


UNITED WISDOM

# Requests, demands and agreements: three different actions with words

Relationships and Intimacy

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## Epigraph

> *“good faith and justice”*

*George Washington, Farewell Address, 1796, international-relations paragraph; excerpt from its reproduction in The Voter’s Text Book, 1868. A historical political position, not an instruction for personal relationships.*

## What this article is about

Imagine an ordinary evening. One adult tells another they need to arrive earlier. The other says they will try. The following day, the first considers an agreement broken, while the second believes they merely heard a wish. Real disappointment is possible here, but whether an obligation was accepted remains uncertain. Words passed between people; a shared understanding of what those words accomplished may never have emerged. The difference between a request, a demand and an agreement matters precisely in these small conversations which later shape plans.

This article distinguishes three actions in speech through their subject, conditions of response and accepted commitment. It does not divide people into kindly requesters and bad, demanding partners. A demand may concern a real obligation, a request may conceal pressure, and an agreement may remain too vague to carry out. The issue is not an attractive name for an utterance, but what one person proposes and what the other actually answers. All everyday scenes below are fictional; they establish neither the effectiveness of a communication method nor a legal assessment of obligations.

## I. A sentence does not exhaust the action

Words about tomorrow evening can report a fact, express a wish, ask for a changed plan or announce an obligation. These actions differ even when the sentence uses identical words. Reminding someone of an accepted promise differs from seeking agreement for the first time. Announcing that a building will close differs from a manager's instruction. Understanding an utterance involves recovering its place in the conversation: what was known, what is being asked now, and which answer would be sufficient. Grammar helps without settling everything.



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In an imagined scene, Mark tells Lena he needs the car tomorrow. If he is reporting his own plan, no specific action has yet been proposed to Lena. If he is asking her to yield the shared car, her agreement and tomorrow's tasks become relevant. If an agreed schedule already applies, the words may serve as a reminder. Each possibility calls for a different response. It is not fair to accuse Lena of breaking an agreement without establishing which possibility was intended and whether she accepted its condition.

The distinction can be named directly, without a theoretical dispute. Are you telling me about your plan or asking me to change mine? This is an editorial example of clarification, not a universal formula. Someone may answer briefly, decline discussion or remain uncertain themselves. The exchange then stays unfinished. That is more accurate than invented consent. It permits planning around uncertainty rather than grounding tomorrow in a promise nobody clearly made and which will later need defending retrospectively.

Before choosing a polite tone, it therefore helps to identify the action. What do I want my words to do: inform, propose, seek consent or recall an obligation? These can combine, but their combination benefits from being visible. Urgency does not automatically turn information into an order. Intimacy does not turn a wish into a contract. A habit of meeting someone else's wishes does not itself confirm an obligation in this new instance. We need the particular subject of the conversation rather than a general verdict on the relationship.

## II. A request leaves the answer open

In a request, I propose a particular action and await an answer which has not been predetermined. This does not mean the outcome is unimportant to me. We can request something significant, feel disappointed by refusal and discuss consequences for our own plans. Yet the other's option to answer differently remains part of the proposal. If refusal is prohibited, calling it a request adds no freedom. On the official CNVC page, requests and needs belong to a communication model; we use it as an approach, not a proven law of relationships.

Imagine Lena asks Mark to collect an order before the shop closes. She needs the items today, but he may be far away and short of time. A specific request identifies what is wanted: which order, where, by when, and whether an answer is needed now. It need not include an extensive account of every feeling. The question of availability nevertheless remains real. Saying today is impossible tells Lena about an available option; it does not itself prove indifference, selfishness or insufficient love.

After refusal, another route can be proposed if the person wants to discuss one. Lena might ask about tomorrow or find a different arrangement herself. This does not mean bargaining until refusal disappears. Repeated new requests may effectively remove the option to end a

conversation. A participant can say they no longer want to consider alternatives. The editorial boundary here is voluntary continuation. It promises no freedom from disappointment and requires no performance of happiness when desired help is unavailable.

Refusal does not mean the absence of every relationship or obligation. Someone may reject a new request while retaining previously accepted tasks. Naming this separately keeps a single answer from becoming a verdict on an entire partnership. Conversely, an expression of love is not specific agreement to collect an order. A request becomes clearer when the desired action is separated from general proof of affection. The answer can then concern that action without turning an everyday question into an examination supposedly determining a person's entire worth.

## III. A demand needs grounds

A demand treats an action as something owed rather than merely wanted. It may rest on an accepted obligation, authority, a rule or a claimed interest. Those grounds need identifying and checking; the word must does not establish them. Reminding someone about a deadline for agreed work differs substantially from attempting to obligate a partner to new actions because they seem obvious. This article addresses everyday clarity, without determining the legal force of demands in a particular country or organisation.

In a fictional example, people previously agreed to divide payment for a shared order. One asks the other to pay the agreed amount on the chosen day. This may be a reminder of an accepted obligation. If the price increases and the conditions change, earlier consent does not necessarily extend to the new amount. Fulfilling an old term and proposing its alteration need separating. Otherwise, a demand silently expands: someone accepted one task and is subsequently credited with accepting every future version the other considers reasonable.

Real obligations do not make every method of presenting them acceptable. Threats, humiliation or restrictions on essential resources are not justified by the existence of a debt. Someone may also acknowledge a demand while objecting to how it should be fulfilled. They might accept that belongings must be returned while declining an unplanned face-to-face meeting. The subject of the obligation, conditions of fulfilment, available alternatives and consequences remain different questions. They cannot be reduced to a single characterisation as complete agreement or evasion of all responsibility.

In ordinary discussion, it helps to ask where the demand came from and precisely which earlier decision supports it. An answer may reveal a genuine agreement, a misunderstanding or different ideas about shared rules. It does not guarantee resolution. Under threats or coercion, the article does not propose challenging authority through argument or proving freedom through refusal; safety and appropriate local help take separate priority. Logical clarity matters

without requiring a dangerous exchange to establish a perfectly accurate name for another person's words.

## IV. An agreement arises between participants

An agreement requires more than one side describing a plan in detail. The other participant must accept the relevant conditions. Our everyday analysis separates what was proposed, heard and agreed. A person can understand a request perfectly and decline it, accept only part, or agree to the result without accepting its deadline. Saying we agreed should refer to terms genuinely shared rather than the ideal version in one person's imagination. Otherwise, agreement becomes a way to attribute one's own decision to someone else.

Mark proposes visiting relatives together on Sunday and staying until evening. Lena says she can arrive in the morning but must leave after lunch. That does not accept the whole initial plan. A new option has emerged, which Mark can still answer. If he continues treating an evening return as settled, a significant distinction disappears. The clearer way to finish this fictional exchange concerns the particular term: do both confirm a morning arrival and departure after lunch, or does the question remain open?

Consent need be neither ceremonial nor recorded in a long document. Everyday life contains simple exchanges with a clear subject. When consequences matter, however, confirming the conditions on which action depends is useful. Silence and an absence of objections should not automatically be assigned the meaning of agreement. Their significance depends on context and established rules; this article offers no legal judgment about silence. For a new voluntary proposal, an unclear response is better treated as incompleteness than as permission to control another person's time.

Clarification has a limit: every detail cannot be described in advance, nor every future disagreement eliminated. Making already significant conditions visible is enough. If timing depends on work, that matters. If a bag's colour changes nothing, it need not be discussed. Specificity serves a shared task rather than control over a partner's every movement. Personal space remains, and nobody must confirm an endless list of details before an ordinary agreement is recognised as adult, honest and sufficiently responsible.

## V. Subject and timing matter more than a general promise

Saying I will be more considerate may be sincere without clearly defining tomorrow's actions. For one person, consideration means warning of delays; for another, it means spending more evenings together. Unstated meanings make a general answer easy to turn later into a promise the speaker never intended. Strengthening it with always cannot repair this uncertainty. A wider promise admits more interpretations. What we need is not an absolute guarantee of care, but the intelligible subject of a particular decision.

In an imagined conversation, Lena explains that preparing dinner is difficult without knowing when Mark will return. He offers to report delays after six. One understands this as writing as soon as a delay becomes known; the other imagines a message at six precisely. Clarifying a short condition can remove that difference in understanding, without guaranteeing performance. They might choose notification whenever a later-than-usual return becomes apparent. Both accepting the wording matters more than one person composing it for two.

An agreement also contains limits of responsibility. Mark can promise his own message, but not uninterrupted reception, his manager's mood or an absence of traffic. This does not excuse every effort in advance. It distinguishes one's own action from an uncontrolled outcome. Changed circumstances can be reported and the next plan discussed. Serious tasks require other procedures and professional conditions, which an everyday article cannot replace. Proportion is useful here: do not construct a commitment around something the participant does not actually control.

Performance and the quality of a relationship are assessed separately. A missed message has factual consequences which can be discussed. It does not automatically reveal a true motive or prove all earlier intimacy false. Repeated failures also cannot be dismissed because intentions are good. Between accusing a personality and ignoring an outcome lies a specific conversation: what was accepted, what happened, what harm followed, and what decision is now available? That conversation need not identify a guilty character in place of a known action.

## VI. Conditional consent remains conditional

Saying I will try often communicates an intention without a firm commitment. Unless the speaker clarifies otherwise, it helps to hear it that way. The phrase is neither empty nor necessarily deceptive. Someone may not yet know their schedule or ability to help. A plan requiring confirmation cannot proceed as though uncertainty has disappeared. A useful question concerns the information needed: when will you be able to answer definitely? The answer might be tomorrow, leaving the organiser to find another option.

In a fictional scene, Mark can arrive at eight if his meeting ends on time. Lena understands, but must confirm a journey for a third person beforehand. Both positions contain something substantial. Mark need not invent certainty, and Lena need not ground an important plan in a conditional answer. They may decide the journey is not yet agreed even though an intention to help exists. Uncertainty is not an insult. Trouble arises when it is concealed and subsequently presented as an unconditional promise accepted beforehand.

The condition also matters when retelling the answer. Telling a third participant that Mark will definitely arrive changes his original response. The new listener does not know consent depended on the meeting ending. Responsibility for that retelling should not automatically transfer to Mark. This is particularly significant in shared work, caring for a relative or distributing several people's time. The article determines no legal compensation, but proposes accurately describing a chain of promises. Who communicated which degree of certainty, and who later increased it without additional agreement?

Seeking a more definite response is not always necessary. Sometimes conditionality can be accepted and plans adapted: retain an alternative, choose something less dependent, or return to the question later. These are editorial options rather than organisational guarantees. An agreement may consist precisely in checking availability at a particular time. What is promised then is a future answer, not the final action. The distinction is small but prevents accusing someone of failing to travel when they promised only to report whether travel was possible and did exactly that.

## VII. Sources ask different questions

In Chapter XIV of Leviathan, Hobbes distinguishes contract, gift and promise within his theory of transferring rights. Chapter XVII connects obligations with the coercive authority of the state. This is historical political reasoning. It permits neither enforcing domestic arrangements through threats nor describing contemporary law. The limited point for this article is that different actions with words should not merge simply because each uses a future tense. In Washington's Farewell Address, fulfilling existing engagements is distinguished from extending them. International politics remains its separate historical context.

In the first section of Kant's work, a false promise raises distinct questions of advantage and duty. Kant offers an ethical argument, not a measured probability of trust. In the CNVC model, needs and requests matter as elements of communication. This is a practical school with its own premises. These sources constitute no shared experiment and prove no identical doctrine of freedom: political theory, duty ethics and a communication model perform different work.

Our comparison is editorial. It highlights the subject of an action in speech, voluntary response and honesty about accepted commitments. It cannot establish that every refusal is morally

indifferent or that close relationships contain no common duties. Neither can it establish the reverse: that a promise's moral importance permits attributing it to someone without consent. Different theories retain their own questions about duty, authority and permissible coercion. Useful reading preserves those disagreements instead of assembling authoritative names around a contemporary technique.

This caution need not obstruct practical conversation. Clarifying an everyday plan does not require accepting all of Hobbes's or Kant's philosophy. A question that exposes uncertainty can be used while a theoretical dispute remains open. A source is no stamp making our proposed phrase right for everyone. It supplies material for comparison and objection. Readers may accept the distinction between a request and an agreement while rejecting a particular method of clarification. That is independent assessment rather than a failure to learn the article.

## VIII. Changed conditions require another conversation

Circumstances can change after a decision is accepted. Inability to fulfil a term, wanting to revise it, and cancelling it unilaterally need distinguishing. These events differ. Someone may honestly warn of an obstacle while the other still encounters consequences and can name them. Reporting a change does not magically erase the earlier obligation. Equally, an obligation does not make every form of fulfilment available. The conversation needs present facts rather than a general conclusion that a good person can always accomplish what was promised.

Imagine Mark was supposed to collect belongings but became ill. He reports that travelling is impossible and suggests discussing a replacement. Lena must now find another route and may be unhappy. Recognising that burden is more useful than demanding immediate understanding as proof of love. Her disappointment, conversely, does not make Mark physically capable of arriving. Two realities can coexist: the promised action did not happen, and its cause genuinely restricts ability. The next decision need not deny either one.

A new agreement requires confirmation like the first. Suggesting asking an acquaintance does not mean that acquaintance has agreed. Cancelling one time does not automatically appoint another. The next option contains its own answers and limits. Sometimes these are absent and the task remains unresolved. That is unpleasant but accurate. Naming missing confirmation is better than creating an appearance of completion which later produces renewed accusations. The significant work concerns altering the plan, rather than finding a more persuasive name for an intention.

Future rules can also be reconsidered if both participants want this. One failure does not, however, automatically establish consent to permanent monitoring, compulsory reports or access to private correspondence. Such measures require their own discussion and

assessment. Everyday clarity is not purchased by surrendering privacy. Where a relationship already contains pressure and threats, the article proposes no joint experiment. In a calm context, distinguishing the event, consequences and possible change is enough, without turning each clarification into proof of a right to manage someone else.

## IX. Ending an exchange without invented consent

At the end, naming the conversation's actual result helps. The request was heard, but no answer is available. A demand is disputed. One term is accepted and another remains open. Both accepted the plan. These four outcomes differ and need not sound like victories. An unfinished discussion can frustrate people, particularly when action is urgent. Speed nevertheless does not turn unaccepted terms into consent. When confirmation is missing, the next plan must account for that gap. Otherwise, organisational urgency becomes grounds for controlling someone's time without a clear answer.

A short summary can be offered for checking rather than delivered as a final record on behalf of both. For example: I understood that you are available in the morning but have not confirmed the evening. The other person may correct this summary too. Checking should not become pressure: I have already written it down, so agree. A useful form stays open to repair. It requires neither identical words from both sides nor indifference to different meanings. Honestly acknowledging an unaccepted term matters more than repeating an elegant phrase.

If agreement is unavailable now, another contact can be proposed or someone can make their own decision within their available options. A unilateral decision may be necessary: declining a trip or organising one's day differently. It should be named as one's own decision rather than a common agreement. The other retains their response and constraints. Situations with mandatory procedures follow relevant rules which were not checked here. This article proposes accurately describing everyday exchanges, not a universal right to exit every obligation through a single utterance.

Finally, clear conversation cannot guarantee conscientious performance. It removes one particular uncertainty: what was proposed and accepted. Future action remains a separate event. Someone may err, abandon a promise or encounter an obstacle, calling for another assessment. A single confirmation does not establish that a relationship has been repaired. The practical result is more modest: participants better distinguish a wish, a claimed obligation and a jointly accepted plan, allowing discussion of later events without first inventing a story about what supposedly always went without saying.

## What this means in practice

Choose a calm everyday conversation without threats, coercion or danger from disagreement. Remembering it mentally is enough; no written record is required. Identify one sentence about a future action and ask what it did: expressed a wish, requested an answer, recalled an obligation or proposed an agreement? If that remains uncertain, preserve the uncertainty. Assigning a convenient meaning simply because it makes later disappointment easier to explain is unnecessary. The exercise diagnoses nobody and tests nobody's love.

Next, separate the subject from the relationship generally. Which action, deadline or condition was actually named? Who answered, and was the answer unconditional consent, partial consent, an intention to try, refusal or no answer? Notice a possible difference between the response and what you later relied on. This is no automatic admission of fault; it clarifies the basis of a plan. If discussion remains possible and voluntary, ask one question about a missing condition rather than conducting a lengthy interrogation about every earlier promise.

After clarification, name the result at its appropriate scale. One term is confirmed; the question remains open; an earlier condition changed; another option is needed. Performance and consequences have not yet been checked. If someone does not want to continue, your own planning can account for their unavailable answer without calling it consent. Under danger, skip the exercise and seek accessible local help through a suitable contact method. In ordinary circumstances, a small clarity consists in words identifying the action actually accomplished in speech rather than a convenient retrospective version of events.

## Key quotation

> *“their genuine sense”*

*George Washington, Farewell Address, paragraph on existing engagements, 1796; an excerpt. International politics remains different from everyday communication.*

## Connections between traditions

| Comparison | Shared question | Difference |
|---|---|---|
| Hobbes and Kant | What makes a promise significant | Political force and ethical duty provide different grounds |
| Kant and CNVC | How another person should be treated | Duty ethics is not a communication sequence |
| CNVC and editorial analysis | How a desired action is expressed | A needs model does not confirm acceptance of a particular plan |
| Hobbes and everyday agreements | How gift, request and obligation differ | Historical transfer-of-rights theory is not a contemporary legal assessment |
| Editorial clarification and promise ethics | What was actually accepted | Checking understanding does not establish future performance |

This is a map of editorial comparisons. It establishes neither agreement among philosophical schools nor the effectiveness of a single technique.

## Sources

• George Washington — Farewell Address, 1796, reproduced in The Voter's Text Book, 1868. Selected international-relations paragraphs read; historical speech, not contemporary law or a communication model.

• Thomas Hobbes — Leviathan, 1651. Selected paragraphs in Chapters IV, XIV and XVII on words, contracts, gifts and state force were read, not the entire book. Historical theory, not contemporary law.

• Immanuel Kant — Fundamental Principles of the Metaphysic of Morals, translated by Thomas Kingsmill Abbott. The first section's false-promise argument was read; ethical reasoning, not a study of communication effectiveness.

• Center for Nonviolent Communication — The Purpose of NVC. Model description and needs/requests sections read; a school's position without claims of universality or guaranteed outcomes.

## Tags

request, demand, agreement, speech action, promise, consent, refusal, conditions, obligation, deadline, conversation subject, clarity, uncertainty, responsibility, confirmation, voluntary participation, boundaries, plans, revision, performance, Thomas Hobbes, Immanuel Kant, CNVC, philosophy of language, ethics, relationships, everyday conversation, right to correct

## About the authors

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