

Topic: **Saying It Well**

Let's get started . . . What are common complaints that you hear in your native country?

**Story:** In 1956 a woman began writing "Dear Abby," an advice column in the newspaper. Readers sent letters about their problems, and "Abby" wrote suggestions for what they could do to solve the problems. Here are some excerpts from "Abby's" column.<sup>1</sup>



**Reader's Letter:**

**Dear Abby:**  
Last night, I went to the movies and took an aisle seat. Two different couples came in late, and each one asked me to move over so they could sit together. I said, "I got here early, and I like this seat." I did not go on to explain I have a torn tendon in my knee and needed the seat to stretch my leg. They became upset and were very rude. If the seats were so important, they could have arrived early or on time.  
-- Marsha

**Abby's Reply:**

**Dear Marsha:**  
Sometimes it isn't **what** you say to people, but the **tone** in which it is said. Perhaps if you had been less **terse** in your reply to the couples who asked you to move over, they would not have become hostile.  
-- Abby






**In pairs for 5 minutes, talk about:**

Abby suggests that Marsha's **tone** or her short (**terse**) reply made the couples become hostile. Do you agree? Why or why not?

**Share one of your partner's comments with the group.**

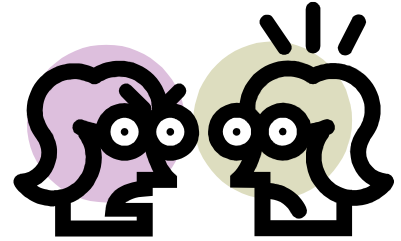
**Interview** 3 people about **how** people complain in their native culture. Write their names in the left column, and then write yes or no for each category. Say, "Do you complain \_\_\_\_\_?" Ask for an example.

Name	With few words? ("This food is bad.")	With many words? ("It's lovely but, I don't care for meat")	With a kind tone? 	I don't complain.  ?	Indirectly? 

**Discussion Questions - talk in pairs or small groups. Change groups from time to time.**

Americans may use an **apology** to be indirect and to soften words that people might not like to hear. Examples: *I'm sorry, but* you are standing on my coat. *I'm sorry to complain, but* your radio is really loud, and my baby is napping. Does your native culture use apologies when complaining? Give an example. Have you heard this in the U.S.? What was the complaint? What happened?

Has someone in this country ever been rude to you (or to someone you know?) Tell what happened. Did someone ever become angry or unfriendly about something that *you* said? Tell what happened.



Do you speak indirectly, directly, with a nice tone, with a strong tone, with body language or in some other way in these cases? Explain how and why.

An emergency.

Giving directions or instructions.

Talking to your boss.

Talking to your coworkers.

Talking to your children.

Talking to your spouse.

Talking to a government official.

Talking to the doctor.

**"If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."** Do you agree or disagree with these famous words from the movie "Bambi?" Explain.

In your home country do people use special words or phrases to be polite? How do people

\* make a complaint?

\* refuse a request or an invitation?

\* ask for a favor?

\* interrupt someone?

Imagine that a visitor comes to your home with her young grandson, and the child behaves badly (yelling, breaking things, etc.). At the end of the visit she asks, "Isn't my grandson wonderful?"



How do you respond? Do you tell your visitor what you really think, or do you tell a white lie? Are there any things you could say to your visitor that would be both honest and kind?

**New vocabulary:** advice column, excerpts, aisle, "go on to explain," torn tendon, rude, tone, terse, hostile, direct, indirect, apology, white lie, complain, complaint, favor, interrupt, imagine, body language

**Keep talking about it this week:** Listen to people complain, refuse, ask for favors or interrupt. Are their words direct or indirect? Share with your Talk Time group next week.

<sup>1</sup>Read it online: [http://www.uexpress.com/dearabby/?uc\\_full\\_date=20090324](http://www.uexpress.com/dearabby/?uc_full_date=20090324)