

## Classification of Refusals in American English

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These are some direct and indirect strategies for making refusals. The strategies we use will depend on the situation, the context, the participants, and the relationship between the participants.

### I. Direct Refusals

- I refuse.
- No
- I can't. / I won't. / I don't think so.

### II. Indirect Strategies

- **Apologizing** (e.g., "I'm [really] sorry..."; "I feel terrible...")
- **Wish** (e.g., "I wish I could, but...")
- **Giving an excuse, reason, explanation** (e.g., "My children will be home that night."; "I have a headache."; "I have to work.")
- **Offering an alternative**
  - I can do X instead of Y (e.g., "I'd rather..." "I'd prefer..." "I could go next week instead.")
  - Why don't you do X instead of Y (e.g., "Why don't you ask someone else?")
- **Promise of future acceptance** (e.g., "I'll do it next time"; "I promise I'll..." or "Next time I'll...")
- **Set condition for future or past acceptance** ("If you had asked me earlier, I would have...")
- **Attempt to dissuade the listener** ("I won't be good company tonight." ; I'm sure someone else will be more fun...")
- **Self defense** (e.g., "I'm trying my best, but...." "I'm doing all I can do, but...")
- **Avoidance**

### 1. Nonverbal

- Silence
- Hesitation (*Mmm... uhm... well...*)
- Do nothing
- Physical departure

### 2. Verbal

- Changing the topic of the conversation (“Oh, by the way, did you hear about...”)
- Repetition of part of request, etc. (e.g., “Monday?” “A birthday party?” “At eleven AM?”)
- Postponement (e.g., “I’ll think about it.” “I’ll check my schedule and let you know”)
- Showing doubt/ uncertainty (e.g., “Gee, I don’t know.” “I’m not sure.”)

## III. Other strategies to make a refusal (Adjuncts to Refusals)

1. Giving a positive opinion/feeling or agreement (“That’s a good idea, but...”; “I’d love to, but...” “I hope you have fun.”)
2. Showing empathy (e.g., “I realize you are in a difficult situation, but...”)
3. Use of pause fillers (e.g., “uhh”; “well”; “oh”; “uhm”)
4. Showing gratitude/ appreciation (e.g. “Thank you (so much) for inviting me, but...”)