# PRESS RELEASE

**I beg your pardon? UK residents utter 14 “polite-isms” a day, in a bid to avoid awkwardness, with “sounds fun, I’ll let you know”, “not to worry” and “with all due respect” among the top phrases**

Researchers from the international awarding organisation, [Trinity College London](https://www.trinitycollege.com/) have revealed a definitive list of very British phrases, most regularly used in situations where a disagreement could potentially occur, after finding that 83 percent of us avoid confrontation at all costs.

And according to the findings, the UK’s number one polite-ism is “ooh could I just squeeze past you” (48

percent) when someone is in your way.

At least four in ten (45 percent) regularly say “sounds fun, I’ll let you know” rather than admit that they have no intention of going, while 42 percent have hastily said the classic “I beg your pardon?” in place of “I’m fuming”.

Other everyday polite-isms include “sorry, I’m a bit busy right now” (41 percent) instead of asking to be left alone, “no rush, whenever you have a minute” (39 percent), when really they want nothing more than to ask someone to hurry up, “with all due respect” (36 percent) as a buffer to making a strong opinion - and the email classic “as per my last email” (35 percent) which is a polite way of saying, “I

already told you this”.

“I hear what you’re saying” (30 percent), meaning “I completely disagree with you”, “not to worry!” (30 percent), translating to “this is a disaster, but I’ll pretend everything is fine” and “I’ll bear it in mind” (29 percent), when really you want to say “I’ll forget about this immediately”, also made the list.

As did “it could be worse” (29 percent) translating to “it’s pretty much the worst thing that’s ever happened”, “that’s one way of looking at it” (28 percent) actually meaning “you’re wildly off the mark” and saying “just a gentle reminder” (26 percent) when you really want to shout “I can’t believe you

haven’t done this”.

90 percent agree that there are certain polite phrases that Brits use when trying to diffuse or get out of a situation, with a further 72 percent saying it is a very British trait.

In fact, the nation utters an average of 14 “polite-isms” a day, with over four in ten (46 percent) admitting that they use them to be nice and avoid any unnecessary tension.

One in two (50 percent) regularly use them in the office, while 43 percent drop them out around their friends. A third (33 percent) rely on polite-isms when talking to their partner.

It’s no surprise that 78 percent admit they struggle to say no to people, opting for more placid phrases such as “ooh, let me think about it” (40 percent), “let me check the diary and come back to you” (23 percent) and “sounds fun! I’ll let you know” (22 percent).

However, despite our love of polite-isms, six in ten (60 percent) admit they hate it when people use them on them.

Almost a third (29 percent) say polite-isms are better than being rude or passive aggressive, while a quarter (25 percent) admit they make them laugh - when said or heard.

Our passion for politeness doesn’t extend to when we’re speaking a foreign language though - 45 percent of those who can speak another language say they find it to be easier to say “no” when they’re not speaking in their mother tongue.

In contrast, over half (52 percent) believe that people learning English SHOULD learn about polite-isms. Dr Ben Beaumont, Head of English Language Teacher Strategy & Publishing at Trinity College London,

commented, “’Polite-isms’ are a fascinating feature of communication, used extensively in the UK, and

often reflecting our preference to be indirect to avoid confrontation. But they’re actually not a new trend. We’ve been using them for thousands of years. There are even examples of ‘polite-isms’ in the Old English classic Beowulf, which was composed between the 7th and 9th centuries.”

“In our work supporting and assessing English, we’ve been able to gather evidence showing us how English learners navigate these features of cultural interaction. We use such research to continually evolve the design of our qualifications with authentic real-world communication in mind, so that we are assessing the language that learners need to interact confidently and appropriately”

“At Trinity, we draw on specialist insights and ongoing research like this to also provide targeted support for teachers and learners worldwide, developing not only their linguistic accuracy but also their practical competence. And by choosing the right qualification for their need, learners can study towards, and gain, the communication skills they need to succeed in their aspirations for life, study, and work. Our approach ensures that learners are not only prepared for exams but also empowered to navigate a

diverse range of situations with confidence.”

And when it comes to digital communication, one in four (26 percent) say they are more direct with their language online than they would be in person.

A third (36 percent) say seeing their words written out has made them more careful about what they say, while in contrast it has made 26 percent more direct.

In a separate survey of teachers who teach English as a foreign language (EFL), more than a third (35 percent) say that global streaming networks have helped to improve students' understanding and use of British polite-isms. That said, just five percent of students embrace the nation’s indirect communication styles enthusiastically, although 19 percent deem it as a necessary part of learning the language.

In fact, EFL teachers say they regularly see students who have just begun learning English use ‘I think’ or ‘maybe’ when disagreeing (67 percent). And two thirds (66 percent) say they regularly start a sentence with ‘yes, but’ when challenging something.

Despite this, 27 percent of EFL teachers say that English language students find Brits’ indirect style confusing, a quarter (24 percent) consider it unnecessarily complicated and a third (34 percent) struggle to recognise when to use a polite-ism.

## 20 BRITISH POLITE-ISMS WE USE

1. “Ooh could I just squeeze past you”. Translation, “Could you please move out of my way” - 48%
2. “Sounds fun, I’ll let you know”. Translation, “I’m not coming” - 45%
3. “I beg your pardon?”. Translation, “I’m fuming” - 42%
4. “Sorry I’m a bit busy right now!”. Translation, “please leave me alone” - 41%
5. “No rush, when you have a minute”. Translation, “please hurry up” - 39%
6. "With all due respect...". Translation, "You're wrong, and here's why" - 36%
7. “As per my last email”. Translation, “I already told you this” - 35%
8. “Sorry, could you say that last bit again”. Translation, “I wasn’t listening to a word you were saying” - 33%
9. "I hear what you're saying". translation, "I completely disagree with you" - 30%
10. "Not to worry!". Translation, "This is a disaster, but I'll pretend everything is fine" - 30%
11. "I'll bear it in mind". Translation, "I'll forget about this immediately” - 29%
12. “It could be worse”. Translation, “It’s pretty much the worst thing that’s ever happened” - 29%
13. "That's one way of looking at it”. Translation, "You're wildly off the mark” - 28%
14. “Just a gentle reminder”. Translation, “I cannot believe you haven’t done this” - 26%
15. “Happy to help”. Translation, “I’m having to help, when I really don’t want to” - 25%
16. “Appreciate if you could let me know either way”. Translation, “I cannot believe you have not replied to me!” - 24%
17. "I'm sure it's just me, but". Translation, "This is entirely your fault, but I'm softening the blow" - 23%
18. "It's not bad, actually”. Translation, "It's surprisingly tolerable, considering my low expectations" - 23%
19. “Happy to discuss”. Translation, “I can’t think if anything worse than discussing this further” - 23%
20. "Interesting idea”. Translation, "That's a really terrible idea” - 22%

## ENDS

**About the research.** *This research of 2,000* UK residents *was commissioned by Trinity College London and conducted by Perspectus Global during February 2025. The research with 400 specialist EFL teachers was commissioned by Trinity College London and conducted by GK & Partners during March 2025.*

**About Trinity College London.** *Established in 1872, Trinity College London is a leading international awarding organisation, publisher and independent education charity. Today, the organisation assesses over 600,000 candidates a year in more than 60 countries in music, drama, combined arts, and English language.* [*www.trinitycollege.com*](https://www.trinitycollege.com/)

*Trinity College London offers regulated English language qualifications and exams that assess*

*communicative and integrated language skills essential for success in today’s interconnected world. Its*

*qualifications and assessments are accepted by thousands of organisations worldwide and cater to learners of all ages and levels, from beginners to advanced speakers.*

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