



How Can English Speakers Say No Politely?

S06E14 | For teachers to adapt to their learners

Purpose

A refusal can be softened with a reason, an apology, a positive opening or a suggestion for another time. Learners need to listen to the whole response and interpret it in context rather than waiting for the word no .

Try this in your next lesson

Direct: Sorry, I can't.

Our suggested routine

Give learners this invitation: Would you like to come to dinner on Friday? Ask them to build three refusals:

Repeat with a request, an invitation and an offer. Then ask learners which version feels right for each relationship.

- ☐ Direct: Sorry, I can't.
- ☐ Softer: I'd love to, but I'm busy on Friday.
- ☐ Softer + alternative: I'd love to, but I'm busy on Friday. How about next week?

Answers and teacher guidance

Meaning check: No, I don't mind normally gives permission after Do you mind if...?; I'd love to, but I can't declines the invitation. Maybe later needs context and does not promise a later agreement.

After the attempt

What worked? What needs another model or a smaller step? Note one change for next time.

Read the full explanation and examples:
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