EPISODE 343

Saying No Politely

Full transcript · mini-story · vocabulary review

Hi! I'm Georgiana, and I'm back with a new episode of the Speak English Now podcast—the podcast that helps you speak English fluently, with no grammar and no textbooks.

Great! Let's start!

Why Is It Hard to Say "No"?

Many English learners (and even native speakers) find it hard to say "no." Maybe you don't want to hurt someone's feelings. Maybe you want to be polite. Or maybe you feel nervous or shy.

But always **saying** "yes" can cause problems. You may feel stressed or overwhelmed. And people may not understand your limits.

Saying "no" is not rude—if you say it the right way. In fact, **saying** "no" **clearly** helps others understand you better.

How to Say "No" **Politely**

Let's look at some simple and polite ways to say "no":

1. Be direct but kind

"I'm sorry, I can't do that."

"Thanks for asking, but I have to say no."

2. Give a short reason (optional)

"I'd love to help, but I'm already busy."

"I can't join because I have another appointment."

3. Offer another time or option (if you want)

"I can't today, but maybe tomorrow?"

"I'm not **available** now, but you can ask Sarah."

4. Use a calm and friendly tone

Even if you use the right words, your tone of voice is important. Speak calmly and **clearly**. Don't sound angry or nervous.

Quick Practice

Someone invites you to a party, but you can't go:

"Thanks, but I can't come this time."

Someone asks for help, but you're too busy:

"I'm sorry, I can't help right now."

Someone offers something you don’t want:

"No, thank you. I’m good."

Remember

Saying "no" is a skill you can practice. Start small, use polite words, and stay calm. With time, it will get easier.

Now, let’s practice.

Mini-Story

Speaking Practice

Answer the questions aloud with short and quick responses. Repeat the Mini-Story several times to improve your speaking and listening.

Sophia worked in a small office in Madrid. One day, her manager asked her to give a short presentation in English.

Did Sophia work in a bakery?
No, she didn’t work in a bakery. She worked in an office.

Was her office in Madrid?
Yes, her office was in Madrid.

Did her manager ask her to give a presentation?
Yes, her manager asked her to give a short presentation.

Was the presentation in English or Spanish?
In English, the presentation was in English.

Sophia felt nervous. She had studied English for years, but speaking in public made her uncomfortable. She looked down and whispered while practicing.

Did Sophia feel relaxed before the presentation?
No, she didn’t feel relaxed. She felt nervous and uncomfortable.

Did she speak loudly when she practiced?
No, she didn’t speak loudly. She whispered.

Did she look at her coworkers?
No, she didn’t look at her coworkers. She looked down.

On the day of the presentation, she stood in front of her team, looked at her notes, and started speaking with a very low voice.

Did Sophia look at her audience?
No, she didn’t look at them. She kept looking at her notes.

Was her voice strong and clear?
No, her voice wasn’t strong. It was very low.

Her manager stopped her and said kindly, "Sophia, we want to hear you. Look at us and speak with more energy."

Was her manager angry?
No, he wasn’t angry. He spoke kindly to her.

Did he want her to yell?
No, he didn’t want her to yell. He wanted her to speak with more energy.

Did he ask her to look at the floor?
No, he didn’t ask her to look at the floor. He asked her to look at the people.

Sophia took a deep breath. She looked at one person, then another. She raised her voice a little and spoke more clearly.

Did she keep whispering?
No, she didn’t keep whispering. She started speaking more **clearly**.

Did she start to make eye contact?
Yes, she did. She looked at people while she spoke.

People smiled and nodded. Sophia began to feel more confident. Her voice became stronger, and she even smiled back.

Did people ignore her?
No, they didn’t ignore her. They smiled and nodded to encourage her.

Did Sophia feel more confident?
Yes, she did. She started to feel more confident.

After she finished, her coworkers clapped. Her manager told her the message was now clear.

Did Sophia stop in the middle of her presentation?
No, she didn’t stop. She finished the whole presentation.

Did people clap when she finished?
Yes, they did. Everyone clapped.

Was her message still unclear?
No, her message wasn’t unclear. It was clear.

That day, Sophia learned something important: eye contact and tone of voice make a big difference. She practiced every day and slowly felt more confident.

Did Sophia learn anything that day?
Yes, she did. She learned that eye contact and tone of voice are very important.

Did she stop practicing?
No, she didn’t stop. She practiced every day.

Did her confidence grow?
Yes, it did. Her confidence grew more and more each day.

A few weeks later, Sophia's manager asked her to help with another project. This time, he wanted her to work on the weekend. But Sophia had already made plans with her family.

Did Sophia's manager ask her to work during the week?
No, he didn’t. He asked her to work on the weekend.

Did Sophia already have plans?
Yes, she did. She had made plans with her family.

Sophia felt nervous again, but she remembered what she had learned. She looked at her manager and said, "I’m sorry, but I have family plans this weekend. I can’t help with the project."

Did Sophia stay silent?
No, she didn’t stay silent. She spoke clearly.

Did she say yes to the project?
No, she didn’t say yes. She said no **politely**.

Did she speak in a rude way?
No, she didn’t speak in a rude way. She was polite.

Her manager smiled and said, "Thank you for letting me know. We’ll find someone else."

Was her manager upset?
No, he wasn't upset. He smiled.

Did he respect her answer?
Yes, he did. He respected her decision.

Sophia felt proud. She had said no politely and clearly. She had stood her ground.

Did Sophia feel ashamed?
No, she didn't feel ashamed. She felt proud.

Did she speak with confidence?
Yes, she did. She spoke with confidence and respect.

This story shows us that asking questions and being assertive is important.

When you are clear and confident, people understand you better, and you feel more comfortable.

Don't be afraid to ask for help. It's a sign of strength, not weakness.

Thanks for listening, and I'll see you in the next episode.

Review

Vocabulary from This Episode

Review the most useful words and expressions before listening again.

01 **say no politely** refuse something in a respectful way.	05 **boundary** a limit that protects your time, needs, or well-being.
02 **feel guilty** feel responsible or bad about doing something.	06 **honest** truthful and sincere.
03 **decline** politely refuse an offer or request.	07 **respectful refusal** a clear no that still considers the other person.
04 **firm** clear and not easily changed.	08 **available** free and able to do something.

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