

There are many different ways of making polite requests in English.

Would you...? / Could you...? / Would you like to...?

If you are asking other people to do things, you would normally use **Would you** or **Could you + infinitive**. **Would you like to...?** is also a very polite way of suggesting or requesting something, politer than **Do you want to...?** Compare the following:

- *Would you please bring your library books back today as they are needed by another borrower?*
- *Could you join us on Saturday? Tom's back from Sydney and we're having a barbecue.*
- *Would you like to join us on Saturday? We're having a barbecue in the back garden.*
- *Would you care to join us on Saturday? We're celebrating Tom's return from Sydney.*
- *Do you want to join us on Saturday? We're having a bash in the garden.*

Would you like...? + infinitive /

Would you mind...?

If you want to sound particularly polite, or if you think the answer may be negative, you can also use **Would you mind + verb-ing** as the preferred alternative to **Could you...?** **Would you mind...?** literally means: **Would you object to...?**

- *Would you mind locking the door when you leave? ~ No, not at all!*
- *Could you please lock the door when you leave? ~ Yes, certainly!*
- *If you're not busy at the moment, would you mind helping me with my homework?*
- *If you're not busy at the moment, could you give me a hand with my homework?*

Can I / could I / may I / might I

If you are requesting something for yourself, all of these forms are possible. **May** and **might** are considered to be more polite, more formal or more tentative than **can** and **could**, but **can** and **could** are usually preferred in normal usage. Compare the following:

- *Can I ask you a favour? ~ Of course you can.*
- *Could I ask you to collect Deborah from school tomorrow ~ Of course you can.*

- *Could I possibly have another cup of coffee? ~ I don't think you should. You won't sleep tonight if you do.*
- *If you've finished with the computer, may I turn it off? ~ Yes, please do.*
- *Might I leave work a bit earlier today? I've got a doctor's appointment at 5.*

Might is more frequently used in indirect questions, as an indirect question softens the request. Note the further polite alternatives that we can use:

- *I wonder if I might leave work a bit earlier today? I've got a doctor's appointment.*
- *Would I be able to leave work a bit earlier today? I've got a dentist appointment at 6.*
- *Would it be OK if I left work a bit earlier today? I've got to take our cat to the vet.*

Would you / Do you mind if I...?

Similarly, if we use **Do / Would you mind if I...?** to make a request, we may be anticipating possible objections:

- *Would you mind if I put off talking to Henry until tomorrow? ~ I think that's a mistake. I think you should speak to him today*

Note the difference between: **Would you mind...?** and **Would you mind me/my...?:**

- *Would you mind filling the ice trays and putting them in the freezer? (= you do it)*
- *Would you mind me/my filling the ice trays and putting them in the freezer? (= I'll do it)*