

Elements of a Good Apology

Using the right words is important. Some people prefer the word “sorry” rather than “apologize”. Some may want to hear the word “regret” or “please forgive me”. Some may want all words used. Use the words that the person would want to hear. The most important thing to convey is genuineness. According to Aaron Lazare from his book “On Apology”, the elements of a good transformative apology are:

1. **Acknowledge the Offense**

- (1) correctly identifying the party or parties responsible for the grievance, as well as the party or parties to whom the apology is owed;
- (2) acknowledging the offending behaviors in adequate detail;
- (3) recognizing the impact these behaviors had on the victim(s); and
- (4) confirming that the grievance was a violation of the social or moral contract between the parties.

This sounds like a lot of detail to think about, but a simple version of it could be “I am very sorry that I was so late. I realize that this has caused everyone to have to reschedule and I recognize the impact of my mistake. I let you guys down and I’m really sorry.”

- ### 2. **Offer Explanation** - Explaining can often turn into sounding like an excuse. The explanation of what happened would need to be offered with enough detail to sound legitimate, but not so much detail that it starts to sound as if you are seeking sympathy for yourself.

Lazare suggests offering very little explanation and maybe a simple “I was responsible. I deeply regret it. I have no excuse” as the most powerful. “Never ruin an apology with an excuse.” — Benjamin Franklin

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An example could be “This was really wrong and I feel terrible to have done that to you”.

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Try something like “I’d really like to make it up to you. If you want, I will make all the arrangements to reschedule and make sure everything falls into place. Would you like for me to do that?”

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You could acknowledge the issue by saying something like “I know you may not be ready yet to hear this, but I am truly sorry”.

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Say something like “Just know that I will keep working to make this up to you and please let me know if there’s anything else that I can do that would make you feel better. I see how much this hurt you and again I am truly sorry”.



Use this as a template to write down your notes to prepare a good apology:

Describe the offense in some detail:

The explanation that doesn't include excuses:

Remorse - How will you communicate that your apology is genuine:

What will you offer to do because of the offense and to make up for it:

When is the right time for this apology:

If your partner does not immediately accept the apology at first, describe what else you can do or say:



Sample Apology Statement

Sometimes it helps to practice an actual apology statement. Here is a sample that you could fill in:

“I am truly sorry for **(the offense)**. I was **(the explanation)** but I realize that is no excuse. I just wanted you to know what happened. **(Remorse)** I feel terrible about it and I know that I must have hurt you badly. I may not be able to fully make up for it, but I will **(reparations)**. You may not be ready to hear it **(timing)** but I wanted to make sure you knew that I totally understand that my actions hurt you. **(Nuance)** Please let me know if there is anything else I can do to make it up to you.”

Your Apology