

Candidate rejection email template (after interview)

A personal, respectful rejection for candidates who interviewed, with optional feedback.

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

When to use this template

Candidates who interviewed have invested real time: preparing, taking time off work, and meeting your team. They deserve a personal message, ideally from the recruiter or hiring manager they met. For finalists, a short phone call followed by this email is better still.

The hard part is feedback. Candidates often ask for it, and a sentence or two of useful, job-related feedback is one of the most generous things you can give. Keep it tied to the job requirements, such as depth of experience with a specific tool, and avoid anything personal. If your company's policy is not to give feedback, say so kindly rather than ignoring the question.

Version 1: After first-round interview

SUBJECT Update on the [Job title] role

Hi [Candidate first name],

Thank you for taking the time to speak with [Interviewer name] about the [Job title] role. We enjoyed learning about your work at [Current or previous company].

After a lot of thought, we have decided to move forward with other candidates whose experience is a closer match for what this role needs right now.

I know this isn't the news you were hoping for. We appreciate your interest in [Company], and I hope our paths cross again.

[Recruiter name]
[Title], [Company]

Version 2: Finalist with feedback

SUBJECT Thank you, [Candidate first name]

Hi [Candidate first name],

Thank you for everything you put into the process for the [Job title] role, including [the work sample / your conversations with the team]. This was a close decision, and I wanted to let you know personally that we have offered the role to another candidate.

The team was impressed by [Specific strength]. The deciding factor was [Job-related reason, such as more direct experience leading a payroll migration], which is central to the first year in this role.

We would genuinely like to stay in touch. If it's all right with you, I will reach out when we open a role that fits your background.

Thank you again, and best of luck.

[Recruiter or hiring manager name]
[Title], [Company]

Subject lines to try

- Update on the [Job title] role
- Thank you, [Candidate first name]
- Your interview with [Company]
- [Job title]: our decision
- Following up on your interviews

How to personalize it

- Mention who they met and one specific thing from the conversation.
- For finalists, call first and follow with this email.
- Keep feedback to one or two job-related points.
- Offer to stay in touch only if you would actually hire them for another role.

Mistakes to avoid

- Feedback about personality, appearance, accent, or anything unrelated to the job.
- Saying the role is on hold if you actually hired someone else.
- Long explanations of how hard the decision was.
- Leaving finalists waiting until the new hire has started.

Legal and compliance notes

Feedback is where rejection emails create legal risk. Stick to documented, job-related criteria from your

interview scorecard. Avoid statements about age, energy, family situation, or fit that could suggest bias. Keep interview notes and scorecards with the application file for at least one year under EEOC rules. Our recruitment process guide explains how structured scorecards make these decisions easier to explain.

When to send it

Within three business days of the decision. For finalists, send it after the chosen candidate has accepted, but don't wait for their start date. If the accepted offer is delayed, send a short status note so finalists aren't left wondering.

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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