



Give effective orders and instructions using the imperative and modal verbs.

Effective Orders

Businesspeople must often give orders or instructions. We generally do that with the imperative mood, as in “Please open the door”. The imperative is direct and everybody will understand us.

However, the imperative is not suitable for all occasions. It could sometimes be too strong because in some cases we must give orders that don’t look like orders. Fortunately, there’s a way to do that using modal verbs.

Modals can help us soften the way we ask people to do things and therefore make our orders more polite.

Strong orders using the imperative

“Finish this before 2.00PM”, “Please bring the report to my office” and “Answer the phone” are orders in the imperative mood.

As you can see, the imperative is very easy to construct. All we need is the infinitive form of the verb as in “Be quiet please” or “Please take the dog for a walk”.

However, sometimes we don't want to be so direct. As we said before, we can use modal verbs to make orders more polite.

Softer orders using *can* or *could*

Can and *could* transform orders into requests and make them more courteous. They're common so use them liberally. Both words are similar, though *could* is more polite.

Suitable: proper.
Soften: make softer.
Courteous: polite.
Rude: impolite.

Can. “Can you please take this envelope to Tug & Co”, “Can you fetch Mary from the airport please?” or “Can you please book a table for tonight?”

Could. “Could you make some more coffee please?”, “Could you send me that file please?” or “Could you please transform this into a PowerPoint presentation?”

Lastly, don't forget to add *please*. Not doing so could make your order or request sound rude.

Andrew's advice: politeness is important in business English so softer orders generally work better than stronger ones.



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