Grow That Local

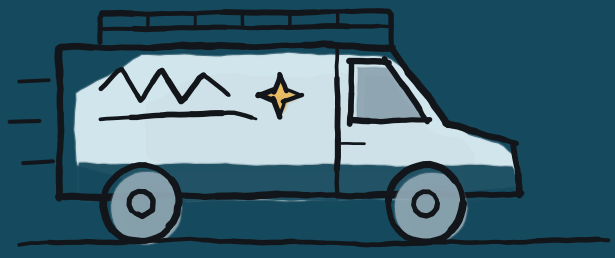
a free guide

How to answer a bad review

What to write, what never to write, when to ask Google to take it down, and how to make your reply the proof the next customer reads.

For owners with a fresh 1-star review.

- 15 short sections in 5 parts
- 60 things you can do in the next 24 hours
- An example in every section
- Sources for every figure



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Before you start

A one-star review feels personal. It usually isn't the end of anything. The people who matter now are the ones who'll read it next week, and they'll read your reply too. This guide shows you what to write so they pick you anyway.

It has 15 short sections in five parts. Part 1 is the method. Part 2 has reply examples for the six bad reviews owners get most. Part 3 is what never to write, Part 4 is when and how to report a review to Google, and Part 5 turns the whole thing into proof. Each section has a short list of things to do in the next 24 hours.

Two rules we kept while writing it:

- Every number has a public source you can check, listed at the end. When we didn't have one, we say "GTL estimate" and tell you why we think it.
- Every example is made up to show the idea. None of them are real customers, reviews or results.



Part 1

Before you type anything

1 Your reply is for the next customer

The idea. The reviewer has already decided what they think. The next customer hasn't. In BrightLocal's 2026 survey, 89% of consumers said they expect owners to respond to reviews, 42% said they're unlikely to use a business that never replies, and 80% said they're likely to use one that responds to all its reviews (BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026, brightlocal.com).

Your reply is public. It shows under the review as coming from your business, and the reviewer gets told you replied (Google: Manage customer reviews, support.google.com). Write it for a stranger deciding between you and two others.

Example. A made-up shopper finds two roofers with the same 4.6 stars. One has a two-star review with no reply. The other has a two-star review with a calm reply that says what they did to fix it. The shopper calls the second one.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Open your Google profile and read your three newest bad reviews as if you were a stranger.
- [ ] Count how many reviews have no reply.
- [ ] Turn on review alerts so you see new reviews the same day.
- [ ] Read the rest of this guide before you reply to any of them.

2 Wait an hour, check your records, then reply within a day

The idea. Your first reply to a bad review is usually the worst one. Wait an hour. Then look up the job: who it was, what was done, what was said, and whether this person is a customer at all. Then reply.

Don't wait days. In the same 2026 survey, 19% of consumers said they expect a reply the same day and 81% within a week (BrightLocal 2026, brightlocal.com). GTL estimate: reply to a bad review within 24 hours. Our reasoning: it shows you watch your reviews, and the reviewer is more likely to take your call while it's fresh.

Example. A made-up painter gets a one-star review at 9pm about a missed spot. They write an angry reply, don't post it, and go to bed. At 8am they check the job notes, see the hallway was rushed on the last day, and write a short, calm reply instead.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] For each bad review, find the job in your records: date, address, who went, what was charged.
- [ ] Ask the person who did the job what happened.
- [ ] If you can't find any record of the reviewer, read section 8 first.
- [ ] Reply to the review within 24 hours of it appearing.

3 The four-part reply

The idea. Every good reply to a bad review has the same four parts, in this order:

1. **Thank them** for telling you.
2. **Own what's fair.** Say sorry for the part that's true. Don't argue about the rest.
3. **Say what you'll do,** in plain words.
4. **Take it offline.** Say you'll call, or give a number.

Keep it to three or four sentences. Write it yourself, about this job. In the same survey, templated or generic replies made 50% of consumers unlikely to choose a business (BrightLocal 2026, brightlocal.com).

To reply on Google: open your Business Profile, select "Read reviews", select the reply icon next to the review, type your reply and select "Reply". Google checks replies before they show, which usually takes up to 10 minutes and sometimes up to 30 days. You can edit or delete a reply later (Google: Manage

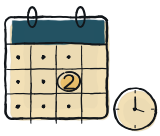
customer reviews, support.google.com).

Example. A made-up house cleaner's reply to a one-star review about a missed bathroom:

> **Reply:**
> **"Thank you for telling us, and I'm sorry. Missing a room isn't the standard we hold ourselves to. I'd like to send someone back to finish it at no charge. I'll call you today."**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Write the four parts on a sticky note by your desk.
- [ ] Draft your reply to your newest bad review using them.
- [ ] Cut it to four sentences or fewer.
- [ ] Post it, then make the call you promised.



Part 2

Replies for the common cases

4 "They were late" or "they never showed"

The idea. Lateness reviews are about respect for someone's day. Don't explain traffic. Say sorry for their time, say what you're changing, and offer to make it right.

Example. Replies for the late review, by trade:

Landscaper, crew arrived at 7am:
"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry. A mower outside your window at 7am isn't fair to you. I've moved your street to later in the route starting this week. I'll call you today."

HVAC, long wait in a heat wave:
"Thank you, and I'm sorry you waited that long in the heat. That week we were booked solid, and we should have told you the real wait when you called. We now give a time on the first call. I'd like to talk it through."

House cleaner, no-show:
"I'm sorry we didn't show up, and that you found out by waiting. That's on us. I'll call you today to book a make-up clean at no charge, at a time that works for you."

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Check what time your crew really arrived, from your records or the tech's phone.
- [ ] Reply with the four parts and one real change.
- [ ] Make the change, such as a text when the crew is on the way.
- [ ] Call the customer.

5 "Too expensive"

The idea. Price reviews are read by people who are about to get a quote from you. Don't argue the number. Thank them, explain the price calmly so the next reader understands it, and take it offline. Never post what they paid.

Example. Replies for the price review, by trade:

Plumber, weekend bill:
"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry the bill was a surprise. Weekend visits cost more because a plumber leaves their family to come out, and we try to say that on the phone first. It sounds like we didn't make it clear enough. I'll call you today."

HVAC, "they tried to sell me a new system":
"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry the visit felt like a sales pitch. Our techs should always give you a repair price next to any replacement price, so you can choose. I'd like to look at what happened and call you today."

Roofer, quote higher than another company's:
"Thank you for taking the time. Roof quotes can differ a lot depending on what's included, like tear-off, underlayment and the warranty. I'm happy to walk through ours line by line. I'll give you a call."

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Find out what the customer was told about price before the work started.
- [ ] Reply with the four parts. Explain the price once, calmly, without numbers.
- [ ] If they weren't told up front, fix that step for every job.
- [ ] Call the customer.

6 "The work wasn't good"

The idea. A quality complaint is the one you can turn around completely. Say exactly what you'll fix and when, then fix it so well it can't be seen. The next reader learns what happens when something goes wrong with you.

Example. Replies for the quality review, by trade:

Painter, drips and a patchy touch-up:
"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry. Drips on your floor are exactly what our drop cloths are meant to stop. I'll come by this week to clean the floor and repaint that wall corner to corner so it's one even finish. I'll call you today to set a time."

Roofer, nail in the driveway:
"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry. A stray nail near your car is exactly what we work hard to prevent. I'd like to come back, sweep the yard with the magnet again and check your tires. I'll call you today."

Landscaper, clippings on the car:
"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry. Our crew is meant to blow every car and driveway clear before leaving. I'll come by today to wash it off, and I've told the crew to check before they pack up."

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Book the fix with the customer, on a set day.
- [ ] Do the fix bigger than the problem, so it can't be seen.
- [ ] Add a step to your job checklist so this one stops happening.
- [ ] After the fix, add a short update to your reply (section 14).

7 "Wrong business": they mean someone else

The idea. Sometimes the review is about another company with a similar name, or a job you never did. Look it up first. If there's no record and the details don't match, say so politely, once. Then report it (sections 12 and 13).

Example. A made-up plumber gets a one-star review about a water softener install. They've never installed one.

> **Reply:**
> **"Thanks for posting. We can't find any record of this job, and we don't install water softeners, so I think this may be meant for another company. If we did work for you, please call us and we'll look into it right away."**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Search your records by name, phone, street and date.
- [ ] Reply once, politely, without calling them a liar.
- [ ] Report the review as off-topic or not about your business (section 13).
- [ ] Take a screenshot of the review and your reply for your records.

8 "I never hired them": fake or not a customer

The idea. A review from someone who was never your customer can be a mistake, a competitor, or a scam. Don't accuse anyone in public. Reply calmly, so readers see you checked, then report it.

If someone contacts you asking for money to remove bad reviews, or threatens more of them, don't pay. That's a known scam. Google's help page on reporting reviews points to a separate help article for it (Google: Report inappropriate reviews on your Business Profile, support.google.com).

Example. A made-up HVAC company gets three one-star reviews in one night, none with any detail, from names they can't find.

> **Reply:**
> **"We take every review seriously, and we can't find any record of working with you. If we did, please call us at [phone] so we can make it right."**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Check every name against your records.
- [ ] Reply once to each, with the same calm line.
- [ ] Report each one (section 13), choosing the reason that fits, such as spam or conflict of interest.
- [ ] Never pay anyone to remove reviews.

9 "Angry, but fair": you really got it wrong

The idea. Some bad reviews are true. Those are the ones to own completely. No "but". A reply that says "we got this wrong, here's what we did" builds more trust than a row of five-star reviews, because the reader can see what you're like when things go badly.

Example. A made-up house cleaner's crew broke a vase and didn't mention it. The client found it in the bin.

> **Reply:**
> **"You're right, and I'm sorry. We broke your vase and we should have told you that day. That's not how we work. We'll pay to replace it, and every cleaner now reports any breakage before they leave. I'll call you this afternoon."**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Say sorry without a "but".
- [ ] Make it right with something real: a redo, a refund or a repair.
- [ ] Change one rule so it doesn't happen again, and say which.
- [ ] Call the customer before the end of the day.



Part 3

What never to write

10 Seven things that make it worse

The idea. A bad reply does more damage than a bad review. The next reader forgives one unhappy customer. They don't forgive an owner who argues in public.

Never write:

1. **"That's not what happened."** Even if it's true. Say what you'll do instead.
2. **Private details.** Their address, what they paid, which days the house is empty, that you have a key, anything about their health or family. House cleaners need this rule most.
3. **Their full name or anything about them that isn't in the review.**
4. **A threat of any kind,** including a lawsuit. The FTC's review rule bans groundless legal threats, intimidation and false accusations used to stop or remove a negative review (FTC: Consumer Review Rule, questions and answers, ftc.gov).
5. **The same reply you wrote last time.** Half of shoppers are put off by generic replies (section 3).
6. **A long reply.** More than four sentences reads as an argument.
7. **Anything you wouldn't say with the customer standing in front of you and three neighbors watching.**

Example. A made-up landscaper's first draft: "We've been doing this 20 years and never had a complaint. Maybe check your own sprinklers." They delete it and write: "Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry the lawn looks scalped. I'd like to come out this week to look at it with you. I'll call today."

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Read every reply you've posted. Edit any that break one of the seven rules.
- [ ] Remove any street, day, key or price details from old replies.
- [ ] Share the seven rules with anyone who replies to reviews for you.
- [ ] If you use ChatGPT to draft, rewrite every reply in your own words before posting.

11 Never trade a fix for a deleted review

The idea. You can refund, redo or repair. You can't make it depend on the review. Google prohibits offering incentives for "changing reviews, or removing negative reviews" (Google: Create a Google link or QR code to request reviews, support.google.com). The FTC's rule also bans using threats or intimidation to get a negative review removed (FTC questions and answers, as above).

Once the fix is done and the customer is happy, you can say once, with no strings: "If you feel differently now, you're welcome to update your review." Then leave it. Never ask before the fix, never ask twice, and never tie it to money.

Example. A made-up roofer's customer asks for a partial refund after a leak. The roofer gives the refund and fixes the leak. A week later, after the next rain, they text once: "Glad it stayed dry. If you feel differently now, you're welcome to update your review. Either way, thanks for giving us the chance to fix it."

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Make the fix or refund on its own, with nothing asked in return.
- [ ] Wait until the customer says it's fixed.
- [ ] Ask once at most, using the line above, and only after the fix.
- [ ] Tell your team: never mention the review when offering a refund.



Part 4

When to report a review, and how

12 What Google will take down, and what it won't

The idea. Google only removes reviews that break its policies. Its help page says "Do not report a review just because you disagree with it or dislike it", and that "Google doesn't get involved in conflict between businesses and customers" (Google: Report inappropriate reviews on your Business Profile, support.google.com). An unfair but real customer's one-star review stays. Reply to it instead.

Reviews worth reporting break a rule in Google's content policy (Google Maps user-contributed content policy, support.google.com):

Report it when the review is	For example
Spam or fake	Several detail-free one-stars in one night from names you can't find
Off-topic	About another business, or a political rant
A conflict of interest	Posted by a competitor, or by a former employee about their job
Harassment, hate speech or profanity	Insults aimed at a named worker
Personal information	Your tech's home address or phone number

Example. A made-up painter gets two bad reviews in a week. One is a real customer who didn't like the color they chose. The painter replies and doesn't report it. The other names the painter's daughter and uses slurs. They report that one for harassment and hate speech.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] For each bad review, ask: does it break one of the rules in the table?
- [ ] If not, reply using Part 2 and move on.
- [ ] If yes, take a screenshot, then report it (section 13).
- [ ] Reply to it anyway, calmly, while you wait.

13 How to report a review and appeal

The idea. There are two ways to report a review, both from Google's help page (Google: Report inappropriate reviews on your Business Profile, support.google.com).

From your Business Profile: select "Read reviews", select the report icon next to the review, pick the reason, such as "Spam" or "Profanity", and select "Send report".

From Google's Reviews Management Tool: confirm your account, select your business, select "Report a new review for removal", select "Report" next to the review, pick a reason and submit.

Google says review checks typically take several days. Go back to the same tool to see the status: "Decision pending", "Report reviewed - no policy violation" or "Escalated". If Google finds no violation, you can send a one-time appeal, for up to 10 reviews at once, from the same tool.

Example. A made-up plumber reports a review about a company in another state. The status says "Decision pending" for four days, then "Report reviewed - no policy violation". They appeal once, adding that their records show no job and that the review names a service they don't offer. The appeal is escalated, and Google emails them the final decision.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Bookmark the Reviews Management Tool (search "Google Reviews Management Tool" to find it).
- [ ] Report each review that breaks a rule, picking the closest reason.
- [ ] Put a reminder in your calendar for a week from now to check the status.
- [ ] If Google says no violation and you're sure it's wrong, appeal once, with your facts.



Part 5

Turn the reply into proof

14 Fix it, then add one line saying so

The idea. The best reply isn't the one you write today. It's the one you update after you've fixed things. Google lets you edit a reply: select "Read reviews", select the edit icon under your reply, change it and select "Update" (Google: Manage customer reviews, support.google.com). One added line turns a complaint into proof of how you handle problems.

Keep the update short and factual, and don't add any private details.

Example. A made-up painter's reply, edited after the fix:

> **Original reply:**
> **"Thanks for telling us, and I'm sorry. I'll come by this week to clean the floor and repaint that wall corner to corner. I'll call you today to set a time."**
>
> **Line added after the fix:**
> **"Update: we came back on Thursday, cleaned the floor and repainted the whole wall. Thanks for giving us the chance to put it right."**

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] List every bad review where you've already fixed the problem.
- [ ] Add one short update line to each reply.
- [ ] Check with the customer before you mention anything about the fix beyond the basics.
- [ ] Make "update the reply" the last step of every complaint you fix.

15 Answer one bad review with honest new ones

The idea. One bad review hurts most when it's one of a few. Among 12 reviews it stands out. Among 60, it's a footnote. The answer is to ask every customer for a review, every job, so the next reader sees the whole picture.

Example (sample numbers). A made-up landscaper with 11 five-star reviews gets one one-star review. Their average drops to about 4.7. A made-up landscaper with 59 five-star reviews gets the same review and still shows 4.9.

Ask every customer, never only the happy ones. Our guide on how to get your first 50 Google reviews has the plan, and our 50 review request texts are ready to copy.

Do it in 24 hours

- [ ] Count your reviews from the last 90 days.
- [ ] Text your review link to every customer from the last 30 days, the ones who complained included.
- [ ] Make "ask for the review" the last step of every job.
- [ ] Reply to every new review the day it comes in, good or bad.

or we can do it for you

Free sample: Your first 10 requests sent

Review requests is $100 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

Review requests: growthatlocal.com/services/reviews



Your first 24 hours, in one list

If you only do five things this week, do these:

- [ ] Look up the job behind your newest bad review before you reply (section 2).
- [ ] Reply with the four parts: thank, own what's fair, say what you'll do, take it offline (section 3).
- [ ] Remove any private details or arguments from your old replies (section 10).
- [ ] Report only the reviews that break Google's rules, and appeal once if you're sure (sections 12 and 13).
- [ ] After every fix, add one update line to your reply (section 14).



If you'd rather hand it off

Grow That Local does this for local businesses: we send review requests after every job and reply to your reviews, good and bad, in your voice. Each service starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay.

Best fit for this guide: Review requests. Free sample: your first 10 requests sent. Review requests is $100 a month, with a 7-day full refund.

Review requests — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
More 5-star reviews, without the awkward asking. Free sample: your first 10 requests sent.

Websites — **from $1 a month · 7-day full refund**
A fast, good-looking site that turns visitors into calls. Free sample: a preview of your new site.

Google Business Profile — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Show up in the map when neighbors search for what you do. Free sample: a profile check-up with 10+ fixes.

Social media posts — **$200 a month · 7-day full refund**
Fresh posts every week, made from your real job photos. Free sample: two weeks of posts, ready to go.

Email newsletter — **$50 a month · 7-day full refund**
Stay top of mind, so past customers call you first. Free sample: your first newsletter, written.

SEO — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Climb Google for the searches that bring in jobs. Free sample: a ranking check and 10 fixes.

Win-back texts — **$100 a month · 7-day full refund**
Bring past customers back for their next job. Free sample: your first 25 customers texted.

Neighborhood postcard — **$400 a month · 7-day full refund**
Your ad in mailboxes across nice neighborhoods. Free sample: your ad, designed and shown on the card.

Monthly report card — **free**
See how you stack up against local competitors. Free sample: your first report card, this month.

Text us at (423) 924-2014, or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

Sources

Every statistic above, with where to check it:

1. BrightLocal Local Consumer Review Survey 2026 (1,002 US adults, published Feb 11, 2026): 89% expect business owners to respond to reviews. brightlocal.com (section 1)
2. Same survey: 42% are unlikely to use a business that never replies. (section 1) (brightlocal.com)
3. Same survey: 80% are likely to use a business that responds to all its reviews. (section 1) (brightlocal.com)
4. Same survey: 19% expect a same-day reply, and 81% expect one within a week. (section 2) (brightlocal.com)
5. Same survey: templated or generic replies make 50% unlikely to choose a business. (sections 3, 10) (brightlocal.com)

Rules and guidance cited (not statistics), checked on 2026-11-12:

- Google, Manage customer reviews (replies are public, how to reply, edit and delete, replies checked before they show): support.google.com (sections 1, 3, 14)
- Google, Report inappropriate reviews on your Business Profile (what gets removed, how to report, status, one-time appeal, extortion scams): support.google.com (sections 8, 12, 13)
- Google Maps user-contributed content policy (spam, off-topic, conflict of interest, harassment, personal information): support.google.com (section 12)
- Google, Create a Google link or QR code to request reviews (incentives to change or remove reviews prohibited): support.google.com (section 11)
- FTC, Consumer Review Rule: questions and answers (in force October 21, 2024; no groundless legal threats, intimidation or false accusations to stop or remove negative reviews): ftc.gov (sections 10, 11)

GTL estimates

These are our own judgment, not measured facts:

1. Reply to a bad review within 24 hours (section 2). Reasoning: it shows readers you watch your reviews, and the reviewer is more likely to take your call while the job is fresh.
2. Keep replies to four sentences or fewer (sections 3 and 10). Reasoning: shoppers skim, and a long reply reads as an argument whatever it says.
3. One bad review matters much less among 60 reviews than among 12 (section 15). Reasoning: it's simple averaging, shown in the section's example.

want it done for you?

Every part of this guide is something we do.

Each one starts with a free sample, so you see the work before you pay. Text us at (423) 924-2014 or start at growthatlocal.com/start.

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