BUSINESS ENGLISH
Formal Email Writing

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English with Logan

Cheat Sheets #4

EMAIL GRAMMAR

Grammar - Polite Requests

Make polite requests using modal verbs

Modal verbs are:

will, would   *shall, should*   *can, could*

may, might   *must, have to*

Can *I send you our latest catalog?*   informal

Could *I send you our latest catalog?*   formal

May *I send you our latest catalog?*   formal

Can *I suggest something?*   informal

Could *I suggest something?*   formal

May *I suggest something?*   formal

Might *I suggest something?*   very formal

I **want to** *ask you a question.*   informal

I **would like to** *ask you a question.*   more formal

Could you also carries a question of ability. If you're asking, "Do you want to do this?" you can use either *would* or *could*. But if you need to ask, "Can you do this?" then *could* is the right choice.

"Would you mind" followed by an -ing verb:

Would you mind sending me your proposal?

Grammar - Indirect Questions

Be more polite by asking indirect questions

- *What time is it?*
    - o *Could you tell me what time it is?*
- *Where is the closest bank?*
    - o *Would you happen to know where the closest bank is?*
- *Is it going to rain today?*
    - o *Do you have any idea if it is going to rain today?*
- *What time does the train leave?*
    - o *May I ask what time the train leaves?*
- *Why did you tell her that?*
    - o *I was wondering why you told her that.*
- *How have you managed to quit smoking?*
    - o *Can you tell me how you have managed to quit smoking?*
- *Is she going to be late?*
    - o *Do you know if she is going to be late?*

- Below are some phrases you can use for indirect questions
- *Can* is usually a little less formal than *could*
- *Would* is typically more formal than *could*
    - o *Can you tell me / Could you tell me / Would you mind telling me*
    - o *Do you know / Do you happen to know / Would you happen to know*
    - o *Do you have any idea / Have you any idea*
    - o *I was wondering / Can I ask / May I ask / I'd like to know*
    - o *Is there any chance / Would it be possible*

Grammar - Passive Voice

The passive voice is more neutral and impersonal

It works well for polite and formal language

Use the active voice to emphasize accomplishments

Use the passive voice to deemphasize a person or a team

Use the passive voice for negative statements

Active voice:

subject	verb	object	time marker
I	walk	my dog	twice a day

Passive voice:

subject	verb	time marker	agent
My dog	is walked	twice a day	(by me)

One of the main reasons for using the passive voice is to avoid mentioning the active voice subject. So if the subject is not important, is unknown, or we just don't want to say who it is, then the passive voice is the right choice.

Active: *Our sales team did not reach their quarterly sales target.*

Passive: *The quarterly sales target was not reached.*

Grammar - Impersonal Pronouns

Avoid: *I, my, mine*   *you, your, yours*   *we, our and ours*

Replace: *I, you, we*   with *one*

Replace: *my, mine, yours, ours*   with *one's*

<u>You</u> can't learn a language without lots of practice.

   <u>One</u> can't learn a language without lots of practice.

When <u>my</u> computer freezes, I usually restart it.

   When <u>one's</u> computer freezes, it's best to restart it.

You can also use <u>*it*</u>:

<u>I don't understand</u> why it's so hard to understand this.

   <u>It</u> is not clear why this is so difficult to understand.

<u>We think</u> that this plan will make it happen.

   <u>It</u> seems that this plan will be effective.

Grammar - Distancing

Use tentative language to distance yourself from your statements

Don't force your opinions on others

~~This **is** the best English course ever.~~

This **may** be the best English course I have ever taken.

This **could** be the best English course of all time.

This **seems to (appears to) be** the best English course.

~~This is **obviously (certainly)** the best English course.~~

This is **probably** the best English course.

State your opinion by saying:

    I believe that...

    In my view...

    As I see it...

    In my opinion...

    From my point of view...

    As far as I'm concerned...