

Ways to soften tone and be tactful and less direct in written communication using “hedges”, “qualifiers” and other useful techniques

Qualifiers: lessen the full impact of the message being communicated; make things appear “less than 100%”

somewhat, a (little) bit, slight, slightly, small, a few, minor, insignificant, certain, possible, potential, not quite, etc.

Hedges: words that make matters seem less definite, certain—a bit more open-ended and **less direct**.

seem, appear, reportedly, apparently, likely, unlikely, essentially, actually, basically, possibly, perhaps. Reportedly and allegedly are also frequently used in political and conflict analysis.

Other techniques:

- Use “not very”+ adjective Ex. instead of “useless”, say “not very useful” or “not very constructive”, instead of “destructive, harmful”
- Use modals like “might” “may” “could” “would” instead of the more definite “will” Ex. This *may* pose a problem in the future.
- Make a question from a statement. Compare: That would be too confrontational. vs. Wouldn’t that perhaps be too confrontational?
- Use introductory phrases such as *I’m afraid... With all due respect...Frankly...In fact...To be honest...Perhaps...etc.*
- Use euphemisms and other roundabout expressions
Ex. What you sent us was not what we wanted.
*What you sent us was different from what we were expecting. OR...
... inconsistent with our expectations (very UN!)*

Ex. The second round of negotiations was a failure.
vs. *...were extremely disappointing.*

- Use passive voice or eliminate the actor, remove the pronoun
We are still awaiting the outcome. vs. A final outcome is still pending

Or find other (alternate) ways to say things such as “The two parties totally disagree!” Try instead: *....are not in agreement about...do not see eye to eye...are deadlocked on....etc.*