

Functional *language.*

Real phrases for real situations. Eight functions, three formality levels, every level adult learners need.

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How to use this bank. Print and pin the page that matches your next class. Photocopy a page for students who need that specific function. Use the quick-reference card on page 10 as a desk reminder. The phrases work across business and conversational lessons.

01 Making requests.

Asking someone to do something — from a favour to a formal demand.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Can you...?
.....
Could you...?
.....
Mind doing X?
.....
Pass me the X, would you?
.....
Any chance you could...?
.....
Do me a favour?

NEUTRAL

Could you possibly...?
.....
Would you mind ...ing?
.....
Would it be possible to...?
.....
I was hoping you could...
.....
Can I ask you to...?
.....
If you have a moment, could you...?

FORMAL

I would be grateful if you could...
.....
Would you be able to...?
.....
I was wondering whether you might...
.....
Might I ask you to...?
.....
Would it be at all possible for you to...?
.....
I'd very much appreciate it if you could...

REAL EXAMPLES

ASKING A COLLEAGUE

Could you possibly send me last quarter's numbers when you get a chance?

ASKING A FRIEND

Hey, mind grabbing me a coffee on your way back?

FORMAL EMAIL

I would be grateful if you could review the attached proposal by Friday.

USE THIS WHEN ...

Tone shifts with stakes. Small ask = casual. Big ask, busy person, or unknown audience = neutral or formal. The longer the request, the politer it sounds. "Could you?" is fine for small things. "I was wondering whether you might possibly..." buys you space for large ones.

Avoid "You should..." or "I need you to..." in any request unless you're someone's boss. Both sound demanding even when polite is intended.

02 Giving opinions.

Sharing what you think, with the right level of confidence for the room.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

I think...

I reckon...

If you ask me...

Honestly?

The way I see it...

For me, ...

NEUTRAL

I'd say...

In my opinion...

From my perspective...

I tend to think...

It seems to me that...

My view is that...

FORMAL

It is my view that...

I would argue that...

From where I stand, ...

If I may offer my view...

I'd like to suggest that...

It strikes me that...

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL CHAT

Honestly, I reckon the third option is better — less hassle.

WORK MEETING

From my perspective, we'd save time by deciding this now rather than waiting.

FORMAL CONTEXT

I would argue that the current strategy needs adjusting before the next quarter.

USE THIS WHEN ...

Modal verbs are your friend. "I think it works" is direct. "I think it might work" gives the room space to disagree. Adverbs like **arguably, probably, possibly** soften without weakening.

"In my humble opinion" rarely sounds humble. **"To be honest"** can imply you weren't being honest before. Use both sparingly.

03 Agreeing.

Saying yes — quietly, enthusiastically, or somewhere in between.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Totally.

Yeah, exactly.

Same.

100%.

Couldn't have said it better.

Fair point.

Pretty much, yeah.

NEUTRAL

I agree.

That's a good point.

I see what you mean.

You make a fair point.

I'm with you on that.

That makes sense.

FORMAL

I couldn't agree more.

You raise an excellent point.

That aligns with my own view.

I'm in full agreement.

I find that compelling.

There's a lot of truth in what you say.

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL

"This place is overrated." — "Totally. Last time was a disaster."

MEETING

"We should slow down on hiring." — "That's a fair point — the numbers do support that."

FORMAL

"The framework needs an overhaul." — "I couldn't agree more — and I'd add it's overdue."

USE THIS WHEN ...

Match the energy of the room. Big enthusiastic "Absolutely!" can sound strange in a quiet meeting. A quiet "That makes sense" can sound dismissive in a brainstorm. Add a **small extension** to make agreement feel real: "I agree — and I'd add...".

Empty agreement gets noticed. Repeating "yes, yes, yes" without engaging with the substance signals you're not really listening.

04 Disagreeing.

Pushing back without damaging the relationship.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Hmm, not sure about that.

Really?

I'm not so sure.

I'd push back on that.

Disagree.

Yeah, but...

NEUTRAL

I see it a bit differently.

I'm not convinced.

I'd actually disagree.

I can see your point, but...

I take a different view.

I'd offer a different perspective.

FORMAL

With respect, I'd disagree.

I'm afraid I don't quite share that view.

I'd be inclined to take a different position.

I'd want to challenge that, if I may.

I see the logic, but I'd argue the opposite.

I'm not sure the evidence fully supports that.

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL

"Coffee tastes better black." — "Hmm, not sure about that — I think milk softens the bitterness."

MEETING

"We should launch in March." — "I see it a bit differently — the data suggests April would be stronger."

FORMAL

"This is the only viable option." — "With respect, I'd disagree — there are at least two we haven't explored."

USE THIS WHEN...

Acknowledge before you disagree. "I hear you, but..." lands far better than a flat "No." **Disagree with the idea, not the person:** "I'd challenge that argument" beats "I think you're wrong." **The word "actually"** can sound condescending. Try "I'd say" instead.

"With all due respect" almost always precedes something disrespectful. If you find yourself saying it, rephrase. **"I hear what you're saying, but..."** can mean "I'm not actually listening." Use it sparingly.

05 Hedging & being tentative.

Saying something without committing fully — useful when you're unsure or want to leave room.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Sort of.
Kind of.
Maybe.
It depends.
I guess.
Could be wrong, but...

NEUTRAL

Perhaps.
It might be that...
I'd say roughly...
More or less.
If I had to guess...
I'm not sure, but I'd lean towards...

FORMAL

It would seem that...
One could argue that...
There appears to be...
I'd suggest, tentatively, that...
It's not entirely clear, but...
If I might venture an opinion...

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL

"Is it going to rain?" — "Could be — sky looks heavy. I'd take an umbrella."

MEETING

"What's our market share?" — "Roughly 18% — I'd want to double-check the latest figures."

FORMAL

"What was the cause?" — "It would seem the second variable had a stronger effect, though further analysis would help confirm."

USE THIS WHEN ...

Hedging buys you accuracy and humility. If you're not sure, say so — it's more trustworthy than false confidence. Useful hedging words: probably, perhaps, somewhat, roughly, tentatively, broadly, generally, in some cases. The phrase "I might be wrong" works in any register and instantly lowers the temperature of a disagreement.

Over-hedging weakens you. If every sentence has three hedges, you sound uncertain about everything. Hedge when it matters, commit when you can.

06 Interrupting politely.

Stepping into the conversation without being rude.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Sorry —
Oh wait —
Quick thing —
Hold on a sec.
Can I jump in?
Hey, before we move on...

NEUTRAL

Sorry to interrupt, but...
Can I just add something?
If I could jump in for a second...
Quick question:
Before we move on, can I say...
May I just add...?

FORMAL

If I might briefly interject...
Forgive the interruption, but...
Could I just come in here for a moment?
May I add a thought before we continue?
I'd just like to flag something before we move on.
If I could make one observation...

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL

"Sorry — quick thing before we move on. Did anyone email Marco about Friday?"

MEETING

"Sorry to interrupt, but I think we're missing the cost angle here."

FORMAL

"If I might briefly interject — I think there's a procedural point we should clarify first."

USE THIS WHEN...

Name what you're doing. "Sorry, can I jump in?" gives people a moment to land their sentence. Always pair the interruption with a reason: "Sorry to interrupt — quick clarification" lands better than just "Sorry." If someone's mid-sentence, wait for a natural pause unless it's urgent.

Don't apologise twice. "Sorry, sorry — sorry to interrupt" undermines what you're about to say. Apologise once, then make your point clearly.

07 Asking for clarification.

Making sure you understood — without making the other person feel they explained badly.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Sorry, what?
Wait, what do you mean?
Come again?
Did you say...?
I lost you — say that again?
Hang on — explain that bit.

NEUTRAL

Could you say that again?
What do you mean by ...?
I didn't quite catch that.
So if I understand correctly, ...
Could you give an example?
Just to clarify — ...?

FORMAL

Could I ask you to elaborate on that point?
Forgive me — could you walk me through that again?
If I've understood correctly, what you're saying is...
Could you unpack that for me?
Would you mind clarifying what you mean by...?
Just so I'm following you correctly...

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL

"Wait, what do you mean it's cancelled? Since when?"

MEETING

"Just to clarify — are we deciding today, or just discussing?"

FORMAL

"Could you walk me through the reasoning on that last point? I want to make sure I'm following."

USE THIS WHEN...

Take the blame, not them. "I didn't catch that" sounds better than "You weren't clear." **Echo back to confirm:** "So you mean..." gives them a chance to correct any misunderstanding before it grows. **Ask for an example**, not just a repetition. Examples almost always clarify faster than rephrasing.

Don't pretend to understand when you haven't — it almost always leaks out later, and rebuilding from a misunderstanding takes longer than asking now.

08 Closing & wrapping up.

Ending a conversation, meeting, or email cleanly — without trailing off.

CASUAL / INFORMAL

Right, I should head off.

OK, gotta run.

Anyway — good catching up.

Cool, let's leave it there.

Alright, talk soon.

Same time next week?

NEUTRAL

Right, let's wrap up.

I think we've covered the main points.

Shall we leave it there?

I'll let you get back to it.

Let's pick this up next time.

Quick recap before we close?

FORMAL

Shall we draw this to a close?

Before we conclude, just to confirm the action items...

I think that's a good place to stop.

If there are no further questions, I'll let everyone go.

Thank you all for your time today.

I'll send a brief follow-up shortly.

REAL EXAMPLES

CASUAL

"Right, I should head off — same time next week?"

MEETING

"Quick recap before we close: Maria's sending the proposal, Tom's checking the budget. Anything else?"

FORMAL

"Shall we draw this to a close? I'll send a follow-up with the action items by end of day."

USE THIS WHEN...

Strong closings beat weak ones. "OK, well... I guess that's it then..." trails off. End with a clear next step: "I'll follow up Friday" / "Talk next week" / "Let me know." For meetings: always recap action items before closing. People remember the last thing they hear.

"Just to circle back..." at the very end of a meeting can extend it by 10 minutes. If you're closing, close.

The *quick-reference* card.

All eight functions at a glance — for when there's no time to flip back.

01 Making requests.

- ▶ Could you possibly...?
- ▶ Would you mind ...ing?
- ▶ Would it be possible to...?

02 Giving opinions.

- ▶ I'd say...
- ▶ In my opinion...
- ▶ From my perspective...

03 Agreeing.

- ▶ I agree.
- ▶ That's a good point.
- ▶ I see what you mean.

04 Disagreeing.

- ▶ I see it a bit differently.
- ▶ I'm not convinced.
- ▶ I'd actually disagree.

05 Hedging & being tentative.

- ▶ Perhaps.
- ▶ It might be that...
- ▶ I'd say roughly...

06 Interrupting politely.

- ▶ Sorry to interrupt, but...
- ▶ Can I just add something?
- ▶ If I could jump in for a second...

07 Asking for clarification.

- ▶ Could you say that again?
- ▶ What do you mean by ...?
- ▶ I didn't quite catch that.

08 Closing & wrapping up.

- ▶ Right, let's wrap up.
- ▶ I think we've covered the main points.
- ▶ Shall we leave it there?