

# Backhanded Compliments

## Part One

### What is a “Backhanded Compliment”?

Backhanded compliments (also known as “left-handed compliments”) aren’t really compliments at all. In fact, they’re insults in disguise. A statement is said that appears to be a compliment, but actually contains an insult or criticism.

When someone gives you a compliment, it makes you feel good. A backhanded compliment, however, can have the opposite effect.

I never expected you to do so well on your test!



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### A “Backhanded Compliment” – An Example

*“That necklace is nice. My grandma would love it.”*

At first it seems as if the person is complimenting you for wearing such a nice necklace. However, the person is also insulting you by saying that the necklace is old-fashioned, and is not something young people wear today.

### A Few Recommended Ways to Respond to a “Backhanded Compliment”

Here are some effective ways to respond:

1. **Focus on the positive part of the sentence and ignore the insult.** By doing so the speaker will see he/she did not succeed in hurting you.

*“I’m glad you think the necklace is nice, too!”*

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2. **Respond with humor.** By doing so you will surprise the speaker and diffuse the tension between you. :Where is your cell phone? Let’s call your grandmother and tell her you are buying her a present!”
3. **Change the subject** – when you do so the speaker will see he/she did not succeed in hurting you.

## Part Two

Read the examples of backhanded compliments appearing on the next page. Then follow these instructions:

1. Choose five examples of backhanded compliments. Explain what the compliment and insult is in each one.
2. These examples were written by adults.
  - a. Add at least five examples of backhanded compliments that a teenager might say.
  - b. Do you frequently encounter use of “backhanded compliments” in your school?
3. Choose six examples and write a response to each one. It can be a response focusing on the compliment part of the statement, or using humor.

**Think about your responses carefully - make sure that you aren't responding with another backhanded compliment!**

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1. You look great today! It's amazing what a little make up can do.
2. Your haircut makes your nose look smaller.
3. You're so independent. It's no wonder you haven't found a partner yet.
4. You actually look attractive in this light.
5. That's a beautiful photo of you. I didn't recognize you at first.
6. Wow, how surprising! This food really tastes good!
7. I never expected you to have such a tastefully decorated apartment.
8. You're not as dumb as you look.
9. Your Instagram makes you seem so fun!
10. I didn't expect you to get the job - Congratulations!
11. You organized the files so well - I never guessed that you had done it.
12. You seem so nice to be a teacher.
13. I never expected your children to be so well behaved.
14. You are so charming when you make the effort.
15. You are so pretty on the inside.

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