**Teaching politeness to students**

Politeness can have a dramatic impact on a student’s ability to “play nice” and otherwise function in a close-knit classroom community. Fortunately, **anyone can learn to be polite.**

Even the most cranky person, either child or adult, can learn to be polite. Why? It’s simple: politeness is a habit that relies on just a few key words. I bet you can guess which ones I’m talking about:

* please
* thank you
* excuse me

No surprises there, huh? But the most effective types of communication in the classroom often start with such simple phrases.



As I said, *anyone* can learn to be polite… just picture the meanest person you can, such as your uptight neighbor who hates your cat or the “you’re not getting a refund” person on the customer assistance line. If they use “please” and “thank you” (and maybe a couple “have a nice day’s”), you’ll end up complaining bitterly about them but will also say:

## Daily classroom politeness practice

When guests are expected in your room, have the kids practice how to ask questions. If they are receiving gifts, such as free books from a local charity, give them the exact words and behaviors to use to express their thanks:

“Thank you so much for the book. I really like to read about frogs!”

Praise them lavishly afterward for their stellar performances.

Asking to use the restroom is another area where I insist on proper form:

“May I use the restroom please?”

Avoid saying: “Can I go to the bathroom?”

**Phrases to Politely Interrupt**  
Try to use these phrases:

* "I'm sorry to interrupt, but...."
* "Before we move on to the next point, may I add...?"
* "Sorry, I didn't catch that, is it possible to repeat the last point.."
* "Excuse me (name), may I add to that...?"
* "Do you mind if I jump in here?"
* **"Pardon me..."**
* "I don't mean to intrude..."
* "While that is an important point, it's also important to add..."

**Impolite Phrases for Interruptions**  
Do not use these phrases:

* Wait a minute!!
* What was that?
* Hold on/Hold up while I say...
* Be quiet...
* It's my turn to talk...
* What are you talking about?
* But, I already said....
* You're not listening to me... I said....
* What did you say?
* What!?

#### The handshake seals the deal

I think that a good, firm handshake while looking someone in the eye puts the absolute stamp of sincerity on “thank you.” Look at the “thanks for the book” scenario above. Now, picture it with a small child saying it while reaching up to firmly shake the hand of the adult.

This simply knocks classroom guests over… no extra words, just one extra action. They are not accustomed to a child behaving with such sincerity.

Practicing the habit of sincerity can lead to real sincerity in the end. And the handshake is the go-to move for this. The rules:

* firm grip (not crushing, not wimpy)
* look ’em in the eyes
* two pumps and release

**Other expressions**

### [hope](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/hope_1" \l "hope_1__8" \o "hope)

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) in [polite](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/polite) [statements](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/statement_1). For example. I hope you have been well.

### seem

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) when you [want](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/want_1) to [say](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/say_1) something in a more [careful](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/careful) or [polite](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/polite) and less [direct](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/direct_1) way. It seems…

### [perhaps](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/perhaps" \l "perhaps__14" \o "perhaps)

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) as a [polite](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/polite) [reply](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/reply_1) to someone when you do not [completely](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/completely) [agree](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/agree) with what they have [said](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/said_1)

### [I’d/we’d be delighted](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/i-d-we-d-be-delighted" \l "i-d-we-d-be-delighted__1" \o "I’d/we’d be delighted)

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) for [politely](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/politely) [accepting](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/accept) an [invitation](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/invitation), or [agreeing](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/agree) or [offering](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/offering) to do something

### [I took the liberty of doing something](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/i-took-the-liberty-of-doing-something" \l "i-took-the-liberty-of-doing-something__1" \o "I took the liberty of doing something)

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) for [telling](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/telling) someone that you have done something without their [permission](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/permission) but you [hope](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/hope_1) that they [approve](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/approve) of this

### [excuse me](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/excuse-me" \l "excuse-me__1" \o "excuse me)

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) for [politely](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/politely) [getting](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/get) someone’s [attention](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/attention)

### [excuse me](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/excuse-me" \l "excuse-me__7" \o "excuse me)

[used](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/used) for [politely](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/politely) [telling](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/telling) someone you are [leaving](http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/leave_1)

**A better way to say excuse me is to say Pardon Me.**

**Other Rules to Follow**

1. Say hello to people – greet people appropriately, gain eye contact and smile naturally, shake hands or hug where appropriate but say hello, especially to colleagues and other people you see every day. Be approachable. Do not blank people just because you’re having a bad day.
2. Take time to make some small talk - perhaps mention the weather or ask about the other person’s family or talk about something that is in the news. Make an effort to engage in light conversation, show some interest, but don’t overdo it. Remain friendly and positive and pick up on the verbal and non-verbal signals from the other person.
3. Try to remember things about the other person and comment appropriately – use their spouse’s name, their birthday, any significant events that have occurred (or are about to occur) in their life. Always be mindful of others’ problems and difficult life events.
4. Always use ‘please’ and ‘thank you’. Make sure you thank people for their input or contribution and always include ‘please’ when asking for something. If somebody offers you something use 'Yes please' or 'No thank you'.
5. Praise and/or congratulate others on their achievements. Praise needs to be seen as genuine – this can be difficult if you feel jealous or angry.
6. At work be polite and helpful to your subordinates as well as your bosses. Respect and acknowledge the positions, roles and duties of others.
7. Use appropriate language – be respectful of gender, race, religion, political viewpoints and other potentially controversial or difficult subjects. Do not make derogatory or potentially inflammatory comments.
8. Learn to listen attentively - pay attention to others while they speak – do not get distracted mid-conversation and do not interrupt. (See our pages on Listening Skills for more.)
9. Respect other people's time. Try to be precise and to-the-point in explanations without appearing to be rushed.
10. Be assertive when necessary but respect the right of others to be assertive too. (See our pages on Assertiveness for more.)
11. Avoid gossip. Try to have positive things to say about other people.
12. Apologise for your mistakes. If you say or do something that may be considered rude or embarrassing then apologise, but don’t overdo your apologies.
13. Avoid jargon and vocabulary that may be difficult for others to understand – explain complex ideas or instructions carefully. Do not appear arrogant.
14. Respect, and be prepared to listen to, the ideas and opinions of others.
15. Dress appropriately for the situation. Avoid wearing revealing clothing in public and avoid staring at others who are wearing revealing clothing. Avoid being dressed too casually for the situation. (See our page: Personal Appearance)
16. Use humour carefully. Aim not to cause any offence and know the boundaries of appropriate language for different situations. (See our page: Developing a Sense of Humour)
17. Practise good personal hygiene. Wash and brush your teeth regularly, change your clothes and use deodorant. Avoid strong perfumes, after-shaves or colognes.
18. Be punctual. If you have arranged to meet somebody at a certain time make sure you are on time, or even a few minutes early. If you are going to be late let the other person/people know as far in advance as you can. Do not rely on feeble or exaggerated excuses to explain lateness. Respect other people’s time and don’t waste it. (See our page: Time Management for more information.)
19. Always practise good table manners. When eating around others avoid foods with strong odours, do not talk with your mouth full or chew with your mouth open, and eat quietly.
20. Do not pick your nose or ears, chew on your fingers or bite your fingernails in public. Also avoid playing excessively with your hair