

How To Respond to Nasty Emails

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Posted by [Nathaniel Francis](#)
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Responding to Nasty Emails

In the age of electronic communication, at some point you and I will will receive a nasty email (or some kind of social media message). Whether it's viciously disrespectful, harshly critical, or simply belligerent, this message will invoke a distinctly emotive, possibly even visceral reaction. Before you hit that reply button, consider the following process to prevent escalation and better express yourself.

Step 1: Read the nasty email

Actually read the email. Don't skim it or just get an impression from it. Slow down and actually read the email itself.

There may be implied meaning between the lines, but figure that out after a good, slow read of the entire email.

Slow... down... and take it all in.

Step 2: Refrain from screaming expletives

Let's be honest. That distinctly emotive, possibly even visceral reaction that you originally felt may intensify. You might wanna yell, curse, or even punch something. But don't. Hold on to that emotion and take a good look at what's going on inside your head. Ask yourself a few questions:

- Is this person being purposefully mean to you?
- Do you really care what this person thinks of you?
- Why is this email lighting you up?

The emotional reaction itself is a clue as to what's going on inside you. Don't let go of that.

Step 3: Write a response to the nasty email

Ok, now cut loose on your keyboard. Open a new email or text document and just start hammering away whatever comes to your mind. Get vicious if you want. Get aggressive if you need to. Cry if you feel like it. Release everything you **really** want to say. Just **DON'T HIT SEND** and **DON'T PUT AN ADDRESS** in your email. This email is most definitely not going back to sender. This is for you, not them.

Step 4: Save the reply message and walk away

You really need a break at this point. Let some steam loose, get a cup of tea. Maybe go for a short walk. You want to put the last few minutes behind you a bit and let all that pent up emotion simmer a bit. This step should be at least 5 minutes, probably 15 or more if you can swing it (after all, you may be at work).

Step 5: Write completely new response draft

Do **not** delete the first message and do **not** write this one next to it. This is a totally, completely new message. In this message you want to:

- say what you want to say
- address what you want to address
- write what you mean
- be clear and direct

Step 6: Lather, Rinse, Repeat (Steps 4 & 5)

Cycle through steps 4 and 5 again and again as often as necessary until

1. You have processed what you feel internally. This will very likely not make it onto the page, but it is important that you personally process it before you move on.
2. You have produced an email that you think is
 - honest
 - direct
 - respectable
 - clear

- concise

Remember: do not put an address in **any** of these emails. Keep them all blank.

Step 7: Send the good email to your email buddy

If you think I made that up (email buddy) - I did. Well... kinda. I've found it a good practice to have someone in your life that you trust to look over your tough emails (and vice versa). That fresh pair of eyes is very important. The job of the email buddy is to go over your response in a constructively critical way. It is important that you only share the good email with your email buddy. Do **not** share the offensive email you originally received or any of your versions before the good one. Your partner is only meant to help you in your actual response, not the entire process (that would be exhausting). That being said, your email buddy may request some context. If that is the case, only share enough to satisfy what they need - be careful to not draw your email buddy down into the depths of your emotional experience.

Step 8: Revise good email according to your email buddy's suggestions

Take your email buddy's perspective seriously and make at least some of the changes they suggest. Again, it is important that this is a person that you respect and trust. Remember that their role is to help you produce the email response you want: one that is honest, direct, respectable, clear, and concise.

Step 9: Lather, Rinse, Repeat (Steps 7 & 8)

Go back and forth as many times as you feel you need to with your email buddy until you both agree that the final draft is something you are happy with. This may take a few rounds or it may be a single go.

Step 10: Send final email to sender

You finally have a good response to a nasty email. Now you can put the return address on it and send it to the instigator with a clean conscience.

Step 11: Compare

Don't delete the previous drafts of the return email. Instead, take a moment to compare them. The very first draft and the final draft would be the best specimens of how you felt and how you chose to carefully respond to the nasty email. Take a good look at both of them (and any others that you felt were key steps along the way). If you have access to one, consider using a text comparing program (like [Beyond Compare](#)) to show you the similarities and differences between these emails - it will help make things very clear.

Step 12: Celebrate

At this point, you will realize that careful consideration saved you from being the monster you would have been out of pure reaction. You could have just hit reply and sent your original, heartfelt message, but by slowing things down and choosing your words carefully, you've become a better person - at least as far as your email is concerned.

And there you have it, a 12 step process to save yourself from being as bad as the nasty email you got stuck dealing with.

Happy Emailing!

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