

WRITING EMAILS

4 THE SANDWICH TECHNIQUE: HOW TO CRITICIZE DIPLOMATICALLY

Firstly, don't worry (too much!) if the email you wrote in class was like this one:

I have carefully analysed your presentation and I believe that there are some serious shortcomings.

1) You need to do x

2) You need to do y

3) Please do z

4) Also, I think you should do a and b

Around 80-90% of my students write exactly the same email – very direct. This is how most people write, particularly in a work environment. My aim is to teach you an alternative – you are free to use it or not.

Think about how you would feel if you were the recipient of the email – you would be quite offended. You are two colleagues. You are not the boss. You need to be friendly and constructive, and not so direct.

Don't confuse being honest and direct with being constructive. You can be honest but it is best to do it in a more indirect way in which you also:

- take responsibility
- give solutions

Don't forget my story about my disastrous relationship with my editors/publishers. My letters and emails caused my editors distress and also meant that I lost a lot of lucrative contracts.

So

Use a three-part structure:

1. Positive beginning – helps the reader accept the criticisms that you outline in stage 2
2. Constructive criticism
3. Positive ending – reinforces the beginning and is designed to ensure you reader takes action

Your aim is to achieve a goal (in the case we analysed in the lesson, the aim was to produce a good presentation). Your aim is **not** to humiliate the other person.

- You don't know the circumstances of the other person.
- Maybe they didn't have time to reduce the text or the number of slides.
- Maybe they were imagining that you were going to write the concluding slide.

Positive (but honest) beginning

Thanks for your presentation - I really liked some of the images you used, and the background template you have used is great.

Introduce criticisms gently

I just have a couple of things to clarify ...

Have you thought about doing x, y, z?

Take joint responsibility / suggest solutions

One thing we could do is ... / The best solution might be ..

It might be a good idea if we ... / Perhaps we could ...

I have always found it useful to ... If you like, I can try and do the Introduction.

Positive Ending – again, must be sincere

Thanks for all the time you have spent on this - I really appreciate it.

With a few changes here and there, I think we can make a great presentation.

Tips

- Combine the sandwich technique with a list of possible solutions.
- Don't just present a series of criticisms.
- By helping the other person, you are also helping yourself – you both want the same outcome: a great presentation.

Life lesson: You can use the sandwich technique in life in general. Particularly with children, boy/girlfriend and boss.
