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Attachment too large: why the message bounces and how to send big files

E-mail

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Attachment too large: why the message bounces and how to send big files

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You attached a file and the message came back with “message too large”, “552”, “size exceeds limit” or “attachment too large”. The limit that decides **is not yours**: it is the recipient’s server’s (or your own full mailbox’s). And there is a surprise: an attached file takes about **a third more** than its size, because e-mail turns it into text to carry it. An attachment that looks close to the limit has already gone past it.

Why it is returned

Cause	How to recognise it
The destination has a per-message limit	The bounce talks about size (“message size exceeds”). The limit is not published and varies from server to server. Ask the recipient.
The destination mailbox has no room	The bounce talks about quota (“mailbox full”, “over quota”). See **the 550 and 552 errors**.
Your own mailbox is full	The copy in “Sent” takes room in your mailbox, just as the received copy takes room in the recipient’s. See **your mailbox is full**.
Webmail warns before sending	It shows a size-exceeded message as you attach. There the limit is webmail’s and not the destination’s.

Sending it anyway, in order of preference

1. **Shrink the file.** Photos: lower the resolution before sending. Documents: export to PDF with lower image quality. Zipping helps with text, but little with photos, PDFs and videos, which are already compressed.

2. **Split it into several messages,** if it is a set of files. Each message has its own size; tell the recipient how many are coming.

3. **Send a link instead of the file.** Upload the file to a folder on your site or to a file-sharing service of your choice, and send the address. The recipient downloads whenever they like, and neither mailbox fills up.

4. **If you use a folder on your site,** protect it with a password or use a name nobody can guess, and delete the file once the recipient has it. See **password protecting a folder**.

As a guide: once a file goes past a few megabytes, a link is usually safer than insisting. And if the recipient works at a company with tight rules, the attachment may be refused or held by one of their policies, nothing to do with size: in that case the link solves it too.

A public link is public.
Whoever has the address downloads the file, and a search engine can find it if the folder is listed. Never leave personal documents or contracts in an open folder: use the password, and delete afterwards.

Agree beforehand.
If you regularly send heavy files (proposals, photographs, plans), ask the recipient how they prefer to receive them. Many prefer the link, which also skips the spam folder. A general note on sending limits is in **how to write an e-mail that does not land in spam**.

NEED A HAND?

Got a bounce you do not understand? Paste us the technical text and tell us the file's size.

Open a support ticket →

Where to see it in your account

The size limit that stops a message is the one the receiving server announces, and you read it in the text of the bounce. On your side, cPanel shows two useful things. In **Track Delivery** you can follow a message and read what the server answered. In **Email Accounts** you see how much space each mailbox uses, which is what fills up with large attachments and the Sent folder. Every hosting plan includes unlimited mailboxes, and the mail takes space from the plan's storage. If a message from or to one of your mailboxes keeps bouncing for size, open a ticket with the text of the bounce and we will look at it with you.

SEE ALSO

- Bounce message 550: what each one means
- Your mailbox is full: what to delete and how to stop it happening
- Password protecting a folder with Directory Privacy
- How to write an e-mail that does not land in spam

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