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Saying sorry in Japan

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Geographical position

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Japanese People and Apologizing

It's important to say you're sorry in most countries, but in Japan apologizing is a cultural must that is non-negotiable for Japanese.

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The interesting aspect of Japan's "apology first" culture is that it doesn't necessarily mean you have some interior sense of sorrow when you apologize - quite often it is simply a way of smoothing over social situations in Japan.



Even if a person didn't do anything wrong, saying "I'm sorry," is a way to maintain harmony and avoid needless embarrassment or awkwardness at work or in some other Japanese social situation.



When apologizing the Japanese often bow. The more you you feel sorry, the more deeply you bow.



Here are some expressions used to apologize.

Sumimasen. すみません。

It is probably the most common phrase used to apologize. It can be used in several different situations (when requesting something, when thanking someone etc.), listen carefully to what the context is.

SUMIMASEN

**MOUSHIWAKE
ARIMASEN**

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Moushiwake arimasen. 申し訳ありません。

Very formal expression. It should be used to superiors. It shows a stronger feeling than "Sumimasen". Like "Sumimasen", "Moushiwake arimasen" is also used to express gratitude.

Shitsurei shimashita. 失礼しました。

Formal expression, but it doesn't show as strong a feeling as "Moushiwake arimasen".

**SHITSUREI
SHIMASHITA**

GOMENNASAI
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Gomennasai. ごめんなさい。

Common phrase. Unlike "Sumimasen" the usage is limited to apologizing. Since it is less formal and has a childish ring to it, it is not appropriate to use to superiors.

Shitsurei. 失礼。

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Casual. It is mostly used by men. It also can be used as "Excuse me".

Doumo. どうも。

doumo
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Casual. It also can be used as "Thanks".

Gomen. ごめん。

Very casual. It should be only used with close friends or family members.

gomen
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In conclusion I want to say that the Japanese typically apologize far more frequently than Westerners. This probably results from cultural differences between them. Westerners seem reluctant to admit their own failure.

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