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WhatsApp message templates and the 24-hour window

Cloud API & Chatbots

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WhatsApp message templates and the 24-hour window

Cloud API & Chatbots Created on **October 10, 2026** 3 min read



On the WhatsApp Cloud API there are two situations. If the customer **wrote less than 24 hours ago**, you can answer with free text. If the **24 hours have passed**, or you are the one writing first, you can only send a **message template** approved by Meta. It is the rule that surprises people coming from ordinary WhatsApp most, and the one behind almost every refused send.

The 24-hour window

The window opens when the customer sends you a message. Inside it, the conversation is free: text, images, whatever the Cloud API allows. Each new message from the customer opens it again. When it closes, the only way to write to them is a template. The exact conditions and the exceptions are in Meta's documentation, and they can change.

Situation	What you can send
The customer wrote recently (inside the window)	Free text and the message types the API allows.
The window has closed	Only an approved template.
They have never spoken to you	Only an approved template, and only to people who agreed to be contacted.
You want to start a campaign	Approved templates and each recipient's consent. See **broadcast lists and the rule nobody knows**.

What a template is

A template is a message written in advance, with **slots for variables** (the customer's name, the order number, the date). You submit it to Meta for review and only then can you use it. Meta puts each template in a category, for example marketing, utility or authentication, and the category limits what the template may say and the conditions that apply to it. Those conditions are Meta's and we do not state them here.

Writing a template that gets approved

1. **Say one thing.** A template that mixes a delivery notice with a promotion is the likeliest to be refused or classified wrongly.
2. **Be specific.** “Hello [name], your order [number] left today” is clear. “We have news for you” says nothing. Write the variables the way Meta’s documentation says.
3. **Give examples** for the variables when the form asks for them. They help the reviewer understand the use.
4. **Do not ask for sensitive data** by message, and do not use misleading language.
5. **Include a way out** in marketing templates, so the customer can ask to stop receiving them.
6. **Wait for approval** before relying on the template in production.

A rejected template is not the end.
Meta gives a reason. Fix it and resubmit. What you should not do is multiply variations of one template to test it: Meta looks at the pattern of use, and repeated sending to people who did not ask brings reports and lowers the number’s quality.

Replying inside the window

1. **Record the time** of the customer’s last message. It is what you use to work out when the window ends.
2. **Before sending free text**, check that the window is open. If it is not, use a template.
3. **Bring the conversation back inside the window.** A useful template gets the customer to answer, which reopens the window.

If your flow runs in n8n or another tool, store the time of the last incoming message and let the flow choose between free text and a template. See **a flow with Evolution API and n8n**. Commercial terms are covered in **the Cloud API: advantages, disadvantages and who it is for**.

RECOMMENDED

Is the webhook still to be built? Start with the server.

See VPS servers →

SEE ALSO

- **Getting started with the Cloud API** →
- **Webhooks from Meta** →
- **WhatsApp for business: the risks and the practices** →

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