65 Apologies, excuses and thanks

A Apologies with common replies

We can **apologise** [say sorry] in different ways in different situations.


A: **I'm(terribly/really) sorry** – I've forgotten your book.


B: **Never mind.** That's OK.

Terribly/really makes you sound 'more sorry'.


A: **I beg your pardon** – I didn't see you there.


B: **That's all right.** (also **That's OK.**)

I beg your pardon is a more formal apology, often used if you walk into someone.


A: **(I'm) sorry to disturb you.**


B: **Don't worry.** Come on in. I can finish this later.

We use this phrase when we **interrupt** / speak to someone who is busy working.


A: **(I'm) sorry to keep you waiting – I won't be long.**


B: OK. Fine.

We use this phrase when someone is waiting for us. *I won't be long* = I will be with you very soon.


A: **Excuse me,** I won't be a minute.


B: OK. Fine.

We use this phrase when we have to leave a room or go somewhere.


A: **I must apologise for** the noise last night.


B: That's all right. I understand.

This is a more formal apology, and it is often used in business letters.


A: **I'm(really) sorry I'm late.**


B: Don't worry.

Common mistakes

I'm sorry I'm late. (NOT I'm sorry ~~for be~~ late. OR I'm sorry ~~to be~~ late.)

B Excuses

We often give an explanation or **excuse** after an apology. An **excuse** is a *reason* for the apology, which may or may not be true. These are excuses students might give for being late for class.

I'm sorry I'm late for class …

- There was a **delay** / **hold-up** on the underground. [when a train, plane, etc. leaves or arrives later than you expect]
- I was **held up** in traffic. [**hold up** – cause a delay and make someone late – is often used in the passive]
- My train **was cancelled** [the train company decided not to run the train], and I had to wait half an hour for the next one.
- I **overslept** [slept longer than I planned or wanted to].

C Thanks and replies

These are some common ways of **thanking** people, with typical replies.

A: **Thanks** (**very much**).
B: **Not at all.** (also **That's OK.**)

A: I've brought your books.
B: Oh, **cheers.** (*infml*)
A: **No problem.** (*infml*)

A: I'll post those letters for you.
B: Oh, thank you. **That's very kind of you.** (This is polite and slightly more formal.)

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Exercises

65.1 **Find three more pairs of phrases that have a similar meaning.**

~~thanks very much~~	I'm terribly sorry	don't worry	never mind
I was held up	~~cheers~~	I beg your pardon	there was a delay

thanks very much / cheers .....

.....

.....

.....

65.2 **Complete the dialogues with one word. Contractions (e.g. *I'm*) count as one word.**

1 A: I'm *terribly* ..... sorry.
B: That's OK.

2 A: Thanks very much.
B: ..... at all.

3 A: Sorry to ..... you waiting. I won't be ..... .
B: That's all ..... .

4 A: I'm sorry ..... late. The 7:30 train was ..... , so I had to wait for the next one.
B: That's OK. No ..... .

5 A: I gave your parents a lift to the station.
B: Oh, thanks. That's very ..... of you.

6 A: I must ..... for missing the meeting yesterday afternoon.
B: ..... mind. I'll ask Claire to tell you what happened.

7 A: I ..... your pardon. I thought the room was empty.
B: That's OK.

65.3 **What could you say in these situations? If it is an apology, give an explanation.**

1 You walk into someone by accident and he/she almost falls over.
I'm terribly sorry. OR I beg your pardon. I didn't see you.

2 You arrange to meet some friends in town at 9 am but you are twenty minutes late.

3 Your car has broken down. You're pushing it to the side of the road and a man offers to help.

4 You need to speak to your boss but she's working. What do you say when you enter her office?

5 You have to leave a meeting to take an important phone call. What do you say to the others?

6 You are on the phone but a customer is waiting to talk to you. What can you say to them?

7 You are late for an appointment because you had to wait half an hour in traffic.

8 Your company promised to send some information to a customer last week. You still haven't sent the information and you must now write to explain. Write the first sentence of your letter.

65.4 Over to you

Answer the questions. If possible, compare your answers with someone else.

1 Are you ever late for class or work? If so, do you have to apologise to anyone? Do you normally give a reason why you are late? If so, what reasons are most common?

2 What other things have you apologised for recently? What did you say? Did you give an excuse?

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