



Advice and Criticism

Giving Advice Structures

Should

This is probably the most common of the structures for giving advice. After should, and its negative - shouldn't - we use the base form of the infinitive of the verb:

You should be careful

We shouldn't cheat

Could

After could, and its negative - couldn't - we use the base form of the infinitive of the verb:

You could buy me a coffee

You could return the answers to the lecturer

It is common to use 'I think' and 'I don't think' with could.

Had better

This structure is common in spoken English and it is usually used in the contracted form. After had better, and its negative - had better not, we use the base form of the infinitive of the verb

You'd better return the answers to the lecturer

You'd better not tell anyone that you found them

Ought

After ought, and its negative - ought not (oughtn't), we use the full infinitive of the verb:

You ought to contact the police

You ought not to cheat in exams

Would

This is commonly in response to a question or as part of a bigger sentence

I'd give them back to the lecturer

I wouldn't use the answers

Exercise

Advise somebody to dress more formally using the following words

Should _____

Could _____

Had Better _____

Ought _____

Would _____

Which of the following is offensive?

Advice given:

- A. You should dress more formally.
- B. You had better dress more formally.
- C. You ought to dress more formally.
- D. I'd dress more formally.
- E. You could dress more formally.

1. When asked, "Should I dress more formally?"

A	B	C	D	E
Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite

2. When asked, "Do I look ok?"

A	B	C	D	E
Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite

3. When asked, "I'm going for an interview what should I wear?"

A	B	C	D	E
Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite

4. When somebody walks into the office

A	B	C	D	E
Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite	Offensive Polite

2. Does it make a difference how the statement is said?

3. How can we reduce the likelihood of people being offended?

Softening Advice

In English the following phrases are often used:

1. I hope you don't mind, but...
2. I'm sorry, but I have to say something...
3. Forgive me for being forward, but
4. This is such a great project, but *you could buy me a Ferrari* and make it even better.

In effect we:

Apologise + but + advice

Or

Positive statement + but + advice

The danger of Why

You have to be very careful when asking why questions, because you are questioning somebody's reasons. Indirectly you are criticising them and people may take offence. If you want to find out about why somebody chose something begin by praising their choice and only then ask about it.

Instead of: Why did you buy that dress?
That's a beautiful dress; where did you buy it? How much did it cost?

Instead of: Why did you choose that school?
That sounds like a great school; how did you choose it?

Instead of: Why did you buy that car?
What a fantastic car, how did you find it?

Exercises

1. Try adding the softening phrases to the advice on the previous page.
2. Think of situations where you have given advice and how it was received.
3. Think of times you have asked why and the reaction you got. What could you have asked instead.

Teacher's Notes

Answers

Advice given:

- A. You should dress more formally.
- B. You had better dress more formally.
- C. You ought to dress more formally.
- D. I'd dress more formally.
- E. You could dress more formally.

1. When asked, "Should I dress more formally?"

A	B	C	D	E
Polite	Polite	Polite	Polite	Polite

D is the most natural English

2. When asked, "Do I look ok?"

A	B	C	D	E
Offensive	Offensive	Offensive	Polite	Polite

3. When asked, "I'm going for an interview what should I wear?"

A	B	C	D	E
Polite	Polite	Polite	Polite	Polite

4. When somebody walks into the office

A	B	C	D	E
Offensive	Offensive	Offensive	Offensive	Offensive

Anything said maybe offensive in these circumstances, but if you are her superior then you may have to say something anyway.