

# WHAT TO DO WHEN SOMEONE DOESN'T LIKE YOUR PHOTO

Quick Guide  
Written by Ľudmila Borošová



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There are billions of people living on our beautiful Earth, so the probability of someone disliking a photograph that you've (or I've!) taken is quite significant. Most of the time it's not a big deal, like an anonymous profile commenting on your new social media post. The Internet gave freedom to so many people expressing their opinions in the comments that you shouldn't give much weight to one small comment. Other times, you might be dealing with negative comments from your paid client asking for a refund or re-edit. You see, sometimes these comments can harm "just" our feelings, but other times they can damage our small businesses. This is when you need to learn what kind of critique you're getting and how to deal with different types of problems you encounter when this happens. We're all human, and negative feedback happens to even the best photographers! Remember, *there is a right client for everyone*: someone who is looking for just you, your style, your personality, your editing, your price, and all in all what you have to offer.

### Today, we'll cover:

- What main types of critique are there in photography?
- How can you solve unpleasant feedback situations?
- What rules can you implement to deal with critique better?

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Let's learn more about the types of critique you can encounter on your photography journey, what they mean, how to prevent miscommunication, how to deal with the critique, and how to stay sane and learn from the situation if anything unfortunate like this happens. Let's start with the least serious one – anonymous comments – and make our way to the real deal: paying clients.



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## ANONYMOUS COMMENTS THAT DON'T REALLY MATTER

As we just outlined above, there are different types of critique that you may receive for your photography. The most common one is comments on social media! Some people seek comfort in online anonymity, and they lose their human boundaries when they can hide behind a fake username. It's important to realize that while everyone has their own opinion, only a few people can find time to really express it. Remember the saying: If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all. Truthfully, anonymous comments are usually from people that have their own problems, and this is a way of making themselves feel better if you interact with them. That's why, if you stumble across a comment like this, it's best to just ignore it. Their critique has nothing to do with your photography, and the anonymous commenter will sooner or later get bored!

## THE HONEST SOCIAL MEDIA CRITIQUE

If you're posting your work on social media or into various online groups and communities, it probably doesn't go unnoticed. As creators participating in these spaces, we are no longer seeking validation in numbers (the number of likes, shares, or followers). We want to spark conversation and connect with other people online, mostly via comments. That's why they are one of the most important ways of engagement. One truly beautiful comment can mean more than 500 likes. But of course, sunshine isn't the only thing we can find in the comment section.

How do you avoid unwanted harsh comments? Specify your feedback preferences. It can be done with just a simple request or even turning off the comments. But sure, if you do that, you might be losing some positive feedback as well. The best way to do it is by facing the potential criticism and taking it as a new opportunity to learn. Rejecting the anonymous hate and embracing constructive

criticism as an opportunity for growth is an enormous change in mindset! When posting your pictures online, just add a simple description: "Do you have any constructive criticism? Please let me know in the comments!" People will be willing to help you push your work to the next level, so you will get a completely fresh perspective. This will allow you to grow as a photographer and will scare away potential anonymous haters.

Have you noticed that people are usually hesitant to reply to negative comments? You shouldn't be. Learn how to distinguish between critique that doesn't matter and critique that is aimed to improve your work. If anyone takes time to give you constructive criticism, take some time to say a few words back. It can be anything from appreciation or explanation to defense. It's polite to reply, and you'll get to practice your communication skills.



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## THE UNSATISFIED (PAYING) CLIENT

The most serious type of negative feedback is from your client. They say that “the customer is always right.” But maybe... you’re both right and you’re just not ideal for each other! So, what should you do if your client doesn’t like the photos you took? Examine the situation from a third perspective. Is the client being unreasonable, or is there some truth in their words?

**First, focus on yourself.** Is the fault on your side? Try asking these questions: Did you really understand the client’s perspective? Did you communicate clearly? Is there anything you could have done differently? Do you remember making the client feel uncomfortable on the photoshoot? Did you mess up the settings on your camera? Are the pictures blurry or unflattering? Does the skin tone match? Do they feel inconsistent? Could you edit them differently? Come up with more questions that could lead you to what went wrong on your side.



**Now, focus on your client.** Was the client a price-catcher or genuinely interested in your work? Did the client see your portfolio before booking? Did he or she have unreasonable requests that were not covered by the contract? Sometimes, the client just wants to complain, be heard, and get a refund (e.g. photos for free), and other times they might be genuinely upset. Work with the situation and use common sense. If you messed up, offer a refund or another photoshoot. If you did five portraits and the client thinks that the coloring is off, provide them with a solution (e.g. a re-edit), not a refund. If you delivered 500 pictures from a wedding and they want

to change something on each of them or do more retouching, explain that these services cost extra and that you'd be happy to provide them. Setting clear boundaries will be beneficial for both you and your customer.

It's crucial to realize that personal messages can often lead to public reviews, so always talk to your clients with respect. Your business survives based on your online presence, and even if you feel like this one customer isn't right, act professionally. You've been building your name for years, and you shouldn't throw it away with one unfortunate situation.



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## SO, WHAT CAN YOU DO TO LEARN HOW TO DEAL WITH CRITIQUE?

### Avoid Making it Happen

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Set clear expectations from the beginning. Take the time to truly understand what your clients want and show them what you offer. Let me show you how I deal with my wedding inquiries: After the couple contacts me, I always make sure to set up a nonbinding meeting in a local café. I talk with them about the wedding plans, share interesting insight from my experiences, and show them my work. We understand each others' expectations and our visions are aligned for future work! After the booking is done and the deposit is received, I also send out a wedding questionnaire with all kinds of questions that will help me do my best work. Questionnaires can help with all photoshoots, not just on big gigs! Make sure to create your own and send it to your clients.

### Be Your First Critique

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It's always very unpleasant when someone doesn't like your work. It can hurt one's feelings easily. That's why it's important to get used to critique and not to see your work through rose-tinted glasses all the time. Be your own (constructive) critic and find three things you could have done better on each photoshoot. There is always something you can improve, and it will help you build mental strength and better your photography.

## Create a Reply Template

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Always be prepared for negative comments or reviews with a personalized template. It's better to come up with the right words when you're calm. You will feel much more at ease dealing with your clients and online comments when you know what you have up your sleeve.

## Never Hide the Reviews

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Negative reviews are unpleasant, and they can scare people away, but they aren't as bad as unmanaged communication. Don't ignore your customers; instead, admit your mistakes and act professionally. Words speak volumes, and it's even truer when you see brands communicating with clients. As a photographer, you do your own PR. Make it count! The way you handle replies to negative comments can be a deal breaker.


## Don't Forget to Spread the Love

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Do you remember how you felt when you received a comment saying that your pictures were beautiful? The butterflies in your stomach are real. Even better, can you imagine someone telling you that you're an inspiration to them? Or that your work is what they keep looking forward to? It doesn't take much

to make someone happy. So, if you feel like you have something nice to say, just say it. A few years ago, I made a resolution to myself that I would compliment people more often. I'd write to random social media managers that they were doing a good job. I'd compliment photographers, models, makeup artists... but also regular people I met on the street.

In general, you should stop focusing on what might be wrong with your photos. They are capturing a special moment – one second in the universe that's never coming back. Look at your photographs realistically and distinguish between critique that's unimportant, critique that's an opportunity to get better, and critique that might potentially harm your business, and deal with them differently. Make a difference with your photos and your choice of words in relation to other people's work. Don't be afraid to compliment; look forward to getting complimented and don't be afraid to take constructive criticism.

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## Self-Check Quiz:

- 1) Should you take critique from anonymous online commenters seriously?
- 2) What can you do that will make online critics bored?
- 3) What do you think is constructive criticism?
- 4) How can you specify your feedback preferences?
- 5) Why is it important to act professionally when dealing with a client?
- 6) What are some of the questions that will help you find the true issue when a customer is unhappy?
- 7) How can you set clear expectations before the photoshoot?
- 8) How can you get prepared for online comments and reviews?
- 9) Should you hide online reviews? Why?
- 10) How can you spread happiness instead of negativity online?

## Assignment:

- Let's try a seven-day challenge of compliment-giving to all online creators that inspire you. For the next week, try sending a nice message to at least two inspiring people each day! It doesn't have to do with photography, but it will help other creatives tremendously.
- Create a questionnaire that you can use on all your sessions. Do a separate one for portraits, senior photos, weddings, etc. Customize them to your needs and make sure that you send it out to your clients before they book you!
- Open your last photoshoot and find three things that you could have done better. What are they? How do you feel after giving yourself constructive criticism?



## Hey there!

Let's get real for a minute... Learning photography can be super challenging! But we're here to help you every step of the way! Here are 3 of our most useful (*and FREE!*) photography resources:



### 3 Free Photography Cheat Sheets

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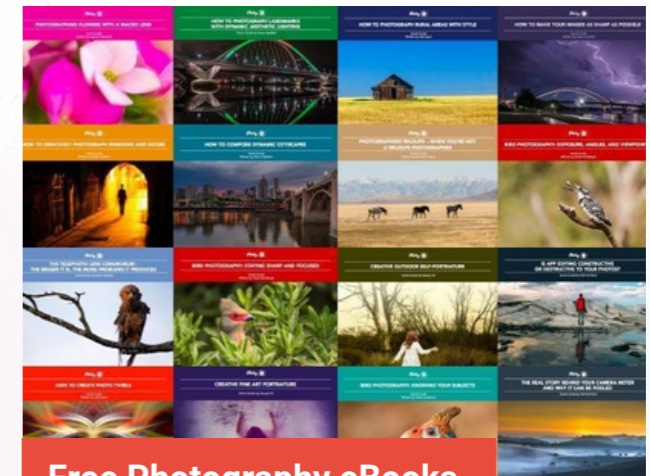
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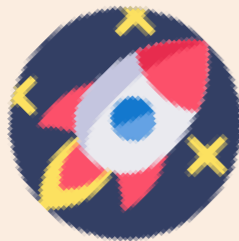
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ludmila is a Slovak photographer focusing on portraiture. She does photography while finishing her Master's degree in Business Administration, specializing in Entrepreneurship. She is based in Prague, Czech Republic but loves to travel around the world and share her stories, as well as her photoshoots, on her blog.

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