

Using Diplomatic Language

Diplomacy refers to interacting with others in a way that fosters good relationships. It involves tact and skill in handling interpersonal communication so that good relationships are maintained and there are no (or few) bad feelings. Being diplomatic involves using phrases to soften our statements when we deliver bad news or negative judgments. The use of these softening phrases conveys an awareness that our judgments are not necessarily right. Here are four tips to soften your language:

1. Avoid using negative adjectives. Instead, use *not + very + a positive adjective*:


<i>The sales associate was unhelpful.</i>	<i>The sales associate was <u>not very helpful</u>.</i>
<i>The building is ugly.</i>	<i>The building is <u>not very attractive</u>.</i>
<i>His English is poor.</i>	<i>His English is <u>not very good</u>.</i>
2. Use qualifiers which are words or phrases that minimize the certainty of a statement:

<i>I'm going to be late.</i>	<i>I'm going to be <u>a little</u> late.</i>
<i>She's bossy.</i>	<i>She's <u>kind of</u> bossy.</i>
<i>We had a disagreement.</i>	<i>We had <u>a bit of</u> a disagreement.</i>
3. Use hedges which are word or phrases that lessen the impact of a statement, or express uncertainty:

<i>There's a problem with our bill.</i>	<i>There <u>seems to be</u> a problem with our bill.</i>
<i>We're out of stock.</i>	<i><u>I'm afraid</u> we're out of stock.</i>
<i>We shouldn't do that.</i>	<i><u>I'm not sure</u> we should do that.</i>
<i>That won't work.</i>	<i>That <u>might not</u> work.</i>
<i>We should delay the project.</i>	<i><u>I wonder if maybe</u> we should delay the project.</i>
4. Invite agreement by asking a question that is negatively-phrased:

<i>That restaurant is too expensive.</i>	<i><u>Isn't that restaurant kind of expensive?</u></i>
<i>We should wait for John.</i>	<i><u>Shouldn't we wait for John?</u></i>

1 | In the email message below, underline examples of each of the four ways to soften language.

 **Message**

Hi Patricia,

Thanks for your suggestions for the agenda. I think we should include Anwar in the meeting if he's available. I'm not sure about including the new brochure on the agenda, though, as we've only got an hour and a half. Perhaps it would be better to leave that until next time.

Re: the catering, maybe we should consider going with a different caterer. We haven't been very happy with Roland's Catering the last few times we've used them.

Also, wouldn't it be better to schedule the meeting later in the day? 8:30 a.m. seems a little bit early to me.

2 Rewrite the following statements. Use one or more strategies to make the statements more diplomatic.

1. My estimate for installing a new kitchen in your house was low.

2. It will be cheaper to fill this position with a student intern.

3. Your sales projections for the next quarter are too high.

4. He's a completely ineffective manager.

5. The report was badly written.

6. That's a bad idea.

7. You made a mistake with my order.

8. Your recent job performance has been terrible.

9. My manager is intolerant of mistakes.

10. I think we should do this first.

11. The filing cabinet you bought is too small.

12. There's going to be a delay in filling your order.
