

Sorry to Bother You: The Email Edition

Spot the apologetic language hiding in your emails before you hit send

About This Worksheet

Most people have no idea how often they apologize in writing. The phrases are small, polite, and automatic, which is exactly why they slip past you. This worksheet walks you through a quick audit of your own sent messages so you can see, in your own words, how much apologetic language you are putting into the world and what it is doing there. By the end you will have a count, a pattern, and one real message rewritten without the padding.

Work from your actual sent folder, not from memory. Write your answers in your own words and be honest about what you find. There are no right answers here, only information you did not have before.



Exercise 1: The Sent Folder Audit

You cannot change a pattern you have never counted. This exercise puts a real number on it.

Objective

A clear count of how often apologetic language appears in your outgoing messages.

Instructions

Open your sent email folder. If you use Slack or text for work, you can include those too. Scan your last 20 outgoing messages and check every phrase below that appears at least once.

Which of these appear in your last 20 messages?

- ☐ Sorry to bother you
- ☐ Sorry for the delay or sorry for the late reply
- ☐ Sorry, quick question
- ☐ Just checking in or just following up
- ☐ Sorry in advance
- ☐ No worries if not
- ☐ Sorry for the long email

Now put a number on what you found.

How many of your last 20 messages contained at least one of these phrases?

Look back at the boxes you checked and pick the one you reach for most.

Which phrase shows up most often for you?

Exercise 2: What the Softener Is Doing

Every apologetic phrase in an email is doing a job, usually protecting you from a reaction you are predicting. This exercise names that job.

Objective

A clear picture of what each phrase is protecting you from, and what your message actually needed to say.

Instructions

Choose three real lines from the messages you audited in Exercise 1. Copy each one into the first column. In the second column, write the reaction you were bracing for when you wrote it. In the third, write what the message actually needed to communicate.

The line I wrote	What I was afraid would happen	What the message actually needed

Read your three rows as a set before answering the next question.

What pattern do you notice across your three rows?

Exercise 3: The Rewrite

Now take one message and strip the padding out of it.

Objective

One real message rewritten to say what you need directly; without a single apology you do not owe.

Instructions

Pick one message from Exercise 2, ideally the one with the most softening in it. Rewrite it below, courteous and complete, with every unearned apology and softener removed. Send the new version or keep it as a model.

Your rewritten message:

You Are Done. What Comes Next

You now have a real count of your own apologetic language and proof that your messages work without it. Keep your rewrite where you can see it.

- ☐ I counted my softeners instead of guessing
- ☐ I know which phrase I reach for most
- ☐ I have one rewritten message to model future emails on

Next Step

For the next week, reread every email before sending and delete any apology you do not owe. The pattern usually runs deeper than email, and this is where changing it begins.