

Saying ‘No’



In American culture, people usually don't just say 'no' to a request, offer, or invitation. This is too direct, and you might offend or insult someone.

Sometimes, people don't say 'no' when they need to because they don't know how to say it in a polite way. Here are some clear *and* polite ways to say 'no'.

How to say ‘no’ to a request

Apology or expression of regret¹ + **but** + reason you cannot help

I'd love to help you, but I'm really busy right now.

I wish I could, but right now I need to focus on this project.

I'm sorry, but I can't do that because I have to do something else.

How to say ‘no’ to an offer

Expression of gratitude² + **but** + reason you can't accept the offer

I appreciate the offer, but I don't need any help at the moment.

Thank you for the offer, but I don't need any help right now.

How to say ‘no’ to an invitation

Apology/Expression of gratitude + **but** + reason you can't accept the invitation.

That sounds great, but I have other plans tonight.

I'm sorry but I have other plans.

I really appreciate the invitation, but I'm busy at that time.

¹ **regret** (noun): to feel sad or sorry about something you cannot do.

I regret that I cannot come to your party on Saturday. I'm busy that night.

² **gratitude** (noun): a feeling of appreciation or thanks

In English, we show gratitude by saying 'thank you.'

Read each situation. Write what you think is a good way to say 'no'.

1. One of your coworkers invites you to go out for drinks on Friday night after work. You don't drink alcohol and you don't like going to bars.

2. You are about to leave for the day when one of your coworkers stops you. He wants to know if you can stay late and help him with a new project. You had a hard day and you really want to go home.

3. You have just been offered a management position. You don't like managing people. You are happy in your current position.

4. Your manager wants to know if you can help with a new project. You already have a lot to do, and you don't think you have time to work on the new project.

5. A coworker brings candy to work and he offers you some. You don't like sweets very much.

6. A group of coworkers invites you to go out for lunch. You have a lot to do and you brought your lunch to work today.

7. A friend of yours wants you to help her build a website for her business. You have a full time job and a family. You don't have time to help her.
