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Digital rejection rules for modern daters

By Judy Mandell

Technology has made rejecting someone easier than ever before. With just a few clicks, you can say “no” and move on to the next dating prospect — and open yourself up to the possibility of a better relationship. “Things like the Internet, text messaging, email and other mobile technologies [allow] you to readily say *no* to someone without having to endure face-to-face or voice-to-voice interaction,” says Susan Newman, Ph.D., social psychologist and author of [The Book of No: 250 Ways to Say It — and Mean It and Stop People-Pleasing Forever](#). “In a way, this is the easy way out — or an easier way out of a relationship that you don’t want to pursue,” says Newman. “As one young man told me, ‘If she doesn’t return my email in a reasonable amount of time or keeps sending excuses via Twitter or text message, I know to forget her.’”

Many of us view the word *no* as a negative thing — a perception that has been ingrained in us since childhood. We hate confrontations, and we don’t want to hurt or offend anyone. The worry is that someone won’t like us or will think of us as being uncaring. Newman says it’s better to have closure so both parties can move on.

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Technology makes dating easier — but our direct contact skills are disappearing

More and more people are breaking up or turning down dates electronically; after all, it’s quick and it’s easy to do. It avoids direct confrontation and the exchange of feelings and emotions, but that’s not always a good thing. “People are becoming less and less equipped to handle direct contact with one another — via telephone or face to face — when they’re beginning a new relationship or ending one,” says April Masini, author of [Think and Date Like a Man](#). “For all of their benefits, text messaging and emailing are damaging our ability to relate to one another as human beings.”

Nevertheless, when a relationship is new, it might be best to let the other person down easy via email. Erika Moore of [RomanceLanguage.org](#) agrees: “Writing allows you to thoughtfully consider your words and to be kind and tactful about saying no,” she explains. “Also, it avoids embarrassment and humiliation. The recipient doesn’t have to put on a brave face or think of something face-saving to say.”

Choose your words carefully to avoid any back-and-forth confrontations

Moore suggests crafting your message using language that you feel good about and then saving it for future use, should you need it. She likes some variation of the following: “Thanks so much; I’m flattered, but my sense is that we’re not a match. I wish you only the best.” Further, adds Moore, “I don’t recommend going into a whole song and dance about why you aren’t a match, which typically results in a time-consuming and potentially hurtful back-and-forth exchange.” Whenever Moore has done this for herself, it has worked out well. “Either I didn’t hear back from the person — leaving me to intuit that either it wasn’t that big of a deal, or he dealt with the disappointment privately — or I got a gracious email back thanking me for my candor.”

“Carefully think through what you text, IM or email someone,” Newman adds. “Be sure it says exactly what you want. In longer relationships, dumping someone over the Internet is not necessarily a quick fix or the best way to go. There’s always room for misinterpretation.”

Seven rules for nicely saying “no”

Dr. Joseph Cilona, a psychologist in New York and coauthor (with Kahlil Gibran) of [The Path: Life Explained in 100 Pages](#), offers these seven rejection rules for every stage of dating:

- 1. Don’t delay; say no right away.** If you’re certain there is no spark or attraction between the two of you, don’t agree to additional dates. Thank the person while you are still on the date together and end things there.
- 2. Don’t let the fear of confrontation drag things out longer than is absolutely necessary.** Do not initiate communication with someone you don’t want to see or talk with just to thank him or her for a date. It’s better to end all correspondence as soon as possible if you’re not interested in pursuing a relationship.
- 3. Be reasonable and choose a communication method that’s appropriate for the length of time you spent together.** If you have already had a lot of in-person contact with someone, it’s a good rule to end things in person, too. If you’ve only been on a few dates and most of your contact has been through technology-based communication methods, it’s more acceptable to end things this way... and probably more comfortable for the other person, too. I like the “one breakup, one follow-up” rule for correspondence via technology. If the person continues to try to communicate after that and you’ve made it clear that you don’t have any interest in seeing him or her again, it’s more appropriate to just stop responding.
- 4. Be honest, but don’t be rude.** Avoid saying things you don’t mean (like “I enjoyed meeting you” or “I had a nice time” or “You seem like a great person”) if you don’t really feel that way. Many people can sense insincerity, so remain honest and keep it simple without crossing into disrespectful territory.
- 5. Have realistic expectations about how your date will react.** No one likes being rejected, so don’t expect a positive reaction or be surprised by a negative or unseemly one. You really don’t know each other that well, and you may not want to know this person. Sometimes our instincts and intuition are in tune, yet not quite a part our conscious awareness. If someone reacts inappropriately, do not engage with that person. End communication immediately and don’t respond to any additional attempts to contact you.
- 6. Take your cues from observing the other person’s behavior on how best to proceed.** Many people who strive to treat others as they would like to be treated themselves end up making avoidable blunders. Don’t assume your

date is just like you and would want to be treated the same way you do. Instead, pay attention to how the other person behaves and take your cues from what you have observed during your interactions together.

7. Listen and respond to whatever reaction you get without letting the other person draw you back in. Focus on what you think the other person is feeling. Don't overly engage; instead, keep your statements simple and resist the urge to console or apologize afterwards.

Judy Mandell is a freelance writer whose work has appeared in Ladies' Home Journal, Newsweek and USA Today, among others.

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