

Real Talk #019 – Complaining at a restaurant

Episode description

Have you ever received cold food at a restaurant? In this Real Talk episode, Andrew and Suzanne explain important expressions and phrases to help you deal with this problem. Join them to learn how to politely voice a complaint at a restaurant.

Fun fact

Many restaurants in Quebec have poutine on their menu. Poutine is a popular Canadian menu item and contains French fries, gravy, and cheese curds.

Expressions included in the learning materials

- The magic word
- I'm sorry/excuse me
- I hate to do this, but [something]
- Would it be possible to [something]?
- Your meal will be on the house



Transcript

Note: The words and expressions that appear in **bold text** within the transcript are discussed in more detail in the Detailed Explanations section that follows the transcript.

Andrew: Hello everybody. My name is Andrew.

Suzanne: And my name is Suzanne.

Andrew: And you are listening to Culips. Hi, Suzanne.

Suzanne: Hey, Andrew. How are you?

Andrew: I'm doing OK. I'm a little bit tired, but I'm OK. I'm good, yeah!

Suzanne: Good. This morning, I feel like I have a little bit of a stomach ache.

Andrew: Oh no.

Suzanne: Yeah, I went to a restaurant last night for dinner, and I don't know if I ate something weird.

Andrew: Maybe your food was just really poor quality. Did it taste OK?

Suzanne: It tasted pretty good, as far as restaurants go. But I don't know. I feel like maybe my chicken wasn't totally cooked. I should have said something, you know?

Andrew: It's funny that you mention that because that is the exact type of situation that we're gonna look at today.

Suzanne: Awesome.

Andrew: Yeah, so today, we're going to do a Real Talk episode. And Real Talk is the series where we teach you guys the English you need for real-world situations in an English-speaking country.

Suzanne: Absolutely, and guys, we design these episodes, so you can learn the English that native speakers use every day. And the goal is to help you be awesome at English and give you the confidence you need to kick butt out there in the real world, every single time you open your mouth to speak.

Andrew: Now, if you're new to the Real talk series, make sure you go back and check out our past episodes after you listen to this one. Because we look at really important situations, like crossing the border or getting clothes altered, or even taking something back to a store for a refund.

- Suzanne: For sure, and we've covered a lot of good stuff in this series. So check it out.
- Andrew: The study guide for this episode is available for download on our website, Culips.com. The study guide includes the transcript for this episode, along with detailed vocabulary explanations, real-world examples, and a comprehension quiz.
- Suzanne: And the study guide, just so you know, is great for proactive English learners who are serious about taking their English to the next level. If that sounds like you, then you should visit Culips.com to pick up the study guide.
- Andrew: All right, Suzanne. Let's get started with the lesson for today. Now, like you said earlier, sometimes you receive some food at the restaurant that's just not quite right. And today, we're gonna take a look at how to make a complaint at the restaurant. And actually, a very specific kind of complaint.
- Suzanne: Yes, that's right. So today, we're going to learn how to complain about cold food at a restaurant.
- Andrew: Now, Suzanne, if my memory serves me correctly, you spent some time working as a server at a restaurant, right?
- Suzanne: Yes, yes. For a long time, I worked as a server in a few different restaurants in New York City.
- Andrew: When you were serving, did you receive complaints about the food ever?
- Suzanne: Yes, you definitely receive complaints. In fact, I prefer to hear complaints. The thing that's the worst is when people wait till the end of their meal, or they finish it, and then they complain. Because then you can't fix it, so it's best to complain right when you taste it or have your first bite. And then the server can actually change it and make you happy.
- Andrew: Wow, that's interesting. I never thought about that. But that makes a lot of sense. Like, why wait till the end? It's too late, right?
- Suzanne: Right, and then nobody's happy.
- Andrew: What about you personally? When you go to a restaurant, are you the type of person that will make a complaint if something's wrong, or do you just hold your tongue?

Suzanne: It really depends if it's something that's tolerable. That's not really their fault. It's just maybe the flavours that were chosen, or something is weird like that. Yeah, I won't complain. I'll just chalk it up to, "Well, I ordered something that I won't order next time." But if it's the way it's prepared, or maybe they forgot something that I asked for—for example, maybe you don't want mayo on your burger, or maybe you want the burger cooked medium instead of medium rare—then yeah, I absolutely will complain. But I do it in a nice way. I say, "**Excuse me.**" You know? "Sorry to bother you," all of those things.

Andrew: Well, that's exactly what we're going to get into right now. And so the plan for today is we're gonna listen to a conversation between a customer at a restaurant and a server at the restaurant. Now, the customer makes a complaint because his food was served to him cold—ew, cold food! OK. And afterward, Sue, you and I will break down the conversation for you guys, and we're going to explain all the key expressions that are super important to know.

Suzanne: Yes, let's get started by listening to the conversation right now.

Customer:	Excuse me?
Server:	Yeah? Is everything OK?
Customer:	I'm sorry. I really hate to do this, but my soup is cold. Would it be possible to have it warmed up?
Server:	Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry about that. Yeah, I'll just take that from you and run back to the kitchen to grab you a new bowl.
Customer:	Thank you so much.
Server:	OK, here's your new bowl of piping hot soup. Again, please accept my apologies.
Customer:	No, no. It's OK. These things happen.
Server:	You know what? To make up for it, your meal will be on the house.
Customer:	Wow, really? Wow, that's very generous. Thanks a lot.
Server:	Yeah, it's the least we can do. Enjoy your meal, and if you need anything, just let me know.
Customer:	OK, will do. Thank you.

Andrew: OK, so we just listened to that conversation, where the customer gets served cold soup. Nobody wants to eat cold soup.

Suzanne: Unless it's gazpacho.

Andrew: But we'll have to assume that the soup was supposed to be served hot. And it wasn't. So in the conversation we heard, the customer makes a complaint. And now, what we'll do guys is break down this conversation and examine the key parts. And the first part that we'll look at is when the customer actually makes the complaint, and he expresses the problem to the server. And so let's listen to that part of the conversation a couple more times.

Customer: **I'm sorry. I really hate to do this, but my soup is cold. Would it be possible to have it warmed up?**

I'm sorry. I really hate to do this, but my soup is cold. Would it be possible to have it warmed up?

Andrew: OK, Sue, so when he made the complaint, he started by apologizing.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Now, why do you think he apologized before he made his complaint? Why do we do this in English?

Suzanne: I think it's because you know that what's coming is really a negative comment. You're saying that you don't like what they're offering. So you're kind of apologizing in advance. "**I'm sorry** that this is gonna be a negative comment."

Andrew: Yeah, and it's also a way to show that you're not being rude. You're still a polite person. It's like, you know, it's going to be an inconvenience for the server, and an inconvenience for the restaurant and the cooks in the back. But at the same time, you don't want to eat cold soup, and you shouldn't have to.

Suzanne: Exactly.

Andrew: Yeah, starting a complaint by offering an apology is a very nice way to do it and really a natural way to make a complaint as well.

Suzanne: Exactly, and you're showing that you're aware of the inconvenience in the situation. And you're not just being mean.

- Andrew: Something I say sometimes, when I do have to make a complaint at the restaurant, is actually similar to what we heard the customer say. 'Cause the customer said, "Ah, **I really hate to do this.**" But I say, "I know, I never do this. I rarely do this, but I have a complaint." Because I don't want to make the server feel like I'm just an annoying customer, right? Because there are some of those people that complain about everything.
- Suzanne: For sure.
- Andrew: I wanna communicate that, oh, it's actually a problem that I have. I'm not just complaining to get attention or try to get a free meal. No, this is a legitimate concern that I have and so saying something like that, "Oh, **I really hate to do this**" or "I never do this" is showing that you have a genuine complaint. I think it shows honesty.
- Suzanne: Yeah. I really agree with you.
- Andrew: If you were to phrase this, if you were to make a complaint at the restaurant, how would you attract the attention of the server? How would you make the complaint?
- Suzanne: I guess it depends on the problem, but I would say, "**Excuse me, I'm really sorry** to do this, but this burger is really raw inside. I asked for medium and it's not." You know, that kind of thing. And usually, they react right away. I would probably say, "Yeah, **I'm really sorry** to do this" or "I'm usually not that person" or I would say, "**I'm really sorry.** I know this is annoying, but..."
- Andrew: That's a very good one: "I know this is annoying." It's like, "I know that this is going to cause you extra work."
- Suzanne: Yes.
- Andrew: But my soup is cold.
- Suzanne: Yes, yeah.
- Andrew: Now what happens if you said, "I just wanted to let you know that my soup is cold"? How would you react if you were the server?
- Suzanne: I would then say, "OK, would you like me to get you a new one?"
- Andrew: Does it sound a little bit rude to you to say that? I just wanted to let you know that my soup is cold.
- Suzanne: Yes, it does sound rude because you're not really offering a solution, or you're not asking for what you want. So the server doesn't really know what

to do. You're just letting me know. OK, does that mean you want me to change it?

Suzanne: Does that mean you want me to talk to the kitchen? Take it away? Reheat it? You know, there's not much information given. You know, it's like saying to someone, "I just want you to know I'm really mad right now." And you don't really know what to do about that. They're not offering any solutions.

Andrew: Yeah, there's no solutions. So I would say to avoid using a structure like this. "I just wanted to let you know that my soup is cold" sounds really kind of bossy or rude, sassy.

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: Before we move on, I just wanted to do a little imagination experiment. And let's pretend that we actually do want to come across as a little bit angry. We do wanna express that we're a little ticked off, you know? My lunch time is short. My break is only an hour, and my soups cold. How can we express that emotion to our server? Because if you say, "**I'm sorry. I really hate to do this**" that comes across as polite. But sometimes we wanna come across as a little bit rude, right?

Suzanne: Yeah, for sure. I think there's a difference between rude and firm. you know? Meaning I don't have time for this and I have a tight schedule, or I have standards, or this is unacceptable. But you're not being mean. I think when you're mean, it's a very different experience in a restaurant then if you're being firm.

Andrew: That's a very good distinction to make yeah.

Suzanne: And I think it's totally reasonable to stand up for yourself and be firm. And something that you could say would be ... You could still apologize and say, "**I'm sorry** to bother you, but I'm on a tight schedule, and the soup is cold. Can you please take it back and bring me a new one?"

Andrew: It would be, like, instead of asking a question—like in the conversation, we heard the customer say, "Now, **would it be possible to have this soup warmed up?**"—he asks a question. You could give a command, still using polite words like please, but like what you just said, "Please warm it up, or please bring a new one." You could be much more direct and actually give an order.

Suzanne: Yes, "I ordered this hot soup, and it's not hot. Can you please bring me a new one?" That's a very firm, borderline rude comment that is giving the complaint and the direction, so you're really telling them the problem and the solution that you desire.



Andrew: Even if you are angry, you should still use the word please. If you just say, “Give me a new soup.” “Bring me a new soup!” Well, that waiter or that waitress, or that server is going to be quite angry at you. Even if you have a legitimate complaint, I think we still have to remember that servers are people, and they’re trying to do a good job. Mistakes happen, so always use that word, please—**the magic word**.

Suzanne: It’s important to remember that the server is merely the person who serves you and is not the person who cooked the food. So most of the time, it’s not their fault that the food is not the way you want it. They’re simply the messenger and the server.

Andrew: Absolutely, yeah.

Suzanne: So it’s important to treat them with respect, and then you will be treated that way too.

Andrew: Suzanne, let’s move on to the second important part of this conversation, and that’s the server’s reaction. How does the server react to the complaint that the customer made? And so let’s listen to that part of the conversation a couple more times.

Server: Oh my gosh, **I’m so sorry** about that. Yeah, I’ll just take that from you and run back to the kitchen to grab you a new bowl.

Oh my gosh, **I’m so sorry** about that. Yeah, I’ll just take that from you and run back to the kitchen to grab you a new bowl.

Andrew: OK, so the server was very kind after receiving the complaint. And she offered to run back to the kitchen as soon as possible, right away, to get the customer a new bowl. The customer in fact asked just to have the soup warmed up, but she offered him a whole new bowl of soup. So this is nice, and I guess my question for you is how do servers usually respond when you make a complaint? How would you respond when you were a server?

Suzanne: I always tried to be kind and fair. I think it really depends on the person’s attitude, you know? If they’re demanding a lot, chances are I will offer them something a little less. And if they’re just simply asking for the bare minimum, I will most likely offer to help them to get something more, like the server did in this situation. If you’re rude and you’re difficult to deal with, chances are I’m not gonna help you out, quite honestly. But if you’re kind and offering a solution, probably I’m gonna do that solution and maybe then some. What do you think, Andrew?

Andrew: Yeah, I think, in my experience, most of the time servers in restaurants, especially in the day and age of Yelp, really wanna go the extra mile to make the customer happy. 'Cause, you know, a negative review online of that restaurant can be very damaging to the business's reputation. So I think, you know, there's this philosophy in the West that the customer is always right.

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: Now, not every business buys into this line of thinking, but many do. And essentially, the customer might not always be right, but you know, you wanna make your customers happy, as much as possible. So if it's within your power to satisfy that customer, you're gonna wanna do that. And I think servers will respond positively to any complaints about the food.

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Especially if it's about the quality that is on their end, right?

Suzanne: Right.

Andrew: If you're like, "I've never tried pheasant before. I wanna try pheasant." And then you order it, and you're like "Ew, I don't like it!" Well, that's not really the restaurant's fault.

Suzanne: Right, right, right or, like, you don't like, you know, an herb or a flavouring or something.

Andrew: So I think the take-home here is that if you do make a complaint at a restaurant about the quality of food, if you do it in a polite way, even if you're a little bit angry, if you do it in a polite way, generally, you will get what you want from the restaurant.

Suzanne: Yes.

Andrew: Let's move on to the third and final key part of this conversation that we're examining today, and this is when the server apologizes to the customer. And so let's listen to that part a couple more times.

Server: Again, please accept my apologies. You know what? To make up for it, **your meal will be on the house**. Yeah, it's the least we can do.

Again, please accept my apologies. You know what? To make up for it, **your meal will be on the house**. Yeah, it's the least we can do.

- Andrew: OK, so in the apology, the server used three really interesting expressions. And so I thought we should cover these vocabulary items, Suzanne, and explain them to everybody 'cause they're really natural and super useful for everyday conversation. And I like them all too. The first one is in the infinitive form: to make up for something. It's a verb to make up for something. And the server when she apologizes, she says, "Oh, to make up for it, **your meal's on the house.**" So what does it mean if you make up for something?
- Suzanne: Well, to make up for something is to make up for the deficiency, right? The mistake. So there was a mistake, and in a way, it kind of brought down the level of the experience. And so now, they're trying to bring the experience back up to a positive level. Maybe it slipped down to a negative experience, and now, they're bringing it back up. And so in that sense, they're making up for the deficiency.
- Andrew: That makes perfect sense, yeah. You're doing something nice for someone because somehow you disappointed that person in the past. You wanna show that other person that you know. You realize that you made a mistake, that you disappointed them. And you wanna do something nice for them to make this situation better. For example, let's say, Suzanne, you and I have plans to go to the park, all right? We're gonna go to the park, and we're going to play badminton, all right?
- Suzanne: Nice!
- Andrew: And I know that you're a huge fan of badminton, and you're really excited to go to the park. But then 5 minutes before we're supposed to meet, I call you and I say, "Sue, I can't do it today. **I'm sorry.** I just can't meet you."
- Suzanne: Aw. And then I get disappointed, yeah.
- Andrew: Right, so you know, later on, maybe you text message me, and you're like, "Ah, Andrew, I'm kinda bummed we didn't get to play badminton today." I could say, "Hey, **I'm sorry.** I realized I let you down. Let me make it up to you. Let me buy you a coffee tomorrow, OK?" I could do something nice to show that **I'm sorry** for disappointing you.
- Suzanne: Yeah, like you could buy me a bunch of doughnuts from Tim Hortons, and then that would totally make up for it.
- Andrew: I thought you were going to say a bunch of badminton birdies.
- Suzanne: No, I'm actually not a big fan of badminton. But I do play it because my boyfriend is a big fan so ...
- Andrew: Oh, no way! I just picked a random activity that I thought would be funny.

Suzanne: Yeah, it is funny. It is a funny sport. That's another podcast episode.

Andrew: Yes, so in this conversation, the restaurant makes it up to the customer by offering him his meal on the house.

Suzanne: Yes, on the house.

Andrew: This is another great expression, on the house. So maybe, Sue, you could explain to everybody what on the house means?

Suzanne: Yeah, so the restaurant is considered the house, right? It's the ... A lot of times in conversation, they'll talk about if you work in the back of the house or the front of the house. So if you're in the back of the house of a restaurant, it means you work in the kitchen. And if you're in the front of the house, it usually means you're a server or a hostess, or a manager—someone who greets the customers. And a lot of times, a place of service, like a bar, a restaurant, a lounge, it's going to be considered the house. And so when anytime someone says it's on the house, it means it's free. It means that the bar, the restaurant, or the store is going to pay for it. And you get to have it for nothing, which is always nice.

Andrew: Another place that we call the house is a casino. There's another expression—the house always wins. This means the casino always wins, so this is another way that we can use this word, the house, to mean a place of business that serves customers. But it's not usually a store. It's more like a restaurant, a bar, casino, hotel—one of these places.

Suzanne: Yeah, that's true.

Andrew: Mmhmm. And it's great when you get something on the house. You will be very happy because it means it's free. You don't have to pay for it.

Suzanne: Yeah. It's the best.

Andrew: It is the best. It is the best.

Suzanne: I think free soup tastes better. Don't you?

Andrew: Free soup tastes delicious. It's the best soup there is.

Suzanne: And so what's the next expression?

Andrew: Yeah, the very last one that we're gonna look at is just a nice set expression that you can tell somebody in response to making up for a mistake that you made. OK? And this expression is it's the least I can do or the least we can do. In the conversation, we heard, "It's the least we can do." But if you are personally saying this, then you'd want to say, "It's the least I can do."

Andrew: But yeah, so if somebody thanks you for something ... OK, Suzanne, for example, let's look at an example. It's easy to explain this way. Pretend, OK, Suzanne, I take you out for coffee to make up for cancelling our badminton plans. And then you know, I'm so clumsy. I accidentally spill my coffee all over you. OK, and I feel terrible. OK, I feel awful. And so I say, "Suzanne, **I'm so sorry**. Oh my God, I will take your shirt to the dry cleaner. I will get it cleaned for you." OK?

And then you say, "Oh, thank you. Thanks, Andrew, that's very nice." I will say, "It's the least I can do." OK? "It's the least I can do." "Why are you thanking me? You know, I caused the accident. I spilled the coffee. It's not your fault. Of course, I should pay to get your shirt cleaned." So it's really the least I can do is, you know, trying to make it up to you by cleaning your shirt or getting your shirt cleaned, right?

Suzanne: Yeah, if you think of it on a scale, right? The least that someone could do is to fix the mess. The very most they could do would be take you shopping and get you a new blouse or new outfit. But that is usually too much, only reserved for certain people, maybe your boyfriend or girlfriend. That they should take you out, right, and buy new clothes. But I'm just kidding. But yeah, the very least, like, the bottom-line kind of gesture would be to, you know, help clean the shirt, help fix the problem in its basic form. So looking at this example, in this conversation, it almost seems that giving him a free meal is really quite nice. It's kind of some of the most they can do, no? I think it's a very nice gesture.

Andrew: It is a nice gesture, and you're making a good point there. That it's going above and beyond what the restaurant has to do. This expression is just a fixed expression that we use whenever we're trying to make up for something, and somebody thanks us for that gesture of making an effort. We just respond with, "Oh, it's the least I can do!" It would be super, super strange to say, "Oh, it's the most we can do," right? It's always, "It's the least we can do."

Suzanne: Yeah.

Andrew: Sue, that brings us to the end of today's episode.

Suzanne: Aw, already?

Andrew: Aw, already. Time flies.

Suzanne: We hope that you'd had as much fun as we have. And if you have any questions, comments, or feedback, we'd love to hear from you. And you know, you can reach us on Facebook at [Facebook.com/CulipsPodcast](https://www.facebook.com/CulipsPodcast), or contact us directly by email at Contact@Culips.com.

Andrew: And don't forget to grab your study guide for this lesson on the website Culips.com.

Suzanne: All right, Andrew. That's it for today. Talk to you guys later.

Andrew: See ya! Bye.

Announcer: Do you like listening to Culips? If so, please show your support by leaving Culips a five-star rating and a review on iTunes or Stitcher. This helps new listeners find the show. So don't delay. Rate and review today.

Detailed Explanations

The magic word

Please is **the magic word**. In casual conversation, when someone uses the expression **the magic word**, they are referring to the word please. For example, if a child forgets to say please when asking for something, a parent might remind or prompt them to use please by saying, "What's **the magic word**?"

It is polite to use the word please when asking for something. You can use the word please at the beginning or end of a sentence. For commands or forceful requests (imperative sentences), insert the word please at the beginning of the sentence. For example, "Please stop talking." For questions (interrogative sentences), insert the word please at the end of the sentence. For example, "Can you stop talking, please?"

Using the word please is very important in conversation and shows good manners. Having good manners and being polite can help you have better day-to-day interactions. So remember to use the word please when you ask or request something from someone else.

Here are a couple more examples with **the magic word**:

Mateo:	Mommy, give me my milk.
Mother:	What's the magic word , honey?
Mateo:	Please. Please, give me my milk.
Mother:	Here you go. Drink up.

Sam:	Are you going to iron my shirts tonight? I have a big meeting at work tomorrow.
Susan:	Not if you ask me like that. Why don't you try using the magic word ?
Sam:	Can you iron my shirts tonight, please?
Susan:	OK. I'll iron them.

I'm sorry/excuse me

You can use **I'm sorry** or **excuse me** to politely get someone's attention or to politely interrupt someone so you can ask a question or make a request. In other words, if you need to get someone's attention or interrupt them, use **I'm sorry** or **excuse me** to be polite.

You can use **I'm sorry** or **excuse me** to get someone's attention. The phrases **I'm sorry** and **excuse me** are both polite ways of trying to draw or attract someone's attention when they are not focused on you. For example, in this episode's dialogue example, the customer gets the server's attention by saying, "**Excuse me**."

You can also use **I'm sorry** or **excuse me** to interrupt someone. If you need to speak with someone immediately, but they are speaking with someone else or otherwise occupied, you can use **I'm sorry** or **excuse me** to politely interrupt them. For example, if your boss asks you to get a report from a co-worker and that co-worker is talking, you could say, "**Excuse me**, my boss asked for the report," or "**I'm sorry**, my boss asked for the report."

It is important to note that you can also use **I'm sorry** to apologize, or before you deliver bad news or state a problem. Using the expression **I'm sorry** helps to soften the bad news or problem.

Here are a couple more examples with **I'm sorry/excuse me**:

Isabelle is at a restaurant, and the sun is shining in her eyes.

Isabelle: **Excuse me?**

Server: What can I do for you?

Isabelle: Do you think that you could pull the shade down on that window, please?
The sun is shining in my eyes.

Server: Sure thing!

Gordon has to leave work right away because his son is very sick. His supervisor is chatting with a co-worker.

Gordon: **I'm sorry** to interrupt. I just got a call from the school, and my son is very sick. Would it be OK if I left work right away?

Supervisor: Of course! Go and don't worry about work!

Gordon: Thank you.

I hate to do this, but [something]

If you have a problem at a restaurant, it is important to first state the problem in a polite way. The expression **I hate to do this, but [something]** is a polite way to voice your problem. Just replace the word something with the problem. For example, if you receive the wrong order, you can say, "**I hate to do this, but I got the wrong order.**"

As Andrew and Suzanne discuss in this episode, there are a number of ways that you can state the problem, such as:

- "I never do this, but [something]."
- "I rarely do this, but [something]."
- "I'm really sorry to do this, but [something]."
- "I'm usually not that person, but [something]."
- "I know this is annoying, but [something]."

All of the expressions listed above are courteous and polite ways to state your concern or problem. They can all be used when you need to tell a server at a restaurant that you have a problem. By using **I hate to do this, but [something]** or any of the above expressions, you are informing the server of your problem in a diplomatic way.

Here are a couple more examples with **I hate to do this, but [something]**:

Chris is eating at a restaurant and just found a hair in his meal.

Chris: **I hate to do this, but I just found a hair in my salad.** Any chance you could get me a new salad?

Server: **I'm so sorry** about that. I'll bring you a new salad on the house right away!

Nancy ordered a vegetarian pizza, but received a pepperoni pizza.

Nancy: **I hate to do this, but I got a pepperoni pizza** and I ordered a vegetarian pizza. I don't eat meat. **Would it be possible to get a vegetarian pizza?**

Server: Absolutely. **I'm sorry** about the mix-up. I'll get that for you right now!

Would it be possible to [something]?

If you have a problem at a restaurant, it is important not only to state what that problem is, but also to offer or ask for a solution. If you simply state the problem, without specifying what the server can do to solve the problem, you may come across as rude or discourteous.

You can use **would it be possible to [something]?** when offering a solution. Just replace the word something with what it is that you want. For example, if you get fries instead of a salad, you can first state the problem by saying, “**I hate to do this, but I got French fries instead of a salad,**” and then offer the solution by saying, “**Would it be possible to bring me a salad?**”

There are a number of ways you can ask for what you want or offer a solution, such as:

- “Could you [something]?”
- “Would you be so kind as to [something]?”
- “Any chance you could [something]?”
- “Do you think you could [something], please?”

Remember to keep your request or solution reasonable. For example, in this episode’s dialogue example, the customer asks the server to reheat their cold soup. This is a reasonable request. It would not have been reasonable of the customer to ask for the soup for free. In fact, asking to not pay for something can be seen as impolite and uncivilized.

Here’s one more example with **would it be possible to [something]?**:

Ben is allergic to pine nuts. He just received the meal he ordered, and it has pine nuts sprinkled on top.

Ben: Oh no! I’m allergic to pine nuts. I didn’t see pine nuts listed on the menu.
Would it be possible to get this without pine nuts, or to get another meal?

Server: Oh yeah, the chef sometimes likes to use pine nuts and parsley as a garnish. Sorry about that, sir. Let me get the chef to make you a new one right away.

Ben: Thanks so much for your help. I should have mentioned that I was allergic to pine nuts.

Server: Not a problem, sir.

Your meal will be on the house

In Canada, it is common practice for restaurants, coffee shops, or bistros to try and make up for mistakes or bad service by offering to reduce the price of the bill or giving a meal item for free.

As Andrew and Suzanne explain in this episode, if a waiter or server says, “**Your meal will be on the house**,” they mean your meal will be free. That is, the restaurant itself will pay for your meal.

There are many ways that a server might offer you a free meal, such as:

- “Have this [something] on the house.”
- “Would you like [something] on the house?”
- “It’s on the house.”
- “That’ll be on the house.”

It doesn’t matter how it is phrased. If you hear the words on the house, chances are that the server is offering you something for free, like a meal, dessert, or drink. If your server offers you something on the house, always remember to thank them!

Be careful: do not ask the server to have something on the house. Even if you are joking, this can come across as impolite.

Here are a couple more examples with **your meal will be on the house**:

Julie:	I’m sorry to do this, but there’s a bug in my soup. Could you get me a new one, please?
Server:	Absolutely! I’m so sorry . I don’t know how that happened, but I’ll get you another soup, and your meal will be on the house .
Julie:	Thanks!

Clara:	I’m usually not that person, but my chicken doesn’t look like it’s cooked properly. Would you be so kind as to cook it for a little longer?
Server:	Oh no! You’re right! Thanks for letting me know. I’ll take care of that right away. Your meal will be on the house .
Clara:	Thanks!

Quiz

- 1. True or false: If a server at a restaurant makes a mistake, you should ask for your meal on the house.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

- 2. John would like to politely ask for ketchup for his French fries. Which of the following should he say?**
 - a) "Can you get me ketchup?"
 - b) "Can I have ketchup, please?"
 - c) "Pass me the ketchup."
 - d) "I'm sorry, you didn't bring the ketchup."

- 3. Mary's fish tastes rotten. Which of the following can she use to state her problem?**
 - a) "Would it be possible to get another fish?"
 - b) "Could you bring me a new fish?"
 - c) "I rarely eat fish, and I don't like bad fish."
 - d) "I'm really sorry to do this, but the fish tastes funny."

- 4. True or false: You can use the expression excuse me to interrupt someone.**
 - a) true
 - b) false

- 5. Liza just discovered a hair in her sandwich. She would like a new sandwich. Which of the following is the most polite way of asking for a new sandwich?**
 - a) "There's a hair in my sandwich."
 - b) "There's a hair in my sandwich. I want a new one."
 - c) "I'm usually not that person, but there's a hair in my sandwich."
 - d) "Would it be possible to get a new sandwich?"

Quiz Answers

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

Episode credits

Hosts: Andrew Bates and Suzanne Cerreta

Music: *Something Elated* by Broke For Free

Episode preparation/research: Andrew Bates

Audio editor: Andrew Bates

Transcription: Heather Bates

Study guide writer: Stephanie Minelga

English editor: Stephanie MacLean

Business manager: Tsuyoshi Kaneshima

Project manager: Jessica Cox

Image: Dan Gold (<https://unsplash.com>)