

Basics

Making suggestions, requests and offers are all essential life skills.

- suggest** – say that you think something is a good idea
- request** – say that you want another person to do something
- offer** – say that you will do something for somebody

In social situations around college or university, you will need to make requests and offers politely. Even with people that you know very well, you need to make suggestions, requests and offers in the right way.

The academic context

When you are working with other students in pairs or groups, especially when there is a problem to solve or a decision to make, you need to express these functions confidently and appropriately.

Key features


- Use of predictable, fixed structures and expressions:

Shall we ...?
Would you mind ...?

- Appropriate choice of formal or informal options:

Formal I suggest ...
Informal Let's ...

- Clear intonation, often rising at the end of a sentence:

Could you pass me that pen? 

Challenges / difficulties

Because many different forms are used to express these functions, it is easy to make grammatical mistakes, e.g. *Would you mind to close the window for me?*

It can sometimes be difficult to use the appropriate intonation in order to sound polite and friendly when making a request or suggestion. Even if you choose a suitable expression, you can sound too direct, or even aggressive, if your intonation is flat.

How can I develop this skill?

Speak English in social situations whenever you can. Think before you speak, and choose the most appropriate option for the situation. Record yourself making suggestions, requests and offers, and try to improve your intonation.

Learning outcome



When you have developed this skill, you will interact with others more naturally and effectively.

Theory to practice

1 Mark each sentence S (suggestion), R (request) or O (offer). There are three for each function.

- a Would you like me to make some handouts? _____
- b Could you make about 20 copies? _____
- c Shall we wait for Sara to come back before we start? _____
- d Shall I get some biscuits, too? _____
- e Let's answer the questions individually and then compare. _____
- f Would you help me move the tables? _____
- g Why don't we divide into two groups? _____
- h Can I help with the photocopying? _____
- i Would you mind checking my essay for spelling mistakes? _____

2 Which request in Exercise 1 is more formal and polite than the other two?

3   **01** Listen and check the pronunciation of the sentences. Notice the rising intonation. Then practise saying the sentences in pairs.

Ways to get more practice

- Listen to proficient speakers making suggestions, request and offers. Notice the expressions they use and the intonation in their voices.
- Find YouTube clips or podcasts in which speakers make suggestions, requests and offers.
- Record yourself practising. Decide if you are happy with your intonation.