



Survival Phrases S1

Cantonese Apologies

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Traditional Chinese

對唔住
唔好意思
唔緊要

Jyutping

deoi3 m4 zyu6
m4 hou2 ji3 si1
m4 gan2 jiu3

English

I'm sorry. Excuse me. (formal)
I'm sorry. Excuse me.
It doesn't matter.

Vocabulary

Traditional	Jyutping	English
對唔住	deoi3 m4 zyu6	sorry
唔好意思	m4 hou2 ji3 si1	excuse me, sorry
唔緊要	m4 gan2 jiu3	it doesn't matter

Vocabulary Sample Sentences

對唔住我嚟遲咗。

deoi3 m4 zyu6 ngo5 lai4 ci4
zo2.

Sorry I was late.

唔好意思，洗手間喺邊？

m4 hou2 ji3 si1, sai2 sau2
gaan1 hai2 bin1 ?

Excuse me, where is the
washroom?

唔緊要。

m4 gan2 jiu3.

Doesn't matter.

Grammar Points

We use 對唔住 (deoi3 m4 zyu6) in a formal level of speech, and it functions as a "Very sorry." We don't use this phrase lightly: it's mainly reserved for serious offenses. When speaking informally with friends, the most common apology is 唔好意思 (m4 hou2 ji3 si1). You can use both apologies to make your way through a crowd. If someone apologizes to you, you can simply reply with 唔緊要 (m4 gan2 jiu3) - "It doesn't matter." This is a very informal way to excuse someone.

Cultural Insight

Quick Tip

In Imperial Chinese culture, an act of deep respect was shown by kneeling and bowing so low as to have one's head touching the ground. This is known as "Kowtow," 叩頭 (kau3 tau4) in Cantonese. However, the kowtow has long disappeared as a common show of respect in China. A warm smile will now do the trick.