

What are Politeness Strategies?

Worksheet

Politeness strategies are communication methods designed to maintain face and reduce conflict. They include indirectness, compliments, apologies, and requests phrased as questions—varying by culture.

Questions

1. Which politeness strategy involves softening a request with 'maybe' or 'perhaps'?
 - A) Hedging
 - B) Indirection
 - C) Compliment
 - D) Apology
2. High-context cultures typically prefer which politeness style?
 - A) Direct commands
 - B) Indirect, face-saving requests
 - C) No politeness needed
 - D) Formal titles only
3. Which is an example of negative politeness?
 - A) Complimenting
 - B) Asking permission before acting
 - C) Thanking someone
 - D) Making eye contact
4. Why do cultures differ in politeness strategies?
 - A) Random variation
 - B) Historical accidents
 - C) Different values, beliefs, and norms
 - D) All cultures are identical
5. How would you politely ask a busy colleague for help in high-context vs low-context cultures?
6. How does politeness differ between refusing a dinner invitation in Japan vs Germany?
7. Show a complaint using high politeness vs lower politeness.
8. Define: What are politeness strategies?
9. Define: Name three politeness techniques.
10. Define: High-context vs low-context politeness?

Answer Key

1. A) Hedging — Hedges weaken the force of a statement, making requests less threatening.
2. B) Indirect, face-saving requests — High-context cultures (Asian, Arab) prioritize maintaining face through indirectness.
3. B) Asking permission before acting — Negative politeness respects autonomy by seeking permission and not imposing.
4. C) Different values, beliefs, and norms — Politeness reflects cultural values around respect, group harmony, and social distance.
5. High-context: 'I wonder if you might have a moment to look at this... if it's not too much trouble.' (hedge, softens demand) Low-context: 'Can you help me with this task?' (direct request) Both show politeness but differ in directness.
6. Japan: 'That's very kind of you, but I'm afraid I might not be able to make it...' (hints at refusal, saves face) Germany: 'Thank you, but I cannot attend.' (clear refusal, respects both parties' time) Cultural norms shape explicitness.
7. High politeness: 'I really appreciate the effort, though I wonder if there might be another way to approach this...' Lower politeness: 'This isn't working. We need to change it.' Politeness protects the relationship while expressing concern.
8. Language techniques to maintain face, reduce conflict, and show respect in communication.
9. Hedges (maybe, perhaps), indirectness (could you...?), apologies, compliments.
10. High-context: indirect, implicit, face-saving. Low-context: direct, explicit, individual-focused.

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