Real Talk #009 – Do you mind?

Episode description

In English, sometimes yes can mean no and no can mean yes. In this episode, Andrew and Morag tackle an example of such a tricky situation. Come join them as they explain all about the useful, but potentially difficult construction of do you mind if [something]?

Expressions included in the learning materials

- ➢ Do you mind if [something]?

- ➢ A do you mind if question

- ➢ No, not at all (positive response)

- ➢ Yes, I mind (negative response)

- ➢ Yeah, that's OK

  I'd rather you not

Transcript

Andrew: Hey everyone. My name's Andrew.

Morag: And my name is Morag.

Andrew: And we're back with another Culips episode.

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Andrew: Today, we are going to do a Real Talk episode. In Real Talk episodes, we tell you about very important expressions that you need to know how to use to function in everyday life in an English-speaking country.

Morag: In this episode, we're going to learn how to use the question **do you mind if [something]?** to ask for permission in a casual way.

Andrew: Yeah, we'll also learn how to answer this question. Because, frankly, it can be a little bit tricky.

Morag: You're right. Even for native speakers. We're going to listen to two short dialogues today. In our first dialogue, we'll hear a positive response to the question **do you mind if [something]?** And in the second, we'll hear a negative response. And after each dialogue, Andrew and I are gonna go through the dialogue very closely to examine and explain all of the key expressions that you guys need to be able to properly ask and respond to **do you mind if [something]?**

Andrew: Awesome, that sounds like a great plan. So let's get to that first dialogue.

Stranger 1:   Excuse me?

Stranger 2:   Uh, yeah?

Stranger 1:   Hey, **do you mind if I borrow your pen?** Mine just died.

Stranger 2:   **No, not at all**. But bring it back, OK? It's the only one I have on me.

Stranger 1:   Yeah, of course.

Andrew:　　So in the dialogue, we just heard a conversation between two strangers at a cafe. The man asked to borrow a pen. OK, let's take a closer look now at how he did that, and what the response was. So even though this was a very short dialogue, we have two key expressions that we should check out. And the first one is how he asked to borrow the pen. He said, "**Do you mind if I borrow your pen?**" "**Do you mind if I borrow your pen?**" And this question that begins with **do you mind if [something]?** in my opinion, this is just a very nice way to ask for permission. It's not too formal, but it's also not too casual. It's just in that sweet spot in the middle. It's casual and polite at the same time. And I think it's perfect for everyday situations.

Morag:　　I completely agree. It's very casual and nice and polite to say to anyone. I use it all the time.

Andrew:　　And so we use this **do you mind if [something]?** question style always with verbs, right? For example, I could say, "**Do you mind if I open the window?**" "**Do you mind if sit down here?**" "**Do you mind if I turn up the TV?**"

Morag:　　"**Do you mind if I go grab a coffee?**"

Andrew:　　OK, I'll wait. So this is the key expression. This casual but polite question style—**do you mind if [something]?** And Morag, what is the second key expression for the first dialogue?

Morag:　　Our second key expression in this dialogue is **no, not at all**. **No, not at all**. Now, this is kind of where things get a bit confusing and strange. Because **no, not at all** in response to the question **do you mind if I borrow your pen?** is an affirmative response. It actually means yeah, yes you can borrow my pen. So, in this situation no means yes. She's saying that she doesn't mind if the man borrows the pen. She doesn't care at all.

Andrew:　　Yeah, so this is really weird. This is wacky English for you, right?

Morag:　　Mmhmm.

Andrew:　　You are saying, "Yes, you can borrow my pen." But how do you communicate that? You have to say "no," right? "**Do you mind?**" "No, I don't mind." It's OK, so "no." Because this is a little bit confusing, Morag, I'm just going to ask you some rapid-fire **do you mind questions**, all right?

Morag:　　All right.

Andrew:　　And I would like you to use positive answers, OK? I want you to agree, but to use no to answer positively. So here we go. Example one.

Andrew:	Hey Morag, **do you mind if I borrow a dollar?**
Morag:	No problem.

Andrew:	OK. **Do you mind if I use your phone to make a quick call?**
Morag:	Nope, go for it.

Andrew:	**Do you mind if I pick your brain about next week's test?** I have a few questions.
Morag:	No, I don't mind. What do you wanna know?

Andrew: So yeah, in all of these examples, the response is positive. But the word Morag used to answer these questions in no or nope. Funny, right?

Morag: The most important part about one of these **do you mind questions**, or waiting for a response, is to hear what happens after the yes or no. 'Cause sometimes people will say things like, "Yeah, no I don't mind."

Andrew: Yeah, exactly.

Morag: Both a yes and a no at the same time. If you're ever confused, just pay more attention to what happens after the yes or no. Like, "I don't mind" or "sure" or "go for it."

Andrew: Mmhmm.

Morag: Or "absolutely not." Whatever it is.

Andrew: Yeah, I can imagine this being very difficult to learn—the subtleties of this question. 'Cause it just doesn't make a lotta sense.

Morag: Nope.

Andrew: I would suggest waiting until the speaker is done. Listen to the whole sentence carefully, and also look for body language, right? If you want to borrow somebody's pen, and they sort of pass you the pen, then you know they're probably agreeing to it.

Morag: Also never feel strange about asking for clarification about this. Because it's something that even native English speakers speaking to native English speakers will have to ask. They'll be like, "Wait! Was that a yes or a no?"

Andrew: That happens frequently. Even native speakers will get this confused all the time, yeah. It's just weird.

Morag: It's a weird one, yeah. All right.

Andrew: All right. Let's listen to our second dialogue for the day. And in this dialogue, we'll hear another **do you mind if [something]?** question, but this time the response will be negative. Permission will not be granted. OK, so here we go. Dialogue number two.

Friend: Hey James. **Do you mind if I invite Sandra out with us on Saturday?**

James: You know, actually, **I'd rather you not**. Sandra and I just don't get along too well. Do you remember what happened last time we all hung out together? She and I got into that big argument right in the middle of the restaurant. I don't know. We just don't see eye to eye.

Friend: Ah, I thought you guys had patched things up. Well, I guess not. OK, I'll tell her she can't come.

Morag: In this dialogue, we heard two friends talking about making plans for Saturday night. So one friend asked for permission to invite their other friend, Sandra, but this didn't go over to well. The male friend, James, turned down the idea. He said that he doesn't get along with Sandra, that they don't see eye to eye. So the important part about this dialogue is that the **do you mind question**—**do you mind if I invite Sandra?**—had a negative response. So let's check out these two expressions.

Andrew: Yeah, exactly. So let's take a look at the question first. The question was, "**Do you mind if I invite Sandra out with us on Saturday?**" "**Do you mind if I invite Sandra out with us on Saturday?**" Again, here we heard **a do you mind if [something]?** question used to ask for permission. It's polite, it's casual, and it's a nice way to ask a friend or even a stranger for permission. It's my favorite time of the episode, Morag. It's quiz time!

Morag: Oh, yay! What's the … What's the quiz on this time, Andrew?

Andrew:	**Do you mind if [something]?**—you're asking for permission. But there are actually many ways we can ask for permission in English. There are many different question styles. So I want everybody out there that's listening just to take the next 30 seconds to brainstorm some alternative ways we could ask this question. What are some ways we could make it formal and really polite, or even make it more casual? So we'll give you 30 seconds. Take some time and try and think of alternative ways to phrase this question.
	OK, 30 seconds is up. Did you come up with any alternative ways to express this question?
Morag:	Mmhmm. Another one that I use pretty often is is it OK if [something]?
Andrew:	Yes. Is it OK if [something]?
Morag:	Yeah.
Andrew:	So, "Is it OK if I invite Sandra?" Now, who would you use this with? Would this be more with your friends or maybe with a boss? Who would you say this question to?
Morag:	It's definitely a little bit more casual. I don't think I'd say this to, like, an older person that I didn't know, for example.
Andrew:	Right. Another very common way that I like to ask for permission is to say, "Can I [something]?" So "Can I invite Sandra?" Or if I wanted to even upgrade that a little bit and make it more polite, I could say, "Could I invite Sandra?"
Morag:	You can also say, "May I [something]?" Although that sounds a little stilted, a little formal.
Andrew:	It's very formal, yeah.
Morag:	Actually, I use it.
Andrew:	Yeah, you're just a very polite person.
Morag:	Maybe I am. Who knows?
Andrew:	I think so.
Morag:	Yeah.
Andrew:	All right, Morag. May we move on to the second key expression?
Morag:	All right. Yeah, let's do it.

Andrew:	All right, so again I think this is the interesting part of this episode. It's how can you respond to these **do you mind if [something]?** questions. And in the second dialogue here, we heard a negative response. But as you'll recall from the first dialogue, when we say "no" to **a do you mind if [something]?** question, it actually means "yes." So how do you respond negatively? Do you say "yes"? What do you say to this question?
Morag:	Hmm. Say for example someone says, "**Do you mind if I open the window?**" You can say, "**Yes, I do mind**." Like, "Don't do it." But that is a bit confusing.
Andrew:	Yeah, and like you mentioned earlier, Morag, even native speakers mess this up. We make errors, and we get confused with these types of questions.
Morag:	Definitely. You would never just say "yes."
Andrew:	Yeah, exactly. So what I personally do, and what I think a lot of English speakers do, is we use just a totally different kind of response. And we like to introduce it with the word actually. Right? So "Actually, **I'd rather you not**." "**Do you mind if I invite Sandra out on Saturday?**" "Uh, actually, **I'd rather you not**." All right? I think this is a very polite way to negatively respond to this **do you mind question**.
Morag:	And very common.
Andrew:	Very common.
Morag:	This is a very common pattern.
Andrew:	It avoids that confusion that yes and no create with this question pattern, yeah. OK, just like we did before, I'm going to ask you some example questions. Morag, maybe you can just respond negatively with this pattern: "Actually, **I'd rather you not**."
Morag:	Sure.
Andrew:	Hey, **do you mind if I borrow that book when you're done reading it?**
Morag:	Actually, I don't want to lend it to you.

Andrew:	**Do you mind if I come by your place tomorrow for dinner?** I heard you're a good cook!
Morag:	Oh actually, I'm busy tomorrow night.

Andrew:	**Do you mind if I use your printer to print off a report?** It's only like a 100 pages or so.
Morag:	Actually, **I would rather you not do that**.

Andrew: Awesome. So we just heard how we can use this actually, **I'd rather you don't do that** or I don't want to lend it to you, I don't want to make you dinner.

Morag: I was thinking this a really, really kind of annoying friend you were being there.

Andrew: Yeah, very demanding. For sure.

Morag: Mmhmm.

Andrew: Well, Morag, that brings us to the end of today's episode, and I hope that all of our listeners out there now have a more solid understanding of how to use this question pattern: **do you mind if [something]?** And how to respond to it as well.

Morag: 'Cause it is an important one, so we will be replaying the dialogues, both of them, one more time at the end here. So you guys can stick around and listen again, and get it nice and solid in your head.

Andrew: That's right. And if you enjoyed today's episode, please support us. You can do that by leaving us a five-star ranking and a review on iTunes. And guys, all it takes on iTunes is one word. All you have to do is say "awesome" or "great," and we are very happy. That will help us spread the podcast to more listeners and new listeners as well.

Morag: If you have any questions or comments, we would really love to hear from you. So you can send us a message through our Facebook page at Facebook.com/culipspodcast or our website, which is Culips.com.

Andrew: That is it for now. We'll be back soon with another new episode.

Morag: Bye everybody.

Andrew: Bye!

Stranger 1:	Excuse me?
Stranger 2:	Uh, yeah?
Stranger 1:	Hey, **do you mind if I borrow your pen?** Mine just died.
Stranger 2:	**No, not at all**. But bring it back, OK? It's the only one I have on me.
Stranger 1:	Yeah, of course.

Friend:	Hey James. **Do you mind if I invite Sandra out with us on Saturday?**
James:	You know, actually, **I'd rather you not**. Sandra and I just don't get along too well. Do you remember what happened last time we all hung out together? She and I got into that big argument right in the middle of the restaurant. I don't know. We just don't see eye to eye.
Friend:	Ah, I thought you guys had patched things up. Well, I guess not. OK, I'll tell her she can't come.

Detailed Explanations

Do you mind if [something]?

Do you mind if [something]?, the key expression in this episode, is a useful and polite way to ask someone for permission.

The tricky part about **do you mind if [something]?** is that you're not asking directly if you can do something. You are asking for permission. You're asking if what you want to do would bother or trouble the person you're asking. There are a number of ways you might hear the question **do you mind if [something]?**, such as:

- "Is it OK if [something]?"

- "Is it all right if [something]?"

- "Would it work if [something]?"

Because **do you mind if [something]?** is a way of asking for permission to do something, it is always followed by a phrase that describes the action or activity you're asking permission for. For example:

- "**Do you mind if I take a 5-minute break?**"

- "**Do you mind if** I **eat some of your lunch?**"

- "**Do you mind if I borrow a sweater from you?**"

English speakers often use **do you mind if [something]?** as a polite way of letting someone know that they want to do something. In these situations, **a do you mind if question** is more about being polite than asking permission.

For instance, if you're visiting someone's home and you're thirsty, you might ask, "**Do you mind if I get myself a glass of water?**" In this scenario, it's very unlikely that the other person would have a problem with you getting yourself a glass of water. By using **do you mind if [something]?**, you are purely being polite. When used to be polite, **a do you mind if question** functions the same way as "may I" or "could I."

So whether you want to ask for permission for an activity or you want to be polite about a request, **do you mind if [something]?** is a very useful construction!

Here are a few more examples with **do you mind if [something]?**:

Angie:	You seem kinda stressed. What's up?
Sam:	I'm running so late today, and am worried that I'll be late for work!
Angie:	Oh no!
Sam:	Wait, do you have your car with you today?
Angie:	Yeah, I do.
Sam:	**Do you mind if I get a ride to work with you?**
Angie:	No, I don't mind. I can give you a ride.

Sophia is visiting Montreal. She is having a hard time finding the entrance to the metro. She decides to stop and ask someone for help.

Sophia:	Excuse me, **do you mind if I use your phone to look at a map?**
Stranger:	What are you trying to find? I might be able to tell you where to go.
Sophia:	I'm looking for the entrance to the Bonaventure metro station.
Stranger:	Oh, that's easy. You just need to go two blocks south of here.
Sophia:	Thank you!

Barbara:	Darn, I missed a call from work. Sorry for breaking up our coffee date, but **do you mind if I step outside and call work back?**
Glen:	No, that's not a problem at all!
Barbara:	OK, thanks! I'll just be gone a minute or two.

A do you mind if question

Responding to **a do you mind if question** can be complex. As previously mentioned, this is because instead of directly asking for permission for an activity, the purpose of **a do you mind if question** is to ask if the other person would be bothered by an activity.

A do you mind if question is equivalent to asking, "Does this bother you?" If someone asks if something bothers you, you would answer either "yes, it bothers me" or "no, it doesn't bother me."

A do you mind if question is used to politely request permission. It is used to ask if someone can do something. This means **do you mind if [something]?** is often used instead of "can I" or "could I." If someone begins a question with "can I," an appropriate response would be "yes, you can" or "no, you can't."

So when asked **a do you mind if question**, the simplest way to answer is "**yes, I mind**" or "no, I don't mind." What is difficult is that the correct positive response is "no, I don't mind," and the correct negative response is "**yes, I mind**." This is difficult because no is used to give permission, and yes is used to deny permission.

Because this is such a tricky topic, the following dialogue examples contain more structured responses than a realistic conversation in English.

Here are a couple more detailed responses to **a do you mind question**:

Carl:	**Do you mind if I borrow your backpack for a day?**
Sandra:	No, I don't mind. It wouldn't bother me if you used my backpack for a day. Therefore, you can borrow it.

Kevin:	**Do you mind if I take my lunch break in an hour?**
Lucy:	**Yes, I mind**. It would bother me if you take your lunch break in an hour because I want to go for lunch at that time as well. Therefore, it is not OK for you to take your lunch break in an hour.

No, not at all (positive response)

When you want to respond positively to **a do you mind if question**, you should use a statement that begins with "no."

For example, in this episode, you heard a dialogue example where someone used the phrase **no, not at all** to give a positive response. The following are some other ways to give a positive response beginning with "no":

- "No, that's all right."

- "No, that's not a problem."

- "No, it's OK."

- "No, go ahead."

Here's one more example with **no, not at all** as a positive response:

Amelia:	**Do you mind if I use your washroom?**
RJ:	**No, not at all**. Go ahead!

Yes, I mind (negative response)

When you want to respond negatively to **a do you mind if question**, you should use a statement that begins with "yes." English speakers will often say "**yes, I mind**," followed by a more detailed negative statement. Here are a few examples:

- "**Yes, I mind**. That's not OK."

- "**Yes, I mind**. I don't want you to do that."

- "**Yes, I mind**. I don't like lending things."

Here's one more example with **yes, I mind** as a negative response:

Erin:	**Do you mind if** I borrow $200?
David:	**Yes, I mind**! I don't lend money to people. Even if I did, I don't have $200 to lend!

Yeah, that's OK

In conversation, the response to **a do you mind if question** can often be confusing, even to native English speakers. It is very common to ask for clarification after someone responds to **a do you mind if question**. When you ask **a do you mind if question**, don't be embarrassed if you're not sure whether or not someone has given you permission.

For example, if you ask, "**do you mind if I borrow your computer?**," you might hear "**yeah, that's OK**," as a response. While it's technically incorrect to use yes to respond positively to **a do you mind if question**, this situation is common in conversation. Remember that it's always OK to ask for clarification.

Here's one more example with **yeah, that's OK**:

Alan:	**Do you mind if I borrow your car?**
Heather:	**Yeah, that's OK**.
Alan:	Wait, I'm confused. Do you mean that you mind or you don't mind?
Heather:	Oh sorry. I meant yes, it's OK if you borrow my car.

I'd rather you not

Similar to **yeah, that's OK**, in conversation, it is common to respond to **a do you mind if question** with a statement that does not begin with either "yes" or "no." This is particularly true for negative responses. For example, in this episode, someone responds by saying, "**I'd rather you not**." Here are some other negative responses that do not begin with yes:

- "That's not OK."

- "Can you not?"

- "I'm not all right with that."

Here's one more examples with **I'd rather you not**:

Jacob:	**Do you mind if I clean the kitchen tomorrow?**
Pam:	**I'd rather you not** wait until tomorrow to clean the kitchen. We have people coming over tonight!
Jacob:	All right, I'll do it now.

Quiz

1. True or false: A do you mind if question is used to ask for permission.

a) true
b) false

2. Which of the following is a negative response to a do you mind if question?

a) "I'd like that."
b) "I'd rather you not."
c) "Sure thing."
d) "No, I don't mind."

3. Which of the following is a positive response to a do you mind if question?

a) Yes, I mind.
b) Yes, I do mind.
c) No, I mind.
d) No, that's fine.

4. Which of the following is a negative response to a do you mind if question?

a) "Yes, I mind."
b) "Yes, that's fine."
c) "No, I don't mind."
d) "No, that's fine."

5. Which of the following is a positive response to a do you mind if question?

a) "Yes, I mind."
b) "Yes, that's fine."
c) "No, I mind."
d) "No, that's not fine."

Quiz Answers

1.a   2.b   3.d   4.a   5.b

Episode credits

Hosts:	Andrew Bates and Morag St. Clair
Episode preparation/research:	Andrew Bates
Audio editor:	Andrew Bates
Transcription:	Andrew Bates
Learning materials writer:	Morag St. Clair
English editor:	Stephanie Minelga
Business manager:	Tsuyoshi Kaneshima
Project manager:	Jessica Cox