Hi. I’m Marianne Raynaud. My goal is to help you improve your spoken English. So let’s get started. If you are an intermediate or even an advanced intermediate speaker but not yet speak English perfectly, I would recommend you learn to speak what I call “polite” English. If you follow my advice, you won’t be misunderstood and you will always be respected.

Many modern songs offer lyrics with very vulgar, trashy language that is seldom used by educated people. This language is full of incorrect English that is used to provoke, scandalize or simply catch your attention. It is far better to focus on correct usage. Then you’ll always make a good impression, and you’ll also be able to recognize language mistakes that are used to create an effect. Here is my advice.

Avoid using contractions until you know all the tenses perfectly. If you do use contractions such as “doesn’t”, “don’t”, “haven’t”, “hasn’t” or “won’t”, be sure you’re not making a mistake. Actually it is far better to use “does not”, “do not” or “will not” in the beginning. Above all never say, “ain’t” as in “I ain’t”, “he ain’t”, “it ain’t” etc. The correct formulation is “I’m not”, “he isn’t”, “it isn’t” and so on.

Another piece of advice is to use “would like” instead of “want”. It may sound “overly” polite, but I can assure you people will appreciate the way you speak to them.

Listen and repeat.

I want a cup of tea. I want red wine. I prefer fish.
I would like a cup of tea. I would like red wine. I would prefer fish.
I want a beer. I want to see the menu. I want sorbet for dessert.
I would like a beer. I would like to see the menu. I would like sorbet for dessert.

Now I will say the sentences with “want”, and you will say the same sentence with “would like” to be more polite. Listen to the examples.

I say: I want a cup of tea. You say: I would like a cup of tea.

Now you go on in the same way.

I want a cup of tea. I want red wine. I prefer fish.
I would like a cup of tea. I would like red wine. I would prefer fish.
I want a beer. I want to see the menu. I want sorbet for dessert.
I would like a beer. I would like to see the menu. I would like sorbet for dessert.
Now let's suppose you are speaking for yourself and a friend. Listen to the example.

I say: We want two cups of tea. You say: We would like two cups of tea.

Now you go on the same way:

We want two cups of tea. We want two glasses of red wine.
We would like two cups of tea. We would like two glasses of red wine.
We want two beers. We want two menus of the day.
We would like two beers. We would like two menus of the day.

If you are the host and have invited people for a drink at a bar or even a meal at home, you will undoubtedly be asking certain questions. Here again there is what I called the direct question with “want” and the polite formulation with “would like”. Listen and repeat.

Do you want to have a seat? Do you want to look at the menu?
Would you like to have a seat? Would you like to look at the menu?
Do you want something to drink? Do you want fish or meat?
Would you like something to drink? Would you like fish or meat?

Now I will say the sentences with “Do you want...?”, and you will say the same sentence with “Would you like...?” Listen to the example.

I say: Do you want to have a seat? You say: Would you like to have a seat?

Now you go on in the same way. Be sure to speak before I give the answer.

Do you want to have a seat? Do you want to look at the menu?
Would you like to have a seat? Would you like to look at the menu?
Do you want something to drink? Do you want fish or meat?
Would you like something to drink? Would you like fish or meat?

Another way of being polite is to use “could” instead of “can”. I will say a direct question with “can” and you will formulate a more polite one with “could”. Listen to the examples.

I say: Can I have a glass of water? You say: Could I have a glass of water?
I say: Can you bring us the menu? You say: Could you bring us the menu?

Now you do it. Be sure to speak before I give the answer.

Can I have a glass of water? Can I have the spicy sauce on the side?
Could I have a glass of water? Could I have the spicy sauce on the side?
Can you bring us the menu? Can I have white wine instead of red?
Could you bring us the menu? Could I have white wine instead of red?

That’s the end of our podcast. Now you can be very polite in conversation and people will appreciate your English. For more practice go to “QualityTime-ESL” for grammar and “5 Minute TOPs” to have fun with song lyrics. Bye for now, and don’t forget to keep smiling.