

In this video from ITFreeTraining, I will look at customer service skills. These skills, often referred to as soft skills, are an important skill for the IT technician to learn. These soft skills may be the difference between getting the job and not getting the job, even when you are competing for the job with someone who has more technical skills then you do.



0:15 To start with, let's consider what customer service is. There are many different definitions for what good customer service is. However, the one I like to use is – in the mind of the customer they received good customer service. In other words, the customer is satisfied. Keep in mind, nothing about this definition includes necessarily giving the customer what they asked for.

At times, you won't always be able to fix the problem the customer is having. The point to consider is: in their mind, do they believe they received good customer service. Sometimes you will fix the problem and they will still be complaining about the service. I will look at some ways that you can give good customer service. You won't be able to make everyone happy every single time, but at least you may be able to make a larger percentage of people happy.

# Looking the Part • Grooming (Comb hair, iron clothes) • Customers relate clothing to attitude

1:02 The first part of customer service is looking the part. This should include grooming, such as combing your hair and ironing your clothes. There is a big difference in the mind of the customer if you walk in looking a bit scruffy to looking well-groomed. Even if you live a bit of an alternative lifestyle, maybe you have dyed your hair blue or have a lot of piercings, taking some time to comb your hair and iron your clothes makes a big difference. People notice the effort you put in, so just make sure you are wearing business attire.

Customers also relate clothing to attitude. If you want to be the part, you need to dress the part. If you don't, the customer will think, "well if this person can't make the effort with their clothing, what effort are they going to make fixing my computer?" In some cases, you may not always be able to dress the part. For example, maybe you are fixing computers in a factory and it is a very dirty place. You don't want to wear your best clothes or maybe they have rules about what clothes you should wear. Your best suit may look great, but if it is a safety hazard, you won't be able to wear it when working on the factory floor.

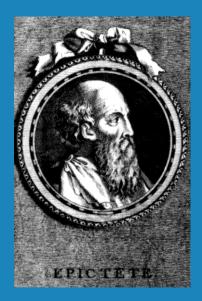
If you find that you have to work on a customer's computer and don't have time to change, just explain it to them so they know. Something as simple as saying, "Apologies for my appearance, I was working on the factory floor and they told me fixing your computer was top priority, so I rushed up here and did not have time to change." This explains the situation and also makes them feel like they are the priority.

If they have an issue with that, you can always offer to leave and get changed and come back. Generally, the customer wants their problem fixed straight away and will forgive your

appearance if you take the time to explain it to them. This goes for cases like emergency call outs, If you are at the gym and get called to work, simply tell them that you could have gone home and got changed; however, this would have added another 30 minutes to an hour before you arrived. If they are not happy with this, then go home, get changed and come back in. Remember, customer service is in the mind of the customer, and if how you look for an emergency call-out is more important than service then make them wait for service. Exercise some common sense, however; if you've just finished working in a factory and are covered with dirt, wash your hands and don't track dirt all through the customer's building with your dirty work boots. Taking your dirty boots off, before walking in the building, or washing your hands is a work of moments. You don't want to leave dirt and grease all over a customer's keyboard or track dirt through their building, as they will remember that.

Any other time, there is no excuse not to look the part. If the main file server has failed and 100 people can't work, people expect the person to be fixing it to look professional. If the person looks scruffy and unkept, they will think this is also the kind of work that you will deliver.

# Listening



 We have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak

3:51 The next part of providing good customer service is being able to listen. As the Greek philosopher Epictetus said, "we have two ears and one mouth so that we can listen twice as much as we speak." When you speak to a user, they may be very upset, angry or not very technically knowledgeable. I will have a look at how to deal with each of these types of customers.

If you want to work out if you are listening enough, ask yourself a simple question, how much talking did you do and how much did the other party do? If you did all the talking you need to talk less. Remember, also people take different lengths of time to respond. Sometimes you need to wait a few seconds for them to answer, so to get good results you need to exercise some patience.

# **Angry Customer**

Listen to why they are angry

• Use reflective listening to show you are listening



4:31 The first customer you may have to deal with is the angry customer. The first thing to consider is that they are angry about something; so take the time to listen and understand what they are angry about. Most of the time, it will be about them not being able to get their job done. If this is the case, remember they are not angry with you, they are angry with the situation; so don't take it personally.

The next point is to listen to what they are saying. If they are saying anything along the lines of, "This is costing the company a lot of money" then you really need to work out some sort of solution quickly. This does not mean you need to fix the problem, as a workaround may be fine for the short term. Anything you can do to stop the company losing money and they will probably be happy with that, at least in the short term, but if you do nothing, they most likely will not be happy with that.

Sometimes they may not explain why this is a big problem, so you need to listen and understand what they are saying. Customers often have an inflated idea of what IT Technicians know; they may think you know everything about their job and why it is a big problem, so they don't need to explain it to you. For example, if they are saying "I can't print," it may not sound like a big problem. When you ask some more questions such as, "How long can you go without printing?" they may tell you "the printouts are for shipping labels and we can't ship anything until it is fixed." Well, they just told you they can't ship anything until the problem is fixed. Sounds like this is more than just a printing problem; it sounds like they said all shipping from the company has just stopped until it is fixed. You can now start to understand why they may be angry about it, as it is more than just a printing problem.

The next step is to use reflective listening to show that you are listening. Reflective listening is showing the customer that you have understood what has been said and that you are listening to them. Saying something like "So you can't print?" is not really reflective listening. Saying something like "So nothing can be shipped until this is solved?" is showing the user that you have understood what the problem is, and it is more than just not being able to print.

IT technicians will often be accused of being out of touch, arrogant or lacking in people skills. Showing just a little bit of empathy can really change that. At the end of the day, the people you support have a job to do and they may be under a lot of pressure. Just showing a little empathy and understanding goes a long way. This means not looking at your watch while talking to them or rolling your eyes when they say something that you think is silly.

In some cases, you may get a very angry customer. Remember, if they are just angry at the situation, try and not take it personally. If they are personally attacking you, being very rude and abusive, you should not have to put up with that, no one should. Remember, however, you need to be professional when dealing with them. If you lose your cool and start abusing them back, that does not look good. If you get one of these customers, try saying something along the lines of "I want to help you, but in order to do so I need to keep this conversation on a professional level." In other words, the customer will need to stop swearing and abusing you if the conversation is to continue.

This particularly applies to call centers where you might have a customer ring you who may be angry or very drunk before they ring. For call centers that deal with the public directly, it is not unheard of that an extremely abusive drunk person will call the center. If you have a customer like that and you can't calm them down, many companies will allow you to hang up the call or walk away. If you do that, however, you will need to let a manager or supervisor know you have done that and why. Call centers say they are all in it together. A good manager or supervisor will jump in and help out when this occurs, as that is what they get paid for. They expect some abusive customers, but also understand a difficult and an abusive customer are two different things. Don't hang up on the difficult ones, just the abusive ones. Although in some cases it may be tempting to respond back to people in a negative way, consider that if the conversation is recorded and uploaded to the internet, this would that look bad for the company and for you. If you are not happy to have the conversation played to everyone on the internet, you probably should consider what you are saying before you say it. When talking to customers or users, always be professional and you can't go wrong.

### Sensitivity

- You can be apologetic that they have had a bad experience
  - This is different from taking responsibility



8:49 The next point to look at is sensitivity. This is taking the time to show you understand the other person's feelings and emotions - A trait that not many IT technicians have. You can be apologetic that the customer has had a bad experience, even though this is different from taking responsibility. For example, if they have had an internet outage causing a lot of lost productivity, unless you work for the internet company providing them their internet service then you're not responsible for the outage, but you can always be sympathetic that it has occurred.

Keep in mind that the customer is paying for your time and skills. If you have been called to a customer site, it is because something has gone wrong. Even if you are not able to do anything to fix the problem, the customer is paying for you to be there, so give them your full attention. If you're in a situation where you need to be culturally sensitive, perhaps you are fixing a computer in a religious building, and you are not sure what the customs are, ask what you need to do. It costs you nothing to take your shoes off before entering a house of worship, but if you company loses a support contract it may cost you your job.

### Honesty

- · Essentially telling the truth
- The job took as long as it actually took
- You only know what you actually know



9:56 The next point that I will look at is honesty. This essentially means telling the truth. This can be difficult when you start getting conflicting interests. For example, telling the truth in sales may be the difference between getting a sale and losing a sale. However, if you tell some lies about what something can do to get a sale, sooner or later the customer is going to start asking questions about what was promised and what they got. You most likely won't get any repeat business from the customer if you tell them lies.

I will never forget a previous job when we were looking at purchasing a Storage Area Network or SAN. The salesperson and my former boss had a discussion about the capacity of the SAN. The total cost had to be under budget; however, the capacity for the price was less than what would meet our needs, according to the sales person. My boss thought otherwise and expressed his opinion to the salesperson. The sale person said something that I will never forget; he said "It would be irresponsible for us to sell you this SAN knowing that it will not meet your needs." What a thing for a salesperson to say. However, my boss thought he knew better and went ahead anyway. Well, he had to later explain to his management why we purchased a SAN that would not meet our needs. If the salesperson had not said what he had said, the salesperson would have had to explain why the SAN we were sold did not meet our needs and potentially lose any sales in the future. Because he was upfront about it, he kept the business and my boss had to do the explaining.

The next point to consider is the job took as long as it actually took. If you have a job where you drive from job to job, it is easy to take an extended lunch. If you start doing this kind of thing, it will catch up with you one day. People talk to each other. Believe me, having worked in

management positions, you hear all about what your staff are up to. You start learning who are the hard workers and who are the ones that don't work as hard.

The last thing to consider is that you only know what you actually know. Many technicians will attempt to make out they know more than what they really do, especially when they just start out, as they are trying to make a good impression. No one knows everything. Customers do expect, however, that you know what you are doing. There are some good ways to deal with this, rather than looking like you don't know what you are doing. If you are not sure, you can always say things like "I want to confirm something before I get started, so I'll make a quick call to a senior technician." This way it looks like you are being cautious rather than you just don't know what you are doing.

You still need to be careful of what you say. For example, I once worked with someone who had installed Windows Server hundreds if not thousands of times. One day he went to a customer site and they asked him to install a version of Windows Server he had not installed before. So, being honest, he said had not installed this before. The customer put in a complaint saying why did you send us someone who does not know what they are doing.

A better answer to this question would have been "I have installed Windows Server hundreds of times, and this version appears similar to a lot of other versions I have installed, so I am not expecting to have any problems installing it." If you have installed Windows Server before, you know that the install process is much the same regardless of which version you are installing, however a customer may not understand that. Have a think about what you are saying and how this will be perceived. A lot of times it is not what you say, it is how you say it. Just remember, don't lie about what you know and, if you need to, ask for help.

### Integrity

- You may have access to everyone's data
  - –Don't go looking through it
- Don't make up a problem when there is none
- Don't use made up techno-babble

11:51 The next point that I will look at is integrity. Depending on what your role is, you may have access to everyone's data or at least some data which may be sensitive. Don't go looking through it. I once worked with someone who wanted to know what everyone else got paid. It was against the company policy to talk about what each other got paid, so he decided to have a look through a human resources computer to get the information. When they found out what he did, well security walked him off site straight away and he had to find himself a new job. This also applies if you work on a customer's computer at their home. They may have all their personal files on the computer, but they don't want you looking through their personal stuff.

Don't go making out there is a problem when there is none. If you start fixing problems that don't exist or even worse creating a problem, this will all catch up with you one day. People talk to each other and they will work it out eventually.

Don't use made up techno-babble to get you out of things. Your customers may not know much about computers, but they don't like being talked down to or treated like they are stupid. This is made particularly worse if you start making up terms. You never know who you are talking to. Some people may have previously worked in IT or for whom IT is a hobby that they work on in their own time. They may know a lot more than you think they do. You start saying things like the problem was caused by cosmic radiation due to excessive orbital wobble. Well your boss may not see the funny side, but maybe security will when they are walking you out of the building!

# Dependability

- Show up on time
  - Being late costs the customer money
- Plan your trip in advance
  - -If late, contact the customer



12:11 The next point to consider is being dependable. The easiest way to do this is to simply show up on time. If you are late, this may start costing the customer money. For example, having a delay because of you showing up late may cost the customer lost productivity, particularly if they have made any arrangements for you prior to your turning up.

To make sure you are on time, plan your trip in advance. It is easy nowadays to get an estimate of how long it will take to get somewhere, but always aim to be at least a little early. Better to be a few minutes early rather than a few minutes late. If you are going to be late, let the customer know. It is better to give them the heads-up rather than leaving them standing around not knowing what is going on.



12:20 I will next start looking at, as an IT technician, how you would go about communicating. To start with, using assertive communication. Assertive communication is being able to communicate being self-assured and confident without being aggressive.

To understand assertive communication, consider that assertiveness is a spectrum from submissive behavior to aggressive behavior. Submissive behavior is essentially being the door mat, so to speak. Everyone walks over you and never listens to your opinion. Submissive behavior is not ideal; your opinion won't be heard. You may not get that raise at work and maybe people will forget that you are even there.

At the other end of the scale is aggressive behavior. This kind of behavior is when it is so important to get your point across you talk over people, don't listen to anything that they say and it does not take much for you to lose your temper. This kind of person feels that everyone has a right to their opinion. This kind of person comes across as rude, arrogant and not generally the kind of person people want to work with.

Assertive communication is the middle ground; this is the confident IT technician who knows when to speak and when to listen. At times, the customer will be in the wrong, so the confident technician is able to listen to what they say and respond back in a way that is not rude or confrontational. This becomes important in IT, as a lot of times the customer, well, will do silly things. The confident IT technician will not pass judgment on the customer for making a silly mistake, but rather step them through it so they understand what occurred.

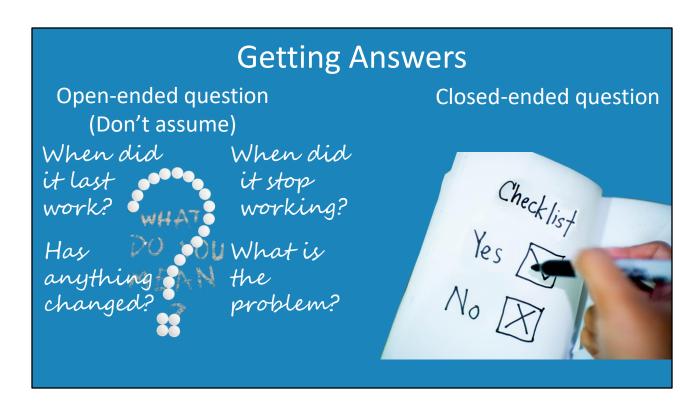
To do this, avoid saying things like "I found what you did wrong." Change this to something like, "I found what is causing the problem." When I come across a customer that has done something particularly silly, I generally say something like, "I don't mind fixing problems like this as it is an easy fix and makes it look like I am being productive to my boss." Remember they are the customer, so this is better than saying, "Well you just wasted five minutes of my time I will never get back. Learn how to use a computer." I always say there are two sides to every coin. I once attended a user's computer because they had no sound on their computer. They basically muted the speaker, so I showed them how to unmute it. A simple thing and a simple fix. I could say they wasted my time having to walk down the stairs to see them, or I could see it as an easy help desk call to close off and contribute to my monthly statistics of how productive I am. I like to look at simple jobs like these as making me look more productive to my boss which keeps me employed. If you start looking at it this way, you may start wishing you had more customers like these.



12:54 The next thing for a good technician to consider is respectful communication. Respectful communication means taking the time to listen to what your customer has to say. The customer may be annoying, but at the end of the day, you get paid to listen to what they have to say. This means avoid distractions when they are talking and actively listen to them. This means incoming personal phone calls will need to wait. When you arrive, don't assume the world stops when you arrive. They may want their problem fixed; however, you may need to wait a few minutes until they finish what they are doing to talk to you.

Nowadays, the biggest distraction is generally social media. If you are with a customer, social media will need to wait. I apologize that the main theme of this video has been cats, but due to cats not having opposable thumbs I was not able to find a picture of cats using social media.

It surprises me nowadays when you have a junior IT technician ask you a question and, while you are answering their question, they will be looking at their social media updates. I suggest you don't; people may not say anything, but it creates a bad impression. You are being paid to work, not paid to be on social media. Senior technicians will help you out, but their time is valuable, so if you look disinterested and can't stay off social media for a minute to listen to what they have to say, they will spend their time helping someone else.



13:12 Next, I will look at how to get answers. Your job as an IT technician is to get something fixed and, in order to do this, you are going to need some information. Customers can be difficult to get information out of. The important point to remember is that they may not have much technical knowledge, so don't blame them if you are not getting the answers straight away.

To start with, ask some open-ended questions. You are trying to find out what has gone wrong. Remember, don't make assumptions. Start with questions like, "What is the problem you are having?" It is also good to ask questions like, "When did it stop working?" and "When was it working last?" I have attended jobs when I have asked these questions and they have told me it has never worked. They have told me that the person who installed it was supposed to come back and fix it, but never showed up. This is clearly not a fault of the customer, maybe a fellow work colleague did not set it up correctly. Luckily, I did not assume anything before asking some questions. You will find that sometimes things stop working because a colleague has changed something on the computer or the network that you did not know about.

Remember, if you come across a problem that has been caused by another colleague, don't go throwing the colleague or your company under the bus. Don't go saying things such as, "I am sick of Bob just making changes on the network all the time, he causes so many problems they should fire him." Say something like, "Thanks for letting me know, I will follow that up internally." You don't even need to say a mistake was made; just tell them you will follow it up. You can have that conversation with Bob when you get back to the office when you are not in front of the customer.

When asking these questions, don't make any accusations. For example, don't say "What did you do to break it?", say something else like, "Has anything recently changed?" Both will potentially get you the same information. Again remember, the customer may not be very technical and thus it may take some time to get the information. You may have to ask the question a few different ways to get the information you need. This is not them being deliberately difficult; it's just them having trouble answering your questions, so you need to be a little patient with them.

Closed-ended questions are also good to get information. An example of a good, closed question is, "What error message did you get?" Most users will dismiss the error message without writing it down, but if you ask some questions like, "What did the error message look like?" or "When did you get the error message?" it may lead you in the right direction to working out what the problem is. Once you get some information about what the problem may be, closed-ended questions are good at drilling down to the actual problem.

# Technical Language (Jargon)

- Avoiding using it
- Example
  - -Brand new monitor performance was sluggish

Technical
The monitor was set to HDMI version 1.4 rather than HDMI version 2.0. HDMI 1.4 does not have enough throughput for 4k and thus the frame rate was reduced.

Non-Technical
The monitor is shipped to run
on a slower speed which
means it will run with older
devices. I have changed it to
the faster setting to fix it. It will
fix the problem, but it may not
work with old devices.

13:47 When you are talking to a customer, avoid using technical language. As an IT technician you know a lot about technology, but the customer probably does not know as much as you do. The customer may use vague or incorrect terms to describe something happening on the computer. Don't worry about correcting them, just worry about trying to understand what they are trying to tell you.

When explaining things, use non-technical language and attempt to give them information they need to know rather than a lot of technical talk. You will at times go to a job to fix a problem that someone has fixed previously. Believe me, you don't want the customer saying that last time they changed some setting but giving you no idea what it could be. Even a non-technical description of what they did is better than a vague technical description of some setting which could be anything.

Let's consider an example. Consider the customer has reported they just received a new monitor and its performance is sluggish. You ask some questions and determine that the monitor has always been like that ever since it was installed. After some troubleshooting, you work out the monitor is set by the factory to use HDMI 1.4 by default. To use HDMI 2.0, it needs to be configured. Once you make the change, the monitor works fine. The customer asks what caused the problem?

A technical answer would be, the monitor was set to HDMI version 1.4 rather than HDMI version 2.0. HDMI 1.4 does not have enough throughput for 4k and thus the frame rate was reduced. Most customers won't know what HDMI is, and if they do, probably don't know there

are different versions and probably do not understand what throughput, 4k or frame rate are. Some customers will know more than others, but it will be rare to have a customer who understood everything in that technical explanation.

A non-technical description would go something like this, "The monitor is shipped to run on a slower speed which means it will run with older devices. I have changed it to the faster setting to fix it. It will fix the problem, but it may not work with old devices." You can see that no jargon was used, and you have told the user the important information. For a new device on the market to work, it is not uncommon for the manufacturer to configure it to use an old setting rather than a newer setting. This is so the device works with older devices; however, it does also mean the device may not be performing the best that it can.

You can see, that by using non-technical jargon, I have explained to them a setting on the monitor was causing the problem, which has now been changed and has fixed the problem. However, I have also explained to them that old devices may not work with that monitor – this is useful information for the customer to know. At least now if they have problems, they will hopefully tell the next technician the problem was caused by a setting on the monitor. At least the next technician will know where to start looking.

### Features vs Benefits

• Speak in terms of benefits rather than features

Feature
MAC Address Randomization
has been added to WiFi to help
prevent third parties capturing
your MAC address and using it
to track your laptop.

Benefit
This improves the WiFi security
on the laptop making it harder
to track your laptop when
using public WiFi.

14:24 At times, you may be installing something for the customer, not necessarily fixing a problem. When this occurs, they want to know what it is you have just installed for them. When you explain this to them, if they are not very technical, explain it to them in benefits rather than features.

For example, you may have installed some security software; a description of the technical feature may be, "MAC address randomization has been added to WiFi to help prevent third parties capturing your MAC address and using it to track your laptop." Essentially the MAC address is used by a network card when communicating on a network. When moving between different public WiFi networks, in theory it is possible for a third party to record this MAC address and use it as a way to track where you have been using your computer. The customer is unlikely to understand that.

Rather than trying to explain what the feature does, explain it in terms of the benefit it gives the customer. For example, "This improves the WiFi security on the laptop making it harder to track your laptop when using public WiFi." Essentially you are telling them how this will benefit them rather than telling them a whole heap of technical jargon which is unlikely to make sense to them.

# Timeline/Follow-up

- More research/Escalate the problem
  - Keep them up to date on what is going on
- Explore any workarounds that may help them
- Follow up to make sure problem is fixed
  - -Thank them for reporting the problem

14:40 Sometimes you won't be able to fix the problem straight away. When this occurs, you may need to do more research or escalate the problem to someone more senior or contact the manufacturer. Regardless of what you decide to do, keep the customer up to date on what is going on. You would be surprised that an upset customer is generally less upset if they know what is going on.

I once supported a site where the file server's network connection disconnected up to a few times a day. Each time this occurred everyone in the office had to reboot their computers. You could imagine how upset everyone started getting. To fix it, we replaced most of the computers in the office, had every network connection tested, replaced the network equipment and replaced the file server. That should do it. Well after we did all that, the problem still happened.

In a case like this, you would expect all the customers to be sharpening their pitch forks, lighting their torches and coming after us. Surprisingly, they were not that upset. The reason being that we kept them informed of what we were doing, and they knew how hard we were working trying to fix the problem. If you are interested, the problem was some software on the server. Once we contacted the vendor, they informed us that this could happen with the version of the software we were running and supplied an update to that software. It took a while, but we fixed the problem.

If you are leaving a customer with a problem, explore any workarounds that may help them till the problem is fixed. Sometimes a workaround will be enough for them to get their job done while they are waiting.

Once the problem has been fixed, follow up with them to make sure that everything is fixed o.k. This is particularly important if it is something you have changed on the network. Don't assume changing something fixes the problem. Sometimes there may be multiple problems or you fix the wrong one. Either way, the customer will think you did not fix their problem. A quick follow up call will confirm everything is o.k. and they will appreciate the call.

When appropriate, thank them for reporting the problem. They are the reason we have a job and also keep our jobs.

This video has covered just some of the things to think about when working as an IT technician. Remember, these soft skills will potentially get you the job over someone who has more technical skills and experience. Employers generally see a gap in technical skills can be fixed faster than a gap in soft skills.

I hope you have found this video from ITFreeTraining helpful. For more videos from us please see our YouTube channel or web site. Until the next video, I would like to thank you for watching.

### References

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"Picture: Star" https://unsplash.com/photos/3iiR4ScIPjs

"Picture: Male with smiley face on face" https://unsplash.com/photos/nnCycrbQu6s

"Picture: Epictetus" https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Epictetus.png

"Picture: Scruffy cat" https://www.pexels.com/photo/grey-cat-on-wooden-fence-2518134/

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"Picture: Handshake" https://unsplash.com/photos/AT5vuPoi8vc

"Picture: Superman" https://unsplash.com/photos/S9uB\_IIDThw

"Picture: Rabbit pocket watch" https://www.pexels.com/photo/white-rabbit-holding-gold-frame-pocket-watch-statue-149290/

"Picture: Grey kitten ears back: " https://www.pexels.com/photo/grey-fur-kitten-127028/

"Picture: Angry cat"

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gato\_enervado\_pola\_presencia\_dun\_can.jpg "Picture: Confident cat" https://www.pexels.com/photo/close-up-photo-of-black-and-white-cat-1695805/

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"Picture: What do you mean?" https://unsplash.com/photos/RUsczRV6ifY

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