Hello and welcome to the first part of our online training devoted to diplomatic English. In this video, we are going to look closely at five grammatical tools we can use to sound more polite and less direct. Alright, so let’s have a look at the first one.

One of the most common structures to use when avoiding direct language are modal verbs. Imagine you face a challenging task at work.

You could say: *This****is****a problem. However,*if you react in this way, you might appear uncooperative and inflexible. Instead, you could use a modal verb and say: *This****could****be a problem.*​

Let’s look at another example. Imagine you want to reject your colleague's idea because you think it wont' work, so you say:  *This idea****will not****work.*But this kind of statement is quite dismissive and abrupt.  We can soften it by replacing ‘will’ with a modal verb ‘might’. *This idea****might****not work.*​

So the **key language** to remember are modal verbs: **‘*would’, ‘could’, ‘may’, and ‘might’****,* ​

 ​In both examples the speaker sounds less direct because the modal verbs help us decrease the level of certainty  and directness.

Let’s move on to another item of grammar – [pause] alternatives to can’t and won’t. ​

When we take part in negotiations we sometimes need to express disagreement with what is offered. We can do it like this: *We****can’t****go higher than that.*However,we may sound uncooperative or powerless. But if we say: *We****are unable****to go higher than that,*we also communicate inability but it's not as restrictive as simply saying: *‘I can’t.’*

Let’s look at another example taken from a negotiation meeting: *We****won’t****accept a deadline of two weeks.*This message seems to be quite straightforward, but we could soften it and say,  **for example**: *We****are not in a position to****accept a deadline of two weeks.*The phrase "We are not in a position to' is more successful than 'we won't’ because it implies that there are other factors influencing our inability.

So the key structures to remember are:  ***‘be unable, not be able to’, ‘be not in a position to’.***​

Try to avoid using can’t and won’t as they make you sound uncooperative and powerless.

Now let’s have a closer look at the way passive constructions can be used to sound more diplomatic.

Very often we notice somebody’s mistake and our first reaction is to name the person responsible for it, like in this statement:  ***You made a mistake*** *in the calculations.* However, a more diplomatic approach would be to remove the person completely, avoid blaming anybody, and focus only on the fact that some mistake occurred, for example:  ***A mistake was made*** *in the calculations.* As you can see, passive construction eliminates the finger-pointing element of the message and makes it more neutral and less aggressive. It also focuses the discussion on the issue not the person.

Let's look at another sentence: ***You must do something to change this.***This message again focuses on the performer and sounds like an order which must be obeyed. By removing the person and using the Passive, we can make it more neutral. For example, ***Something must be done*** *to change this.* The sentence is no longer direct, and while it still sounds a bit threatening, it is not so personal anymore.

The use of passive voice helps us avoid blaming others and focus on the WHAT, rather than the WHO.

There is one more example of how the passive can help avoid finger pointing.  We can use such passive phrases as  '*it was said', ‘it was thought’, ‘it was understood’, ‘it is assumed*’ if we don’t want to place responsibility directly on somebody.

In the example:  ***You said*** *the product was ready for  release,* the speaker emphasizes who is responsible for giving the wrong information about the readiness of the product. Such a statement might make the listener feel guilty and uncomfortable. We could remove the blaming tone of the message with the help of a passive phrase  ***It was said*** *that the product was ready for  release*.

So, if you want to create more distance and reduce the amount of personal responsibility, the passive and passive phrases are the right tools to use.

Another useful tool is the continuous form. Let's look at how the meaning changes when we use the continuous form instead of the simple.

We can express our expectations in the following way: *We* ***hoped******to*** *sign the contract today,* but this message sounds a little bit like we have already given up our hope and are ready to admit defeat*.* Instead, we could say:*We* ***were hoping to*** *sign the contract today.* The past continuous form 'We were hoping’ carries a much more positive impact and implies we are still very much hopeful about signing the contract.

Another example: *We thought of a different approach.* This message can be improved by using the continuous form which suggests that we still hope the customer will agree to a new approach. *We* ***were thinking*** *of a different approach.*

So generally, using the continuous form rather than the simple form softens the message and indicates that the window of opportunity is still open.

The last tool we are going to focus on is polite conditionals.

Let’s analyze the following examples : ***Send****it back as soon as possible.*Receiving this sort of message is never pleasant and it can sound a little too blunt. Instead, we can express the same idea, but more politely, with the help of a conditional phrase:  ***I would appreciate it if you sent****it back as soon as possible,*Or : ***I would be grateful if you could send****it back as soon as possible.*

Using polite conditionals changes the tone from imperative to diplomatic and invites cooperation.

*In this table you will find all the diplomatic grammar tools we have covered in this video.*

*1. Modal verbs*

*2. Alternatives to can’t and won’t*

*3a. The passive*

*3b. Passive phrases*

*4. The continuous form*

*5. Polite conditionals*

Thanks for watching. Now, please move on to the exercises section.

