
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

How do you... say sorry?



This is not a word-for-word transcript

Finn

Hi this is Finn, with another guide to real, spoken English. This time, how to say **sorry**. Now, we all make mistakes, but how we say sorry is very important.

Being polite people, the British do say sorry quite a lot. **I'm sorry, have you got the time?, I'm sorry – do you know where Oxford Circus station is?** But this is more like saying **excuse me**. I'm sorry, have you got the time? is like: Excuse me, have you got the time?

Now, let's look at a few situations where people really do mean **sorry**, and the different ways the word is used.

Rob and Neil are going to apologise to each other quite a lot in these examples.

So, first, Neil apologises to Rob. They've agreed to meet at a cafe. What does Neil say?

Neil

Hi Rob, **sorry I'm late**. The train was supposed to get here 30 minutes ago. But you know how it is... horrible delays, I'm afraid.

Rob

That's ok.

Finn

Sorry I'm late. That might be the most common apology you'll hear in English! Sorry I'm late! You could also use this pattern **sorry I'm...** to say things like **sorry I'm slow**, or **sorry I'm not very good at this**.

Right. Now's it's Rob's turn to apologise to Neil. Rob borrowed Neil's bike – but something bad happened. What was it?

Rob

Neil, I've got something to tell you. You know how you lent me your bike? Well, I don't have it. It was stolen. **And I'm really sorry**.

Neil

Right.

Rob

I'm so sorry about this.

Neil

Rob, you're an idiot.

Finn

The bike was stolen. And Neil sounds a bit angry. And did you notice how Rob apologised? Well first, he prepared Neil for the apology by saying:

Rob

Neil, I've got something to tell you.

Finn

When someone hears this, they know something serious is coming next. Next, the apology itself. And this was just a simple sentence.

Rob

I'm really sorry.

Finn

I'm really sorry. You could also say **I'm so sorry.** Or just, **I'm sorry.** Or just **sorry.**

Rob

Well, I don't have it. It was stolen. And **I'm really sorry.**

Neil

Right.

Rob

I'm so sorry about this.

Finn

I'm so sorry about this. In English, you often say you're sorry 'about' something – listen to these...

***I'm sorry about** the flowers.*

***I'm sorry about** the cake. I cooked it for too long.*

***I'm sorry about** the mess on the floor.*

Right, we're almost there – but remember Neil called Rob an idiot? Well, Neil feels bad. Neil's turn to apologise to Rob. How does he do it?

Neil

Rob. **I really want to apologise for** what I said earlier.

Finn

So Neil said: "**I want to apologise for** what I said". Lots of people do this in English. It's a way of saying sorry, without using the word 'sorry'. I want to apologise for being late, I want to apologise for the mess on the floor.

But Neil actually did say sorry afterwards. He said:

Neil

I'm really sorry for calling you an idiot.

Finn

Sorry for calling you an idiot. Sorry for... can be followed by a verb in the –ing form, like Neil used it there: "**Sorry for calling you an idiot**". Or followed by a noun. Listen to these these:

Sorry for making you late.

Sorry for the mess on the floor.

There we go – lots of different ways to say sorry:

I'm sorry

I'm really sorry

I'm so sorry

sorry about something

sorry for something

and I want to apologise for something.

And there we are. **I'm really sorry** but I have to go now. Bye.

Here's the whole conversation of Neil and Rob again:

Rob

Neil, I've got something to tell you. You know how you lent me your bike? Well, I don't have it. It was stolen. And **I'm really sorry**.

Neil

Right.

Rob

I'm so sorry about this.

Neil

Rob, you're an idiot.

Rob. **I really want to apologise for** what I said earlier. **I'm really sorry for** calling you an idiot.