

## Functions 1

Adapted from "First Certificate Language Practice" by Michael Vince

### Explanations

- **What are functions?**

We can describe language by using words to talk about grammar (grammatical description). But we can also describe language by saying how it is used. This is the function of the language (functional description).

*If I were you, I'd leave now.* grammatical description: second conditional  
functional description: giving advice

- **Choosing what to say**

Our choice of words can be influenced by the situation we are in, by the person we are talking to, and by what we are talking about. Compare these different phrases for asking permission.

Asking permission from a friend:

*Is it all right if I use the phone?*

Asking permission from the same person, but about a more serious topic:

*Do you think I could possibly phone Australia?*

Asking permission from a stranger:

*Do you mind if I open the window?*

The first example was informal and friendly. The second two examples were more formal and polite. There are no exact rules about when to use an informal phrase and when to use a polite phrase, but usually we use polite language when we:

- talk to strangers or people we don't know well.
- talk to people who have higher status.
- talk about sensitive topics.

- This unit practises the following functions and possible responses.

**Asking for and giving advice**

**Agreeing and disagreeing**

**Apologising**

**Complaining**

**Ending a conversation**  
**Asking for and giving directions**  
**Greeting**  
**Asking how someone is**  
**Asking for information**  
**Introducing yourself**  
**and others Inviting**  
**Accepting and declining invitations**  
**Offering something**  
**Offering to do something**

- Key points**
- 1 Our choice of words depends on the situation, our relationship with the person we are talking to, and what we are talking about.
  - 2 We should respond in an appropriate way, informally or politely (see point 1) and in accordance with how the other person speaks to us first.
  - 3 If we do not use polite forms, there is a risk that the other person will think we are being rude. We may not get the result from the conversation that we want.