Delay your crabbiness: Outlook features for itchy trigger fingers

Applies to: Microsoft Office Outlook 2003

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Crabby Office Lady

Hey you, you clever, hot-under-the-collar person who can type faster than a cheetah can run. Think twice (or more) before popping off that tart e-mail message. Yes, there are ways to recall it — but sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. The best recipe to avoid embarrassment is to take out your frustrations in another manner.

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I know you (because I *am* you):

You're hot under the collar and everybody knows that (and sometimes loves that) about you. And yes, you have a bit of an itchy trigger finger and you've been known to pop off an e-mail message that is, shall we say, less than diplomatic, and a bit more curt than you'd intended (sometimes — only sometimes). But before sending your clever and scathing message out there to the world, remember this: The pushing of the Send button lasts a moment; its effects can last a lifetime — or at least until you're back on the streets, looking for another job.

Outlook does offer a few ways to get that message back, but before I jump into that, I want to come clean: Nothing is foolproof. Certain conditions have to be just right in order for this message recall thing to work. For one, both you and your recipient have to be using Microsoft Exchange Server.

NOTE If you don't know what Exchange Server is (let alone know whether you're using it), I suggest you watch this helpful demo: Got Exchange? See how to check.

Using the Outlook recall feature

When you're using Outlook with Exchange Server, you have a few options when it comes to trying to recall a message.

1. If your unsuspecting recipients have not yet read this "oops" message, you can delete, or **recall** it. Again, this only works if they *haven't already read the message.*

    NOTE You can also be notified if this recall attempt succeeds or fails for each recipient. If it's a lot of people we're talking about here, I'd forego this part.

2. You can recall the original message and replace it with a more, shall we say, gentle one.

    NOTE If you decide to replace the original message with a new one, Outlook will automatically open up a new blank e-mail message so that you can reword your message — carefully this time.

You've done your best...but it's out of your hands

The success or failure of a recall depends entirely on the settings the recipients have in Outlook.

*   If your recipients have **Process requests and responses on arrival** selected on their computers (in Outlook: **Tools** > **Options** > **E-mail Options** > **Tracking Options**), even if the original message — the one you tried to recall — has not been read, the recipient will be notified that something disappeared from their Inboxes. (And boy does that summon up curiosity.)

- If **Process requests and responses on arrival** is NOT selected on your recipients' computers, both messages, the original one and the new one, show up in the Inbox...and then fate steps in.
    1. If the recipient opens the recall message first, the original message is deleted and the recipient is informed that you, the sender, deleted the message from his or her mailbox.
    2. If the recipient opens the original message first, the recall fails, both the old and new messages are available, and you are left with egg on your face. Cluck-cluck.

There are many more variables when it comes to recalling messages. Sometimes it has to do with certain rules your recipients have set up, or, if you sent the message to a public folder, sometimes both the original and the new message show up in the folder (and live there for eternity).

I suggest you read some of the articles and view the demos I've referenced below about recalling messages, and see what may work for you. But again, my advice (if not always followed by myself) is to count to 10 before you send the message. However, if you've already sent it, realize that the message you just popped off in the heat of the moment is probably going to be read by someone before you've changed your mind and have had the opportunity to recall it.

- Demo: Take that message back
- How message recall works
- Recall or replace a message you've already sent
- Recall or replace a message after it is sent

Recalling messages to someone not using Exchange Server

You can't. I'm sorry, but you just can't. Therefore, I've created a list of things you can do to vent instead of sending that damaging e-mail.

1. Count to 10. Or 20. Or 100 if you have to.
2. Shout into your pillow (or, in your case, your chair's upholstery).
3. Close your office door (or, if you work in a cubicle, go to your car) and have yourself a good cry.
4. Head on over to the cafeteria or vending machine and gorge yourself on a good dose of medicinal chocolate.
5. Write to me (crabby@microsoft.com). I read all the messages I receive, and I never take them personally, ever.

"Experience is the name everyone gives to their mistakes." — Oscar Wilde

About the author

Annik Stahl, the Crabby Office Lady columnist, takes all of your complaints, compliments, and knee-jerk reactions to heart. Therefore, she graciously asks that you let her know whether this column was useful to you — or not — by entering your feedback using the **Did this article help you?** feedback tool below. And remember: If you don't vote, you can't complain.

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