day, however, I have a quick question about a sentence. If you have the time, would you be able to check it for me? This is the sentence in case you have the time to check it, "how is you?"

D: Hi Teacher John, I would like you to check this sentence, please. "How is you?"

Ways to Make your Questions Sound Politer (or NOT) in English

PLEASE DOES NOT EQUAL POLITENESS

Using past tense modals:

1. **Could** you check this document? (instead of "can")

Consultative devices:

1. **Would you mind** checking this document?
2. **Would it be possible** to check this document?
3. **Is it alright if** you check this document?

Downtoners:

1. Is it **possible** to check this document?
2. Could you **just** check this document?

Conditionals:

1. **Could** you check this document **if** you have the time?

Past Tense and Aspect:

1. **I was wondering** if you could check this document?
2. **I wondered** if you could check this document?
3. **I wanted** to ask if you could check this document?

Negatives:

1. **I don't suppose** there's any chance you could check this document?

Adding extra information:

We do this, typically, with speakers who have higher power or if the request has a higher level of imposition.

1. Would it be possible for you to check this document **because I don't know whether it's correct and I've been checking it for days.**

Apologising:

1. **I'm very sorry**, but would you please check this document?

Giving Thanks:

1. Could you check this document? **Thank you.**

Homework

Q1. You're in English class. You're with your classmate who you've known for 2 years and you're really good friends with. You regularly see each other outside the classes for drinks. You want her to open the window. Write in the comments what you think is an appropriate way to ask her.

Q2. You're in English class. You have a teacher who you've known for 2 years, but you have a very professional relationship with her and you're not close personally. You have only ever communicated in English classes, never outside the classes. You really respect her. You want her to open the window. Write in the comments what you think is an appropriate way to ask her.