



## GALIMATIAS GUIDE TO POLITENESS IN ENGLISH

"Is there a risk that you are unintentionally being rude - impolite in English, even if you add a please?" Claire Rytkönen, Galimatias Concept Oy Ab





## INTRODUCTION

- Finnish writing style may sometimes be a bit direct, whereas in English you need to soften your message and yet be convincing. The same information, politely expressed, will get a better response from an English native speaker and is more likely to keep up a good working relationship. We can see that politeness in English can make a big difference in your business relationships. In this guide we will give you a few ideas how to make this possible.



# WAYS OF BEING POLITE

## Requesting

Could you...  
Would you be able  
to...  
Can I ask you to...

## Thanking

Many thanks for all  
your efforts.  
Thank you. I really  
appreciate...  
Thank you again. I  
know X has taken  
a great deal of  
energy/effort/  
organisation.

## Highlighting

Could I draw your  
attention to...  
One point to  
highlight is...  
The crucial/vital  
issue here is...  
This is really  
important.

## Forbidding

N.B. – please  
don't.  
X is not possible/  
acceptable/  
sufficient.  
Can I remind you  
not to...  
Please be aware  
that X cannot....



# WAYS OF BEING POLITE

## **Warning**

It would be  
advisable to  
stop/cut...  
It would be best to  
avoid...

## **Helping another save face**

We will bear this  
in mind.  
We will make a  
note of this.  
We will keep these  
details on file.

## **Thank you very much again for**

your consideration  
of X in connection  
with Y.

thinking of us in this  
regard.

## **We wish you all the best**

in the preparations for Y  
for the upcoming year/  
season /  
the future

**And look forward to**  
further cooperation in  
the future if not in X.

meeting at X/soon/in the  
future if not at Z.



# WAYS OF BEING POLITE

## Refusing politely

Softener – I understand... I appreciate your difficulties... I fully sympathise...

That's not possible, I'm afraid.

We won't be able to...

It is a disappointment that...

## Compliments

The X went extremely well thanks to you and all your efforts.

X was extremely thorough/ well-conceived / well received / impressive. A fantastic job. Very well done.

## Compliments

We are lucky to have X/you

X was an excellent result / had superb feedback. All credit to you and your team..

Hope you have a very well deserved...



# WAYS OF BEING POLITE

## Breaking bad news

Unfortunately/ regrettably...

we have already committed to another...  
it is not possible due to...

we have a policy of...

## Breaking bad news

Unfortunately/regrettably...

due to budget constraints/ time constraints / Finnish legislation/ the demands of our workload mean that

## Breaking bad news

Unfortunately/regrettably...

X is not possible/feasible/ sustainable/permitted/ profitable/advisable/ capable/responsible...

We won't be able to...

I'm afraid that....

I regret to inform you that....



# WAYS OF BEING POLITE

## Apologising

I'm very sorry for...  
Many apologies for the inconvenience.  
I apologise for the mistake and any problems it may have caused.

## Apologising

My/Our fault entirely. We are at fault/to blame.  
We would like to rectify this by...  
In compensation we would like to...







BY FOLLOWING  
THESE KEY RULES  
WE CAN MAKE  
SURE OUR EMAILS  
ARE POLITE:

1.  
REQUESTS  
RATHER THAN  
ORDERS

2.  
CHOICES  
RATHER THAN  
STATEMENTS.

3.  
ADVICE RATHER  
THAN  
WARNINGS

4.  
ADULT TO ADULT  
RATHER THAN  
ADULT TO CHILD

SOME EXAMPLES OF DO'S AND  
DON'TS IN ENGLISH WRITTEN  
COMMUNICATION





## TAKE A LOOK AT THE EXAMPLES:

Impolite/rude form	How it sounds to a native speaker	Alternative polite form
Was that it?	Sounds contemptuous – was that all/that is not very much.	Can I check – was that the X document? Is X the document/detail we discussed?
I hope you're not... You better not...	Sounds threatening – Often a sentence that begins "You better not" or "I hope you are not" ends with a negative condition. e.g. "You better not be late or we will reduce your salary", "I hope you are not expecting time off or you will be disappointed."	Are you doing/using X? - It would be better to... I would advise against doing/using X... Can we remind you to avoid doing/using... Just a small reminder to avoid doing/using...





## TAKE A LOOK AT THE EXAMPLES:

Impolite/rude form	How it sounds to a native speaker	Alternative polite form
What's your problem?	A direct insult – you are the problem.	What issues/problems are you having with... What features/aspects of X are providing difficult? Which parts of X are causing difficulty?
Don't forget	Sounds like adult to child.	Could you remember to... Can I remind you...
On time	Sounds like adult to child.	We must meet the deadline. Punctuality is crucial here. This is very sensitive.



## TAKE A LOOK AT THE EXAMPLES:

Impolite/rude form	How it sounds to a native speaker	Alternative polite form
Do it properly	Sounds like adult to child.	Could you make sure X is thoroughly/ carefully/completely done? Can you give X your full attention and focus to ensure complete satisfaction for... Could you ensure that X is done to the highest possible standard?/ right down to the smallest details?
Put it in a file, Tell me, Make sure	Sounds arrogant – a direct imperative sounds like a command.	Could you put it in a file? Can you tell me? Would you make sure?



## TAKE A LOOK AT THE EXAMPLES:

Impolite/rude form	How it sounds to a native speaker	Alternative polite form
You will be doing section 8 too?	Sounds arrogant – a statement with a question mark assumes action rather than giving someone a choice.	Will you be able/available to do section 8?
I will wait for section 7	Sounds impatient – as if section 7 is already late.	I look forward to receiving section 7. Let me know when you have finished section 7.
If you can't do it there are plenty of others that can.	Sounds threatening – you are not special; many others can easily do your work.	We fully understand if you are not available. /Could you let me know if it is not possible? Then we can make other arrangements if you are not free.



## GIVE IT A TRY! REPHRASE THESE STATEMENTS POLITELY:

1. We won't be coming to the conference. We have another event on the same day.
2. We do not need your service now.
3. Take time to properly study these.
4. If you can't do it there are plenty of others that can.
5. No that wouldn't work. Try again.
6. That's not my responsibility.
7. Yes there was a mistake in the code. It is fixed now.
8. The presentation was fine. Thanks.
9. Thanks but no thanks.
10. I can't help. It's not my responsibility.
11. Please arrive on time.
12. You have improved from last year.



## THE POLITE WAY TO SAY....

1. Unfortunately we won't be able to attend the conference due to a previous commitment.
2. We do not currently require a provider but will be sure to keep you details for the future.
3. Could I ask you to look over these thoroughly?
4. If you are unavailable please let us know and we will try to make other arrangements.
5. Unfortunately that would not work. Could you try another solution?
6. I am afraid that's not my responsibility but I will refer you to the right person
7. I apologise for the mistake in the code. Thank you for highlighting it. It is fixed now.
8. Your presentation was well done. Many thanks for your efforts.
9. No thank you it is not necessary at the moment.
10. I am sorry I can't help you as it is outside my area but I will refer you to the right person
11. Could you be especially punctual for this, thank you.
12. There has been great development from last year. Well done!





**CONTACT US TO FIND THE  
RIGHT TRAINING SOLUTIONS  
FOR YOUR ORGANISATION:**

**HELSINKI:**

PURSIMIEHENKATU 29 - 31 B, 5TH  
FLOOR

**TURKU:**

PITKÄMÄENKATU 6 A

**TAMPERE:**

HATANPÄÄN VALTATIE 18

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