

How to Apologize in English (and Repair Mistakes)

Say sorry like you mean it — then fix it

EPISODE 14 • LEVEL B1-B2

Episode summary

- A real apology has four parts: own it, name it, fix it, prevent it. “Sorry” alone is a sound, not an apology.
- Match the weight: “Excuse me” for small bumps, “I am sorry” for real mistakes, “I sincerely apologize” for serious ones.
- Take responsibility with active voice: “I made a mistake.” Never “Mistakes were made” — by whom? Ghosts?
- Delete the “if”: “I am sorry I offended you” — never “I am sorry if I offended you.” And never “I am sorry you feel that way.”
- Pair words with action: “Let me make up for the delay with express shipping.” The repair ends when they feel okay, not when you feel relieved.
- Save “sorry” for real damage — “Thanks for your time” for small things. Then extract the lesson, delete the replay, and move on.

What’s inside this PDF

20 key words • the four-part apology • Say It Better upgrades • 3 practice exercises

Key Vocabulary

20 words from this episode — learn them, then use them this week

1. apology

the words you say when you did wrong.

> A real apology has four parts — own, name, fix, prevent.

2. regret

the sad feeling about a past mistake.

> I deeply regret missing your event.

3. make up for

to repair damage with action.

> Let me make up for the delay with express shipping.

4. take responsibility

to own your part.

> I take full responsibility for the error.

5. forgive

to stop feeling angry about a mistake.

> She forgave me after my sincere apology.

6. move on

to continue after a problem is resolved.

> We apologized, we fixed it, we moved on.

7. sincere

real and honest, not fake.

> Save “I sincerely apologize” for serious mistakes.

8. fault

responsibility for a mistake.

> It was my fault — I should have checked.

9. excuse

a small apology for a small thing.

> “Excuse me” fits small bumps.

10. prevent

to stop something happening again.

> Prevent it: “From now on, I will set a reminder.”

11. repair

to fix what your mistake damaged.

> Words apologize; repair rebuilds trust.

12. lesson

what the mistake taught you.

> Extract the lesson, keep the lesson.

13. replay

playing the mistake again in your head.

> Delete the replay — do not replay the mistake for weeks.

14. damage

the harm a mistake caused.

> Save “sorry” for real damage.

15. pressure

stress put on other people.

> Missing the deadline put pressure on the team.

16. specific

exact and clear, not vague.

> “Sorry” without specifics is a sound, not a repair.

17. active voice

saying who did it: “I made a mistake.”

> Active voice is brave. Passive voice hides.

18. non-apology

words that sound like sorry but blame you.

> “I am sorry you feel that way” is a non-apology.

19. brave

willing to face something hard.

> Three brave words: “I made a mistake.”

20. timeline

in this episode: forgiveness takes its own time.

> Forgiveness has its own timeline — never demand it.

The Four-Part Apology

own it, name it, fix it, prevent it

Own it

"I was wrong. I missed the deadline." — three brave words: "I made a mistake."

Name it

"...and that put pressure on the team." Specifics turn a sound into a repair.

Fix it

"I have fixed it. Could you check that everything is okay now?"

Prevent it

"From now on, birthdays go in my calendar a week early."

Move on

"I extracted the lesson. The replay is deleted."

Say It Better — 10 upgrades

☐ "Sorry" — fast, eyes on your phone.

☐ "I was wrong. I missed the deadline, and that put pressure on the team."

☐ "I am sorry you feel that way."

☐ "I am sorry I did that. It was my fault."

☐ "I am sorry if I offended you."

☐ "I am sorry I offended you. Here is how I will fix it."

☐ "Mistakes were made."

☐ "I made a mistake." — active voice, brave words.

☐ "Sorry for asking a question."

☐ "Thanks for your time." — save "sorry" for real damage.

☐ Apologizing and vanishing.

☐ "I have fixed it. Could you check that everything is okay now?"

☐ Replaying the mistake for weeks.

☐ "I extracted the lesson. The replay is deleted."

☐ "Sorry" five times for one small thing.

☐ "I am sorry I am late. It will not happen again." — one real apology beats five empty ones.

☐ "My bad" for a serious mistake.

☐ "My bad" is for spilled coffee; "I sincerely apologize" is for real damage. Match the weight.

☐ "You have to forgive me."

☐ "I understand if you need time." — forgiveness has its own timeline.

Practice Time

3 exercises — do them today, not “someday”

Exercise 1 — Fill in the blank

Word bank: apology • take responsibility • make up for • forgive • regret

1. A real _____ has four parts — own, name, fix, prevent.
2. “I _____ _____ _____ for the error” — no “if,” no passive voice, no ghosts.
3. Words apologize; actions _____ _____ _____ the damage.
4. You can ask for forgiveness, never demand it — it has its own timeline.
5. _____ is the feeling; the apology is the action.

Exercise 2 — Repair it

Rebuild each weak sorry (answers below):

1. “Sorry” — fast, eyes on your phone. > Say it better:
2. “I am sorry you feel that way.” > Say it better:
3. “Mistakes were made.” > Say it better:

Exercise 3 — Repair one mistake

This week, repair one real mistake with the four parts — own it, name it, fix it, prevent it. “I was wrong. I forgot your birthday. I am sending your gift today. From now on, birthdays go in my calendar a week early.” Then move on: extract the lesson, delete the replay.

- A message you forgot to send.
- A meeting you were late to.
- A promise you broke.

Answer key

Ex 1: 1 apology • 2 take responsibility • 3 make up for • 4 forgive • 5 Regret

Ex 2: 1 “I was wrong. I missed the deadline, and that put pressure on the team.” 2 “I am sorry I did that. It was my fault.” 3 “I made a mistake.”