



FREE GUIDE • FEED YOUR BRAIN TOOLS

The No-Sorry Email Guide

20 swaps, 3 real before-and-afters, and a 30-second check to help you say what you mean, kindly and clearly.

By Tiffany Whitney

Consultant • Brain-Based Coach • Amazon Bestselling Co-Author

START HERE

You're not doing it wrong

If "sorry" slips into your emails before you've even decided to say it, you're in good company. It usually comes from care: you notice how your message might land, and you want it to land well. That's a strength.

The catch is that a reflex "sorry" can sit in front of your best work. The reader meets the apology before the point, the ask, or the good news. This guide helps you keep the care and lose the reflex, so the people you work with see your competence and your kindness at the same time.

Inside

1. **Why we over-apologize**, the brain-based version
2. **20 swaps**: instead of saying this, say that
3. **3 before-and-afters** from real rewrites
4. **The 30-second pre-send check**
5. **When "sorry" is exactly right**

How to use it. Don't try to fix every email at once. Pick one swap this week, the one you catch yourself using most, and use it every time. That's how a new habit gets built.

Why we over-apologize

Here's what your brain is actually doing.

A reflex "sorry" is usually a habit, not a decision. Much of what we do every day runs on habit: a cue shows up, and the familiar response fires before we've thought it through. For a lot of us, the cue is the moment we worry an email will land badly, and "sorry" is the response that fires.

Habits change at the spot where they fire. Seeing the swap at the exact place the old habit shows up gives you a new response to practice right there. Repeated in the same spot, the new response gets easier. That usually takes weeks of everyday practice, not one good email, so be patient with yourself.

It isn't because women do more wrong. In one set of studies, women apologized more than men because they judged more everyday moments as worth an apology. That's a sign of how closely you pay attention to other people. You can keep the attention and choose different words.

Some apologies build trust. Sympathy, like "I'm sorry to hear about your dad," isn't the reflex. In one set of studies, expressing regret for something that wasn't the speaker's fault increased trust. Keep those.

Sources

Wood, W., Quinn, J. M., & Kashy, D. A. (2002). Habits in everyday life. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.83.6.1281

Lally, P., van Jaarsveld, C. H. M., Potts, H. W. W., & Wardle, J. (2010). How are habits formed. *European Journal of Social Psychology*. doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.674

Schumann, K., & Ross, M. (2010). Why women apologize more than men. *Psychological Science*. doi.org/10.1177/0956797610384150

Brooks, A. W., Dai, H., & Schweitzer, M. E. (2014). I'm sorry about the rain! *Social Psychological and Personality Science*. doi.org/10.1177/1948550613506122

Instead of saying this, say that

Instead of	Try
~~Sorry to bother you, but...~~	Start with your ask: "Can you review the budget by Friday?"
~~Sorry for the delay.~~	"I know you needed this last week. I'm aiming to send it by Wednesday. Will that work?"
~~Sorry for the late reply!~~	Just answer. "Here's the update you asked for."
~~Sorry, quick question...~~	"Quick question:"
~~Sorry if this is a dumb question.~~	"Can you walk me through how approvals work?"
~~So sorry, but I can't make it.~~	"I'm afraid I won't be able to make Thursday's sync."
~~Sorry, would it maybe be possible to move the deadline?~~	"I'd like to move the deadline to Tuesday. Will that work?"
~~Sorry for the long email.~~	"Three updates below. The decision I need is the first one."
~~Sorry, I think there might be a mistake?~~	"I don't believe the totals match the invoice. Can you confirm?"
~~Sorry to be a pain.~~	Delete it. Asking for what the work needs is part of your job.

More swaps for every day

Instead of	Try
Sorry, I forgot to attach it!	"Here's the attachment."
Sorry it's so rough.	"Here's the draft. I'd love your eyes on the timeline section."
Sorry, just checking in on this?	"Can you confirm by Thursday whether we're moving forward?"
Sorry to interrupt...	"I'd like to add one point."
Sorry, but I disagree.	"I see it differently. Here's why."
Sorry, I can't take that on right now.	"I won't be able to take this on this month."
Sorry for all the questions!	"Thanks for walking me through this."
Sorry, running late!	"I'm running five minutes late. See you at 2:05."
No worries if not!	"Will that work?"
Sorry again!	"Thanks!"

Notice the pattern: say the fact, then the next step. "I'd like to" for your own plans. One direct check-in at the end.

The late deliverable

BEFORE

Hi Jenna,

I am SO sorry for the delay on this, I know you needed it last week and I feel awful. Things have been crazy here and I just haven't been able to get to it. I'm really sorry. I'll try to have the vendor comparison to you by Wednesday if that's still helpful? Again, so sorry for holding things up.

Best,
Dana

AFTER • TIFFANY'S REWRITE

Hi Jenna,

I know you needed this last week. I'm aiming to send you the vendor comparison by Wednesday. Will that work?

Best,
Dana

What changed

- Three apologies became zero. "I know you needed this last week" owns the impact, and that is the accountability.
- "I'll try... if that's still helpful?" became "I'm aiming to... Will that work?" A real date, one direct check-in.
- "Things have been crazy here" is gone. She doesn't owe anyone the backstory.

Moving her own deadline

BEFORE

Hi Tom, I hate to ask this and I'm sorry to be a pain, but would it maybe be possible to push the strategy deck deadline from Friday to next Tuesday? I know it's not ideal and totally understand if not. The new customer data only came in yesterday and I want to make sure the numbers are right. Sorry again, let me know what you think!

AFTER • TIFFANY'S REWRITE

Hi Tom, I'd like to move the strategy deck deadline from Friday to next Tuesday. New customer data came in yesterday, and I want to make sure the numbers are correct. Please let me know if that works. Thanks!

What changed

- "Would it maybe be possible to push..." became "I'd like to move..." It's her deadline, so she states her plan.
- The real reason stays, because it helps: new customer data came in yesterday.
- "Totally understand if not" and "Sorry again" became "Please let me know if that works. Thanks!"

Flagging a scope change to a client

BEFORE

Hi Rachel, thanks so much for sending this over! I just wanted to flag, and sorry if I'm misreading this, but it looks like the new requirements add the mobile app and the reporting dashboard, which I don't think were in the original SOW? I could be totally wrong. I'm sure we can figure something out, I just want to make sure we're on the same page about timeline and budget. Does that make sense? Happy to hop on a call whenever works for you!

AFTER · TIFFANY'S REWRITE

Hi Rachel, appreciate you sending this over. The new requirements add the mobile app and the reporting dashboard, which I don't believe were in the original SOW. Can you confirm? If so, we should align the timeline and budget. I'm happy to hop on a call. Let me know.

What changed

- "Sorry if I'm misreading" and "I could be totally wrong" became one calibrated phrase: "I don't believe."
- "Does that make sense?" became "Can you confirm?" A question they can actually answer.
- The warmth stays: "appreciate you sending this over" and "I'm happy to hop on a call."

The 30-second pre-send check

Read your email once with these in mind. Most fixes take a few seconds.

- ☐ **Count the sorrys.** Is each one about real harm? If not, delete it and say what happened plus the fix.

- ☐ **Find your ask.** Is it in the first two lines? If not, move it up.

- ☐ **State your plan.** For your own work, write "I'd like to...", not "Would it be possible...?"

- ☐ **Close the escape hatches.** Cut "no worries if not," "totally fine if not," and "only if you have time."

- ☐ **Trim the softeners.** Cut "just," "maybe," and "I think" in front of facts.

- ☐ **One check-in, at most.** End with "Will that work?" or "Let me know." Skip it if you already asked a question.

- ☐ **Keep your warmth.** Your greeting, one thank-you, and your sign-off stay. Kind and clear go together.

When "sorry" is exactly right. When you've hurt someone, broken a confidence, or caused real harm, one sincere "I'm sorry" plus the fix is the grown-up move. Sympathy for someone's loss or hard week is always welcome. This guide is about the reflex, not the real thing.

KEEP GOING

Want help with the next email?

Try the free Stop Saying Sorry email fixer

Paste any email and get it back clear and still sounding like you, with a one-line note on every change and the habit behind it. Free, no signup.

tools.feedyourbrain.net/tools/stop-saying-sorry

Get The Rewire

Tiffany's free newsletter, every Tuesday. One idea, one story, one small shift.

feedyourbrain.net/rewire

Feed Your Brain Tools are writing aids informed by brain and behavior research. They aren't therapy, counseling, or medical, legal, or HR advice. If you're struggling, please reach out to someone you trust or a licensed professional. In the US, you can call or text 988 any time.

© 2026 Tiffany Whitney | Feed Your Brain LLC · tiffany@feedyourbrain.net

