



# UNIT TWO

## **REQUESTING/GIVING INSTRUCTIONS**

### **Introduction**

Choosing suitable language to make a request can be challenging. If a request is too direct it can be seen as offensive and can have negative consequences for the requester. Indirect requests (i.e. requests that are softened or tentative) are more polite because they indicate that the hearer has a choice.

## Part A: Looking at a workplace interaction

### The context – Asking for a day’s leave

Tom and Greg have worked closely together for some time so know each other well. Greg is Tom’s boss. Tom enters Greg’s office to request a day’s leave on Friday.

#### 1. Thinking about context

Working with a partner, use the context information above and complete the table:

Tom and Greg:	High	Medium	Low
Status difference		✓	
Level of familiarity			
Level of difficulty (how hard is it to make the request?)			

#### 2. Thinking about communication

Here is one way that Tom could make his request:

*“Hi Greg. I am going to take Friday off. Any problem?”*

What do think about this approach? How might Greg react?

#### 3. Role-play

The first part of the conversation between Tom and Greg is provided below. Work with a partner to role-play the conversation. When you have role-played, write down your conversation.

*The conversation:*

**Tom:** Can I just have a quick word?

**Greg:** Yeah, sure, have a seat.

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## 4. Comparison and analysis

### a. Comparing the conversation

Compare your conversation with the original conversation between Tom and Greg (see p.23). What differences do you notice?

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### b. Analysing the conversation

Underline words or phrases that Tom and Greg use to make the conversation go smoothly (see pp.31-32 for a range of phrases). Note:

- The phrases they use to agree and acknowledge each other’s comments. How frequent are these?
- The way Tom phrased the request. (Did he use ‘please’?)
- The words or phrases used to soften the force of the request. Can you think of situations when it is appropriate to be more direct and not use softening words or phrases?
- Whether Tom and Greg are trying to be co-operative. How can you tell?
- Whether humour is used. Why or why not?

Listen to the way the request is expressed. Listen in particular to:

- The volume of Tom’s voice (loud or soft).
- The stress pattern of the request. Which words are stressed?
- The use of pauses.
- The use of any sighs or inhaling and exhaling (noticeable breathing in and out).
- The intonation pattern of the request. Is it a falling, rising or mixed falling and rising pattern?

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**c. Evaluating the conversation**

Rate Tom's communication using the scales below (circle a number in each scale). Discuss the evidence you used to make your rating.

(i) How *polite* was Tom?

Polite			Impolite
1	2	3	4

(ii) How *direct* was Tom?

Direct			Indirect
1	2	3	4

(iii) Overall, how *effective* was Tom's communication style? Note that effective communication involves achieving your purpose efficiently while also maintaining good relationships.

Very effective			Not at all effective
1	2	3	4

**d. Focus on turn-taking**

Read the conversation again and focus on the steps taken in the dialogue.

- How does the dialogue begin? Brainstorm some other useful openers.
- Is small talk used? Why? How effective is the use of small talk?
- Where in the conversation does the request come?
- How many turns does each person have in the conversation? What does this illustrate?

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**e. Cross-cultural comparison**

Compare this communication style with the style used in your country. Are there any differences or similarities?

**5. E-mail and telephone communication**

- a. Imagine that this communication takes place via e-mail. Write Tom's initial e-mail to Greg. How might Greg reply?
- b. Write what Tom would say to Greg if he telephoned him about this matter.
- c. What changes, if any, have you made to the communication compared to the face-to-face version?

**The original conversation between Tom and Greg**

1. **Tom:** Can I just have a quick word?
2. **Greg:** Yeah sure, have a seat.
3. **Tom:** Great weather, eh?
4. **Greg:** Mm.
5. **Tom:** Yeah, been a good week. Did you get away skiing at the weekend?
- 6.
7. **Greg:** Yeah we did ... Now, how can I help you?
8. **Tom:** I was just wondering if I could take Friday off and make it a long weekend.
- 9.
10. **Greg:** Mm, I don't see any problem with that – you will have finished that report by then, won't you?
- 11.