Functions
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
The purpose for which an utterance or unit of language is used.

Language functions are often described as categories of behaviour; e.g. requests, apologies, complaints, offers, compliments.

The functional uses of language cannot be determined simply by studying the grammatical structure of sentences.
For example, sentences in the imperative form may perform a variety of different functions:

- *Give me that book.* (Order)
- *Pass the jam.* (Request)
- *Turn right at the corner.* (Instruction)
- *Try the smoked salmon.* (Suggestion)
- *Come round on Sunday.* (Invitation)
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 the following phrases for asking permission.
1. Asking permission from a friend:
   • *Is it all right if I use the phone?*

2. Asking permission from the same person, but about a more serious topic:
   • *Do you think I could possibly phone Australia?*

3. 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.
Choose the most suitable response

a) Do you feel like going to the cinema this evening?
   1) That would be great.
   2) Thank you very much for your kind invitation.

b) More coffee anybody?
   1) Would it be all right if I had some more?
   2) I'd love some.

c) I wish you wouldn't smoke in here!
   1) I don't agree, I'm afraid.
   2) Sorry, shall I open the window?

d) Well, it was nice talking to you, but I have to dash.
   1) Yes, I enjoyed talking to you too.
   2) OK, see you.
e) Could you tell me whether this train stops at Hatfield?
1) I believe I could.
2) I believe it does.
f) Shall I collect the tickets for you?
1) That would be a real help.
2) Yes, I think you shall.
g) What would you do in my situation?
1) I think you should ask for a loan from the bank.
2) I thought you would ask for a loan from the bank.
h) How do you do. I'm Bill Thompson.
1) Very well thank you.
2) How do you do.
Answers

a. 1
b. 2
c. 2
d. 2
e. 2
f. 1
g. 1
h. 2
On the followings slides...

Complete the second sentence so that it has a similar meaning to the first sentence, using the word given.

Do not change the word given.

You must use between two and five words, including the word given.
a) Can I offer you a lift home? **like**
   • Would .................................. home?
b) What time does the next train leave? **tell**
   • Could.................................... the next train leaves?
c) I think you should sell the car. **I'd**
   • If I....................................... the car.
d) Shall I mow the lawn? **to**
   • Would............................... mow the lawn?
e) Am I going the right way for Downwood? **this**
   • Is.................................. Downwood?
f) Do you have to make so much noise! **wouldn't**
   • I...................... so much noise!
g) What's your advice? **should**
   • What do....................... do?
h) Let's go for a pizza. **going**
   • How......................... a pizza?
Answers

a) you like a lift
b) you tell me what time
c) were you I’d sell
d) you like me to
e) this is the right way for
f) wish you wouldn’t make
g) you think I should
h) about going for
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 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.