

# Making Complaints Politely at a Restaurant

Intermediate (B1-B2)



## WARM-UP DISCUSSION

Think about your restaurant experiences. Talk about each topic below.

1. The best restaurant you've eaten at.
2. A problem you've had in a restaurant.
3. What you usually do if something goes wrong.

## VOCABULARY & SPEAKING

Part 1. Match the words and phrases with their meanings.

|             |         |               |
|-------------|---------|---------------|
| Bill        | Portion | Overcharged   |
| Undercooked | Burnt   | Disappointing |

1. \_\_\_\_\_ Not cooked enough
2. \_\_\_\_\_ Cooked too much
3. \_\_\_\_\_ Paid more money than you should
4. \_\_\_\_\_ How much food you get
5. \_\_\_\_\_ The amount you pay at the end of the meal
6. \_\_\_\_\_ Not as good as you expected

**Part 2. Choose three words and make your own short sentences about food or restaurants.**

|             |         |               |
|-------------|---------|---------------|
| Bill        | Portion | Overcharged   |
| Undercooked | Burnt   | Disappointing |

**Part 3. Read the two versions. Which one sounds more polite? Why? What's the difference in tone?**

1. "This soup's cold."

2. "Excuse me, I'm really sorry to bother you, but the soup is a bit cold."

**Discuss:**

- Is it always better to be polite when something goes wrong?

**Part 4. Match each phrase to its purpose.**

| Phrase                                               | Purpose                   |
|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. I really appreciate your help                     | A. Asking for help        |
| 2. Could I possibly speak to the manager?            | B. Appreciating service   |
| 3. I think there's a mistake with the bill.          | C. Starting a complaint   |
| 4. Could you fix it, please?                         | D. Softening the issue    |
| 5. Excuse me, I'm really sorry to bother you, but... | E. Escalating politely    |
| 6. I hate to say this, but...                        | F. Describing the problem |



**Part 5. Complete the dialogue using the polite phrases.**

**I really appreciate your help**

**Could I possibly speak to the manager?**

**I think there's a mistake with the bill.**

**Could you fix it, please?**

**Excuse me, I'm really sorry to bother you, but...**

**I hate to say this, but...**

**A (Customer):** \_\_\_\_\_ (1) my pasta is cold and the sauce tastes burnt.

**B (Waiter):** Oh, I'm so sorry about that. Would you like me to replace it for you?

**A:** Yes, please. \_\_\_\_\_ (2) I've already been waiting a while, and my friends have finished eating.

**B:** I understand. I'll get a new dish for you straight away.

*(Later, when the customer is paying)*

**A:** \_\_\_\_\_ (3) \_\_\_\_\_ (4) We didn't order two desserts, but they're on the bill.

**B:** Oh, you're right. I'll take them off right away.

**A:** Thank you. \_\_\_\_\_ (5)

**B:** Of course, I'll get her for you now.

**A:** Thanks very much. \_\_\_\_\_ (6)

**B:** You're very welcome — and sorry again for the mix-up.

**Part 6. Dialogue follow up.**

- Practise the conversation with a partner.
- Change the problem (cold food → wrong drink / slow service / missing order).
- Practise again, keeping your tone polite and calm.

**Part 7. Read each situation and say what you would politely say to the waiter. Use the phrases from the previous activity.**

- Your steak is undercooked.
- You were charged for a drink you didn't order.
- There's hair in your food.
- You've been waiting 30 minutes.
- The waiter brought the wrong dish.

**Part 8. Discuss the following questions.**

1. How do people complain in your country — directly or politely?
2. Do restaurants usually offer a discount or apology?
3. How do you think English-speaking customers complain differently?
4. Which country do you think has the most polite customers?

## REFLECTION

**Think about a time you had to make a complaint.**

1. What language or tone did you use?
2. Did the situation get resolved?
3. Which polite phrase from today would you use next time?

