

# Polite Requests & Permission: Formal and Informal Contexts

INTERMEDIATE

**Focus: can you, could you, Do you think you could, Can I have, Can I get, May I have, can I / could I, Do you mind if I, Is it all right / OK if I, I'd like (I would like)**

In English, the words we choose depend on who we are talking to (**context**) and how polite we want to be. Using direct imperatives (e.g., "Give me that!") is often considered rude.

## 1. Asking Others to Do Things (Requests for Action)

When we want someone to do something for us, we use these structures followed by the **base verb** (without 'to').

- **Can you...?** (Informal/Neutral)
  - *Example:* "Can you open the door?"
- **Could you...?** (More Polite/Formal)
  - *Example:* "Could you help me with my homework?"
- **Do you think you could...?** (Very Polite/Soft)
  - *Example:* "Do you think you could send me that file?"

## 2. Asking for Items and Services

When ordering in a restaurant or asking for things in a shop.

- **Can I have / Can I get...?** (Common/Neutral)
  - *Example:* "Can I have a coffee, please?" / "Can I get the check?"
- **I'd like...** (Polite Desire)
  - *Note:* Short for "I **would** like". It is more polite than "I want".
  - **Structure:** *I'd like* + **Noun** OR *I'd like* + **to + Verb**.
  - *Example:* "I'd like a salad." / "I'd like to make a reservation."

## 3. Asking for Permission (Can I do this?)

When you want to know if it is okay for **you** to do something.

- **Can I...?** (Informal)
  - *Example:* "Can I use your pen?"
- **Could I...?** (More Polite)
  - *Example:* "Could I speak to the manager?"
- **May I...?** (Formal)
  - *Example:* "May I come in?"

## 4. Checking if Something is Okay

- **Is it all right / OK if I...?** + Present Simple
  - *Example:* "Is it all right if I **leave** early?"
- **Do you mind if I...?** + Present Simple
  - *Example:* "Do you mind if I **sit** here?"
  - **Important Response Logic:** If you say "**No**", it means you do **not** mind (Permission Granted). If you say "**Yes**", it means it is a problem (Permission Denied).

## Practice: Polite Requests, Permission, and Desires

**Instruction:** Complete the sentences using the cues in brackets. You must use the target phrases (Can/Could/May/Mind/Like) and put the main verb in the correct form. Pay attention to whether the speaker is asking for **permission**, making a **request**, or expressing a **desire**.

- **Note:** Use contractions where possible (e.g., *I'd like*).

1. \_\_\_\_\_ (you / open) the window, please? It is very warm in here.
2. \_\_\_\_\_ (I / have) a glass of water, please?
3. Excuse me, \_\_\_\_\_ (you / mind / if / I / sit) in this chair?
4. Good morning. \_\_\_\_\_ (I / speak) to Mr. Henderson, please? [Formal]
5. I am really hungry. \_\_\_\_\_ (I / like / order) the steak with fries.
6. \_\_\_\_\_ (you / think / you / could / help) me carry these heavy boxes?
7. Hey, \_\_\_\_\_ (I / use) your charger for a minute? Mine is broken. [Informal]
8. \_\_\_\_\_ (it / all right / if / I / park) my car in your driveway?
9. We \_\_\_\_\_ (not / like / go) out tonight. We are too tired.
10. \_\_\_\_\_ (I / get) the bill, please? We are ready to leave.
11. \_\_\_\_\_ (you / mind / if / I / not / come) to the meeting tomorrow? I have a doctor's appointment.
12. \_\_\_\_\_ (you / pass) the salt, please?
13. Hello, \_\_\_\_\_ (I / like) a ticket to London, please.
14. \_\_\_\_\_ (May / I / ask) a personal question?
15. \_\_\_\_\_ (it / OK / if / we / start) the presentation now?

## Answer Key

1. **Could you open / Can you open** (Request for action)
2. **Can I have / Could I have / May I have** (Requesting item)
3. **do you mind if I sit** (Checking objection)
4. **May I speak / Could I speak** (Formal permission)
5. **I'd like to order / I would like to order** (Polite desire)
6. **Do you think you could help** (Soft request)
7. **Can I use** (Informal permission)
8. **Is it all right if I park** (Checking permission)
9. **would not like to go / wouldn't like to go** (Negative polite desire)
10. **Can I get / Can I have** (Requesting service)
11. **Do you mind if I don't come** (Checking objection with negative verb)
12. **Could you pass / Can you pass** (Request for action)
13. **I'd like / I would like** (Polite desire + Noun)
14. **May I ask** (Formal permission)
15. **Is it OK if we start** (Checking permission)