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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