Hello and welcome to *How To* – the series all about useful English. My name is William Kremer.

Today, we’re going to be looking at how to ask a favour – that is, how to ask someone to do something for you out of kindness or generosity. For example, you might ask a friend to help you with your English. Or maybe you’re going to go away and you want a neighbour to water your plants.

Now, on one level, this is easy. All you need to do is say…

*Voice:* Can you do me a favour?

*William:* *Can you do me a favour?* Or you could say…

*Voice:* Can I ask a favour?

*William:* *Can I ask you to do me a favour?* Say one of those things, and then say what you want the other person to do. *Could you help me with my English? Can you water my plants next week?* Now, this gets a bit more complicated because we tend to be very polite when we’re asking favours. So instead of saying *Can you do me a favour?* what we might well say is,

*Voice:* Could I ask you to do me a favour?

*William:* *Could I ask you to do me a favour?*

*Voice:* Could I ask you to do me a favour?
William: That’s more polite than saying *Can you do me a favour?* Now, in the following clip, you’ll hear Catherine and Neil, who are neighbours. In this clip, Catherine checks that Neil isn’t busy and then she asks a favour. She’s going on holiday and she wants Neil to feed her cats while she’s away…

Neil: Oh hiya, how are you doing?
Catherine: Hi Neil, hi, I’m fine, um… have you got a minute?
Neil: Er, yeah, sure.
Catherine: I’m not disturbing you, am I?
Neil: No, no no.
Catherine: OK, well, what it was, um, I don’t know if I told you that I’m going on holiday next week for a couple of weeks…
Neil: Oh right, cool – very nice!
Catherine: Yes, and I was wondering if I could ask you a massive favour… which is would you mind popping in and feeding the cats while I’m away?
Neil: Yeah, yeah that’s fine, sure. I mean, what sort of time do they need to eat ‘cause um I, sometimes I get home …

William: Don’t worry if you missed some of that - they were speaking very very fast! But listen again to how Catherine asks her favour:

Catherine: I don’t know if I told you that I’m going on holiday next week for a couple of weeks…
Neil: Oh right, cool – very nice!
Catherine: Yes, and I was wondering if I could ask you a massive favour… which is would you mind popping in and feeding the cats while I’m away

William: *I was wondering if I could ask you a massive favour. I was wondering if I could ask you a massive favour.* There are a couple of things to note about this. Firstly, Catherine asks her favour as an indirect question in the past continuous tense – *I was wondering if I could ask you.*
William: This is a very polite way to make a request. Now the second thing to note about what Catherine said is that word *massive* which means ‘really big’. When we ask favours we tend to exaggerate by saying *Can I ask you a massive favour?* or *Can I ask you a big favour?* or maybe *Can I ask you a huge favour?*

Now in the next bit of the clip Catherine tells Neil all about her cats’ eating habits - how often they eat, what they eat and so on. I’m not going to play that to you, but if you go to the *How To* webpage on BBC Learning English dot com, you can listen to the whole conversation and read a transcript. Right now I’m going to fast-forward to the end of the conversation.

Catherine: …just give me a call and I’ll show you where everything is.
Neil: Yeah that’s fine, sure, no problem.
Catherine: Ah sweetheart, thank you so much!
Neil: Where are you going?
Catherine: Vietnam!
Neil: No way! Fantastic!
Catherine: I can’t wait!

William: Catherine says *Ah sweetheart, thank you so much*, which is a very warm and affectionate way of saying *thank you*. As well as *thank you*, there are a couple of special things that you can say when someone has agreed to do you a favour. Listen to this:

Catherine: Oh thank you so much Neil, I’ll bring you something nice back to say thanks!
Neil: Oh, you don’t have to do that.
William: Catherine says *I’ll bring you something nice back*. She’s saying that she’ll bring a gift back from holiday to say ‘thanks’ for the favour. It’s quite common, if someone agrees to do a favour, to use the future tense to promise a reward. So for example, you might say,

Voice: Oh thank you so much, I’ll buy you a drink when I get back!

William: *Thank you so much, I’ll buy you a drink when I get back!* And here’s another ways of doing this:

Voice: Oh thanks so much – I promise I’ll return the favour sometime!

William: *I promise I’ll return the favour* – this means that you will do the same favour for this person in the future, so, for example, when he goes on holiday you’ll feed his cats…you’ll ‘return the favour’.

Voice: Oh thanks so much – I promise I’ll return the favour sometime!

William: Lastly, you might want to use this phrase:

Voice: Oh thanks mate, I really owe you one!

William: *Thanks, I really owe you one.* You’re saying that you owe your friend a favour. *Thanks I really owe you* or maybe, *Thanks, I really owe you one.*

Voice: Oh thanks mate, I really owe you one!

William: Now don’t forget to go to the *How To…* webpage on BBC Learning English dot com for the script of this programme and some extra audio resources and a quiz. Goodbye!