



ESL
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The Art of Saying No

Lesson	CEFR
1	B2

Speaking

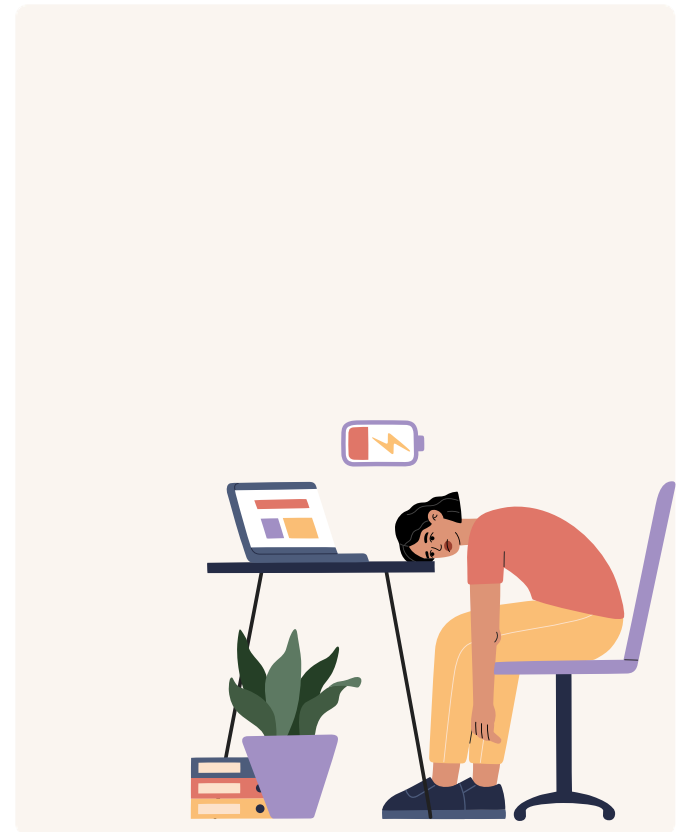
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Introduction

Many of us suffer from a common affliction: the inability to say "no."

Whether it is a boss asking us to log on over the weekend, a family member demanding a massive favor, or a friend inviting us to an event we have zero energy to attend, we frequently say "yes" out of guilt.

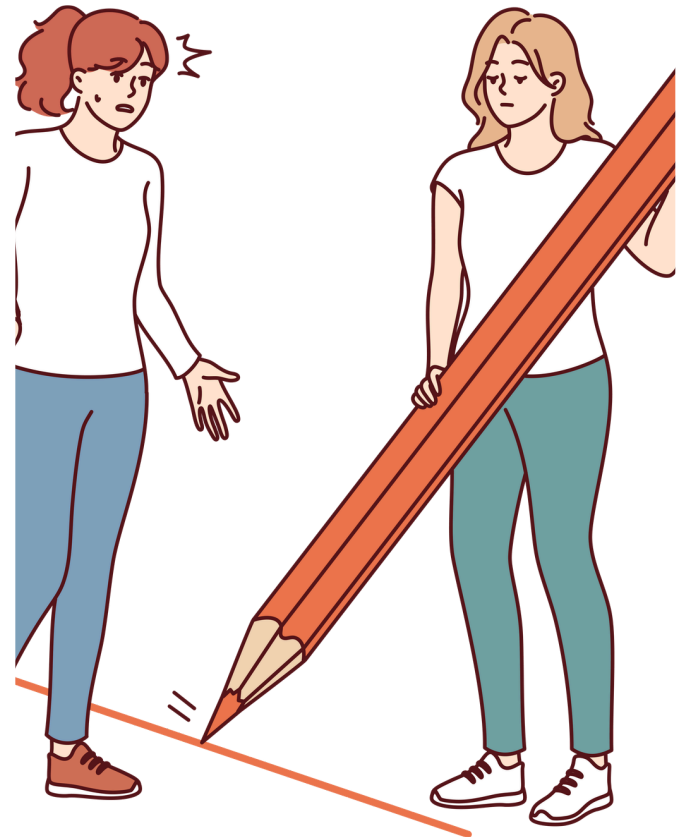
Learning how to set firm, polite boundaries is an essential life skill required to protect our time, mental health, and relationships from burnout.



Vocabulary Focus

People-Pleaser: A person who constantly prioritizes the needs, desires, and validation of others above their own, often to their own detriment.

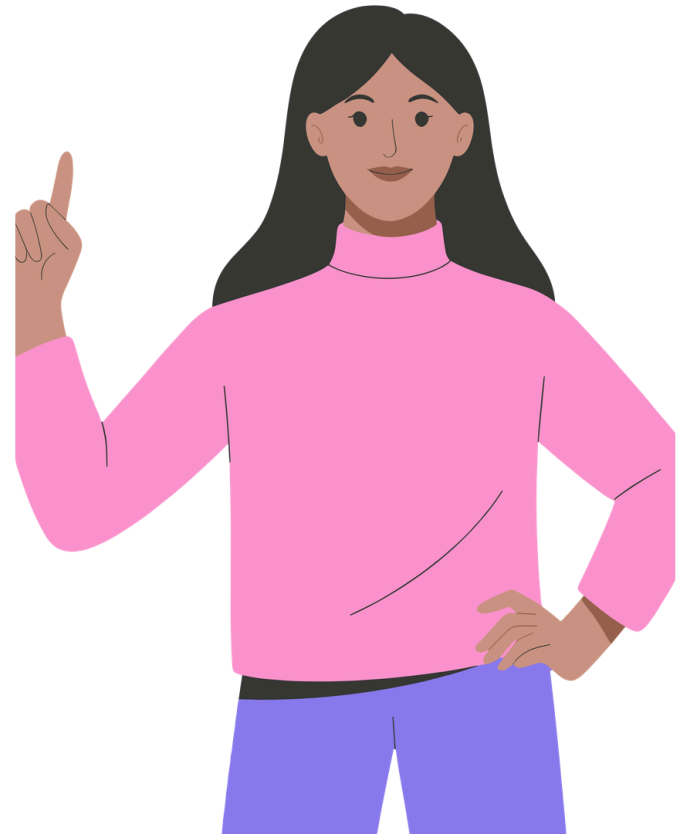
Boundary: A psychological or physical limit that a person sets to identify what is acceptable and safe behavior from the people around them.



Vocabulary Focus

Guilt Trip: An intentional attempt to make someone else feel bad or remorseful in order to manipulate them into doing something they don't want to do.

Assertive: Characterized by a confident, firm, and respectful declaration of your needs, opinions, or boundaries without becoming aggressive or defensive.



The Cost of a False "Yes"

Why do we find saying "no" so agonizing? From an evolutionary perspective, human beings are hardwired to cooperate and stay connected to their social tribe. Rejecting a request can trigger a subconscious fear of social isolation, conflict, or appearing unhelpful. This vulnerability makes us easy targets for a guilt trip.

However, experts point out that every time you say a false "yes" to someone else, you are actually saying a definitive "no" to yourself, to your rest, your hobbies, or your family. The trick to breaking the people-pleaser loop lies in changing your vocabulary. By utilizing structured linguistic buffers, you can deliver a rejection that is respectful but non-negotiable.

The Boundary Decoder: Saying 'No' Professionally

The Raw Instinct (Can be Blunt)	The Assertive, Diplomatic Alternative
"I don't want to work late tonight."	"I have a personal commitment this evening, but I will make this project my top priority first thing tomorrow morning."
"Stop asking me to lend you money."	"I value our relationship immensely, but I have a strict rule against mixing finances with friends and family."
"I'm too tired to come to your party."	"Thank you for the invite! I really need a quiet evening to recharge this weekend, but let's grab coffee next week instead."
"You are giving me way too much work."	"I want to ensure this receives the highest quality. Let's review my current task list together and decide which priorities to shift."

Let's Discuss!

Round 1: Personal Tendencies & The Guilt Loop

- Would you classify yourself as a people-pleaser? Is it easier for you to say "no" to a stranger, a family member, or your boss?
- Share a time when you said "yes" to a request even though you desperately wanted to say "no." What was the consequence?
- Have you ever had a friend or relative use a deliberate guilt trip to make you change your mind?

Round 2: Corporate Culture & Boundaries

- In your country, is it culturally acceptable to say "no" to a boss outside of office hours?
- Do you think smartphones and apps like Slack have made it harder or easier to maintain a healthy boundary?

Interactive Arena: The Boundary Challenge

Provide an impromptu, assertive response that says "no" politely without a defensive apology:

Scenario 1: Your coworker asks you to look over their 30-page report right as you are packing up your bags to leave the office on a Friday afternoon.

Scenario 2: A friend asks if they can sleep on your living room couch for "a few weeks" while they look for a new apartment, but you know they are messy and loud.

Scenario 3: Your cousin asks to borrow your car for a weekend road trip, but you are incredibly protective of your vehicle and don't want anyone else driving it.