



Learn Japanese Pod with Asuka and Alex - Series 02 Podcast 03 How to apologise in Japanese

Lesson goal

In this lesson you're going to learn some various ways to apologise in Japanese and what situations to use them in naturally.

Main lesson

Being humble, sincere and ready to admit you are wrong are traits held in high regard in Japan. Making excuses is avoided as that can be interpreted as being selfish or childish.

Japanese are also sometimes quick to apologise for the actions of others especially if they are in the same group. Some westerners might sometimes find this hard to understand however Japanese people are highly sensitive to the group dynamic and how their actions might affect others.

So, let's have a look at the most useful vocabulary and phrases for apologising in Japanese.

すみません Sumimasen

This is most common way to say sorry for something. It is common for people in conversation to pronounce it "seimasen". However, it is also useful in a variety of other situations, for example:

1) "Excuse me" if you bump into someone on the street or just a simple apology

すみません – sumimasen

Sorry, that was bad of me

2) Getting someone's attention such as a waiter or when you want to ask someone directions.

すみません、メニューお願いします – sumimasen, menyuu onegaishimasu

Excuse me, can I have the menu please?

すみません、駅はどこですか – sumimasen, eki wa doko desu ka

Excuse me, where is the station?



3) Receiving something from someone

A: メニューをどうぞ – menyuu o dozo

B: すみません – sumimasen

A: Here's the menu

B: Thanks

ごめんなさい Gomen nasai

“Gomen nasai” is a little less formal than “sumimasen” and can sometimes sound a little childish so it's better to only use this with friends and not your boss or other superiors.

It can also be shortened to ごめんね – gomen ne which is much more casual. When in doubt, use “sumimasen”.

申し訳ありません Mōshi wake arimasen

This is a very formal phrase and is stronger than “sumimasen” and “gomen nasai”. This should be used when apologizing to superiors. As a tourist or customer, you'll often hear this when staff apologize to you.

Here are some typical uses of this phrase:

大変申し訳ありません -taihen mōshiwake arimasen

I'm very sorry

遅れて申し訳ありません – okurete mōshiwake arimasen

I'm sorry for being late

申し訳ありません満席です – mōshiwake arimasen manseki desu

I'm sorry, the flight is full. (no seats left)



申し訳ありません満室です – mōshiwake arimasen manshitsu desu

I'm sorry we don't have any available rooms left.

失礼します Shitsurei shimasu

Shitsurei literally means “rude” so when you say Shitsurei shimasu is a semi-causal way to say you are sorry. It has various uses including the following;

失礼な！ – shitsurei na

How rude! – Used when complaining about a rude person.

失礼します – shitsurei shimasu

I'm sorry / Excuse me

失礼しました – shitsurei shimashita

I'm sorry (This is usually used for something bad you did or a mistake you made)

失礼 – Shitsurei

Sorry (Very casual and usually used more by men)

お先に失礼します – osaki ni shitsurei shimasu

May I be excused? – This is used when you are the first person to leave a social gathering or the office at the end of the day.



ご迷惑 Gomeiwaku

This means trouble or troublesome and although is not an apology in itself, it is used a lot with “sumimasen” and “mōshiwake arimasen” and is quite formal. For example:

ご迷惑をおかけてしてすみません – gomeiwaku o okakeshite sumimasen

I'm sorry for any trouble I caused. (Polite)

ご迷惑をおかいております – gomeiwaku o okakeshite orimasu

(The most formal way of apologizing often seen on signs outside construction works)

お詫び申し上げます Owabi Mōshi agemasu

This is extremely polite and formal. It is rarely used in speech and usually appears in formal letters of apology.



Dialog examples from the podcast

Example 01

A: あの、変なことして本当にすみません

B: どんなこと？

A: ちょっと言えないんですけど

A: ano, hen na koto shite hontou ni sumimasen

B: donna koto

A: chotto ienain desu kedo

A: I did something weird, I'm sorry

B: What kind of thing?

A: I can't really say

Example 02

遅れちゃってすみません

okurete shimatte sumimasen

I'm sorry for being late

Example 03

すみません、メニューお願いします

sumimasen menyuu onegaishimasu

Excuse me, may I have the menu please?

Example 04

すみません、駅はどこですか

sumimasen eki wa doko desu ka

Excuse me, where is the station

Example 05

A: 明香さんいろいろ助けてくれました。どうぞ、バラです。

B: すみませんアレックス

A: asuka san iroiro tasukete kuremashita. douzo bara desu

B: sumimasen arekusu

A: Asuka, you've helped me with so many (various) things. Here are some roses.

B: Thank you Alex (You shouldn't have)



Example 06

お忙しところ大変申し訳ございません

oisogashii tokoro taihen moushi wake arimasen

I'm sorry to disturb you at such a busy time

Example 07

お待たせしてしまって本当に申し訳ございません

omatase shite shimatte hontou ni moushi wake gozaimasen

I'm sorry to have kept you waiting

Example 08

ご迷惑をおかけして大変申し訳ございませんでした

gomeiwaku o okake shite taihen moushi wake gozaimasen deshita

I'm extremely sorry to have caused you such trouble

Example 09

大変ご迷惑をおかけして申し訳ございませんでした。では失礼します。

taihen gomeiwaku wo okake shite moushi wake gozaimasen deshita. dewa shitsurei shimasu.

I'm sorry to have caused you so much trouble. Please allow me to excuse myself now (and leave)



Get involved with the Learn Japanese Pod Community

Website: <http://learnjapanesepod.com>

Send us a question at: info@learnjapanesepod.com

Twitter: <https://twitter.com/japanesepodcast>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/LearnJapanesePod>

FIND OUT ABOUT OUR PREMIUM MEMBERSHIP HERE:

<http://learnjapanesepod.com/premium-membership/>