

# How to get good customer service in New Zealand

Most languages have different ways of speaking depending on your relationship with the person with whom you are speaking. English is no different!

The ways of expressing politeness in your native language may be similar or different to English. When asking people for help, especially if they are not close friends, Kiwis are often quite indirect. They may feel irritated or annoyed if spoken to in a way they consider too direct and forceful.

We promise you that people will generally be more helpful and kind to you if you follow some of our suggestions below. Have a look at these points and try to gradually incorporate more of them into your speech.

Feel free to talk about them and practise using them with our staff at the LLC. Good luck!

## From the LLC Team

- Greet the person in a shop/behind a counter, bus driver etc. before asking for help.

In order of decreasing formality: ✓ 'Good morning'/'Good afternoon'/'Good evening' ✓ 'Hello' ✓ 'Hi/G'day' (Kiwi English, short for Good day)

'Kia ora' is also common and you can say it if someone does something for you as it is the Māori for 'thank you'.

- When you approach someone for help you should ideally wait for them to finish what they are doing (give them a few seconds before telling them what you want). If you must interrupt, start with 'excuse me...'

- Avoid being too abrupt (too sudden/brief and to the point), even if your request seems obvious to you. An example from the LLC:

✗ '11' ✓ 'IELTS 11, please'. (better) ✓ 'I'd like IELTS 11, please'. (even better) ✓ 'I'd like to borrow IELTS 11, please'. / 'I wonder if I could borrow IELTS 11'? (best)

- 'Want' is often too strong and makes you sound demanding. Replace it with 'would like'.

✗ 'I want a flat white'. ✓ 'I'd like a flat white please'. (It's a type of coffee you'd order in a café in case you are wondering).

✗ 'Check the details again on your computer'. ✓ 'Maybe you could check the details again on your computer'?

✗ 'I want to look at it'. ✓ 'Would you mind if I look at it'? (You may notice if you listen carefully that some Kiwis add another layer of politeness by using this in the past tense e.g. ✓ 'Would you mind if I looked at it'? If this seems a bit too advanced for you, don't worry it's not essential, but remember that though English sometimes seems like an informal language, that native speakers do have ways of expressing different levels of politeness).



- Change your requests to sound like a suggestion or question.
  - ✗ 'I need you to help me'. ✓ **'Perhaps** you could help me'?
  - ✗ 'I want you to help me top up my snapper card'. ✓ **'Could** you help me top up my snapper card'?
  - ✗ 'Check the details again on your computer'. ✓ **'Maybe** you could check the details again on your computer'?
  - ✗ 'I want to look at it'. ✓ **'Would you mind if** I look at it'? (You may notice if you listen carefully that some Kiwis add another layer of politeness by using this in the past tense e.g. ✓ 'Would you mind if I looked at it'? If this seems a bit too advanced for you, don't worry it's not essential, but remember that though English sometimes seems like an informal language, that native speakers do have ways of expressing different levels of politeness).
- Another way to make requests polite is to use 'possible'.
  - 'Would it be possible** to renew this book'? ✓ **'Would it be possible** to open a new bank account'?
- Always use 'thank you' as much as possible. You may be interested to know that even close friends and family use this when talking with one another, therefore it is essential when speaking with people you don't know well. 'Please' is also important, though is best used at the end of a polite question.
  - ✗ 'Please help me scan this.' ✓ 'Would you mind helping me scan this please'?
- Avoid addressing those serving you as 'bro' or 'mate'. Not everybody appreciates being addressed like this, even if it is well-intentioned. It is informal language best saved for people with whom you have a close relationship.
  - ✗ 'Hi bro, can you tell me where the nearest Kiwibank is'? ✓ 'Hi, can you tell me where the nearest Kiwibank is'?
- The appropriate responses to yes/no questions such as 'Would you like to borrow a pen?' are 'yes please' or 'no thank you' (more formal) / 'no thanks' (less formal).
- If you need to say 'no' it's often better to avoid saying it directly. Soften it by saying 'I'm sorry...' then giving a reason or excuse.
- If you have a complaint this is fine, you should indeed make it known, but try to be as polite as possible and avoid blaming the person you are talking to personally.
- Smile and look the person you are speaking to in the eye, it always helps!
- Above all, regardless of age or anything else, remember that in New Zealand the person serving you regards you as their equal. If you make them feel you think you are superior to them (for example by demanding they do something) then they may become much less helpful. Conversely, if you are friendly and polite they may sometimes even make a special effort to help you more than you would expect!

