

Amber: Hello, I'm Amber and this is How to ... the series from BBC Learning English dot com that gives you useful language to do things in English. In this programme, we look at different ways of saying sorry in everyday situations.

First, let's recap the simplest way to tell someone that you're sorry for doing something wrong. It's just a one-word exclamation:

Sorry!

Amber: Now imagine you're playing music very loudly in your room and your flatmate is trying to revise for his exams, he shouts:

Turn it down! I've got an exam in the morning!

Amber: You should shout back:

Sorry!

Amber: And turn your music down! Listen again.

Turn it down! I've got an exam in the morning!

Sorry!

Amber: Now, sometimes, especially with people you don't know, it's more polite to say 'I'm sorry'. For example, imagine you're in a library and you step backwards without looking and step on someone's foot. In this situation, it would be polite to say:

Ah! I'm sorry!

Amber: Just 'sorry' would do, and in a busy situation, like a crowded train, just 'sorry!' would be enough.

Now, if you need to say sorry for doing something wrong to someone you know well or care about a lot, we often add the words 'really' or 'so' to emphasise how we feel. For example:

I'm *really* sorry, Pete, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

I'm *so* sorry I forgot your birthday, Oliver!

Amber: Those speakers do sound truly sorry, don't they? Listen again to how we add the words 'really' and 'so' to stress how we feel.

I'm *really* sorry, Pete, I didn't mean to hurt your feelings.

I'm *so* sorry I forgot your birthday, Oliver!

Amber: And just a note about body language – in British culture, when we say sorry to people we know well and care about a lot, it's usual to make eye contact, and we might even put a hand on the person's arm as we speak.

Now so far we've looked at short and simple ways to say sorry. These will get you a long way, but when you've done something more serious, you might want to say sorry *and* to say what you're sorry for.

So let's practice three ways to do this. It's worth learning these three patterns because even in informal (everyday) situations, it's polite (in English) to explain what you're sorry about – people expect it!

Here's an example of the first pattern. Imagine you're late for your English lesson. When you arrive, you tell the teacher – 'I'm sorry I'm late.'

I'm sorry I'm late!

Amber: Now you try. You look in your bag and you've forgotten your text book. How could you say sorry for this to the teacher?

(pause)

Amber: 'I'm sorry I forgot my text book.' Or 'I'm sorry I've forgotten my text book.' Now here are two more easy ways to explain *why* you're sorry – they use the words 'about' and 'for'. First, here are some examples using 'about':

Sorry about the mess. I'll clean up later!

I'm sorry about the trouble I've caused.

I'm so sorry about last night.

Amber: And here are two examples of how to say *why* you're sorry using the word 'for'.

Sorry for eating the last piece of cake!

I'm really sorry for taking your DVD!

Amber: Notice that we say sorry for *doing* something!

Sorry for *drinking* all the milk!

I'm sorry for *lying*.

Amber: And finally – it might be a good idea to *give a reason for your behaviour* when you say sorry. This is something we often do in English.

I'm sorry for *lying* but it seemed the best thing to do at the time!

Amber: And now to end the programme, here's part of an episode of The Flatmates – where you can hear lots of conversational English. You'll hear Helen say sorry to her friend and flatmate, Tim. Helen is sorry for shouting angrily at Tim a few days before, when he'd asked her a polite question about the rent.

Notice that Helen doesn't actually say the words 'I'm sorry' at first – instead she says 'I want to apologise for ...' and this is something people often say as a way of saying sorry without actually saying the words 'I'm sorry'! You can say 'I want to apologise for ...' Listen.

Helen: **Tim, have you got a minute?**

Tim: **Well, it's not like I've got a ton of things to do, is it?**

Helen: **No, no, it's not. Tim, I want to apologise for the way I spoke to you the other day.**

Tim: **Oh yeah?**

Helen: **Yeah. I was well out of order. I've been having a hard time lately but that's no excuse. I'm sorry.**

Amber: Well, I hope you won't be lost for words, the next time you want to apologise in English!

There's more functional English in 'How to ...' from bbclearningenglish.com