



BLOOMSBURY INTERNATIONAL

How to Apologise In English

What is the best way to apologise in English?



If you have been to England, I'm sure you have experienced English politeness. In England, people apologise a lot. We say sorry when we do something wrong, when we have upset someone, when we want to sympathise with someone, when we are about to disturb someone and even when someone else disturbs us! Have you ever stepped on someone's foot and the other person says sorry before you?! I suppose they feel sorry that their foot was in your way!



What is the best way to apologise in English?

There are many different ways to say sorry in English depending on the situation, who you are apologising to and how you are feeling. You may have already learnt this vocabulary in your [English classes](#); however, I have listed 10 common expressions to say you're sorry below:



1. Sorry.

This is a very common, simple apology and there are many situations we can use it in. For example,

- when we bump into someone on the street (“Sorry!”)
- when we want to get someone’s attention (e.g. to go past them on a train. “Sorry, excuse me”)
- when we are sympathising with someone (e.g. “I’m sorry to hear that”)
- when we know we have done something wrong (e.g. “Sorry I’m late”)

This is a weak apology so don’t use it if you have done something very wrong – it won’t sound strong enough!

2. I’m so / very / extremely / terribly sorry.

This is similar to “sorry” but adding an extra word makes the meaning stronger. For example:

“I’m so sorry I didn’t come to your party yesterday.” “I can’t believe I forgot the tickets. I’m terribly sorry!”

3. How careless of me!

This phrase is used when we criticise ourselves for making a mistake. For example:

“I just broke a glass, how careless of me! I’ll buy you a new one.”



4. I shouldn't have...

We use this when we realise that we have done something that we shouldn't have done and now we regret it. For example:

"I shouldn't have shouted at you last night. I didn't mean what I said."



5. It's all my fault.

We use this phrase when we want to take responsibility for something. For example:

"It's all my fault we missed the train. I should have woken up earlier."

6. Please don't be mad at me.

This is quite an informal phrase which we use when we've done something wrong and we don't want the other person to be angry with us. For example:

"Please don't be mad at me but I have to cancel our plans this weekend."

7. I hope you can forgive me / Please forgive me.

We use this to ask forgiveness from someone when we do something to upset them. For example:

"I acted awfully last night and I know I embarrassed you. I hope you can forgive me."



8. I cannot say/express how sorry I am.

This is a very strong way of saying sorry. We use this when we know we have done something very wrong and we cannot find the right words to apologise. For example:

“I cannot express how sorry I am for telling James your secret. I had no idea he would break up with you.”

9. I apologise for... / I'd like to apologise for...

This is a more formal way of saying sorry. You usually hear it in formal/business situations or emails. For example:

“I apologise for the delay in replying to your email.”

10. Please accept my (sincere) apologies.

This is a very formal way of apologising, especially when the word ‘sincere’ is included. It is usually used in formal letters. For example:

“Please accept my sincere apologies for the mistake. We will refund the money to your account immediately.”

Being polite and knowing how to apologise are important in all [languages](#) and cultures. After all, everyone makes mistakes! Hopefully now you will know how to say sorry in any situation... and if these phrases do not work, you can always send flowers!



Have fun with English!

Complete these apology sentences with the correct word.

1. Please _____ me for interrupting you. I didn't realise you were on the phone.
2. I can't believe I forgot your birthday. Please don't be _____ at me.
3. I'm so _____ I'm late. There was so much traffic!
4. Oh no, how _____ of me! Do you have a cloth so I can clean it?
5. We _____ for the train delay. We will get you to your destination as soon as possible.
6. I'm _____ but you are sitting in my seat.

Answers:

1. Please forgive me for interrupting you. I didn't realise you were on the phone.
2. I can't believe I forgot your birthday. Please don't be mad at me.
3. I'm so sorry I'm late. There was so much traffic!
4. Oh no, how careless of me! Do you have a cloth so I can clean it?
5. We apologise for the train delay. We will get you to your destination as soon as possible.
6. I'm sorry but you are sitting in my seat.