

Module 8 – Writing Bad-News Messages

Learning Objectives

1. Apply the three-step writing process to bad-news messages
2. Show how to achieve an audience-centered tone in bad-news messages and explain why it helps readers
3. Differentiate between direct and indirect organizational approaches to bad-news messages and discuss when it's appropriate to use each one.
4. Explain the purpose of buffers and things to avoid when writing them.
5. List guidelines for delivering bad news to job applicants
6. List the main purpose of performance reviews and explain the guidelines to follow when giving negative reviews.

How to say “NO.”

1. Many people have difficulty saying “NO” because of its abruptness and negativity
2. A “NO” that is not properly explained can be very damaging.
3. The three-step process of writing bad-news messages can help the writer say the words in less damaging ways.

The Three-Step Process

1. Planning Bad-News Messages
2. Writing Bad-News Messages
 - a. Refusal
 - b. Rejection
 - c. Negative announcement
3. Completing Bad-News Messages
 - a. Revision
 - b. Proofreading typos
 - c. Errors in spelling, or problems with mechanics.

Developing Strategies for Bad-News Messages

1. To convey the bad news
2. To gain acceptance
3. To maintain goodwill
4. To promote a good corporate image
5. To minimize future correspondence

Creating an Audience-Centered Tone

1. Accept that bad-news represents a firm decision.
2. Understand that the decision was fair and reasonable.
3. Remain well disposed toward the business.
4. Preserve their pride.

5. Use the “You” Attitude
6. Choose positive Wording
7. Use Respectful Language

Choosing Positive Words

Avoid a Negative Tone

1. I can’t understand you!
2. Your account is in error.
3. Your report is wrong.
4. The damage is not our fault.

Use a Positive Tone

1. Please clarify your request
2. Your letter reached me today.
3. Corrections have been made to your account

The Direct Approach

1. Opening. Start with a clear statement of the bad news.
2. Body. Give reasons for the decision (perhaps offering alternatives).
3. Close. End with a positive statement; strive to maintain goodwill.

Direct Approach is used:

1. When all internal messages are direct.
2. When firmness is needed
3. For routine or minor situations
4. When audience prefers bad news first

The Indirect Approach

1. Open with a buffer
2. Give logical explanation of reasons
3. Clear statement of Bad News
4. Positive Close

Use this approach:

1. When audience will be displeased
2. When audience is emotionally involved

Begin With a Buffer

Things to Do

1. Show appreciation
2. Pay attention
3. Compliment reader
4. Be understanding
5. Show sincerity

Things to Avoid when using a Buffer

1. Never give impression that good news will follow
2. Never say, “No”
 - a. Don’t use wordy/irrelevant phrases and sentences
 - b. *We have received your letter*
 - c. *This email is in reply to your request*
 - d. *We are writing in response to your request*
3. Refrain from using a know-it-all tone
 - a. You should be aware that...
4. Avoid apologizing
 - a. Weakens the explanation of unfavorable news
5. Don’t write a buffer that is too long

State the Bad News

1. De-emphasize the Bad News
 - a. Minimize the space or time devoted to the bad news
 - b. Subordinate bad news in a complex or compound sentence.
 - c. Embed bad news in the middle of a paragraph or use parenthetical expressions
2. Use a Conditional (*if* or *when*) Statement
3. Focus on the Positive
 - a. We sell exclusively through retailers—NOT, We are unable to serve you
 - b. Avoid Blunt Language

Avoiding Blunt Statements

Instead of

1. We must deny
2. We cannot afford to
3. We must reject the proposal
4. We must turn down

Say this

1. The position has been filled.
2. Contact us again...
3. We’ve accepted the proposal from another builder
4. Please send your payment

End with a Positive Note

1. Remain Positive and Sincere
 - a. Don't refer to, repeat, or apologize for the bad news
2. Limit Future Correspondence
 - a. avoid wording such as "If you have further questions, please write"
3. Stay Confident and Optimistic

- a. avoid statements such as "Should you have further problems, please let us know".
- b. avoid saying, "If we can be of further help, please contact us".

Types of Bad-News Messages — Negative answers to routine requests

1. Refusing Requests for information
 - a. Use either direct or indirect approach
2. Refusing Invitations and Requests for Favors
 - a. Poll class for examples!
3. Refusing Claims and Requests for Adjustments
 - a. Use the Indirect Approach
4. Avoid accepting responsibility for the unfortunate situation
5. Avoid blaming or accusing the customer
6. Be cognizant of being sued for (written --libel) defamation (spoken -- slander)

Types of Bad-News Messages cont'd

1. Negative Organizational News
 - a. Providing Bad News about Products
 - b. Delivering Bad News about Company Operations
2. Negative Employment Messages
 - a. Refusing Requests for Recommendation Letters
 - b. Rejecting Job Applications
 - c. Giving Negative Performance Reviews
 - d. Terminating Employment

Employment Applications

1. Use a Direct Approach
2. State Reasons Clearly
3. Suggest Alternatives

Performance Reviews

1. Review Job
2. Provide Feedback Requirements
3. Develop a Plan of Action

Negative Performance Reviews

1. Confront the problem
2. Plan the message
3. Respect privacy
4. Focus on the problem
5. Obtain commitment

Termination Letters

1. Express the Decision

2. Give Specific Justification
3. Minimize Negative Feelings

Available tools of learning—not required for this unit of study:

1. Learning Objectives Checkup -- Test your knowledge (pg. 255-256)
2. Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage -- (pg.259)