Who are you talking to?

A register is a variety of a language used for a particular purpose or in a particular social setting. Different situations require different registers. The examples below go from the least polite to the most polite.

A  Give me a hand, will ya?
B  Please help me.
C  Will you help me?
D  Could you help me?
E  Would you mind helping me?

You might not hesitate to use A to speak to a friend or a close family member at home, but it would be inappropriate to use A to speak to your teacher in the classroom. Just as you can be not polite enough, you can also be too polite. For example, a boss is probably not going to use E to assign a task to someone that works for him. It would be too polite and would imply that the employee had a choice whether or not to complete the task, which would be misleading.

DIRECTIONS: Read each sentence and its setting/characters below. Indicate whether the sentence is too polite (A), just right (B), or not polite enough (C) for the setting and characters. Write your answer on the line.

1. “Please take a seat.” Teacher speaking to a student in the classroom.
2. “Would you please kick that ball back to me?” One kid to another on the playground.
3. “I expect this report to be on my desk in the morning.” Boss to employee in an office.
4. “Will you set the table, please?” Mother to daughter in the home.
5. “Get that thing out of here.” Son to father in the home.
6. “Would you like to buy some candy for my soccer team fundraiser?” Teenager to an adult neighbor.
7. “Would you mind having it finished by noon?” Woman to her auto mechanic.
8. “Go to your room.” Parent to a young child who is misbehaving.
9. “Excuse me, is this seat taken?” Man to a woman he doesn’t know at a theater.