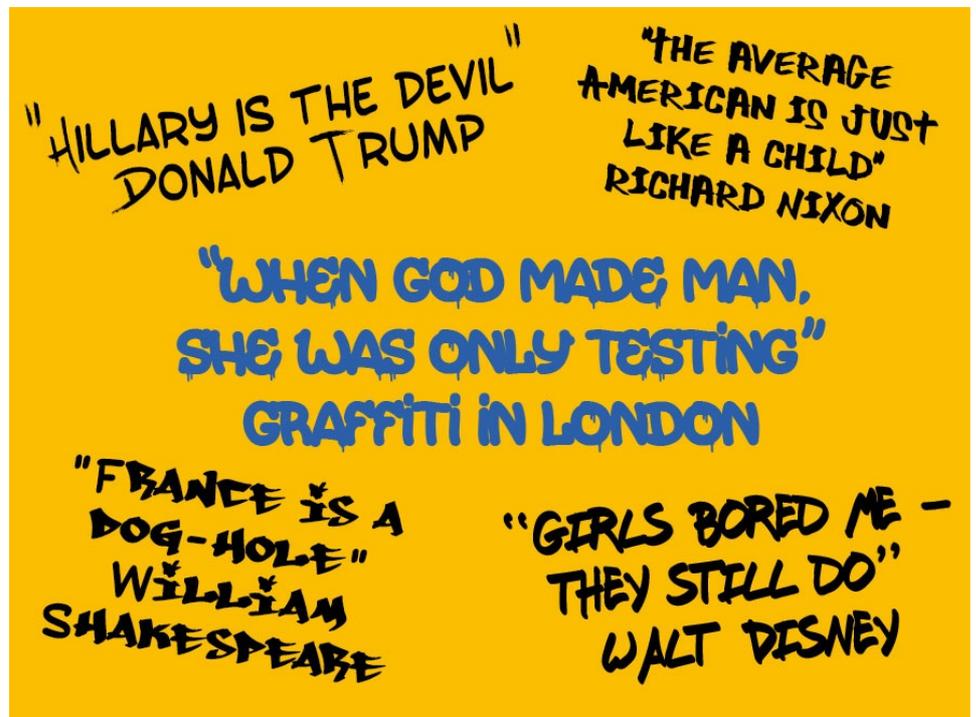


# Texts, tweets and twerps: the rise of rudeness

Road rage. Fat shamers. Victim blaming. We are all getting ruder, according to a brilliant new book by British writer Danny Wallace. Is this true – and is it necessarily a bad thing if so?



**Watch your words:** Rudeness has always existed. Some, like Shakespeare, turned it into an art.

All **Danny Wallace** wanted was a hot dog. But the cashier in the diner was not cooperative. She spoke impolitely, made him wait an hour, then refused to give him his food.

The incident so infuriated Wallace that he was inspired to write a book about rudeness. In *I Can't Believe You Just Said That!*, which came out this month, the British author asks why we can be so horrible to each other. He speaks to psychologists, politicians, lawyers, cab drivers. His conclusion: we are ruder than ever.

The book has been praised for its humour. It tells some fascinating stories, such as the anecdote of the Islamic State **fighter** who complained that his fellow jihadis had bad manners. It explains exactly what went down in that diner. It is also full of **quotable stats** (did you know that British people are at their rudest between 3pm and 4pm?).

One of Wallace's reasons for the rise of rudeness is the internet. He argues that anonymity enables us to say things we would **not dare utter** to someone's face. Social media

in particular has helped bring about a culture in which everyone must have an opinion – whether nice or nasty.

Wallace is not alone. Academics and journalists have long argued that hashtags like #YOLO and #JustSaying can embolden people to hurl insults without thinking of the consequences. **Studies** suggest that online rudeness can affect people's relations in the real world.

Then there is modern hardware. Technology like smartphones and headphones have been blamed for isolating people and encouraging bad manners. Texting during dinner, for instance, is often a source of tension within a family.

But some experts reply that it is not that simple. In many ways, they say, we are becoming more civil. For example, being rude about someone's race or disability is far less accepted today than it was even a few decades ago. Perhaps it is not rudeness that is increasing, but our sensitivity to it.

"As humans, we have this need to be respected," says Wallace. Are we really all getting a bit too discourteous?

## Oh no you didn't

Definitely, say some. Trolling is everywhere online – just look at the US president's tweets to see how normalised rudeness has become. And it's affecting us in real life. Research shows that it makes us less creative and less effective at doing our work. We need to start being a lot more respectful to each other.

Shut up, reply others. Nastiness is uncalled for, but rudeness is not always nasty. It often occurs because different people have different values. Texting during dinner only annoys adults because they didn't grow up doing it. Sometimes, "rudeness" is just evidence that society is evolving – which is a good thing.

## Q & A

### Q: What do we know?

A: Rudeness has always existed – writers like Shakespeare and Oscar Wilde even turned it into an art form. But what counts as rude varies throughout history and across cultures.

In 19th-century America, gentlemen had to bow before unmarried women. In Japan today, many people consider it improper to eat on public transport. This goes to show that "rudeness" is quite subjective.

### Q: What do we not know?

A: How exactly rudeness affects us. It is fair to

assume that most people do not like it when others are impolite with them, but the science behind this is inconclusive. Research has suggested that rudeness harms our work ethic and creativity, impairs our ability to complete simple tasks (like forming acronyms! OGM!), and even makes us more prone to heart attacks.

## YOU DECIDE

1. How would you define “rudeness”?
2. Does social media affect the way you interact with people in real life?

## WORD WATCH

**Danny Wallace** – Aside from his writing, Wallace has been a filmmaker, broadcaster and actor. He is perhaps best known for his book *Yes Man*, in which he describes a year he spent saying “yes” to any offer made to him.

**I Can’t Believe You Just Said That!** – The book is published by Ebury Press.

**Fighter** – Omar Hussain, a former supermarket

## ACTIVITIES

1. Over the next week, keep a journal in which you note every time someone is rude to you (or you are rude to someone). Then share your findings with the class.
2. Watch the video of Korean schoolchildren in *Become An Expert*. In groups of four, write your own song on the subject of “netiquette”.

guard from the UK, listed his grievances in a blog post in 2015. He complained that his colleagues drove badly, stole his shoes, used his charger and talked loudly when he was trying to sleep.

**Quotable stats** – Among other revelations: one in five Britons consider themselves rude, and more than half say someone has been rude to them in the last week.

**Not dare utter** – Wallace tells the story of a man who sent him a very abusive tweet. Some

## SOME PEOPLE SAY...

*“You can’t be truly rude until you understand good manners.”*

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

time later, Wallace saw him in a pub and confronted him. The man grovelled, explaining that he was having a bad day when he sent the tweet.

**Studies** – For example, a 2013 study by social scientist Joseph Grenny found that one in five people had decided to avoid somebody in real life because of an unpleasant online conversation.

## BECOME AN EXPERT

Read this article on [theday.co.uk](http://theday.co.uk) for links to recommended videos and further reading.

 Notes