



American Expression E2677 Pardon me

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The phrase “pardon me” is a polite expression used in English to ask for forgiveness, request repetition, or politely get someone’s attention. It is commonly heard in everyday conversations and is considered a courteous way to acknowledge a small mistake or interruption. The word “pardon” itself comes from a French origin meaning forgiveness or excuse, and when combined with “me,” it literally means “please forgive me.” Over time, the phrase has become a standard part of polite speech in many English-speaking cultures.

One of the most common uses of “pardon me” occurs when someone does something slightly impolite unintentionally, such as bumping into another person in a crowded place. By saying “pardon me,” the speaker quickly acknowledges the action and expresses courtesy. This small phrase helps maintain social harmony and demonstrates respect for others. In public settings like buses, elevators, or busy sidewalks, it is often used automatically as a sign of good manners.

Another frequent use of “pardon me” is when someone did not hear or understand what another person said. Instead of bluntly saying “what?” which can sound rude, a person may politely say “pardon me?” to request clarification or repetition. In this context, the phrase functions as a gentle way of asking someone to say something again. It signals attentiveness while still maintaining politeness in conversation.

“Pardon me” can also be used when trying to get someone’s attention in a respectful manner. For example, a person might say “pardon me” before asking a question to a stranger, such as requesting directions or assistance. This usage shows consideration and helps soften the approach, especially when interrupting someone who may be busy. In customer service, hospitality, and formal environments, this expression is widely appreciated.

In addition, the phrase sometimes serves as a mild apology for minor bodily actions such as coughing, sneezing, or clearing one’s throat in public. By saying “pardon me,” the speaker shows awareness that the action may have disturbed others. Although these situations are natural and unavoidable, the expression communicates courtesy and awareness of social etiquette.

The tone and context of “pardon me” can slightly change its meaning. When spoken gently, it signals politeness and humility. However, when used with a certain tone, it can also express surprise or mild offense, as in “Pardon me?” when someone hears something unexpected or inappropriate. In such cases, the phrase conveys a request for clarification along with a subtle reaction.

In conclusion, “pardon me” is a versatile and polite expression that plays an important role in everyday communication. Whether used to apologize, request repetition, gain attention, or acknowledge a minor interruption, the phrase reflects respect and consideration for others. Its continued use shows how small expressions of courtesy can help maintain positive social interactions and smoother conversations in daily life.

#### Questions for Discussion

1. What situations make it appropriate to say “pardon me” instead of “excuse me” or “sorry”?
2. How does saying “pardon me” help maintain politeness and respect in everyday conversations?
3. In what ways can the tone of voice change the meaning or feeling of the phrase “pardon me”?
4. Why might “pardon me” be considered more formal or polite than simply saying “what?” when asking someone to repeat something?
5. Can you think of situations in public places where using “pardon me” would improve social interactions between strangers?