

Polite (and not-so polite) Ways to Refuse

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1. Refusing an invitation

Sometimes, it's difficult to guess whether an invitation is real or merely a polite offer. In this case, a simple polite refusal can be used to judge the persons' true intentions.

改天吧

(gǎi tiān ba)

Maybe another day,

下次吧

(xià cì ba)

Maybe next time,

以后/回头再说

(yǐhòu /huítóu zài shuō)

Let's talk about it later.

e.g.

A: 去我家坐坐吧! (Qù wǒjiā zuòzuò ba!)

Go to my house and have a seat!

B: 改天吧。(Gǎitiān ba.)

Maybe another day.

A: 你没吃饭吗? 我请你吃。(Nǐ méi chīfàn ma? Wǒ qǐng nǐ chī.)

Did you not eat? Let me treat you to dinner.

B: 谢谢了, 下次吧。(Xièxie le, xià cì ba.)

Thank you, next time.

Of course, if they respond and confirm that their invitation was serious, accepting is the most appropriate way to respond.

2. Refusing an offer

Chinese people tend to decline gifts or favors multiple times before finally accepting them. This is a polite way to show modesty because it shows that you don't want to trouble others.

不用了

(bùyòng le)

No need.

不必了

(búbì le)

It's not necessary.

太麻烦你了

(tài máfan nǐ le)

It's too much of a bother.

别忙了

(biémáng le)

Please don't bother.

e.g.

A: 你用我的车吧。(Nǐ yòng wǒ de chē ba.)

You can use my car.

B: 不用了, 太麻烦你了。(Bùyòng le, tài máfan nǐ le.)

No, it's too much trouble for you.

A: 我借钱给你吧。(Wǒ jiè qián gěi nǐ ba.)

Let me lend you money.

B: 不必了, 谢谢。(Búbì le, xièxiè.)

No, thank you.

This initial refusal before final acceptance also happens often when people offer food or drink, especially when it is offered by someone they don't know well. That's why when Chinese people offer you something to eat or drink, and encourage you to "eat more," if you really want to say no, you can use the phrases:

我现在不想吃。

(Wǒ xiànzài bù xiǎng chī.)
I don't feel like eating right now.

谢谢，待会儿吧。

(Xièxie, dāi huìr ba.)
Thank you, maybe later.

3. Refusing unsolicited suggestions

When a salesperson approaches you with an offer you're not interested in, you can refuse them directly by saying

不要，谢谢。

(Búyào, xièxie.)
No, thanks.

When talking to someone you know, on the other hand, it's more common, and polite, to make an excuse or say you'll get back to them later. For example:

我考虑考虑

(Wǒ kǎolù kǎolù.)
I'll think it over.

我想想吧

(Wǒ xiǎngxiǎng ba.)
I'll think about it.

4. Refusing a request

If someone is asking you for information or advice and you don't feel comfortable doing so, you can try to redirect the conversation by switching the topic, putting it off, or dodging the question. You might say:

我不太清楚。

(Wǒ bú tài qīngchǔ.)

I am not really sure.

这样不好吧。

(zhèyàng bùhǎo ba)

This might not work.

可能不太方便。

(kěnéng bú tài fāngbiàn)

It might be too inconvenient.

e.g.

A: 你告诉我老板的想法, 好吗? (Nǐ gàosù wǒ lǎobǎn de xiǎngfǎ, hǎo ma?)

Can you tell me what the boss thinks?

B: 可能不太方便。(kěnéng bú tài fāngbiàn)

It might be too inconvenient.

5. Bonus phrases!

When someone gives you an unreasonable request or suggestion, and you want to decline directly, you can say:

不可能

(bùkěnéng)

Impossible!

想得美

(xiǎngdeměi)

You wish!

没门儿

(méiménr)

No way!

休想

(xiūxiǎng)

Never, not a chance!

These refusals are very straightforward and blunt, be careful about who you say them to. 想得美 is a little sarcastic, and 休想 is very firm and resolute, and it might sound like you're quite annoyed.

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