

Lesson 27: Apologizing & Expressing Regret

In yesterday's lesson, you learned how to argue and swear in English – but after having an argument or fight, it's important to apologize in order to maintain a good relationship! This lesson will teach you about the different ways to say you're sorry and accept responsibility for what you did wrong.

Kim and Nathan are a married couple. They had a big fight earlier in the day, because Kim booked flights to visit her parents during their vacation – but Nate had been making other plans to travel with friends. Now listen to their conversation as they make amends:

Conversation – Apologizing

Nathan: Kim, I just wanted to apologize for yelling at you earlier.

Kim: Well, you *should* be sorry.

Nathan: I've been under a lot of stress at work, but that's no excuse. I shouldn't have lost my temper.

Kim: Look – don't worry about it. I'd like to apologize too – I definitely should have checked with you before making plans for our vacation.

Nathan: It's all right.

Kim: Next time, I'll make sure we're on the same page about decisions like this.

Nathan: It's partially my fault, too. I've been so busy that we haven't even really had time to talk lately.

Kim: I understand.

Nathan: You know, sometimes I wish I hadn't taken this job. It's turning out to be more demanding than I expected.

Kim: I'm sure it'll get easier once you learn the ropes. What do you want to do about our vacation, though? If only I hadn't bought non-refundable tickets!

Nathan: That's OK. We'll go visit your family this year – and next year we'll plan a trip together.

Conversation Vocabulary & Phrases

The basic way to apologize is to say **"I'm sorry"** or **"I want / I'd like to apologize"** (more formal). You can also add the word **"for..."** and then describe exactly why you are apologizing:

- **"I'm sorry for yelling at you."**
- **"I'm sorry for using your computer without asking."**
- **"I want to apologize for losing my temper."**
- **"I'd like to apologize for missing the deadline."**

For very minor mistakes – like bumping into someone – you can use these phrases:

- **"Oops – sorry."**
- **"Sorry about that."**
- **"Excuse me."**

Say this when you cough, burp, fart, blow your nose, or make another bodily noise in public.

If you did something VERY bad and you want to apologize even more strongly, you can say:

- **"I'm really sorry / I'm so sorry."**
- **"Please accept my sincere apology."**
Very formal – used in professional situations
- **"I can't express how sorry I am."**

Accepting Responsibility

When apologizing, it can be helpful to show that you recognize what you did wrong. Here are some phrases for expressing your role in the problem:

- **"It was my fault."**
- **"I messed up."**
- **"I know I let you down."**
- **"It was wrong of me to..."**

- **“I should have...” / “I shouldn’t have...”**

Use these phrases to say what you wish you had done differently.

- **“I should have** called to tell you I’d be late.”
- **“I shouldn’t have** taken your CD without asking.”
- **“I accept full responsibility.”** *(formal)*
- **“My behavior was inexcusable.”** *(formal)*

Promising to Do Better

It’s also common to include a promise in your apology, using **will/won’t**:

- **“Sorry about the spill – I’ll clean it up.”**
- **“I’m sorry for breaking your calculator – I’ll buy you another one.”**
- **“I apologize for the mistake – I’ll be more careful next time.”**
- **“I’d like to apologize for being late – it won’t happen again.”**

Asking for Forgiveness

Sometimes people end an apology by asking the other person to forgive:

- **“Please don’t be angry at me.”**
- **“Please don’t hold it against me.”**
- **“Will you forgive me?”**

Responding to an Apology

There are several ways to respond to an apology, depending on the situation and the seriousness of the problem:

- **“That’s OK.”**
- **“It’s all right.”**
- **“Don’t worry about it.”**
- **“No problem.”**
- **“No harm done.”**

Say this to emphasize that there’s no major damage resulting from the person’s mistake.

- **“It happens.”**

Say this when the other person has made a mistake that is common, and happens frequently to everyone

- **“I understand.”**

For more serious problems, you can add these phrases. They emphasize the fact that you consider the problem resolved, and you don't want it to affect your relationship in the future.

- **“Let's forget about it.”**
- **“We'll say no more about it.”**
- **“We'll consider the matter closed.”**
- **“I forgive you.” / “You're forgiven.”**

Unfortunately, when you apologize, the other person might still be angry, and not want to accept the apology. Here are some examples of angry rejections of apologies:

- **“I'm sorry for the way I treated you yesterday.”**
“You should be!”
- **“I'd like to apologize for the late delivery.”**
“Well, that's not good enough! I'd like a refund, too.”
- **“Sorry about the loud music last night.”**
“Don't do it again.” / “Don't let it happen again.”

You can use a variation of this last phrase together with one of the other phrases when you DO want to accept the apology, but you also want to warn the other person that future mistakes will not be tolerated. For example: “It's all right. Just don't let it happen again, OK?”

In the conversation, we also see four different ways to express regret.

I should have... / I shouldn't have...

- **“I should have** studied harder for that test. I was pretty unprepared.”
- “I saw a beautiful sunset yesterday. **I should have** taken a picture.”
- **“I shouldn't have** left my umbrella at home – it's starting to rain now.”
- “I have a stomachache. **I shouldn't have** eaten so much at the buffet.”

Pronunciation tip: Most native speakers pronounce these expressions like **should of** / **shoulda** and **shouldn't of** or **shouldn'a** – but the correct way to write it is always “should have” and “shouldn't have.”

I regret –ING...

- “**I regret dropping** out of school – it was a big mistake.”
- “**I regret waiting** until I was an adult to start learning another language.”
- “**I regret not studying** abroad when I had the chance.”
- “**I regret not staying** in touch with my childhood friends.”

When talking about things you wish were different in the past, always use the –ING form of the verb after “regret.” This is a bit more formal; in spoken English we usually use “I wish I had / hadn't”:

I wish + past perfect:

- “**I wish I'd started** taking dance lessons years ago.”
- “I'm stuck in traffic – **I wish I'd taken** the train instead of the bus.”
- “**I wish I hadn't broken up** with my high school boyfriend – but I was young and immature.”
- “**I wish I hadn't drunk** that whole bottle of wine yesterday. Now I have a terrible hangover.”

If only + past perfect...!

This phrase is often used as an exclamation:

- “**If only I'd invested** in Apple Computers 20 years ago! If I had, I'd be rich today.”
- “**If only I'd known** you were coming! I would have made dinner.”
- “**If only I hadn't been** so shy in college! I probably would have had a lot more fun.”
- “I couldn't sleep at all last night – **if only I hadn't watched** that horror movie before going to bed!”

“If only + past perfect” is often followed by imagining what would have happened if your action in the past had been different, as in the first three examples.

You've finished Lesson 27! Today's speaking task is to leave a message telling me one thing you had to apologize for and one or two regrets you have. Describe the situation and try to use some of the phrases from the lesson.

Click here to record your message: <https://www.speakpipe.com/espressoenglish>