
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

How to make polite requests



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hi, I'm Finn, and I'm here with another programme teaching you real, functional English. This time it's: making polite requests. Now that's when you want someone to do something for you. So you could say something like:

Please write the report by the end of today.

But that sounds a little bit too direct. There are other ways to make requests which are more polite, and more likely to make the other person feel OK!

So, I've asked Neil and Rob to help out with these examples. Neil wants Rob to finish editing a programme, but Rob doesn't seem too keen. Listen to the different ways Neil asks him to do this. How many different ways does he use?

Neil

Morning Rob.

Rob

Hi Neil.

Neil

How's that programme coming along? **Would you mind** sending it to me when it's finished?

Rob

Yeah sure, I can do that.

Neil

So Rob, **is there any chance you could** send me that programme you've been promising me?

Rob

OK. I'll do my best.

Neil

So Rob. **Are you OK to** send that programme soon?

Rob

Yeah, sure.

Neil

So Rob, that programme we were talking about earlier. **I'd really appreciate it if you could** send it over to me.

Rob

I'll try.

Neil

So, Rob, **if you could** send me that programme for checking, **that would be really great.**

Rob

Right, I'll do my best.

Neil

Have you started it?

Rob

Soon, soon.

Finn

So there we are. And - oops - sounds like poor Rob hasn't even started it yet! So Neil made five requests there. He said:

Would you mind sending it to me...?

Is there any chance you could send it to me...?

Are you OK to send it...?

I'd appreciate it if you could send it...

If you could send it, that would be great...

Let's look at each of those in turn. The first three, we can learn as chunks:

Would you mind...?

Are you OK to...?

Is there any chance you could...?

Firstly, **would you mind...?** Now, this is really common. It's usually followed by a verb in the -ing form, like this:

Would you mind lending me five pounds?

Would you mind sending me an email with that information?

There we are, **would you mind...?** Next, **are you OK to...?** Now this is followed by the verb in the infinitive, like this:

Are you OK to send it today?

Are you OK to finish it this afternoon?

This one, **are you OK to...?** is more often used in a work context, rather than in a situation with someone you don't know.

The next chunk we can learn is – **is there any chance you could...?**

Neil said – **is there any chance you could** send it to me?

So this one is followed by the infinitive as well:

Is there any chance you could send...?

Is there any chance you could send me that information?

Is there any chance you could make a cake for her party?

Great. Now finally – this is a really good one; it's a very common and useful form – and it uses **would** and **could**, and it can be in either order, so listen to these:

If you could finish it, that would be great.

It would be great if you could finish it.

It sounds a bit like a second conditional in terms of its form. Let's remind ourselves of the second conditional. In a second conditional you say **if + past simple**, then **would + infinitive**. So for example:

If I had a million dollars, **I would buy** a big house. If I had a million dollars, I would buy a big house.

So, coming back to our polite request, here the 'if part' always takes the modal verb **could**: **if you could...** plus an infinitive, as Neil said: **If you could finish the programme...**

And then the result part with **would** – is generally is something like **it would be great**, or **that would be great**, we can use 'it' or 'that'. Or you could say something like **that would be fantastic**, or even **I would appreciate it**.

It's something very positive – if you could do something, that would be great. Or it would be great if you could do something.

And now occasionally, people sometimes make this request without the result part. They just say:

So Rob, if you could finish the report... thanks.

There we are – lots of ways to make polite requests!

Would you mind...?

Are you OK to...?

Is there any chance you could...?

If you could do something that would be great.

It would be great if you could do something.

So there we are, five different ways of making polite requests. Hope you've enjoyed learning it – and make sure you practise these when you can. Let's listen to the whole thing again!
Bye.

Neil

Morning Rob.

Rob

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