

# 10 ways to say NO

*This playbook gives designers, project leads, and studio teams ten practical, people-first ways to say no. Use it to protect your boundaries, your team, and the integrity of your work.*

## 1. The Expert's No

**Say: "That change would compromise the design intent and compliance requirements, so I can't recommend it. I can show you an alternative that achieves the same goal."**

Why it works: Reinforces authority and positions you as a trusted expert, not an order-taker.

## 2. The Collaborative No

**Say: "I see what you're aiming for. Let's explore another way to achieve that outcome without affecting the schedule or budget."**

Why it works: Acknowledges intent and redirects the conversation without resistance.

## 3. The Prioritisation No

**Say: "I can take this on, but it will mean delaying the current deliverables. Which would you prefer I prioritise?"**

Why it works: Clarifies trade-offs and gives control back to the decision-maker.

## 4. The Process No

**Say: "We can't move forward until this stage is approved. Once we have your sign-off, we'll action the next phase."**

Why it works: It focuses on the process, not the personality, reinforcing accountability.

## 5. The Resource No

**Say: "The team is at capacity right now, and taking this on would affect the quality of work. We can revisit it when we have space next month."**

Why it works: Protects team wellbeing and makes quality the non-negotiable.

## 6. The Boundary No

**Say: "We don't work outside of agreed hours, but we can schedule time first thing Monday morning to review this together."**

Why it works: Sets expectations around time while offering a constructive path forward.

## 7. The Reality Check No

**Say: "That option isn't feasible within the current budget, but if additional funds are available, we can explore it properly."**

Why it works: Moves the conversation to resources, not resistance.

## 8. The Coaching No

**Say: "I understand this feels urgent. Before we rush, can we step back and check whether this aligns with our goals?"**

Why it works: Encourages reflection and helps the team stay strategic, not reactive.

## 9. The Accountability No

**Say: "Approvals were delayed on your side, which has pushed out our timeline. To maintain quality, we'll need to adjust completion accordingly."**

Why it works: Uses facts to reframe blame and set respectful accountability.

## 10. The Future-Focused No

**Say: "We can't take that on right now, but it's a great idea for Phase 2. Let's revisit it once this stage is complete."**

Why it works: Defers rather than denies, keeping collaboration and enthusiasm alive.

The goal isn't to say no for the sake of it; it's to say yes to what matters most.

Each **no** protects your energy, your team, and the integrity of your project.