
A question from Mohammad Atai in Iran:

I do appreciate receiving your advice regarding the use of *to worry* and *to be worried*.

Actually, when do we use the following sentences?

I worry about you.

I am worried about you.

Catherine Chapman answers:

Hello Mohammad! There's no need to worry – I'm here to answer your question! First of all, let me say that both of your sentences are grammatically correct. So we need to have a look at the way we construct them and use them to see how they're similar and how they're different.

Now let's look at the first one. When we say *I worry about you* we use the verb *to worry* in the active form. So the subject is *I*, the object's *you*, so it's a simple subject – verb – object structure (and there's a preposition between the verb and the object, that's *about*).

Now the second one - *I am worried about you* - starts with a subject, but then it has the verb *to be* followed by the past participle of the verb *worry*. Now, you can see that *worried* operates as an adjective in this sentence; also, the phrase *I am worried* can be understood as a passive structure, where the passive subject (*I*) is before the verb and the agent (*you*) is after the verb (or we don't mention it at all).

So, which form should you choose for which situation? Well I think that the first one - *I worry about you* - is a general statement which means that the speaker is generally worried, most of the time, about this person. But the second statement – *I am worried* – seems to have an element of 'now' about it – the speaker seems to be talking about a specific feeling (that's worry) that he or she has at the time of speaking – and he or she's mentioned the cause or the

reason for the feeling - *about you* – and that reinforces the idea that the worry is specific to this situation.

So, to show you what I mean, let's extend the sentences with a bit of context. If I say,

I worry about you – I'm your mother

mothers always worry about their children, it's not a specific situation, it's a general situation, *I worry about you because I'm your mum.*

But if I say,

I'm worried about you, you're looking very thin

that's a specific situation. Maybe you're usually not underweight at all but in this situation I think you look thin and I *am worried* about you.

So, let's sum up Mohammad. Both of your sentences are correct, and they mean pretty much the same thing. But if you want to talk about a general, long-lasting worry, say *I worry about you*, and if you want to talk about a specific worry related to a specific event that's happening now (or happened recently), you can say *I'm worried about you*.

OK then Mohammad, thanks very much for your question and I do hope you're not too worried about your English!

Catherine Chapman has a BA (hons) in Communication Studies, CTEFLA, DELTA and a Masters Degree in Educational Technology and ELT (Manchester University, UK). She has taught EFL, EAP and IT skills in several countries, worked in ELT management and has developed web-based ELT & EAP materials projects in institutions including Istanbul Technical University (Turkey) and Newcastle University (UK). She now works as an ELT Writer for BBC Learning English.