

Softening Language in English

STEP 1 – Warm up by watching a TV or movie clip of someone delivering feedback. Any of the reality TV competitions could work where there is a performance or a sales pitch and a panel of judges comment. Whoopi Goldberg in *Sister Act* gives an example of softened speech when she takes over the choir and delivers constructive criticism to two members. (You can find the clip on YouTube.) Discuss blunt vs. softened language. What kinds of words or phrases are used? Explain the concept of sugarcoating things.

STEP 2 – Use Task A to identify common ways to soften a statement.

Answers:

1. I think it would be best if we stopped here.
2. Do you think we could possibly meet one hour earlier?
3. Maybe it's not such a bad idea to ask Olivia for help.
4. My guess is that probably wouldn't work.
5. I kind of got the impression that it's not built very well.
6. I sort of feel that he didn't contribute as much as he could have.
7. That's rather harsh, I think.
8. I'm afraid I don't exactly agree with that.
9. It kind of seems unfair in a way.
10. At times it can be a little annoying.

Optional: Challenge the students to be more direct in each statement.

Example: 1. *We should stop here.* / *We're going to stop here.*

Explain that it's not necessarily rude, but the wording sounds more authoritative.

STEP 3 – In Task B, students may work in pairs or small groups. Discuss all variations.

Possible answers:

1. **That might not be** an efficient way to do it. / **That might not be the most efficient** way to do it.
2. **I think we probably** need to meet again tomorrow.
3. Do you **possibly** have time to talk? / **Would now possibly be** a good time to talk?
4. **It looks like you may have** made a mistake.
5. **I kind of get the impression that** we're not all on the same page.
Even softer: *I kind of get the impression that we're not exactly on the same page.*
6. That's not **quite** what I had in mind.
Even softer: *I'm afraid that's not quite what I had in mind.*
7. **Maybe you just** need to rethink your approach.
Even softer: *Maybe you just need to rethink your approach a little.*
8. You **tend to** worry **a little** too much.
Even softer: *I think you tend to worry a little too much.*
9. **Why don't you** tell me a time that **would work** for you?
10. **I'm afraid** I'm not **exactly** ready yet.

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TASK A. RECOGNIZING SOFTENED LANGUAGE.

Underline the words that soften each statement.

1. I think it would be best if we stopped here.
2. Do you think we could possibly meet one hour earlier?
3. Maybe it's not such a bad idea to ask Olivia for help.
4. My guess is that probably wouldn't work.
5. I kind of got the impression that it's not built very well.
6. I sort of feel that he didn't contribute as much as he could have.
7. That's rather harsh, I think.
8. I'm afraid I don't exactly agree with that.
9. It kind of seems unfair in a way.
10. At times it can be a little annoying.



TASK B. SOFTENING STATEMENTS.

Soften each statement by using the suggested words in parentheses.

1. That's not an efficient way to do it. (might)
2. We need to meet again tomorrow. (I think/ probably)
3. Do you have time to talk? (possibly)
4. You made a mistake. (looks like/ may)
5. We're not all on the same page. (I get the impression/ kind of)
6. That's not what I had in mind. (quite)
7. You need to rethink your approach. (maybe / just)
8. You worry too much. (tend to/ a little)
9. Tell me a time that works for you. (why don't you/ would)
10. I'm not ready yet. (I'm afraid/ exactly)