

Candidate rejection email template (after application)

A kind, quick rejection for applicants who won't move to an interview.

Updated October 15, 2026. Written and reviewed by the HRTally Research Team.

When to use this template

Send this to applicants you decide not to interview. It is the most commonly skipped email in recruiting, and skipping it is the most common candidate complaint about employers. A short, polite message closes the loop, frees the person to focus elsewhere, and leaves a better impression than silence ever will.

At this stage you don't owe a reason, and most recruiters don't give one. Keep it short, thank them, and if you would genuinely consider them for other roles, say so and mean it. If you won't, leave that line out. Candidates can tell a form letter from a real invitation. For applicants you did interview, use the post-interview rejection instead, which deserves more personal attention.

Version 1: Standard rejection

SUBJECT Your application for [Job title] at [Company]

Hi [Candidate first name],

Thank you for applying for the [Job title] role at [Company] and for your interest in joining our team.

We have reviewed your application carefully, and we won't be moving forward with it for this role. We received many applications, and we have decided to focus on candidates whose experience most closely matches what this team needs right now.

We appreciate the time you spent applying, and we wish you the best in your search.

[Recruiter name]
[Company] Recruiting

Version 2: Rejection with an invitation to apply again

SUBJECT Update on your [Company] application

Hi [Candidate first name],

Thanks for your interest in the [Job title] role. We won't be moving forward with your application for this

position.

That said, your background in [Specific area] stood out, and we often hire for roles that need it. If you would like, we will keep your application on file for [Number] months and reach out if something fits. You are also welcome to apply directly for any role on our careers page: [Link].

Thank you again, and good luck.

[Recruiter name]
[Title], [Company]

Subject lines to try

- Your application for [Job title] at [Company]
- Update on your [Company] application
- Thank you for applying, [Candidate first name]
- [Job title] application update
- Re: your application to [Company]

How to personalize it

- Use the candidate's first name and the job title, even in a batch send.
- Only offer to keep the application on file if someone will actually look.
- Send it from a recruiter or named team, not a no-reply address.
- Mention a specific strength only if you truly noticed it.

Mistakes to avoid

- Giving a reason that could be read as discriminatory, such as being overqualified or not a culture fit.
- Waiting until the role is filled to send rejections you could have sent weeks earlier.
- Using language like unfortunately in the subject line.
- Encouraging people to apply again when you don't want them to.

Legal and compliance notes

Keep the reason general. Phrases like overqualified can be read as age bias, and culture fit can hide all kinds of bias. Keep applications and records of the decision for at least one year under EEOC recordkeeping rules, longer if a charge is filed, and longer still for some federal contractors. If you use AI to screen applications, the rejection may be subject to notice rules in places such as New York City.

| When to send it

Within a week of deciding, and no more than two to three weeks after the candidate applied. Many applicant tracking systems let you schedule rejections to send a day or two after the decision, so they don't feel instant and automated.

| Before you hit send

- The job title, pay range, and dates match what is in your applicant tracking system.
- Every placeholder in brackets has been replaced or deleted.
- Candidates who will be interviewed or assessed are told how to request an accommodation.
- Nothing in the message comments on age, family, health, or other protected characteristics.
- A real person is named as the contact, with a reply address someone checks.

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