

Bounce Code Triage Sheet

Read the first digit before the dashboard label

RFC 3463

2 . X . X **Success class**

Delivery succeeded or the requested action completed. Keep normal state, but do not confuse SMTP success with inbox placement.

4 . X . X **Persistent transient failure**

Hold or retry according to provider policy and context. Group by recipient domain and preserve the exact enhanced status code.

5 . X . X **Permanent failure**

Suppress permanent recipient failures from future sending and investigate policy/authentication failures before retrying.

Do not collapse all failures into one rate

Nine failures can mean six dead addresses plus three provider deferrals. The same 15% headline rate needs two different queue actions.

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Triage in this order

PRESERVE EVIDENCE**1****Save the exact response**

Store SMTP code, enhanced status code, recipient domain, sender mailbox, timestamp and message ID where available.

2**Classify permanent vs transient**

Do not retry a known permanent address failure just because the campaign tool has a generic retry switch.

3**Group by concentration**

One provider returning many 4.x.x responses suggests a different issue than random 5.1.x address failures across unrelated domains.

4**Check authentication when policy codes appear**

Authentication-specific failures should send you to message headers and DNS, not to copy changes.

5**Change one variable**

Pause the suspect segment or reduce exposure while keeping the rest of the diagnostic state stable.

Reference

RFC 3463 defines the enhanced status-code class.subject.detail structure. Provider-specific text still matters; save it rather than normalizing it away.