

Unit 6

Can you do me a favor?

Contents

1. Making, agreeing to, and refusing requests
2. Asking for, granting, and refusing permission

Behavioral Objectives

The students should be able to:

1. Use appropriate expressions to make, agree to, and refuse requests in different situations
2. Use appropriate expressions to ask for, grant, and refuse permission in different situations

Warm-Up

Read the following requests and match each of them to the possible setting and speakers. Indicate which one occurs in formal or informal context. The first one has been done for you.

Request	Setting	Speaker	Context
a. Get me a cup of coffee. I want to stay awake during the morning class.	3	6	informal
b. Could you come down a bit more? I still can't afford it.			
c. I was wondering if you could give me four weeks annual leave.			
d. Will you be quiet? Good boys don't make loud noises.			
e. Would you mind carrying the luggage up to my room?			
f. Can you do me a favor? No one can help me but you.			

Setting

1. In a hotel lobby
2. At home
3. At a café
4. At a night market
5. In a restaurant
6. In an office

Speaker

1. Mother and daughter
2. Employee and employer
3. Two friends
4. Customer and seller
5. Guest and bellhop
6. Two students

**Conversation**

Instructions: Listen to the telephone conversation between a college student and a landlord. Then fill in the blanks with the words you hear. The first one has been done for you.

Situation: Surasak, a Thai graduate student who has lived in New York for two years, has several problems in his apartment. He is filing a complaint against the landlord.

Surasak: Hello there. Could I talk to (1) to Mr. Marvin?

Marvin: Yes, Marvin's speaking. Is that Surasak?

Surasak: Yes, it's me. Well, I have some problems with my room. First, I suspect there's something wrong with the air conditioner as my last month's bill is much higher than usual and it's the only one power guzzler in my room. _____ (2) for you to send a technician out to check it tomorrow?

Marvin: _____ (3) there's a problem with that. Are you available in the afternoon?

Surasak: Actually tomorrow is my day off. I'll stay inside all day. And one more thing. The toilet's constantly running. _____ (4) a plumber out to fix it tomorrow?

Marvin: I'm not sure whether he's available or not, but I'll check it and call you later. Anything else?

Surasak : _____ (5) to make a complaint about the noise from the neighbors upstairs. It sounds like there's a live band playing every night. _____ (6) to stop them from making such a loud noise? I can't sleep well for almost a week. I think they're new tenants and might not know the rules of this apartment.

Marvin: _____ (7) I'll check who the room owner is and tell him to quiet down.

Surasak: Thank you very much. I hope I can sleep better soon!

Useful Expressions

1. Making Requests

There are a number of ways we can make requests, depending on a person with whom we speak. One way to make requests is to use modal verbs: will, would, can, could. "Can" and "will" are less formal than "could" and "would". We usually use "can" and "will" in informal situations, such as with friends or family. We use "would" and "could" to make polite requests in formal contexts, such as with strangers, seniors, or people in authority.

Less formal	More formal
To a friend: Can you pass me a napkin?	To a stranger: Could you pass me a napkin?
Father to daughter: Can you go to bed now?	To a professor: Could you repeat that?
To a colleague: Will you photocopy this form?	To a boss: Would you look over my report?
Mother to son: Will you chew with your mouth closed?	Bank teller to customer: Would you fill out this form?

We use "will" and "can" in affirmative short answers. We do not usually use "could" and "would" to agree to requests in short answers. We also avoid using "won't" in negative short answers as it sounds rude and angry.

Yes/no questions	Short answers	
	Affirmative	Negative
Can you pass me the salt?	Yes, I can.	No, I can't.
Can you buy me a coffee?	Yes, I can	No, I can't.
Will you give me a raise?	Yes, I will.	No, I won't.
Will you look after my kid?	Yes, I will.	No, I won't.

Although we can agree to or refuse requests using the modals “can” or “will” as exemplified above, it is quite uncommon to do so except in formal situations. Instead, we are more likely to respond to requests in other ways, some of which are shown below:

Requests	Affirmative	Negative
Can you give me a hand with this?	Yes. Sure. Sure thing. Of course. Absolutely. OK. Certainly.	I'm afraid not. I'm in a hurry. Sorry. I can't right now. Sorry. I'm in a rush.
Would you rearrange the seats in that room?	Sure, no problem. I'll see what I can do.	I can help you later on, but not just now. Sorry! I'm afraid I can't.

When we refuse requests, often we do not say “no” as it sounds rude. We might be a bit more diplomatic in rejecting requests using the following strategies.

Requests	Refusal strategies		
	Making a statement of regret	Giving reasons	Offering an alternative
Would you come to my office this afternoon?	<u>I'm sorry</u> I can't.	I can't. <u>I have a dentist's appointment.</u>	I have a dentist's appointment. <u>Could it be tomorrow morning instead?</u>

There are several other ways to make requests. We can use the phrase “Would you mind + gerund (v.ing)” to make polite requests. A “no” answer means that the listener agrees to the request.

Request	Answer
Would you mind closing the window?	No, not at all.
Would you mind taking off your shoes?	No problem.
Would you mind coming earlier tomorrow?	No, that's fine.

The above-mentioned ways of making requests are called indirect strategies, which are preferably and frequently used by English native speakers. However, in some situations it is common to use direct strategies although they sound stronger and less polite. The most direct one is using imperatives, as exemplified below.

- Get me a pie.
- Put your coat there.
- Come here before 9.

Using imperatives is common among friends or people who have an informal relationship to one another. We can use “please” to make imperatives sound more polite or less authoritative. In informal situations, we use “please” with friends or family to soften the tone of imperatives. We put a comma before “please” if it comes at the end of the sentence.

Take off your hat and glasses before entering the bank, please.

- Please mind the gap between the train and the platform.

We can also soften the tone of imperatives by adding polite forms such as “sir”, “ma’am”, or “miss”.

- Stay calm, ma’am. We are trying our best to find your luggage.
- Sir, watch your head!

We also use the phrase “would like + infinitive (v.inf)” to make requests. It is more polite than “want”. We usually add “please” to make the request even more polite.

I'd like two blueberry muffins and one ice coffee, please. (polite)

I want two blueberry muffins and one ice coffee. (impolite)

Some other phrases that we use to make polite requests are as follows:

Request	Structure
Would it be okay if you give him a hand?	Would it be okay if you + v.inf
Would it be possible to reschedule the meeting?	Would it be possible to + v.inf + ?
Is there any way you could extend the deadline?	Is there any way you could + v.inf + ?
If you don't mind, can you hold the door for me?	If you don't mind, can you + v.inf + ?
I was wondering if you could give me a raise.	I was wondering if you could + v.inf
I'd appreciate it if you could finish the project by tomorrow morning.	I'd appreciate it if you could + v.inf

Using indirect strategies to make requests are more polite than using direct counterparts. The more indirect our strategies are, the more polite we become. Still, we can use imperatives, the most direct request strategy, with friends or between family members, which is perfectly acceptable and preferred in informal communication.

2. Asking for Permission

Closely related to making requests is asking for permission, which means asking someone if we are allowed to do something. This is partly because we also use the modals “can” and “could” to ask for, grant, or refuse permission as we do with making, agreeing to, or refusing requests. We also use “may” to ask for permission. “Can” and “could” are less formal than “may”. We usually use “may” in formal situations when we speak to strangers, seniors, or people in authority. We can also add “please” to make our request even more polite.

Less formal	More formal
Child to parent: Can I stay late tonight?	Business call: A: May I speak to Mr. Jones, please? B: Sure. May I ask who's calling?
Friend to friend: Could I borrow your car for a day?	Sales clerk to customer: May I put all these items in one bag?

Colleague to colleague: Could I use your laptop for a minute?	Police officer to driver: May I search your trunk?
Brother to sister: Can I eat your tarts?	Banker to client: May I have your bankbook, please?

We use “may” or “can” to grant permission. Similarly, we use “may not” or “cannot” to refuse permission.

Asking for permission	Granting permission	Refusing permission
Could I hand in my assignment tomorrow?	Yes, you may.	No, you may not.
Can I use your printer?	Yes, you can.	No, you cannot (or can't).

Instead of answering with “can” or “may”, we often use expressions such as “sure”, “certainly”, or “go ahead” to give permission.

Asking for permission	Granting permission
Can I stay here for a little longer?	Sure. Certainly.
Could I make a photocopy of your textbook?	Go right ahead. Be my guest.

To make a refusal sound more polite, we often say “sorry” or “be afraid not” and give a reason.

Asking for permission	Refusing permission
Could I submit my project tomorrow?	I'm sorry, but you can't. It's due today.
Can I park my car right there?	I'm afraid not. It might block the traffic flow.

Some other phrases that we use to ask for permission are as follows:

Question	Structure
Would it be possible for me to use your computer for a minute?	Would it be possible for me to + v.inf + ?
Would you mind if I turned on the TV?	Would you mind if I + v.2 + ?
I was wondering if I could use your office tomorrow morning.	I was wondering if I could + v.inf
Is it okay if I smoke in here? (informal)	Is it okay if I + v.1 + ?

Speaking Practices

What would you say in the following situations? Keep in mind that the relationship between you and the hearer is important as it affects your word choice in making requests as well as asking for permission. The first one has been done for you.

1. It's very hot in the room and you want your friend to turn on the air-con.
Can you turn on the air-con, please?
2. You will throw a party next week and want your friend to come over.
3. The man who is sitting next to you in the cinema is talking loudly on the phone. You would like him to talk quietly.
4. You can't see a timetable at the train station because a stranger is standing in front of it.
5. You want your sister to look after your dog because you will be away from home for a week.
6. You missed class yesterday as you were sick, and you want your classmate to lend you his notes.

7. You didn't understand the address someone gave you and you would like him to spell it for you.
8. You would like a passer-by to take you a photo in front of a famous sculpture.
9. You need to borrow your friend's laptop as you left yours at home.
10. You are thirsty, and your roommate has some orange juice in the refrigerator.
11. You are paying your bill at a restaurant downtown. You have no cash and would like to pay with a credit card.
12. Your rent is due tomorrow, but you still have no money. You ask your landlord whether you can pay it late.
13. You have been sick for several days and tomorrow your final project is due. You want to ask your professor whether you can hand it in next week.
14. You missed class yesterday and you want to know if you could photocopy your classmate's notes.
15. You want to hang out with your friends tonight and want to know if your mother will allow you to do so.

Pronunciation Tips

We use rising intonation to make our request sound polite. This is because we leave the hearer decide whether to accept or reject the request. By contrast, if we use falling intonation, we expect the answer “yes” from the hearer, which sounds more like a command than a polite request. This is also the case for asking for permission, which requires rising intonation in order to sound polite.

More polite (rising intonation ↑)	Less polite (falling intonation ↓)
<p>1 2 3</p> <p>Can you come here before 9?</p>	<p>2 1 1</p> <p>Can you come here before 9?</p>
<p>1 2 3</p> <p>Could I have that?</p>	<p>2 1 1</p> <p>Could I have that?</p>

Communicative Activity

Instructions: With your partner, decide who will be the roommate at home and the roommate at work. You will be given role cards with different scenarios to act out. Fill out the table and role play one situation with your partner. A model conversation with the underlined portions to be filled in the tables is given below.

Model Conversation

Situation: Jack, who is at work, is talking to his friend James, who is at home, on the phone.

James: Hello.

Jack: Hi, James. It's Jack. I'm still at work.

James: Really? It's nearly 5:00 now. I thought you left your office already.

Jack: I was supposed to but I have to meet my project deadline. It's due today. Listen. I'm running late. Can you do me a favor?

James: Sure. Anything. What is it?

Jack: I'm having several friends coming over for a party tonight. Could you thaw out some meat and sausages for me?

James: I'll do that right now. Anything else?

Jack: That's it. Oh. By the way, I'll be stopping by the café on the way home. Do you need anything?

James: Actually, we are running out of milk, so please buy, erm, ... four bottles.

Jack: Got it. I should be home in about two hours. See you then.

James: I almost forgot to tell you that I'm hanging out with friends tonight.

Jack: OK then. See you later tonight. Have fun.

For the receiver (roommate at home):

Roommate's name	Why your roommate's late	Roommate's request	Reason for request
James	Has to meet his project deadline	Thaw out some meat and sausage	Have friends coming over for a party

For the caller (roommate at work):

Roommate's name	What your roommate needs	Where to buy it	Where your roommate is going tonight
Jack	Four bottles of milk	supermarket	Hang out with friends

Receiver's role cards:

1. You are out of bread. You want your roommate to pick some up from the bakery. You will be gone before your roommate comes home because you are going to the cinema with some friends.
2. You are out of dog food. You want your roommate to pick some up from the pet shop. You will be gone before your roommate comes home because you are going to a reunion party at a hotel downtown.
3. You are out of paracetamol. You want your roommate to buy a bottle of Tylenol from the drug store. You will be gone before your roommate comes home because you are going to a night club.
4. You are out of ketchup. You want your roommate to buy a bottle from the supermarket. You will be gone before your roommate comes home because you are going to a theater.
5. You are out of A4-sized paper. You want your roommate to buy two reams from the stationery store. You will be gone before your roommate comes because you are going to visit your aunt at the hospital.
6. You are out of dishwashing liquid. You want your roommate to pick some up from the convenient store. You will be gone before your roommate comes home because you are eating out with some friends.
7. You are out of washing powder. You want your roommate to pick some up from the convenient store. You will be gone before your roommate comes home because you are going jogging in the park.

Caller's role cards:

1. You are running late because you have to meet a client. You need your roommate to tidy up your bedroom a bit because your parents are going to stay overnight with you.
2. You are running late because you have to write some important e-mails. You need your roommate to put a bottle of wine in the fridge because you are having some friends over for drinks after work.
3. You are running late because you have to prepare for a meeting tomorrow. You need your roommate to get your clean clothes from the laundry service before it closes at 8.
4. You are running late because you have to finish a report. You need your roommate to put your favorite pair of jeans in the dryer because it is wet and you will need it to go to a concert with your boyfriend/girlfriend tonight.

5. You are running late because you have to install a new computer program. You need your roommate to lend you his/her car because you are going out of town tomorrow.

6. You are running late because you have to wait for your paycheck. You need your roommate to thaw out some pork in the fridge because your boyfriend/girlfriend is coming over for dinner.

7. You are running late because you have to set up a new computer network. You need your roommate to mop the floor because your uncle is coming over for a visit.

Quiz

Choose the best choice to complete each dialogue about making requests and asking for permission.

1. Passenger: _____ My son feels like throwing up.

Taxi driver: Sure, no problem.

Passenger: Thank you.

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| a. Would you please drive slower? | b. Drive slower. |
| c. May you drive slower? | d. I want you to drive slower. |

2. Jack: _____ I didn't come to class yesterday.

James: Of course. Make sure you give it back to me before Friday.

- I was wondering if you could lend me your notes.
- Can I borrow your notes?
- May you lend me your notes?
- Would you mind if I borrowed your notes?

3. Secretary: Hello. Lisa is speaking. _____

Caller: I'm Dexter. Could I talk to Mr. Gray?

Secretary: Sure. Hold on a second, please.

- | | |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| a. Tell me your name. | b. I want to know your name. |
| c. May you tell me your name? | d. Could I have your name, please? |

4. Stranger 1: Would you mind if I took this seat?

Stranger 2: _____

Stranger 1: Thank you.

- | | |
|----------------------|-------------------------|
| a. Yes, of course. | b. Yes, I would. |
| c. No, go on please. | d. No, it doesn't mind. |

5. Father: Can you get me a hammer?

Son: _____

- a. Be my guest.
- b. Go right ahead.
- c. Not at all.
- d. Certainly.

6. Mark: _____ I have to attend a graduation ceremony next month.

Spencer: Sure, no problem.

Mark: That's very kind of you.

- a. Can I borrow your black suit?
- b. Would you please lend me your black suit?
- c. May you lend me your black suit?
- d. I was wondering if you could lend me your black suit.

7. Student: I'm not feeling well. _____.

Principal: I'll do it now.

- a. Call my mother and ask her to come and take me home.
- b. May you call my mother and ask her to come and take me home?
- c. Could you please call my mother and ask her to come and take me home?
- d. Would you mind if you called my mother and ask her to come and take me home?

8. Employee: _____ My parents are coming over for my brother's wedding.

Boss: Sure, no problem.

- a. Could I take two days off next week?
- b. Give me two days off.
- c. I want two days off.
- d. May you give me two days off?

9. Bank teller: _____

Client: Of course.

- a. May you fill out this form?
- b. Fill out this form.
- c. I want you to fill out this form.
- d. Could you fill out this form, please?

10. Laura: _____ I don't even have time to have lunch.

Janet: Sure thing. Get some rest, though. You are working just too hard.

- a. Can you go to the bank and pay my electricity bill?
- b. I was wondering if you could go to the bank and pay my electricity bill.
- c. May you go to the bank and pay my electricity bill?
- d. Would you mind going to the bank and paying my electricity bill?

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