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B2 · BUSINESS GRAMMAR · ≈ 27 MIN

Diplomatic Language — *practice on paper*

You have built the lesson — now lock the four tools in on paper. New sentences, same rule: the diplomacy sits in the form.

Diplomacy sits in the **form** : hedge · downtoner · past form · **impersonal frame**

NAME _____ DATE _____

YOUR BUILD — 1 · SORTING ◯ | 2 · FILL-IN ◯ | 3 · CORRECT ◯ | 4 · WRITE ◯

BRICK 1 · SORT BY EFFECT · APPROX. 4 MIN ●○○

Say each phrase quietly. Does it cushion the message? Left column. Does it land on the other person unbraked? Right column.

I'm afraid … | That's impossible. | I was wondering … | You must fix it. | a bit awkward | totally unacceptable | It looks as though … | You forgot again. | somewhat surprising | far too late

SOFTENED	BLUNT

BRICK 2 · FILL IN THE SOFTENER · APPROX. 6 MIN ●●○

Fill each gap with one word from the pool — **use every word exactly once**: afraid · hoping · looks · Might · seems · slightly · very · wondering. Read the whole sentence before you choose.

01 I'm _____ the shipment will not leave before Wednesday.

02 I was _____ whether we could meet on Thursday instead.

03 There _____ to have been a mix-up with the September figures.

04 We are running _____ behind on the second batch.

05 It _____ as though the quotation went to the wrong address.

06 I was _____ we could look at the payment terms again.

07 That is not _____ convenient for our team this week.

08 _____ I suggest a shorter pilot phase before we commit?

YOUR BUILD · 1 · SORTING · 2 · FILL-IN · 3 · CORRECT · 4 · WRITE

BRICK 3 · FIND AND CORRECT THE MISTAKE · APPROX. 7 MIN

In each sentence exactly one softener is built wrongly — word order, linking word or word choice. Write the whole corrected sentence on the line below.

01 I was wondering whether could we move the call to Thursday.

02 Might I to suggest a shorter pilot phase?

03 The timeline is looking a few tight for Friday.

04 It seems to be a gap in the September figures.

05 I was hoping if we could review the payment terms.

06 I am afraid, that the delivery date has moved again.

BRICK 4 · WRITE YOUR OWN SENTENCES · APPROX. 8 MIN

Write one sentence for each prompt, from your own working week. Use at least one tool per sentence — and still say the thing clearly.

01 Refusal: a date does not work for you. Start with "I'm afraid …"

02 Request: you want to talk about the price. Start with "I was hoping …"

03 Problem: an invoice is wrong. Name nobody — start with "There seems …"

04 Disagreement: you see a plan differently. Downgrade the no instead of firing it.

MINI-CHECK – CAN I DO THIS YET?

- [ ] I know that "I was hoping" is not about past time but about distance.
- [ ] I downgrade a no instead of firing it: "not very convenient" rather than "inconvenient".
- [ ] For problems I name the thing, not the person: "There seems to be …"
- [ ] I notice when I over-hedge — the message still has to be there at the end.

Not every box ticked? Build the lesson once more and try this sheet again tomorrow.

Answer key

Check only when you have finished. Every answer comes with the **why** — the rule matters more than the result.

BRICK 1 · SORTING

01 **softened** — I'm afraid …
Flags the bad news a beat before it lands.

02 **blunt** — That's impossible.
A bare no with no hedge — it leaves no room.

03 **softened** — I was wondering …
A past form used as distance, not as time.

04 **blunt** — You must fix it.
"Must" aimed at another person reads as an order.

05 **softened** — a bit awkward
A downtoner before the adjective takes the edge off.

06 **blunt** — totally unacceptable
An intensifier instead of a downtoner — the criticism gets louder.

07 **softened** — It looks as though …
An impersonal frame: the thing is named, nobody is accused.

08 **blunt** — You forgot again.
Names the person as culprit and invites a defence.

09 **softened** — somewhat surprising
Understatement: the criticism stays audible but quiet.

10 **blunt** — far too late
An intensified negative judgement with no softener at all.

BRICK 2 · FILL-IN

01 I'm **afraid** the shipment …
"I'm afraid" announces bad news.

02 I was **wondering** whether …
Only "wondering" takes a "whether" clause.

03 There **seems** to have been …
After "There" it is "seems to", never "looks to".

04 running **slightly** behind
A downtoner in front of the delay — the fact still gets said.

05 It **looks** as though …
"It looks as though" is the set phrase for an inference.

06 I was **hoping** we could …
"Hoping" takes the clause directly, with no linking word.

07 not **very** convenient
A negated positive instead of "inconvenient" — same message, quieter.

08 **Might** I suggest …
A modal hedge: the proposal is offered, not imposed.

BRICK 3 · CORRECT

01 … whether **we could** move the call to Thursday.
After "whether" comes statement order, not question order.

02 Might I **suggest** a shorter pilot phase?
A modal verb is followed by the bare infinitive, without "to".

03 … looking **a little** tight for Friday.
"A few" counts nouns; before an adjective it is "a little".

04 **There** seems to be a gap in the September figures.
This impersonal frame starts with "There", not with "It".

05 I was hoping **we could** review the payment terms.
"Hoping" needs no "if" — the clause follows directly.

06 I'm **afraid that** the delivery date has moved again.
English puts no comma in front of "that".

BRICK 4 · WRITE

Model answers — yours may sound different, as long as one tool is doing work and the message stays clear.

01 I'm afraid Thursday morning is going to be difficult for us — would Friday work instead?
Hedge plus alternative: the no is said, the conversation stays open.

02 I was hoping we could look at the unit price again before we sign.
The past form creates distance — the ask sounds negotiable.

03 There seems to be a duplicate line on the September invoice — could you take a look?
Impersonal frame plus question: no culprit, clear next step.

04 I'm not sure I'd go that far — the timeline looks a little optimistic to me.
A downgraded no instead of "I don't agree", but the criticism stays.

NEXT BRICKS — KEEP BUILDING FREE ONLINE

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