

How to Disagree Politely

Say no in English — without sounding rude

EPISODE 2 • LEVEL B1-B2

Episode summary

- Disagree with the idea, never with the person. “That plan has a problem” is fine. “You are the problem” is war.
- Soften your language: small words like “I think,” “maybe,” “a little” are pillows around your words.
- Partial agreement is the most powerful tool: “I see your point, but...” keeps the other person’s mind open.
- Ask questions instead of attacking. “What happens if it rains that day?” does the disagreeing for you.
- The sandwich method for sensitive moments — positive, disagreement, positive — and never embarrass someone publicly.
- The tone trap: the same words can be friendly or rude depending on your face and your voice. Smile when you disagree.

What’s inside this PDF

20 key words • 3 magic sentences • Say It Better upgrades • 3 practice exercises

Key Vocabulary

20 words from this episode — learn them, then use them this week

1. disagree

to have a different opinion.

> I disagree with his plan, but I respect him.

2. polite

showing good manners and respect.

> She gave a polite answer even though she was angry.

3. opinion

what you think or believe about something.

> In my opinion, the new design is better.

4. respect

treating someone as important and valuable.

> We can disagree and still show respect.

5. point of view

the way you see a situation.

> From her point of view, the price was too high.

6. interrupt

to stop someone while they are speaking.

> Sorry to interrupt, but I have a question.

7. compromise

an agreement where both sides give up a little.

> We found a compromise that made everyone happy.

8. tone

the feeling in your voice — friendly, angry, cold, warm.

> It's not what you say, it's your tone.

9. softener

a small word that makes a sentence gentler.

> I think, maybe, and a little are useful softeners.

10. partial agreement

agreeing with part of an idea before you disagree.

> Partial agreement keeps the other person's mind open.

11. sandwich method

a kind criticism between two positive comments.

> Use the sandwich method with sensitive people.

12. magic sentence

a short, polite phrase for a difficult moment.

> "I see it a bit differently" is one of the magic sentences.

13. tone trap

when the same words sound rude or kind, depending on your voice.

> The tone trap: smile when you disagree.

14. lose face

to feel embarrassed in front of other people.

> Nobody wants to lose face in a meeting.

15. teammate

someone you work with toward the same goal.

> Questions make you sound like a teammate, not an enemy.

16. pillow

in this episode: a softening word around a hard message.

> Softeners are like pillows around your words.

17. battlefield

a difficult situation, like disagreeing in writing.

> Writing is the hardest battlefield for disagreements.

18. cold

unfriendly in feeling or tone.

> If your face is angry, no warm phrase can save you.

19. private

not in front of other people.

> Disagree privately, never embarrass someone publicly.

20. mature

calm and wise in difficult moments.

> Staying polite in a heated moment looks mature.

Disagree Without Damage

the 3 magic sentences + the tools that carry them

“I see it a bit differently.”

Use it when you disagree but want to stay warm.

“Sorry, can I add something?”

Use it when you need to interrupt.

“Let’s agree to disagree.”

Use it when the conversation is going nowhere and you want peace.

Softeners: I think • maybe • a little • sort of • kind of

Pillows around your words — same meaning, zero damage.

Partial agreement: “I see your point, but...” • “That’s true, however...”

Give the other person something first, then your disagreement lands softly.

Say It Better — 10 upgrades

☐ “You are wrong.”

☐ “I see it a bit differently.”

☐ “That’s a stupid idea.”

☐ “I’m not sure that would work — can we think about other options?”

☐ “Shut up, I’m talking.”

☐ “Sorry, can I just finish this thought?”

☐ “You don’t understand anything.”

☐ “Let me explain what I mean.”

☐ “That’s terrible.”

☐ “I have some concerns about that.”

☐ “No no no, listen.”

☐ “Sorry to jump in — can I add something quickly?”

☐ “Whatever, I don’t care.”

☐ “Let’s agree to disagree on this one.”

☐ “You’re lying.”

☐ “That doesn’t match what I’ve heard — can you tell me more?”

☐ “That’s impossible.”

☐ “That might be difficult. What if we tried it another way?”

☐ “I don’t care about your opinion.”

☐ “I hear you, and I see it differently.”

Practice Time

3 exercises — do them today, not “someday”

Exercise 1 — Fill in the blank

Word bank: softener • partial agreement • sandwich method • tone • magic sentence

1. A _____ is a small word that makes a hard sentence gentle, like “maybe.”
2. Start with _____ — “I see your point, but...” — to keep the other person open.
3. The _____ wraps your criticism between two kind comments.
4. It’s not what you say, it’s your _____ — smile when you disagree.
5. “Let’s agree to disagree” is one of the three _____s.

Exercise 2 — Rewrite it better

Say each one the polite way (answers below):

1. Your friend calls your idea bad, loudly, in front of everyone. You want to say “You are wrong.” > Say it better:
2. You want to cut into a fast meeting. You only know “Shut up, listen.” > Say it better:
3. You think a plan will fail. You want to say “That’s impossible.” > Say it better:

Exercise 3 — The softener mirror

Stand in front of a mirror. Turn five hard sentences into soft ones: “You’re wrong” becomes “I’m not sure about that.” Say them out loud with a smile — if you look angry, the words don’t matter.

- A movie your friend loves but you hate.
- An idea at work you disagree with.
- A plan you think will fail.

Answer key

Ex 1: 1 softener • 2 partial agreement • 3 sandwich method • 4 tone • 5 magic sentence

Ex 2: 1 “I see it a bit differently — can you tell me why you think that?” 2 “Sorry, can I add something quickly?” 3 “That might be difficult — what if we tried it another way?”