

ETIQUETTE AT THE OFFICE.- Session 1.- Sorry is the hardest word.

Situation

Read the text and listen to the situation.



Another day at the office begins and **Lourdes** phones a friend of hers.

Lourdes: Hi, **Michael**, it's me, **Lourdes**. How are you?

Michael: Sorry, who are you?

Lourdes: I am **Lourdes**, do you remember me? I am a trainee at British Corporation.

Michael: Right. Sorry, I'm a little bit distracted today. I was thinking about a problem I have. I don't know what to do; maybe you could give me some advice.

Lourdes: Well, tell me and maybe I can help you.

Michael: It's my girlfriend, you know. We kind of **fell out**, and at the moment she's not talking to me.

Lourdes: What happened?

Michael: Nothing, but she seems to be angry at me for some reason.

Lourdes: Have you tried talked to her?

Michael: Yes, without success. I have been trying to say sorry to her through phone calls and text messages, but she is still ignoring me. It is a **tough** situation to say sorry especially if you do not even have the chance to say a proper apology. You see, I don't want to upset her and make her dislike me even more.

Lourdes: Yes, I agree. By leaving her needy messages you will only push her further away.

Michael: What can I do instead?

Lourdes: Well, I'm not an expert in the subject, but perhaps now you are wondering whether she will **break up** with you. I think you should try to be calm and **collected**. Instead of saying what you want, apologize and tell her how important she is to you.

Michael: Thank you **Lourdes**, I think I might do what you suggest.

Lourdes: No problem. I'm glad I can be of help. Bye!

Michael: Bye, **Lourdes**.



Now it's your turn

Write in the forum:

- ✓ Have you ever had to say sorry about something? If you were Michael, what would you say?
- ✓ Is it common to apologise in your country?
- ✓ Are there any differences between apologising in your country and in English-speaking countries?

Submit

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Cultura y Deporte.**
[Aviso Legal](#)

1.- What to say: I'm sorry.

Quotation

"A man's manners are a mirror in which he shows his portrait."

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

Situation

Lourdes has told **Susana** about her conversation with Michael. **Susana** has been listening very **attentively**.

Susana: It looks like your friend has a serious problem.

Lourdes: Yes, and I don't know what to tell him, honestly. I'm not very good at giving advice.

Susana: I know! Your friend can play the guitar, can't he?

Lourdes: Yes, that's right.

Susana: And he's good at writing songs, isn't he?

Lourdes: Yes, he used to play in a band.

Susana: Well, he should write a song to his girlfriend. You know, a song to say he's sorry.

Lourdes: Right, that's a fantastic idea. I can't wait to tell him. Thanks **Susana**, you're great.

Susana: I know, I know.



If you aren't good at singing or writing songs and you want to find out more about saying sorry, read the following chart. You might find some interesting expressions to apologise.

- ✓ **To emphasise how you feel**
 - I'm really sorry... *I'm really sorry, Pete, I didn't mean to lose your book.*
 - I'm so sorry... *I'm so sorry I forgot your birthday, Oliver!*
- ✓ **To say why you're sorry**
 - Sorry about... *Sorry about the mess. I'll clear up later.*
 - Sorry for... *Sorry for taking your DVD.*
- ✓ **To say sorry without using the words 'I'm sorry'!**
 - I'd like to apologise for... *I'd like to apologise for the way I spoke to you earlier.*

Adapted from http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/learningenglish/radio/specials/1331_howto_feedback/page3.shtml

You should know

How would you respond politely to the following requests? Go to the BBC Learning English website and take the quiz.

[Quiz Responses.](#)

1.1.- Celebrity apologies.

Would you know the difference in meaning between "I'm sorry" and "I apologise"? If you [bumped into someone](#) with your [shopping trolley](#), you might use either phrase. But what about public apologies? For celebrities and politicians the differences are key, and the choice of the right phraseology is vital. Let's take a look at some examples:



In 2009, actress **Kate Winslet** won two Golden Globe awards: for [best supporting actress](#) in *The Reader*, and for best actress in *Revolutionary Road*. Winslet's emotional [acceptance speech](#) immediately [ensured](#) its place in the gallery of YouTube classics, when she tried to apologise to her [fellow nominees](#): "I'm so sorry Anne (Hathaway), Meryl (Streep), Kristin (Scott-Thomas) oh God, who is the other one?" she gasped. "Oh yes, Angelina (Jolie)... OK... Now forgive me... Is this really happening?"

German football team Energie Cottbus announced it would [refund](#) 600 supporters the admission price of a recent [away game](#). The fans travelled 610 km to see their players beaten 4-0 by the Schalke team. It was Energie Cottbus's sixth loss in seven games. A statement on the club's website said: "By refunding the [cost of admission](#) for their supporters, the red and whites would like to apologise for the [pitiful](#) performance which they displayed at the Veltins Arena".

Rap star **Kanye West** apologised for interrupting the acceptance speech of singer Taylor Swift at the MTV Video Music Awards. As Swift was collecting the award for best video by a female artist, West jumped on to the stage saying "Taylor, I'm really happy for you... but Beyonce had one of the best videos of all time." The audience [jeered](#). Later, West wrote on his blog: "I'm soooo sorry to Taylor Swift, her fans and her mom ... I spoke to her mother right after and she said the same thing my mother would've said."

Software giant **Google** apologised to Michelle Obama over a racially offensive image of her that appeared when users searched for images of the US first lady. Google placed an "offensive search result" notice over the picture. The company said: "Sometimes our search results can be offensive." But it refused to take the image down from its search results.

Adapted from http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/magazine/8000481.stm
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8424417.stm>
 and <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/8377902.stm>



Now it's your turn

Decide if the following are true or false:

"I'm sorry" and "I apologise" are not acceptable ways to apologise if you bumped into someone with your shopping trolley.

- True.
 False.

Celebrities who want to apologise have to choose their words carefully.

- True.
 False.

Kate Winslet's acceptance speech received many visits on YouTube.

- True.
 False.

The German football team refunded the supporters for having travelled 610 km.

- True.
 False.

Kanye West apologised to Taylor Swift in person.

- True.
 False.

Google has not removed the offensive image of Michelle Obama from its website.

- True.
 False.

1.2.- Apology to "The stolen generations".

Kevin Rudd was the 26th Prime Minister of Australia and is currently the Minister for Foreign Affairs. In 2008, he offered a broad apology to all Aborigines and the Stolen Generations for their "profound **grief**, suffering and loss" in a carefully worded statement that was **greeted** by a **standing ovation**.

The Stolen Generations is a term used to describe the children of Australian Aboriginal **descent** who were removed from their families by the Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions, under **acts** of their respective parliaments. The **removals** occurred in the period between approximately 1869 and 1969, although in some places children were still being taken in the 1970s.



Text adapted from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stolen_Generations and http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kevin_Rudd

You should know

Now watch the video in which the Australian Prime Minister reads an apology to the aborigines.



[Text summary](#)

[Read the apology transcript.](#)

[Apology transcript.](#)

2.- How to say it: Modal verbs to express ability.

Think about it

What is the difference between these two sentences?

- ✔ *Jamie can play the guitar.*
- ✔ *Jamie could play the guitar when I was six.*



When we talk about ability, we mean two things.

First, we mean general ability. This is something that once you have learned you can do any time you want, like being able to read or swim or speak a language, for example.

The other kind of ability is specific ability. This means something that you can or can't do in one particular situation. For example, being able to lift something heavy, or find a place you are looking for.

✔ Present:

- ➔ **Can / can't** (for both general and specific ability).
 - *I can play the piano.*
 - *She can speak English.*
 - *He can't drive – he's too tired.*
 - *We can't come now.*
 - *I can't ride a bike.*

✔ Past:

- ➔ **Could / couldn't** (for general ability).
 - *I could read when I was four.*
 - *She could speak French when she was a child, but now she has forgotten it.*
 - *He couldn't dance at all until he took lessons.*
 - *My grandfather couldn't swim.*
 - *When I was a child, I could play chess very well but my father couldn't.*
- ➔ **Was able to / couldn't** (for specific ability).
 - *When the computer crashed yesterday, I was able to fix it. (Not I could fix it.)*
 - *She was able to pass the exam, even though she hadn't studied much. (Not she could pass.)*
 - *He called us because he couldn't find the house.*
 - *I couldn't open the window.*

✔ Future:

- ➔ **Will be able to.**
 - *If you ask him, he will probably be able to help you.*

Translation

[Click here to read the Spanish translation.](#)

2.1.- Modal verbs to express permission.

- ✓ **Can** and **Could** + **INF** are used to ask for permission.
 - *Can I use your car tonight, dad?*
 - *Could I use your car tonight, dad?*
- ✓ There are differences between the two:
 - **Can** is used in informal situations while **Could** is used in more formal, polite situations.
 - *Can I borrow your pencil, Tomas?*
 - *Could I borrow your pen, Mr. Clapton?*
 - **Can** is used for the present and **Could** is used for the past.
 - *Last night I couldn't go to the disco, my father was really angry with me.*
- ✓ The use of **May** + **INF** is very formal.
 - *May I use telephone, please? Yes, you may.*
- ✓ Note that when we want to give permission, we use **can** or **may**, but not **could**.
- ✓ **Be allowed to** + **INF** is used to express that we have permission to do something.
 - *We will be allowed to smoke in a bar when we are 18 years old.*
 - *People over 55 years have been allowed to leave the building 30 minutes earlier.*
- ✓ Are there any differences between **can** and **be allowed to**?
 - **Can** is used for general permission while **be allowed to** refers to a particular occasion.
 - *People only can smoke in the staff room.*
 - *The prisoner was allowed to leave the prison for one day last weekend.*



Translation

[Click here if you want to read the Spanish translation.](#)

2.2.- Now you put it into practice.



Now it's your turn

Fill in the blanks with CAN or CAN'T:

- I'm sorry but you smoke here.
- you speak French? No, I .
- You leave your bags at reception.
- you sign here, please?
- You visit different tourist attractions.
- Children under 12 travel alone. They must always be accompanied by an adult.
- Where I find a tourist information office?
- Where are you? I see you.



Submit



Now it's your turn

Look at the following phrases and use one of the modal verbs in brackets to fill the gaps.

- You (may/could) leave now if you wish.
- (Could/May) you open the window a bit, please?
- (May/Can) you play the piano?
- (Can't/May) I make a call on your mobile?
- Do you know if Mark (can/can't) sing?
- (Can't/May) I sit here, please?
- Caroline, your friends (can/could) stay the night if they want to. They're perfectly welcome.
- (May/Could) you lend me 40 Euros till Monday?
- Listen, please. Students (may/could) study in the library from five to nine in the evening.

Submit



Now it's your turn

Write the phrases in brackets in their correct forms into the gaps. Use contractions where possible.

- Last week we swimming, but this week we can. (can / not / go)
- Maybe your friend Lara a new house next year. (can / buy)
- If you try hard, you your exams. (can / pass)
- When I was four, I . (can / not / swim)
- George his homework when his desk is in such a mess. (can / not / do)
- They were so busy, they me a text message. (can / not / write)
- Larry his jacket. He can wear it again. (can / clean)

Submit

3.- Words you need: Apologising.

There is a saying in English which goes "Sorry is the hardest word to say". This is strange because many non-native speakers of English believe the opposite – that it's the easiest word to say because English speakers seem to say it so often in so many different situations! When you apologise, how you use your voice is crucial, as is your choice of language.



Now it's your turn

What does "I'm sorry" mean in the sentences below? Match the sentences and their meanings.

Matching exercise

Sentences	Match	Meaning
Sorry, I think that's my coat.	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. I beg your pardon.
He had a terrible childhood. I'm sorry I asked him to tell me about his past.	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Excuse me.
Sorry, what did you say?	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. I regret (something).

Submit



Now it's your turn

What is "I'm sorry" equivalent to in the following sentences? Match the sentences and their meanings.

Matching exercise

Sentences	Match	Meaning
I'm sorry I won't be able to go because...	<input type="checkbox"/>	1. Disagree.
I'm sorry, but I can't agree with you on this.	<input type="checkbox"/>	2. Give bad news.
I'm sorry, you can't have the afternoon off because...	<input type="checkbox"/>	3. Make a request.
I'm sorry, you can't smoke at school.	<input type="checkbox"/>	4. Refuse a request.
I'm sorry, your computer can't be fixed.	<input type="checkbox"/>	5. Refuse an invitation.
Sorry, could you open the window?	<input type="checkbox"/>	6. Refuse permission.

Submit



Now it's your turn

What would say in the following situations? Practise in the forum.

1. You did not catch what your boss said.

2. You won't be able to have a drink with the rest of your co-workers because you're not feeling well.
3. A colleague is using a room that you had booked in advance.

Submit

A step ahead

For more information on how to say sorry, visit the following website.

[Saying sorry.](#)

3.1.- Accepting apologies.

- ✓ When we **accept** an apology we can use phrases such as:
 - *That's OK.*
 - *No problem.*
 - *Don't mention it.*
 - *It's quite all right.*
 - *It's not important.*
 - *Don't worry about it.*
 - *No worries.*
- ✓ When we decide **not to accept** an apology we can say:
 - *I'm afraid that's not good enough.*
 - *I'd rather you didn't let that happen again.*
- ✓ A more subtle way of not accepting an apology is to pretend it hasn't been made, for example:
 - *A: I'm sorry I lost your pen.*
 - *B: I'll go and get another one.*
 - *A: Sorry I'm late.*
 - *B: Well, take a seat.*



Now it's your turn

Respond to the following prompts in the forum:

1. I'm sorry I'm late again.
2. I'm so sorry I forgot your birthday again.
3. I'm really sorry the report wasn't ready in time for your meeting with Mr. Henderson.
4. I'm sorry for drinking all the coffee.
5. I'm sorry, they didn't have green tea so I've brought you a black tea instead.

A step ahead

For more information on how to accept an apology, visit the following website.

[Accepting an apology.](#)

Appendix.- Licenses of resources.

Licenses of Resources used in session 1.- "Sorry is the hardest w

Resource (1)	Resource information (1)	Resource (2)	
	By: Polina Sergeeva. License: CC by 2.0. From: http://www.flickr.com/photos/polinasergeeva/3021632376/		By: butupa. License: CC b From: http://www.flic
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