Hi. I’m Marianne Raynaud. My goal is to help you improve your spoken English. So let’s get started. In a previous podcast I recommended that students learn to speak what I call “polite” English—using the expressions “Would you like…?” or “Could you…?” instead of the more direct “Do you want…?” or “Can you…? By using “polite” English you will avoid misunderstandings and you will always be respected. Now we will look at other ways of producing “polite” English.

One obvious solution is simply to say, “please” at the beginning or the end of a request, in other words when you’re asking for something. “Can I have a glass of water?” is a bit too direct. “Could I have a glass of water?” is better and “Please, could I have a glass of water?” is really polite English. Even more often “Please” is heard at the end of a request.

Listen and repeat. These are requests with “can” where “please” is added at the end.

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

Let’s do an easy exercise. I will make a request with “can”, and you will repeat it, adding, “please” at the end. Listen to the examples.

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

Now you go on in the same way adding, “please” at the end. Speak before I give the answer.

Can I have a glass of water?
Can I have a glass of water, please?
Can you bring us the menu?
Can you bring us the menu, please?
Can I have white wine instead of red?
Can I have white wine instead of red, please?

Now the same exercise but with “could”. You will repeat the request and add “please”.

Could you bring us the menu?
Could you bring us the menu, please?
Could I have a glass of water?
Could I have a glass of water, please?
Could I have the spicy sauce on the side?
Could I have the spicy sauce on the side, please?
Could I have white wine instead of red?
Could I have white wine instead of red, please?
Let’s practice with another expression, which you undoubtedly know, but perhaps don’t use very often: “Do you mind...?” For example it is much more polite to say, “Do you mind opening the window?” to someone in a restaurant instead of the direct “Open the window”. Listen and repeat.

Do you mind opening the window? Do you mind standing in line?
Do you mind going outside to smoke? Do you mind parking your car over there?

In the next exercise I will give an order that is too direct and you will give the more polite version. Listen to the examples.

I say: Open the window. You say: Do you mind opening the window?
I say: Go outside to smoke. You say: Do you mind going outside to smoke?

Now you go on in the same way.

Open the window. Stand in line.
Do you mind opening the window? Do you mind standing in line?
Go outside to smoke. Park your car over there.
Do you mind going outside to smoke? Do you mind parking your car over there?

Of course it is even more polite to say, “Would you mind?” instead of “Do you mind?” So now you will convert my polite sentences into some even more polite versions. Listen to the examples.

I say: Do you mind opening the window? You say: Would you mind opening the window?
I say: Do you mind smoking outside? You say: Would you mind smoking outside?

Now you go on in the same way replacing “Do you mind...?” with “Would you mind...? ”

Do you mind opening the window? Do you mind standing in line?
Would you mind opening the window? Would you mind standing in line?
Do you mind smoking outside? Do you mind parking your car over there?
Would you mind smoking outside? Would you mind parking your car over there?

Finally let’s do the same exercise but with the negative. Listen to the examples.

I say: Do you mind not smoking here? You say: Would you mind not smoking here?
I say: Do you mind not jumping the line? You say: Would you mind not jumping the line?

Now you go on in the same way. Always speak before I give the answer.

Do you mind not smoking here? Do you mind not opening the window?
Would you mind not smoking here? Would you mind not opening the window?
Do you mind not jumping the line? Do you mind not parking your car here?
Would you mind not jumping the line? Would you mind not parking your car here?

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.

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