The Imperative

In English, as in many other languages, **we can influence the person we are speaking to** by prompting them to perform or to not perform a specific action. The most direct way of doing this is through use of the imperative, as the name of this verbal mood indicates. The imperative mood in English is generally used to **give an order, to prompt someone to do something, to give a warning or to give instructions**.

There are several distinguishable forms of the imperative in English: affirmative, negative, and exhortative, as well as the more cordial ways of expressing an order. Let's look at the characteristics of each of these together.

Affirmative Imperative

This is the most common and direct form of the imperative. There is only second person singular and plural. It is formed by using the base form of the verb (*infinitive* without the *"to"*).
Hurry up *or you'll miss the show!*
Switch *the TV **off***.
Put *the flour, milk, and eggs in a bowl and **whisk** until smooth.*

Given that this is a very direct way to give orders, it can be accompanied by other expressions such as *just*, *please*, and *if you don't mind* in order to soften the tone.
*Just **wait** for me here, please.*
Close *the door, if you wouldn't mind.*

Negative Imperative

The negative form of the affirmative imperative requires the addition of the auxiliaries *do + not* (*don't* in its contracted form) to be added to the Base form of the verb.
Don't be *late!*
Do not go *to work today.*
Don't keep *opening the fridge!*

Exhortative Imperative

More than an imperative, this imperative is an exhortation and only applies to the <u>first-person plural</u>. In some cases, it is accompanied by *please*. It is formed using the prefix *Let's + the base form of the verb* in the affirmative form.
Let us observe *a minute of silence, please.*

In the negative form, the addition of the negation *not* is required between the prefix and the verb.
Let's not go *in, please.*

When the prefix *Let* is followed by a personal pronoun other than *us*, the meaning changes to *"allow"*.
Let me do *the washing up for once.*

Suggestions

In some cases, the imperative can be used to give suggestions or to make proposals. In these cases, you're including yourself in the action, and there are two constructions:
Let's + base form of the verb (Exhortative Imperative)
Let's not argue.
Let's take *a holiday!*

Why don't we + base form of the verb
Why don't we go *to the beach?*
Why don't you tell *her the truth?*

Imperative + personal pronoun

In some cases, a personal pronoun can be added to reinforce the imperative value. But, be careful to not appear impolite. This verbal form is only used for a **strong and decisive order**.
A: Can I go home?
B: No, ***you wait*** *another 10 minutes.*

Don't you tell *me what to do!*

Imperative addressed to a group of people

In some situations, we must speak to a clearly-defined group of people. In that case, we can use words like *somebody* , *everybody*, and *all*.
Somebody call *an ambulance. Quick!*
Everybody sit down*, please.*
All rise! (used in courtrooms)

Imperative + do

n some cases, the auxiliary *Do* can be added to give a more formal and courteous appearance to the imperative, and also to emphasize it.
Do come *in!*
Do come *and visit us next time.*
Do help *yourselves to the buffet!*

Use of the Imperative

Give instructions or orders

Adults do not usually give each other orders, unless they are in a position of authority. The intonation of an order is important: each word is stressed, and the tone falls at the end of the sentence:
Sit down now! ('Sit', 'down' and 'now' are all stressed, and the tone falls on 'now'.)

However, adults can give orders to children and to animals:
Here are some orders you could give your pet dog:
Come here!
Sit!
Heel!
Fetch!

Instructions are given to you by other people, or even by an app such as your GPS.
Turn left.
Go ahead.
Push the button.

Warning

You can use the imperative to *warn someone of danger*. All the words in the warning are stressed, but the last word has a higher tone than the first word:

Watch out!
Look out!
Don't cross!

Advice

When you give advice using the imperative, the words are stressed normally:

Eat an apple – it's much better for you than a biscuit!
Don't tell him you're resigning now! Wait until Monday when he's in a better mood.

You can often read articles in magazines that *give advice on a subject*. Sometimes, this advice is presented as *Dos and don'ts*. For example:

Traveling long-distance
Do try to sleep well the night before
Do drink plenty of water
Do try to walk about the plane during the flight
Don't drink alcohol
Don't eat heavy meals
Don't wear restrictive clothing

Requests and invitations

You can also use the imperative to make a request, but you should use a *polite word* before the verb:

Please take a seat.
Please wait here.
Please hold the line.
Please don't smoke here.

In written English, you might also see "Kindly" used as a polite word:

Kindly return the documents as soon as possible.
Kindly forward this to the Sales and Marketing department.
Kindly send me 2 copies of your brochure.

For invitations, you just use the regular imperative form but without stressing any of the words. You should speak in a calm manner, instead:

Have a sit.

SUMMARIZING

Sometimes too much theory can be a little daunting. Don't worry!
I've made you a summary table to review the previous information and to
have the basic concepts together with concrete examples.

Type of Imperative	Structure	Example
Affirmative Imperative	Verb (base form)	*Come here right now, I have to talk to you*
Negative Imperative	*Don't / Do not +* verb (base form)	*Don't quit now, you're so close to the finish line.*
Exhortative or suggestion	*Let's +* verb (base form)	*Let's leave this place please, I don't feel comfortable.*
Imperative + personal pron.	Personal pron. + verb (base form)	*Don't you tell me what to do.*
Imperative directed at group	Indefinite pron. + verb (base form)	*Everybody be quiet, please.*
Do + imperative	*Do +* verb (base form)	*Do finish your homework.*