

# The imperative: further information

## Being polite

1. We need to be careful when using the imperative to give orders because it can sometimes sound too direct. It is a good idea to add 'please' when we are not speaking to friends, family or close colleagues etc.

Please **get** it done by tomorrow.

Please **call** back later.

2. Adding 'do' can also make offers and invitations sound friendlier.

Do **sit** down.

Do **ask** if you need any help.

Do **have** lunch with us soon.

3. We can use 'never' or 'always' before the verb.

Always **send** a confirmation email.

Never **share** your password.

'Don't ever' is also possible - it makes an order more emphatic.

**Don't ever do** that again!

4. We can also make the imperative more emphatic by adding 'do'.

Do **be** quiet; I'm trying to work.

Do **try** to be there on time.

5. You might hear 'you' before the verb. This is also emphatic and may be accompanied by a gesture that indicates who the speaker is addressing but **be** careful; this is not considered polite.

You **come** here now!

**Don't you do** that again!

## Including the speaker

**Let's** is a contraction of 'let us'. We always use the contracted form in conversation. You may, very occasionally, hear the full form in formal speeches. For example:

**Let us pray.**  
**Let us now say thank you to...**

The negative has two forms:

**Let's not** have the meeting on Monday.  
**Don't let's** be late again!

## Question tags

The usual question tags for imperative sentences are 'will you?' and 'would you?'

These can make an order seem more polite.

**Close the door, will you?**  
I'm busy at the moment. **Come back tomorrow, would you?**

or more emphatic

Just **finish** your homework, will you?!  
**Get it done by this afternoon, would you?**

and in a negative sentence, 'will you?' can make an offer more insistent.

**Don't hesitate** to call me, will you?  
**Don't forget**, will you?

We can also use 'won't you?' for invitations. This is polite and insistent.

**Join us** for dinner tonight, won't you?

If we use 'do' and 'won't you?', it is polite and very insistent.

Do **come** to my party, won't you?

**Note that we can only use 'would you?' and 'won't you?' in affirmative sentences.**

After **'let's'**, the question tag is **'shall we?'** for both positive and negative sentences.  
**Let's** have some more tea, shall we?  
**Let's not** do this again, shall we?

## Sarcasm and humour

Adding the tag **'why don't you?'** means that the speaker is being sarcastic.

**Make** fun of me, why don't you?  
**Go** ahead, **laugh**, why don't you?  
Just **lie** about it then, why don't you?

These are not genuine invitations or orders. The speaker is reproaching someone for something he/she has already done.

Of course, the British are well-known for their sarcastic sense of humour. Imperatives can be found in many phrases coined by speakers of English. For example:

Never **put off** till tomorrow what you can do the day after tomorrow. [Mark Twain]  
**Don't be** humble. You're not that great. [Golda Meir]  
**Get** your facts first, then you can distort them as you please. [Mark Twain]  
**Do** something productive. **Stop** being yourself. [the Sarcasm Society]  
Always **forgive** your enemies; nothing annoys them so much. [Oscar Wilde]



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Last update: 2023/02/14 14:32

