

What are Politeness and Social Conventions?

Worksheet

Politeness and social conventions are culturally learned rules of respectful interaction—using formal forms, indirect requests, and maintaining face to ease social exchanges.

Questions

1. 'You must do this' vs. 'Might you consider doing this?' differs in...

- A) grammar only
- B) politeness level
- C) meaning
- D) urgency

2. Honorifics (you/thou, du/Sie) signal...

- A) time period
- B) gender
- C) social distance and respect
- D) regional accent

3. A culture that values directness (low context)...

- A) is impolite
- B) values efficiency over face-saving
- C) requires guessing
- D) uses more formal pronouns

4. Using someone's first name without asking is...

- A) always respectful
- B) depends on context and culture
- C) old-fashioned
- D) grammatically wrong

5. A child asks a parent vs. a student asks a professor for help.

6. Turning down an invitation in a direct culture vs. an indirect one.

7. How do honorifics reflect politeness?

8. Define: What are politeness conventions?

9. Define: Are politeness rules universal?

10. Define: Why do we use politeness?

Answer Key

1. B) politeness level — Both request action; second is more polite through indirectness and deference.
2. C) social distance and respect — Formal forms maintain distance and show politeness in hierarchies.
3. B) values efficiency over face-saving — Direct cultures state needs plainly; indirect cultures hint to preserve harmony.
4. B) depends on context and culture — In formal or hierarchical contexts, it can breach politeness norms.
5. Child to parent: 'Can you help me?' (direct, intimate) Student to professor: 'Would you have time to assist me?' (indirect, deferential) Same request; different register based on relationship and hierarchy.
6. Direct (Dutch): 'No, I can't come' (clear, no excuse needed) Indirect (Japanese): 'I will consider it' (suggests maybe, preserves the asker's face) Different politeness norms produce different expectations.
7. English: 'You' for everyone (no distinction) French/German: tu/vous, du/Sie (informal/formal) Japanese: -san, -sama, keigo (highest deference) Language structure embeds politeness choices.
8. Culturally learned rules for respectful interaction—formality, indirectness, face-saving techniques.
9. No—what's polite varies greatly by culture, context, and relationship.
10. To show respect, manage social distance, maintain relationships, and ease communication.

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