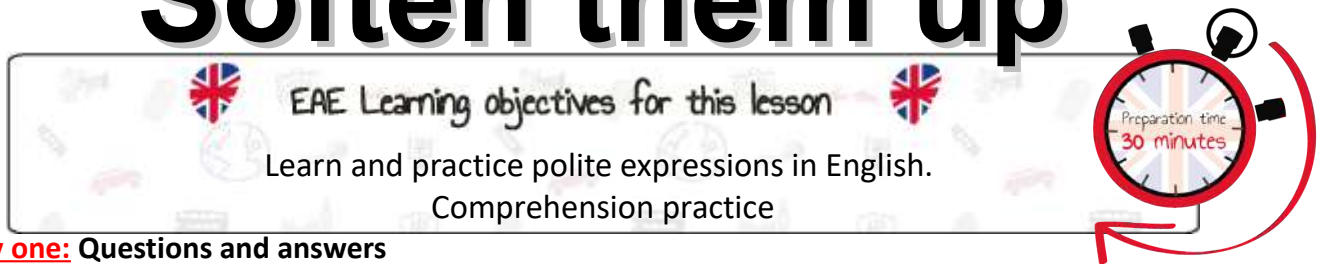
Lesson Plan © Easy Access English

Soften them up



Activity one: **Questions and answers**

1. Do you sometimes speak English to customers or suppliers?
2. Do you ever have to say sorry or explain something politely?
3. Do you feel comfortable using English in that type of situation?
4. What other situations do you speak English in at work?

Activity two: **Softening phrases**

Look at the sentences below. Which is the most polite?

1. Pass the phone to Mr Smith
2. Can I speak to Mr Smith
3. Please could I speak to Mr Smith
4. Could I speak to Mr Smith please?

Yes, using "could" instead of "can" does make a request more polite but there are phrases we use to be less direct and more polite when we make requests.

Here are some other polite and indirect ways of asking for things:

- **I was hoping you /I could…**

I was hoping you could work this Saturday.
I was hoping I could take Friday off.



- **I was wondering if you/I could…**

I was wondering if you could cover my shift next Tuesday.
I was wondering if I could take an extended lunch break to run some errands.

- **Do you think you/I might be able to..?**

Do you think you might be able to help me out with these reports?
Do you think I might be able to leave a few minutes?



- **Would you mind..**

Would you mind helping me to carry these boxes?
Would you mind explaining the instructions for this machine?

- **I'd really appreciate it if…**

I'd really appreciate it if you could send me that report this morning.
I'd really appreciate it if you could tell me where I could find Mr Smith.

- **Could you possibly**

Could you possibly show me the way to Mr Smith's office please?
Could you possibly spare the time to explain something to me?

Now think of some of your own examples.

Activity Three: **Role plays**
Practice using polite expressions in the following situations

(A) Your company has just purchased a new projector for the conference room. You don't know how to use it yet, but a coworker of yours has already used it several times. You would like your coworker to show you how to use the projector on his lunch break. How would you ask him to help you?

(B) Your car is in the shop and you had to take the bus to work. It's raining really hard, and you don't want to take the bus home. One of your coworkers lives a few miles from you. You want her to give you a ride home. How would you ask her for a ride?

(C) Someone from outside the company visited your office and gave a presentation. You thought it was a great presentation and you would like a copy of the Power Point slides. How would you ask the presenter for the document?

(D) Something unexpected happened this morning and you are late for work. You realise that you do not have your supervisor's phone number. You decide to call a coworker and ask her to tell the boss that you will be late. How would you ask your coworker to do this for you?

(E) Someone is coming to visit the airport who wants to invest in a private plane, you have to ask your co-workers politely to help you show them around.

(F) Some members of your team are having some technical issues with their computers. You decide to ask Gary, the company's network administrator, to come by and see what the problem is. How would you ask Gary to do this?

(G) Your department has a company car. Typically, only senior members of your team can use the car. However, you have an important meeting with a client, and you want to use the company car to make a good impression. How would you ask your supervisor to use the car for your upcoming meeting with your client?

Activity Four: **INDIRECT**
When you need to tell someone something in a polite way, it's best to be less direct. For example it's not polite to say:

- There is a delay in delivery.
  It is more polite to say -
- I'm sorry, there's a delay in delivery.
  It's most polite to say -
- I'm afraid there might be a slight delay in delivery.



Might and Slight - these words make the sentence less direct and more polite.

Here are some other qualifiers you can use in a similar way:
a little, a bit, a little bit, slight, slightly, small, one or two.

For example:
1. We are having one or two problems with logistics today and there are some delays.
2. There is a small problem with that item I'm afraid.
3. I'm sorry but we are a little bit behind schedule.

Activity Five: **Dialogue**

Read the dialogue with your teacher:

Ron - Hello, IKEA customer service how can I help you?

Nancy - Hello I'm waiting for a delivery and it hasn't arrived.

Ron - I'm sorry to hear that. Please could you give me some information and I will check on it for you. What's your name please and address?

Nancy - Nancy Reagan, The White House, Washington.

Ron - OK Mrs Reagan, let me see now. Ah yes, I see what the issue is. I'm afraid we have had a little bit of a problem with that item as it has been catching fire in people's houses.

Nancy - what! That's scary!

Ron - Yes indeed, which is why IKEA has immediately taken action to remove it from all our stores.

Nancy - Well why didn't anyone inform me? I've been waiting here all morning.

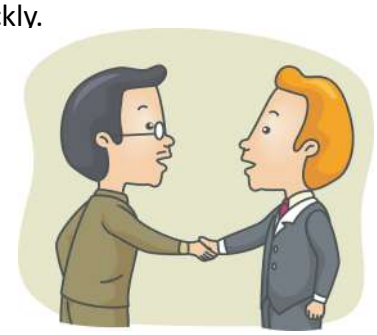
Ron - Yes, I'm sorry about that, I understand. The thing is that we have had one or two problems with communication as we are being inundated with calls from members of the public. Would you mind choosing another lamp from the catalogue and we will deliver it very quickly.

Nancy - OK then, I'll do that.

Ron - Thanks so much for understanding, we really appreciate that.

Nancy - OK, Goodbye.

Ron - Goodbye.



Activity Six: **Listening comprehension**

Listen to the song and number the words in the order you hear them in the song
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d27gTrPPAyk

Tea	Be yourself
Toast	Walking
Sobriety	« Manners Maketh Man »
Alien	Cane
Sun	Coffee
Propriety	Englishman
Gentleman	No matter

Activity seven: **Role Play**

With a partner, act out the following situation

- You are in a conference and someone is being very impolite, you need to ask them to leave, but they are not listening to you. Do you continue to be polite?

