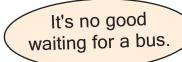
'Sorry'

Many expatriates working in the UK comment that many British people avoid direct statements that may appear sudden or harsh. We say 'no' as often when we *agree* as disagree (typically, after a negative statement).



No, I agree.

And even when we do say no to disagree we often say 'sorry' as well.



The British say **yes but** for **no**. We disagree **with respect**. When we terminate someone's contract, we say **I'm sorry**, **I'm going to have to let you go** as if the employee was a bird in a cage. And we say sorry a lot.

Sorry means 'excuse me', sorry means 'hey', sorry is even something an aggressive person might say before he starts a fight. We even say sorry if someone else accidentally pushes against us and we are innocently standing still. Sorry is on a par with 'OK' as the most used and most versatile word in the language. It also remains the standard word for an apology.

Put these instructions in more polite language:

- 1) Leave now!
- 2) Don't put hot plates on the table.
- 3) Stop talking so loudly!
- 4) Get me some milk.
- 5) Don't smoke in here.
- 6) Turn off the music.

I'm sorry but

ROLE PLAY

Use 'sorry' at least once in each exercise:

- 1) Your teacher has parked in your space.
- 2) You did not hear what your teacher said.
- 3) You are rejecting your teacher's application to the role of senior manager in your company.
- 4) You need to ring off as you have a meeting. Arrange to call back.



'Yes, but ...'

British people do say what they think, even if they disagree with you. But there is a tendency to soften the negativity, to avoid being confrontational. Here are some of the ways people say no or disagree in the UK:

Yes but ...

I'm not sure about that. I'm not sure I agree with you. I'm not sure I go along with that. It's not quite what I had in mind I don't see it that way.



I think it's hetter to walk.

> Yes, but it will take an hour to get there. Why don't we take a taxi?

Respond to the following statements in a 'soft' way:

- 1) Employees should work 14 hours a day.
- 2) The best way to improve global communication is to ban all languages except English.

Criticising and being negative

If we want to be more direct in a negative or critical way, we give notice of it: "Let me be straight with you" prepares the way for direct talking. "To be blunt"

introduces a negative or controversial remark. "With respect"

warns someone that you mean the opposite.

I have to say, I think that's wrong

Criticisms are softened with words like

To be frank, I think he's **not** very suitable

"a bit...", "slightly...", "not very...".

We say 'a bit overcooked' when we mean 'cooked too much'.

I have to say I think it's a bit risky

With respect You **slightly** miss the point

> Let me be straight with you: we need a new manager

Imagine that you are looking around your tutor's flat with a view to renting it. Using the 'softening' phrases, explain that it is

- 1) Too small
- 2) Too far from the centre of the town
- 3) Too expensive
- 4) Very cold
- 5) Next-door to noisy neighbours



Understatement

Expressions like "a bit...", "slightly...", "not very..." that tone down criticism are symptomatic of British understatement. It is not only negative things we tend to soften, but positive statements too. Sometimes people express their enthusiasm in a way that seems they are not enthusiastic at all:



In the UK you will come across lots of people who tone down their expressions. We 'soften' or qualify descriptions (a <u>bit</u> expensive, <u>slightly</u> overcooked).

With your teacher, use 'a bit', 'fairly', etc, to describe your ...

a bit fairly extremely boring dull likeable bossy easygoing nice bright efficient punctual busy elegant pushy calm exciting quiet caring expensive shy charming fashionable small slightly not very rather attractive difficult kind bdddy laid back likeable bossy easygoing nice punctual punctual pushy quiet scalm exciting quiet caring expensive shy charming fashionable small support your comfortable generous tasty complicated helpful thoughtful
confident impatient time-consuming typical dangerous impressive understanding delicious inspiring unreliable demanding irritating wet

- ... boss
- ... teacher
- ... partner
- ... house
- ... job
- ... office
- ... UK food
- ... UK weather
- ... UK clothes



Criticising and complaining

Stefan Bergsen is Swedish and has recently been appointed IT Manager at a company in the UK. He is a charming man to meet, but his colleagues find his emails abrasive. Rewrite this email in a more acceptable style.

All British people are capable of complaining. Within the family or to close friends, they call it 'grumbling' or 'whingeing'. But complaints to other people are generally filtered through the 'soft edge', with statements like **I'm** sorry but ...

Britons don't like to complain in public in case they are perceived to be 'making a fuss'.

Complaining in public is regarded as 'making a scene'. Most children feel awkward if their parents complain to someone in front of them.

What is your experience of people in the UK? Do they avoid 'making a scene'? Are they reluctant to expose their feelings?

How do they compare with other nationalities? The Italians for example?

To: All departments From: Stefan Bergsen Date: 14 June 2004

It is forbidden for non-IT staff to install the new software.

Strict compliance is necessary in all UK offices.

Stefan Bergsen

I'm sorry, but...



Write a memo to your colleagues with the instruction not to park their cars in the spaces reserved for the senior directors.

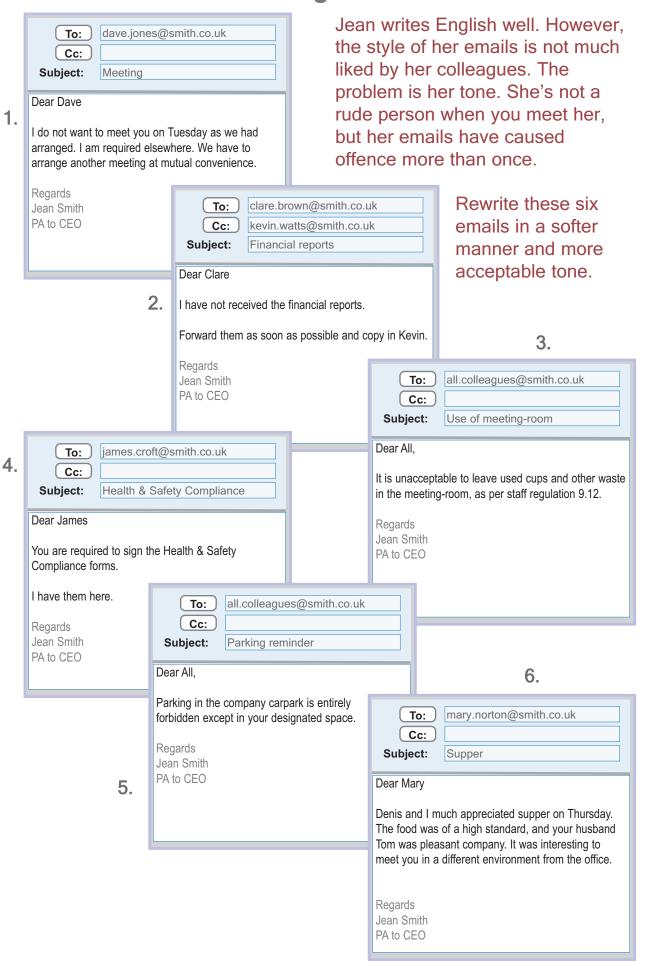
You are an HR officer: write an email to employees in Design & Development asking them not to wear jeans in the office.

ROLE PLAY

You are on a train and are just returning to your seat from the buffet. Someone (your teacher) is sitting in your place.



Writing emails





Discuss these expressions with your teacher:

