You are <u>so</u> polite!

EAE Learning objectives for this lesson

Learn techniques to use intonation and stress effectively. Learn and practice new idiomatic expressions. Test your reading comprehension. Practice situations using polite expressions.

Activity One: Questions and answers, with your teacher.

- ☑ Do you consider yourself to be polite?
- ☑ Are good manners important to you?
- ☑ Do you know how to be polite in English?
- ☑ Do you try to use polite expressions when you speak English?
- ☑ In what situations do you think it's most important to be particularly polite?

Activity Two: Intonation and stress in English - It makes you sound more polite!

1/ Read the *<u>article</u>* below about intonation:

'Intonation is about how we say things, rather than what we say. Without intonation, it's impossible to understand the expressions and thoughts that go with words.
Listen to somebody speaking without paying attention to the words: the 'melody' you hear is the intonation. It has the following features:

- ★ *The pitch moves up and down, within a 'pitch range'.*
- ★ *A pitch movement (a rise or fall in tone, or a combination of the two) takes place on the most important syllable known as the 'tonic-syllable'.*
- ★ *These patterns of pitch variation are essential to a phrase's meaning. Changing the intonation can completely change the meaning.'*



Here's an example - let's try it out:

SK: Can I help you?
C: I'd like a chocolate (fall) ice-cream.
SK: One chocolate (fall-rise) ice-cream. Anything else?
C: One strawberry (fall) ice-cream.
SK: One chocolate (fall-rise), one strawberry (fall-rise). Anything else?
C: Yes. One chocolate (fall-rise), one strawberry (fall-rise), and one vanilla (fall).

(Source British Council).

2/ Read the <u>article</u> below about stress.

The way we hear and understand spoken English is also very much dependent on the words which are stressed. When we stress a word we say it louder, or more slowly. English is a stress timed language which means that the rhythm of the words depends on which words we decide to stress, not on the number of words in the sentence. So instead of giving the same amount of time for each syllable, we say some syllables, or words, very quickly and others slowly. We also say important words more loudly in order to emphasize them.

This means that if you try to understand each and every word, you will fail, because some words are not pronounced. It also means that if you do not stress important words, you will sound unenthusiastic, and unclear. Here's an example - let's try it out: (the underlined words are stressed more than the other words).

CSC Hello this is Maria, how can I help you today?
C Hi, I'm still waiting for a delivery of something I bought on line and it's very late.
CSC I'm terribly sorry to hear that. Could you give me some more information and I will be able to try to help you.
C Well it's a EKTORP sofa in red. I ordered it a week ago and it was supposed to arrive today but I have had no news from the delivery company.
CSC I understand, thanks for explaining. Could you give me your order number and I will check what's happening.
C Yes it 104 55 6 7
CSC Let me see now, you are Mrs Macron, you live at the Elysee Palace in Paris, is that correct?
C Yes that's right.
CSC OK Mrs Macron, I see that the item you ordered is currently not in stock. I'm really sorry about that, there must have been a problem.
C Well yes there is a problem because I paid and I need a sofa today!
CSC Well, I'm sure we can find a solution for you. Would yo like to have a look at the other red sofas we have in our range and we would be happy to deliver one today as long as it's in stock, even if it's a more expensive modal.
C OK, that's really kind of you. Let me have a look at the website then. Can you tell me know if it's in stock?
CSC Yes of course, I will check the availability as soon as you tell me which one you could be interested in.
C OK well I like the look of the STOCKHOLM sofa
CSC Let me see, OK well it's available so that's not a problem, for delivery later today, however as it's nearly twice the price of the other one you chose, then I'm afraid that we wouldn't be able to offer that exchange.
C That's OK I will pay the difference
CSC That's very flexible of you thank you very much.
C shall I pay now by credit card?
CSC Yes I will transfer you to my colleagues in home shopping. Thanks very much for understanding and once again on behalf of IKEA France, please excuse us for this issue. I will send you some vouchers which you will be able to use now for the rest of your purchase.
C thanks a lot.
CSC Have a good day.

Read the dialogue a second time, focussing on your intonation and on your stress at the same time.

Activity Three: Extra Polite!

Polite expressions in English can seem to be quite exaggerated compared to the French equivalent. Here are some examples of such common expressions:

- ★ I'm terribly sorry but..
- ★ I'm afraid that…
- ★ Would it be at all possible to…
- ★ May I ask you if…
- ★ Could you possible…
- ★ Could I possibly ask you to…
- ★ I definitely will make sure that it gets sorted…
- ★ I absolutely agree…
- ★ I can certainly help you…
- ★ That is a fantastic alternative…
- ★ Rest assured Mr……
- ★ I do understand the inconvenience you have faced……
- ★ I will be more than glad/ happy to assist you….
- ★ I will ensure that…
- ★ What I will do for you right away is……
- ★ I assure you I will try my best…..
- ★ I'm really sorry for the inconvenience, what I can do for you is ….
- ★ I know how frustrating that could be…

Customer service centers in English speaking countries really focus on showing in every contact that the company is really there to help the customer.

They use the tone of their voice to convey their dedication and enthusiasm. If you speak to a call center it's likely that the assistant will use a lot of strong polite expressions and a lot of rising and falling pitch as well as stressing parts of the polite expressions.

This means that Anglophones speaking to a call center in France would expect a similar level of courtesy. Now let's practice reading the polite expressions using intonation and stress.

You may feel that it sounds a little theatrical to use intonation and stress in your calls, but this is really how people speak, particularly in this type of professional situation.



Activity Four - Play some roles.

With your teacher, act out the following situations. Use the expressions from activity three and use intonation and stress to show your enthusiasm, your commitment to helping the customer and your empathy.

1. A customer calls you because they have been to three different IKEA stores to try to find a new cupboard door for their kitchen, but they are all out of stock in each store. He has to find a new door because the first one was damaged when he got it out of the box.
2. An irate customer calls because the bed he had delivered was not assembled and he paid for an assembly service. He has really tried to put it up himself but there are many different pieces and he is really frustrated.
3. A customer calls to place a particularly large order. She needs things to be delivered quickly and you really want to be sure not to disappoint her because the repeat business is guaranteed if it works out.
4. A customer calls to ask for help and advice about choosing a new kitchen. She has a lot of questions.
5. A customer calls because her table has been delivered but when she opened up the boxes she found that the color and model is wrong. She is expecting her family for a big dinner the next day.

Activity Five - Read the article from the callcenterhelper.com site, answer the questions.

'There are a number of ways we can use listening to pick up on the feelings and thoughts of the speaker.



Pitch

A caller's mood can be detected by listening to their pitch. When you speak on the telephone you cannot see their mood but you can hear it. You have probably heard the phrase 'You can hear a smile on the telephone'. This is due to the higher pitch that is naturally adopted when someone speaks when they are smiling.

If we are in a state of fear or excitement the muscles around our voice box tighten, making our voice higher pitched. So even if we don't understand the words someone is using we can tell if their mood or thoughts have changed.
Be aware of someone's pitch on the telephone, by listening to it you can gauge what their true thoughts are, even if the words don't reflect it.

Power

Power is the emphasis or stress put on a word or part of a word by lowering or raising the voice. Emphasizing a particular word in a sentence can change the meaning completely.

For example, say the following sentence seven times. Each time emphasize a different word. Notice how the meaning of the sentence changes as you change the emphasis.

'I didn't say your service was bad'.
I – I didn't say it, someone else did.
Didn't – don't put words in my mouth.
Say – I might have implied it, but I didn't say it.
Your – Not yours, the company's.
Was – Not was – is.
Bad – Not bad – it's totally unacceptable.

Listen carefully to where the emphasis is placed in the sentence to fully understand the message being conveyed. To ignore it could change the whole meaning of the sentence and you could end up talking at cross purposes.

We pick up on these vocal characteristics unconsciously. By being aware of the way the words are being spoken you will be able to 'hear' what isn't being said but the feelings and emotions being communicated. This is invaluable if you are to understand fully the purpose of your caller's contact and move towards a satisfactory outcome.

Equally important to hearing and listening for vocal characteristics from your caller is the way you say the words you use during a conversation.

We have all spoken to people whose voice is devoid of any character.

In these instances the emotions they feel are controlled or easily disguised. They may speak monotonously, failing to change the pace, or employ the tactics of emphasis, tone or inflection. Talking to someone with little character in their voice soon becomes an effort and we switch off. It is also difficult to assess their emotions.

If you detect that the vocal characteristics conflict with the words the caller is using, investigate what they are saying. A simple way to do this is to reflect back the feelings that you're picking up in the message by acting like a mirror. You reflect back on the emotions that you sense carry significant weight to the meaning of the message.

'Seems like you have some concerns'.

'I sense you were a little anxious'.

Your reflection is phrased in a question-like manner because you are inviting a response from your speaker. Confirming or clarifying what you think you heard is understanding gained right on the spot.

Keep the lines of communication open and improve the service you deliver to your caller by employing good vocal characteristics and listening to those of your caller.

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Questions:

1. What does the word 'mood' mean?
2. What does a person's voice sound like when they are smiling?
3. How can you change the meaning of a sentence?
4. How can you hear what isn't being said?
5. What is equally important?



