



HOW TO SAY “NO.”

Guidance, tips, and email scripts for 8 common scenarios.

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INTRODUCTION

So many people — myself included — struggle to say: “No.”

We’re afraid of hurting people’s feelings. We’re afraid of missing out on potential opportunities. We’re afraid of “burning bridges” or “closing doors” that might otherwise remain propped open. We’re afraid of seeming like an ungrateful diva or jerk. We’re afraid of disappointing our colleagues. We’re afraid of being perceived as “unhelpful” or “uncooperative” or (as some of my clients tell me) a “bad mom.” The issues go on and on!

These fears cause us to say “Yes” when we’d rather not... which leads to resentment, burn out and exhaustion. UGH. It’s a tiring pattern. I hope this book helps you to break out of that pattern... and start a fresh chapter in your life!

It is absolutely possible to say “No” with a respectful, considerate tone. When you do this, most of the time, people won’t get mad at you. Quite the opposite. They’ll be impressed by your self-awareness and your polite communication style. They might even tell you, *“That was the best NO I’ve ever heard. Thank you.”* (That actually happened to me once! It was a lovely compliment!)

By saying “No,” you won’t just create more time for the projects and priorities that matter to you. You’ll also “lead by example.” You’ll become a role model. You’ll show people that it’s OK to say “No,” and that it can be done very gracefully.

Hopefully, other people will be inspired by the example you set — and our world will become a happier, less resentful place. Hallelujah!

-Alex

NO RULES

I don't believe in strict, rigid "communication rules." Every situation and relationship is unique. But here are some general guidelines for times when you need to say "No..."

NO APOLOGY REQUIRED

You don't have to say, "I am sooo sorry!" or "Please forgive me, but I just can't..." if you've done absolutely nothing wrong.

If someone is asking you for a special favor, then they are taking up *your* valuable time, not the other way around. If anyone should be apologizing, it's them, not you!

NO EXPLANATION REQUIRED

In most instances, it's much more powerful to say, "My hourly rate is \$150" — period, end of sentence — rather than, "No, sorry, actually, I can't lower my hourly rate. It used to be lower, but now it's not. I had to raise it last year because... [long explanation]."

You don't owe anyone a lengthy explanation about why you are not available, why you are not interested, why you charge what you charge, etc. Try to avoid "justifying" or "explaining" or "rationalizing." Typically, it just makes you sound insecure.

NO EXCUSE FOR CRUELTY

Being "firm" is not the same thing as being "cruel."

As the Dalai Lama says, "Be kind whenever possible. It is always possible." No matter what the situation is, there is always a way to craft your "No" with tact and compassion. Don't belittle people. Don't mock people. Don't make people feel "stupid" for asking you a question, or for making a request. Don't be careless with people's emotions.

Even if the person who's emailing you is a total PEST who NEVER LISTENS and is SO OBNOXIOUS, be like Michelle Obama and take the high road. As Michelle puts it: "When they go low, we go high."

Those are my personal policies for saying: "No." Starting on the next page, you'll find a series of common scenarios and scripts / examples of what you can say...

SCENARIO #1
“Will you do _____ for me?”

This is a general, all-purpose NO for anything you don't want to do.

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

Your _____ sounds awesome! What a terrific _____. Thanks for inviting me to _____.

Right now, I am focused on _____.

My free time is a bit limited, so I'm going to decline your _____.

Thank you very much for thinking of me.

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Nora,

Your new book club sounds awesome! What a terrific idea. Thanks for inviting me to join.

Right now, I am focused on getting back into my daily yoga practice and spending quality time with my sweetheart.

My free time is a bit limited, so I'm going to decline your invitation.

Thank you very much for thinking of me.

(And enjoy reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*. It's a modern classic, for sure. :)

-Alex

SCENARIO #2

“Will you donate to my fundraiser / Kickstarter campaign?”

Because sometimes you just can't make a financial contribution, no matter how wonderful the project may be.

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

Wow! You're _____?

Your _____ sounds amazing. I loved getting this update from you.

I can't make a cash donation right now, but I would love to support you in a different way. (Maybe _____? Let me know.)

I'm rooting for you. Thank you for reaching out. Most of all, thank you for making the world a better place.

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Sam,

Wow! You're running a 10K to raise money for breast cancer research?

Your fundraising campaign looks amazing. I loved getting this update from you.

I can't make a cash donation right now, but I would love to support you in a different way. (For example, I could make you an awesome music playlist that you can listen to while you're running / training for the race! Let me know if that's something you'd like.)

I'm rooting for you. Thank you for reaching out, and most of all, thank you for making the world a better place.

-Alex

SCENARIO #3
“Could we meet up for coffee?”

One time, a client told me, “If I accepted every ‘coffee date’ invitation that I receive, I would die of caffeine poisoning... and I’d never have time to get any actual work done.” Haha! I can definitely relate.

Coffee is delicious, but sometimes you just can’t squeeze that kind of meeting into your week. Here’s a good script for that situation...

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

Thanks for the invitation to meet up for coffee!

Right now, I am _____.

My free time is really limited, so I’m going to decline your _____.

Based on your note, it sounds like you are interested in _____. Here’s something that might help: _____.

Enjoy your _____!

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Greg,

Thanks for the invitation to meet up for coffee!

Right now, I’ve juggling some tight writing deadlines, plus getting ready to move into a new home.

My free time is really limited, so I’m going to decline your coffee invitation.

Based on your note, it sounds like you are interested in starting a career as a writer. Here’s something that might help: [50+ ways to make money as a writer](#).

Enjoy your upcoming trip to Portland!

-Alex

SCENARIO #4
“Could I pick your brain?”

It’s always flattering when someone wants to “pick your brain” and get advice from you. But sometimes you just don’t have time. Or you’re simply not interested. Or you want people to hire you and pay for your advice, not get it for free! It’s important to set clear boundaries so that you don’t turn into a “free advice factory.”

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

These are great questions! I’m honored that you want my input.

As a _____, my policy is that I don’t give “advice” via email.

If you’d like to pick my brain, here are two options:

1. You can _____. Here’s where to do that: _____.
2. Or, you can choose your #1 question, and I may be able to answer it in a future _____.

Thank you!

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Kevin,

These are great questions! I’m honored that you want my input.

As a professional writing coach / consultant and business owner, my policy is that I don’t give “advice” via email.

If you’d like to hang out and pick my brain, here are two options:

1. You can attend one of my upcoming retreats. You’ll find all the info on my website: alexandrafranzen.com

2. Or, you can choose your #1 question, and I may be able to answer it in a future installment of my advice column, [Good Question](#).

Thanks for reaching out, Kevin! Have an excellent day.

-Alex

SCENARIO #5

“Can we hang out this week? Just you and me?”

Sometimes, you don't have time to set up a 1-on-1 playdate — even if it's someone you really love seeing, like a close friend. My personal strategy? Throw an intimate get-together at your place and catch up with all of your closest friends... all in one evening.

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

I'm so glad you wrote to me. I've been missing you, too.

Since you're one of my closest friends, I can be totally honest with you... my schedule is super-tight right now and I'm feeling pretty overwhelmed. As much as I'd love to _____, I don't think it's realistic. It's just one of those weeks!

But the good news is... I'm planning a _____ on _____ and I'd love you to come if you're available. It's at _____ from _____ to _____.

We can catch up on _____ and snack on some _____. I have a feeling you'll love the other people I've invited, too.

If that sounds good, just write back and say *I'll be there!*

If you can't make it this time, no worries. I'll send you an invite to my next shindig, too.

Love,

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Sophie,

I'm so glad you wrote to me. I've been missing you, too.

Since you're one of my closest friends, I can be totally honest with you... my schedule is super-tight right now and I'm feeling pretty overwhelmed. As much as I'd love to have lunch with you tomorrow, I don't think it's realistic. It's just one of those weeks!

But the good news is... I'm planning a dinner party on Sunday night and I'd love you to come if you're available. It's at my place from 6pm to 9pm.

We can catch up on your new relationship (can't wait to hear everything!) and snack on some Brie and crusty bread. I have a feeling you'll love the other people I've invited, too.

If that sounds good, just write back and say *I'll be there!*

If you can't make it this time, no worries. I'll send you an invite to my next shindig, too.

Love,

-Alex

SCENARIO #6
“Will you be involved in my project?”

Sometimes, you might get an invitation to be involved with a company, or a project, and it just doesn't "feel right." There's no specific reason for it. It just doesn't. This script is great for those kinds of scenarios.

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

Thanks for writing! _____ sounds like a very _____ project. Way to go!

I'm honored that you want me to be involved, but this doesn't feel like the right fit for [me / my skills / my schedule / my personality].

But thanks for thinking of me.

I'm wishing you all the best with _____ and all of your future projects, too.

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Warren,

Thanks for writing! Your marketing conference sounds like a very ambitious and exciting project. Way to go!

I'm honored that you want me to be involved, but this doesn't feel like the right fit for me right now.

But thanks for thinking of me.

I'm wishing you all the best with this event (I know it's going to be terrific!) and all of your future projects, too.

-Alex

SCENARIO #7
“Can we discuss this on the phone?”

Sometimes, it makes perfect sense to “hop on the phone” with a potential client, customer, or business collaborator. Other times? It’s a waste of time... for both of you.

I’ve found that when someone (like a potential client or customer) emails me and says, “Could I just explain everything to you on the phone?” that’s like “code” for: “I feel confused and I don’t know how to explain what I need in a simple email so I’d like to ramble for 43 minutes and maybe you can decipher what I’m trying to say.”

And that... does NOT sound fun to me. If I suspect that’s the situation, I always try to direct the person towards my website, or some other place, rather than getting on the phone. Here’s a script for that type of situation...

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

It sounds like you’re curious about _____, and you’re feeling “on the fence.”

If you have a specific question about _____, feel free to email it to me.

If you don’t have a specific question — more like a general feeling of “*Hmm, should I...?*” — here’s my best advice:

- Spend some time on my website: _____. Particularly this section: _____. That should give you a clear sense of my _____.

- After doing that, if your gut is still saying, “*Hmmm, I’m not sure about this...*” then I’d urge you to listen to that gut feeling. It probably means that we’re not an ideal match (... which is totally OK!)

I hope this is helpful. Happy website-exploring!

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey Rocco,

It sounds like you're curious about purchasing my new online writing class, and you're feeling "on the fence" about whether to go for it or not.

If you have a specific question about the course, feel free to email it to me.

If you don't have a specific question — more like a general feeling of "*Hmm, should I...?*" — here's my best advice:

- Spend some time on [my website](#). Check out my [free articles, free workbooks, and other free materials](#). That stuff should give you a clear sense of my personality and teaching style.

- After doing that, if your gut is still saying, "*Hmmm, I'm not sure about this...*" then I'd urge you to listen to that gut feeling. It probably means that we're not an ideal match (... which is totally OK!)

I hope that's helpful, Rocco. Happy website-exploring!

-Alex

SCENARIO #8

“I can’t afford to pay you. Will you do this for free? Please?”

Over the years, I’ve received some pretty wild, panic-stricken emails from people who claim that they DESPERATELY need my help ASAP... except they can’t afford to pay me.

Sometimes, these types of emails feel completely genuine, and my heart breaks for whatever financial situation they’re dealing with. But other times, these types of emails feel more like the 3am ramblings of a drunk person who discovered my website halfway through a bottle of Jameson.

Regardless, I always try to respond compassionately, and I always provide alternative / free resources whenever possible. Even if I can’t help them myself, at least I can point this person towards some other type of support.

BLANK SCRIPT

Hey _____,

Thanks for writing. I’m honored that out of all the _____ in the world, you want to work with me!

I believe in the power of generosity and sharing knowledge freely, which is why I _____. But reducing my rates (or working for free) is not something I do.

If you can’t afford to hire me right now, you can _____.

I’m wishing you all the best with your _____.

Thanks again for reaching out.

[your name here]

FILLED-OUT / EXAMPLE SCRIPT

Hey there,

Thanks for reaching out. I’m honored that out of all the writing coaches in the world, you want to work with me!

I believe in the power of generosity and sharing knowledge freely, which is why I've written [hundreds of free articles](#) filled with my best tips on writing, communication, and creativity. I share as much as I can, as often as I can. But reducing my hourly rate (or working for free) is not something I do.

If you can't afford to hire me right now, you can spend some time soaking up the tips on [my website](#). I hope you discover something that makes your day a little brighter — and I'm wishing you all the best with your projects.

-Alex

ABOUT THE CREATOR OF THIS BOOK



Alexandra Franzen is a writer based in Portland, Oregon. She's a published author whose projects include ***50 Ways To Say You're Awesome*** (Sourcebooks), ***Our Q&A A Day: A 3-Year Journal for 2 People*** (Potter Style, a division of Random House / Crown), and several self-published projects, including a novel called ***Milk & Honey: A Love Story*** and a novel called ***So This Is The End***.

Alexandra's writing has also been featured on websites like **Time, Forbes, Newsweek, HuffPo, BuzzFeed, and Lifehacker**, as well as in song lyrics, on product packaging, and stenciled onto fine art paintings. She has led writing workshops in 17 cities around the world, and one of her events was named one of the **"50 Best Conferences to Attend This Year"** by The Muse.



Additionally, Alexandra works as a ghostwriter and writing coach / consultant. She has worked with tech companies like **Hewlett-Packard**, celebrity-driven brands like **Rachel Zoe's DreamDry**, and hundreds of small businesses and start-ups. She runs a popular newsletter (13,000+ subscribers) and website (just shy of 1 million visitors per year) where she shares personal stories and advice on writing, creativity, motivation, and how to create a positive ripple in the world.

Alexandra lives inside a converted restaurant loft-space with a chef named Brandon and a fish named RuPaul. When she's not typing on her laptop, she's typically running, lifting weights, or fantasizing about her next peanut butter-related snack. You can learn more about Alexandra's current projects at:

AlexandraFranzen.com.

THANKS FOR READING! HAVE AN EXCELLENT DAY.

A few things you can do next:

- Get more FREE STUFF. Free workbooks, free coloring sheets, all kinds of neat things.

<http://www.alexandrafranzen.com/free-stuff/>

- Visit my SHOP to see my collection of books, paintings, jewelry, and more.

<http://www.alexandrafranzen.com/shop/>

- Register for an upcoming WRITING RETREAT. Writers of all experience levels: welcome.

<http://www.alexandrafranzen.com/retreats/>

- Step away from your computer, tablet, or phone. Go outside, feel the sunlight on your skin, take a walk, or head to the gym. Because maybe your brain could use a break from the Internet. The non-digital world is pretty amazing, too.