

# Say No to a Client: Reply Templates

*Four replies for the requests that aren't revisions or scope changes: a rush date, a discount, a "can you just" favor, and a job you can't build. Each one has three parts: the no, one real yes, and a next step the client answers in one word. Fill in every [bracket] and delete the guidance in italics. Works in Google Docs, Word, Notion or any email client.*

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## 1. The formula: No, Yes, Next

- **No:** say it plainly, in the first line, about the request and not the person. Give a reason only if it's true and about the schedule or the scope, not your week.
- **Yes:** offer one real thing you can do and will keep. A smaller yes you keep beats a bigger one you break.
- **Next:** end on one step the client can take with a single word ("phased", "smaller", "guide").

*If the request is more work on the project itself (another page, another round), it isn't a no. It's a price: use a change request or a revisions reply instead.*

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## 2. Reply: a rush date

*Use it when the client wants the launch earlier than the date you agreed. Before you answer, look at your other clients' deadlines and see which one would move. AIGA's Standard Form of Agreement says to factor in your prior commitments to other clients when you draft a work schedule.*

**Subject:** Re: [Launch date]

Hi [Client first name], I can't launch all [seven] pages by [the 6th]. That slot is [another client's]. [Home, services and contact] can go live on [the 6th], and the other [four] on [the 20th] as planned. Reply "phased" and I'll send the plan today.

*Only give a reason that's true. Charging extra for a rush is your call: quote it like any change, and only if no one else's date moves.*

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## 3. Reply: a discount

*Use it when the client asks for a lower price. AIGA's Standard Form of Agreement says that the initial client response is often to ask for a lower price, that it's best to avoid a discussion of standard hourly rates and discuss the scope of work instead, and that reducing the scope of work reduces the overall price. So cut the job, not the rate.*

**Subject:** Re: [Price]

Hi [Client first name], I can't do the [seven]-page site for [\$3,000]. A [five]-page site, without [the booking form], is [\$3,450]. Or the full site, [\$4,800] in [three] payments. Reply "smaller" or "full".

*Check the sums: [\$4,800] minus what you remove ([\$1,350]) is [\$3,450]; [\$4,800] in [three] payments is [\$1,600] each. The payment plan is your own terms, so set yours. If both are still too high, ask what number they had in mind.*

**If a friend asks for a "friend price":** *no smaller version, no apology. Same job, same price, friends included, is our opinion, not a rule.*

Hi [Friend's name], thanks for thinking of me for [the café]. Same job, same price for every client: [the page] is [\$900]. If now isn't the right time, tell me when and I'll send a fresh quote. Reply "go" and I'll send the quote today.

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#### 4. Reply: a "can you just" favor

*Use it for a favor that isn't part of the project, like setting up email. If it's more work on the website, that's a price instead. If it's a true two-minute favor, just do it.*

**Subject:** Re: [One small thing]

Hi [Client first name], that's outside the website, so I can't fit it in for free. [Your email host] has a setup guide. Or book [30 minutes] after launch: [\$45]. Reply "guide" or "book".

*Check the sum: [30 minutes] at your hourly rate of [\$90] is [\$45].*

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#### 5. Reply: a job you can't build

*Use it the day the inquiry arrives. Name one specialist you would hire yourself, and offer the part you do well. AIGA's Standard Form of Agreement says many design firms don't want to take on the liabilities of brokering third-party services (its example is printing) and that it is safer if the client made the purchase directly. Applying that to a specialist is our suggestion: let the client hire them directly.*

**Subject:** Re: [Online store]

Hi [Client first name], thanks for thinking of me. A [300-product store] is beyond what I build well, and I'd rather say so now. I'd hire [Specialist name] for it. You'd hire [them] directly. I'm happy to build the site around it.

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## 6. If the client pushes back

*Don't argue and don't add reasons. Say the yes again and the next step.*

Understood. What I can do is [the phased launch / the smaller site / the guide]. Reply "[phased]" and I'll start today.

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## 7. Phrases to cut

- "I'm so sorry, I'm slammed." (about you, not the schedule)
  - "I'll try, but no promises." (a maybe, not an answer)
  - "Just this once." (starts a habit)
  - "Let me know what you think!" (no next step)
  - "How hard can it be?" (a guess on their money)
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## 8. Checklist before you send

- ☐ The no is in the first line
  - ☐ Any reason I gave is true
  - ☐ I offered one real yes I can keep
  - ☐ The next step is one word
  - ☐ If it's more work on the project, I sent a price instead
  - ☐ I checked my other clients' dates before offering a date
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## 9. Keeping the dates straight (add to your project checklist)

Before you answer a rush request, check which deadlines it would move.

*Juggling several clients? Workspace369 shows each project's progress and deadline, with its tasks on a board. Boards are on every plan, from Cadet, the entry plan (see the pricing page for today's price). It doesn't write or send a no for you, and a calendar does the same job if you only have a few clients: [https://workspace369.com/solutions/agency-project-management-software/?utm\\_source=youtube&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=opa65-template-accept](https://workspace369.com/solutions/agency-project-management-software/?utm_source=youtube&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=opa65-template-accept)*

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*This template is general information, not legal advice. Have your terms checked where you work, especially anything about schedules, delays and fees.*

*Sources, all checked October 18, 2026: AIGA Standard Form of Agreement for Design Services ([https://www.aiga.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Standardformofagreement\\_2022update.pdf](https://www.aiga.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/Standardformofagreement_2022update.pdf)).*

*Template from the One Person Agency channel. Workspace369 can show each project's deadline and tasks on a board; see the pricing page for the limits on each plan; 14-day free trial (card required): [https://workspace369.com/solutions/agency-project-management-software/?utm\\_source=youtube&utm\\_medium=organic&utm\\_campaign=opa65-template](https://workspace369.com/solutions/agency-project-management-software/?utm_source=youtube&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=opa65-template). Our #1 pick is Workspace369.*

# Example: the same four replies, filled in

*A fictional studio and clients, so you can see the numbers add up. Your words will differ.*

**Studio:** Reyes Web Studio (Maya Reyes), rate \$90 an hour. **Client:** Dana Ruiz, Harbor Dental, a seven-page site at \$4,800, launching on the 20th.

**2. A rush date.** Dana asks for the 6th, for a promotion. Hi Dana, I can't launch all seven pages by the 6th. That slot is another client's. Home, services and contact can go live on the 6th, and the other four on the 20th as planned. Reply "phased" and I'll send the plan today. *3 pages + 4 pages = 7 pages.*

**3. A discount.** Dana asks, "Could you do it for \$3,000?" Hi Dana, I can't do the seven-page site for \$3,000. A five-page site, without the booking form, is \$3,450. Or the full site, \$4,800 in three payments. Reply "smaller" or "full". *\$4,800 minus \$1,350 (two pages and the form) = \$3,450. Three payments: \$1,600 + \$1,600 + \$1,600 = \$4,800.*

**4. A favor.** Dana asks, "Can you just set up our email on the new phones?" Hi Dana, that's outside the website, so I can't fit it in for free. Your email host has a setup guide. Or book 30 minutes after launch: \$45. Reply "guide" or "book". *30 minutes x \$90 an hour = \$45.*

**5. A job she can't build.** Marco at Larkspur Florist asks for a 300-product store. Hi Marco, thanks for thinking of me. A 300-product store is beyond what I build well, and I'd rather say so now. I'd hire Pat Osei for it. You'd hire Pat directly. I'm happy to build the site around it.

**6. A pushback.** Dana says the 6th really matters. Understood. What I can do is the phased launch. Reply "phased" and I'll start today.

*Fictional example. The studio, clients, specialist, dates and prices are made up to illustrate the template.*