Ways to soften tone and be tactful and less direct in written communication using “hedges”, “qualifiers” and other useful techniques

Qualifiers: lessen the full impact of the message being communicated; make things appear “less than 100%”

somewhat, a (little) bit, slight, slightly, small, a few, minor, insignificant, certain, possible, potential, not quite, etc.

Hedges: words that make matters seem less definite, certain—a bit more open-ended and less direct.

seem, appear, reportedly, apparently, likely, unlikely, essentially, actually, basically, possibly, perhaps. Reportedly and allegedly are also frequently used in political and conflict analysis.

Other techniques:

• Use “not very” + adjective Ex. instead of “useless”, say “not very useful” or “not very constructive”, instead of “destructive, harmful”

• Use modals like “might” “may” “could” “would” instead of the more definite “will” Ex. This may pose a problem in the future.

• Make a question from a statement. Compare: That would be too confrontational. vs. Wouldn’t that perhaps be too confrontational?

• Use introductory phrases such as I’m afraid... With all due respect...Frankly...In fact...To be honest...Perhaps...etc.

• Use euphemisms and other roundabout expressions Ex. What you sent us was not what we wanted. What you sent us was different from what we were expecting. OR... ... inconsistent with our expectations (very UN!)

Ex. The second round of negotiations was a failure. vs. ...were extremely disappointing.

• Use passive voice or eliminate the actor, remove the pronoun We are still awaiting the outcome. vs. A final outcome is still pending

Or find other (alternate) ways to say things such as “The two parties totally disagree!” Try instead: ....are not in agreement about...do not see eye to eye...are deadlocked on....etc.