# Positive Face

[**Face**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Face_(self_image)) is the public [self-image](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self_image) that every adult tries to project. Brown and Levinson (1987) characterized positive face by desires to be liked, admired and related to positively, noting that one would threaten positive face by ignoring someone. Positive face refers to one's [self-esteem](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Self-esteem) – wanting to be liked. During any social interaction, [cooperation](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cooperation) is needed amongst the [participants](http://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/participation) to maintain each other’s faces. Loss of face by any participant can lead to embarrassment or distress.

## Face-Threatening Acts

According to Brown and Levinson, positive face exists universally in human [culture](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture). In social interactions, face-threatening acts are at times inevitable based on the terms of the conversation. A face-threatening act is an act that inherently damages the face of the [addressee](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Addressee) or the speaker by acting in opposition to the wants and desires of the other. Most of these acts are verbal, however, they can also be conveyed in the prosodic features of speech (such as [tone](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tone_(linguistics)), [inflection](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Inflection), etc.) or in non-verbal forms of [communication](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Communication).

Positive face is threatened when the speaker or hearer does not care about their interactor’s feelings, wants, or does not want what the other wants.

## Examples of possible face-threatening acts

* *Orders, advice, reminders, threats, or warnings*
* *Expressions of envy or admiration, or expressions of strong negative emotion toward the hearer (e.g. hatred, anger, lust)*
* *Expressions of disapproval e.g. insults, accusations, complaints, contradictions, disagreements, or challenges.*
* *Disrespect, mention of topics which are inappropriate in general, or in the context.*
* *Belittling or boasting.*
* *Use of sarcasm directed at a participant or someone important to them.*
* *Sensitive topics that relate to politics, race, or religion are raised.*
* *Interrupting, non-sequiturs (irrelevant comments).*
* *The speaker misidentifies the hearer in an offensive or embarrassing way. This may occur either accidentally or intentionally. Generally, this refers to the misuse of address terms in relation to status, gender, or age. e.g. Addressing a young woman as "ma’am" instead of "miss."*

# Politeness Strategies

Politeness strategies are used to formulate messages in order to save the hearer’s face. They are used to make the hearer feel good about himself, his interests or possessions, and are most usually used in situations where the audience knows each other fairly well.

Examples:

* *Watch out!*
* *Hear me out:...*
* *Leave it, I'll clean up later.*
* *You look sad. Can I do anything?*
* *If we help each other, I guess, we’ll both sink or swim in this course.*
* *That’s a nice haircut you got; where did you get it?*
* *Perhaps, he might have taken it, maybe.*
* *You couldn’t find your way to lending me a thousand dollars, could you?*
* *It’s not too much out of your way, just a couple of blocks.*
* *I hope offense will not be taken.*
* *I’m sorry; it’s a lot to ask, but can you lend me a thousand dollars?*
* *A request is softened, made less direct, and imposing (e.g. past continuous ‘I was wondering’; informal tag ‘What d’you reckon?)*
* *Anticipatory thanks, promises, and compliments (e.g. ‘I knew you would say yes. You’re an angel.’).*
* *Indirect strategy e.g. say “Wow, it’s getting cold in here”, insinuating that it would be nice if the listener would get up and turn up the thermostat without directly asking the listener to do so.*

**An example is given in the following dialogue from the television soap opera, "**[**Neighbours**](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neighbours)**":**

Clarrie: So I said to him, forget your books for one night, throw a party next weekend.

Helen: A party at number 30! What will Dorothy say about *that*?

Clarrie: Well, what she doesn't know won't hurt her. Of course, I'll be keeping my eye on things, and (SIGNAL OF OPENING) that brings me to my next problem. (EXPLAIN PROBLEM) You see, these young people, they don't want an old codger like me poking my nose in, so I'll make myself scarce, but I still need to be closer to hand, you see. So, (ASK FAVOR) I was wondering, would it be all right if I came over here on the night? What d'you reckon?

Helen: Oh, Clarrie, I...

Clarrie: Oh (MINIMIZATION) I'd be no bother. (REINFORCE EXPLANATION) It'd mean a heck of a lot to those kids.

Helen: All right.

Clarrie: (THANK WITH BOOST) I knew you'd say yes. You're an angel, Helen.

Helen: Ha! (laughs)

*(All of this is done in attempt to avoid a great deal of imposition on the hearer and is concerned with proceeding towards a goal in the smoothest way and with sensitivity to the participants.)*