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Writing Bad News

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It used to be dangerous to be the bearer of bad news. In ancient times, people often killed the messenger if they disliked the message! Business today may be more civilized, but the fact remains that a bad-news message is one that your reader doesn't want to receive.

To deliver bad news, you have two choices: (1) state the bad news right away, or (2) soften it by leading up to it with an explanation. If the bad news is minor, or if your reader expects it, go ahead and be direct. But in most cases, the second approach is better. You can organize bad news messages using the simple [BEBE formula](#). This chapter shows you how.

(For more help, see the mini-course [Writing Bad News Messages \(/product/writing-bad-news-messages-single-license\)](#).)

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Guidelines Writing Bad News 108

Your goal when sending bad news is to write a message that is clear, fair, and courteous.

1. [Plan \(/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#plan\)](/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#plan): (Ideas and Organization)

Aim to convince the reader that your news is necessary and fair.
Strive to continue a good relationship with the reader.

Prepare to draft.

Consider what your reader wants or expects.

Gather work-related reasons for your news.

If appropriate, explore other options for the reader.



2. [Draft \(/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#draft\)](/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#draft): (Ideas, Organization, and Voice)

Remember **BEBE**—**B**uffer, **E**xplanation and **B**ad news (main point), **E**xit.

Opening Begin with a buffer: a neutral statement like thanking the reader for past business, agreeing on a point, or expressing understanding.

Middle Build up to the bad news.

Be brief. One good reason is preferable to several weak ones.

If helpful, explain company policy.

State the bad news in the middle or at the end of a paragraph. If possible, follow with an alternative.

Closing Express regret (without apologizing) and end politely.

3. **[Revise \(/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#revise\)](/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#revise)**: (Ideas, Organization, Voice, Words, and Sentences)

Have you supplied a clear, sensitive explanation that helps the reader say, “I understand”?

Have you used a sincere, gracious tone that avoids a “we” versus “you” attitude?

Have you used neutral, exact, and sensitive wording?

Do you have easy-to-read sentences with smooth transitions?

4. **[Edit \(/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#edit\)](/book/write-business/chapter-8-how-tos#edit)**: (Conventions and Design)

Have you checked names, dates, grammar, punctuation, and spelling?

Have you checked format (spacing, type, and so on)?

“Tact is the art of making a point without making an enemy.”

—Howard H. Newton



Breaking Bad News

Writing Bid Rejections

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February 12, 2019

Mr. Felix Grove

Sea-to-Mountain Landscapers

8900 Coast Road

Seattle, WA 98134-6508

Dear Mr. Grove:

SUBJECT: Bid 4459 Everson City Park

Thank you for your bid to design and develop Everson's eight-acre city park adjacent to Kingston Elementary School and the Nooksack River.

Your bid was competitive for several of the criteria outlined in our original Request for Proposals (RFP). Your cost estimates, experience, and references were as strong as those from other bidders. However, Earth-Scape Design's overall plan tipped the bid in their favor. By including a variety of native plant species, Earth-Scape's natural, sustainable landscape will require less long-term care and create less stress on the Nooksack watershed. Because their plan contained a variety of plants, it also offered added educational value.

The Planning and Development Committee appreciates the work that you put into your proposal. We look forward to your interest in future Everson projects.

Yours sincerely,



Alice Potter

Development Committee Chair

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Writing Claim Denials

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June 17, 2019

Confirmation of email sent on June 14, 2019.

Mr. Jamaal Ellison

Southeast Electric



1976 Boulder Road, Suite 1214

Charlotte, NC 28261-1203


Dear Mr. Ellison:

 We have finished investigating your concerns about the ATV16 drives that you installed for American Linc Company. We do

understand that the drive and serial-link failures have inconvenienced both you and American Linc.

 After testing the drives you returned, our line engineer determined that they failed because the temperatures in the cabinet exceeded the maximum operating temperature of the drives, leading to electronic-component failure. As noted in the ATV16 manual, the drive may malfunction under such conditions. For this reason, we cannot repair the drives without charge. We would be happy, however, to consider the  following solutions:

1. We could remove the drive's plastic cover and install a stirring fan in the enclosure to moderate the temperature.
2. We could replace the ATV16 drives with the ATV18 model, a model more suitable for the machine you are using. (If you choose this option, we would give you a 15 percent discount on the ATV18s.)

 Please let me know how you would like to proceed. I look forward to hearing from you and to continuing our partnership.

Yours sincerely,



Elaine Hoffman
Product Manager

Writing Complaints (Basic)

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February 26, 2019

BHC Office Supply Company
39 Davis Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15209-1334

ATTENTION: Shipping Manager

I'm writing about a problem with the purchase order #07-1201. Copies of the original PO plus two invoices are enclosed.

Here is the sequence of events concerning PO 07-1201:


Dec. 17, 2018: I faxed the original purchase order.


Jan. 8, 2019: Because I hadn't heard from your office, I spoke with Kim in customer service. Then I re-sent the PO because she could not find the original in your system.

Jan. 15, 2019: I received a partial shipment, with the remaining items back-ordered (invoice 0151498).

Jan. 22, 2019: I then received a second shipment that was

complete (invoice 0151511). Noting the duplication, I contacted Kim, and she cancelled the back-ordered items.

 I am returning the partial order (duplicate items) by UPS. Please credit our account for the following: (1) the duplicate items listed on invoice 0151498 (\$863.85), (2) the shipping costs of the partial order (\$69.20), and (3) the UPS costs to return the duplicate items (\$58.10). The total credit comes to \$991.15.

 I look forward to receiving an adjusted statement and to continued cooperation in the future.



Gary Sheridan—Office Manager

gs/mc

Enclosures 3

Writing Complaints (Serious)

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January 15, 2019

Mr. Steven Grinnel


Director of Operations

Industrial Aggregate Equipment Company


4018 Tower Road

Albuquerque, NM 87105-3443

Dear Mr. Grinnel:

 I am very concerned about the 40-foot Snorkel Lift that we contracted with you to rebuild when we traded in our old Marklift. Continued delays in the rebuilding schedule and subsequent problems with the lift itself leave me uncertain about Industrial Aggregate's ability to provide Rankin Technologies with continued service.

 Here is an overview of the problem:

-  1. We ordered the Snorkel Lift in April 2018, and you promised delivery in July. We did not receive the lift until September.
-  2. When the lift arrived, we noticed several key parts had not been replaced, and the boom did not operate correctly. Your project supervisor, Nick Luther, assured us that the parts would be fixed in a timely manner, and he provided a substitute lift for free.
3. Two months later, Mr. Luther called to say that everything was fixed. However, when we visited your facility on

December 18, the gauges and tires on the lift had not been replaced, and the dual fuel unit had not been installed.



. When we finally received the Snorkel Lift on December 22, several items we noticed on December 18 still had not been fixed. In fact, the lift still had these deficiencies:

- several oil leaks
- missing “on/off” switch in the basket
- no dual fuel capabilities
- boom vibration when retracted after full extension

Page 2

Steven Grinnel

January 15, 2019



We have been extremely disappointed with the lift’s condition and overall performance. Your original promise of a fully operational Snorkel Lift in “like new” condition by July 2018 (agreement copy enclosed) has not been met.

In the past, we have appreciated your service and assistance. From our experience of the past six months, however, we can only conclude that you are experiencing problems that make it difficult for you to provide the service Rankin Technologies needs.



We want to resolve this issue. By February 15, 2019 please provide us with a lift that meets all the specifications agreed to and that has no operational deficiencies. If you are unable to

provide the lift by that date, we will cancel our order and seek reimbursement for the used Marklift we traded in April 2018.

Sincerely,



Jane Ballentine
Maintenance Project Engineer

JB/RD

Enc.: copy of agreement

cc: Andrew Longfellow President, Industrial Aggregate
Equipment Company

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Writing Credit or Loan Application Denials

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May 5, 2019

Ms. Mary-Lou Twain
780 East 41st Street, Apartment 712


Houston, TX 77022-1183

Dear Ms. Twain:

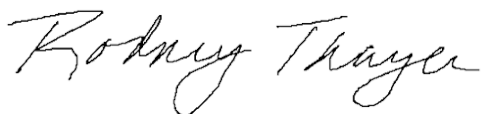
 Thank you for meeting with loan officer Jean Olms last Friday and applying for a loan to open your gift shop.

 When we review an application, one of the factors that we consider is the applicant's credit history. A good credit history shows a pattern of paying obligations. At this time, because you have not established a credit history, we cannot approve your request to borrow \$200,000. However, you can establish a good credit history in one of two ways:

- Apply for, use, and make prompt payments on a credit card.
- Take out and repay a smaller loan at Lone Star Bank. Just a \$5,000 loan successfully repaid would establish a positive financial record.

 We hope that these suggestions will help you begin to establish a good credit history. Then you may reapply for the loan that you requested.

Sincerely,



Rodney Thayer
President

RT/BJH

P.S. Please see the reverse side of this letter for information about your rights under the Federal Equal Credit Opportunity Act and other relevant laws.

Writing Crisis Management Messages

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To:

All Staff

Subject:

Recent FDA Plant Inspection Presents Challenges

Good Morning:

As you know, this past Monday, July 12, the FDA came to our plant for a spot inspection. I'm writing to share the inspection results and our response.

The good news is that the FDA inspectors did not find problems warranting a shutdown of Premium Meats. However, the bad news is that the inspectors cited us for three major violations resulting in a fine of \$100,000.



The FDA is sending us a clear message. We must take immediate steps to protect our customers, our jobs, and our company. To that end, I have taken the following steps:

1. The Executive Committee met with me to review the FDA report and determine the problem areas in our production process.
2. I have directed the Production Management Team to review quality-control procedures and conduct two retraining sessions immediately.
3. I have appointed a Quality Task Force of both management and production staff to study the production process and make further recommendations.
4. I have briefed Sales and Public-Relations staff and directed them to contact customers and the media.



With short-term solutions and long-term cooperation, we will keep Premium Meats operating and prospering. If you have any suggestions or questions, please speak to your immediate supervisor or a member of the Quality Task Force.

Lawrence Durante

Writing Negative Change Announcements

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January 15, 2019


Policy 46759

Ms. Virginia Beloit
72 Elias Street
Washington, DC 20018-8262

Dear Ms. Beloit:

 Periodically, insurance companies review their policies, assess the cost of offering the policies, and make changes where needed. When that happens, it's my responsibility as an insurance agent to inform my clients and help them make necessary adjustments.

Last week Hawkeye Casualty, the company with whom you have your auto insurance policy, discontinued all policies for drivers considered “high risk.”  Because you have had a traffic accident within the past 12 months and have received two speeding tickets during the same period, the company has relabeled your status as “high risk.”  As a result, Hawkeye Casualty has cancelled your auto-insurance policy effective January 31, 2019. However, I have found another company that will offer you auto insurance. While the cost of this new policy is somewhat higher than your present policy, the coverage is comparable, and the company is reliable.

 Please call me at 612-489-0020 within the next week so we can discuss the situation and decide how to proceed.

Sincerely,

Eric Wright

Eric Wright

EW/RN

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Writing Poor Results Explanations

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To:

 Laurie@vgouto.com, julie@vgouto.com, mark@vgouto.com


Cc:


 micah@vgouto.com, rachel@wgauto.com

Subject:


 Van Gorp Automotive Sales Report and Customer Survey

Good morning, Laurie, Julie, and Mark:

 Last week, Jesse Cam from marketing sent me last year's sales report, along with a summary of our customer survey (copies attached). As the report shows, we had another good year: annual receipts in our three stores increased 9 percent. In addition, the survey shows that customers' satisfaction with our Maintenance Departments continues to be high: 74 percent, Excellent; 18 percent, Good; 6 percent, Fair; and 2 percent, Poor. That's great news—and our employees deserve the credit!

 However, the survey also shows that our sales personnel can improve. During your next meetings with them, please read through customers' comments listed in Jesse's summary. Note statements like those listed below, identify the problems, and discuss how we can improve:

1. "Nobody greeted me when I walked in."
2. "The sales guy talked to me and two other customers—all at the same time."
3. "Your salesman knew his stuff—but he seemed to push a sunroof, and I didn't want one."
4. "Leah was great, but she was your **ONLY** female salesperson!"

 After reviewing the attachments and then meeting with your sales staffs, please write a report on your findings and send copies to Jim N., Jamie, and me.

Thanks,
Bernice Gardener

Writing Proposal Rejections


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March 25, 2019

Mr. Gavin Farnsworth
Miami Computer Enterprises
Box 115
South Benton Mall
Miami, FL 33166-1217


Dear Gavin:

 Thank you for your proposal that I join your Customer Training Department. I appreciate your confidence in my ability to provide Miami Computer Enterprises' clients with instruction and technical support.

 While considering your proposal, I reflected on the reasons that I started my own computer-consulting service two years ago. One of the reasons was flexibility. As an independent consultant, I could regulate my work activities around family demands. Although your proposal was financially attractive, I must turn down your offer, at least for now.

In 17 months (August 2020), my youngest child will enter grade school. If you are still interested in me at that time, I

would be happy to reconsider your proposal. Until then, I hope you will want me to continue doing contract projects for MCE, especially with your Spanish-speaking clients.

 Thanks again for your generous proposal. I wish MCE continued growth and success.

Yours sincerely,



Juanita Guivera

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Writing Donation-Request Denials

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April 16, 2019

Ms. Marlis DeQuincey

Executive Director

Family First Center

468 Provis Way

Fairfield, NY 12377-2089

Dear Ms. DeQuincey:

I read with interest your letter about Family First Center's project. Your efforts to build a shelter for women and children victimized by domestic violence is certainly commendable.

I am honored that you have invited Rankin Technologies to participate in your project. Rankin seeks to be a good corporate citizen and a positive force in the community. To that end, we have already committed ourselves to partnerships with nonprofit organizations that mesh with Rankin's interests in the environment, in urban renewal, and in Third-World development. For this reason, we cannot participate in your project at this time.

Rankin employees will, however, be encouraged to continue to support your work in the community campaign. In fact, I will distribute materials about your project to our employees so that individuals may choose to get involved.

I wish you well, Ms. DeQuincey, in your important work of helping the victims of physical and emotional violence in this community.

Yours sincerely,



Barbara Reinholdt
Office Manager

br/dn

Writing Funding-Request Denials

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To:


OscarNunez@rnkn.com


Subject:

Netware Training for Sales Staff

Dear Oscar:

 I've reviewed your request to send all the sales reps to the Netware training seminar in Cincinnati. Oscar, I agree that this training would help your staff be more productive.

 With your request in mind, I reviewed our training budget to see if we could afford the seminar. A large portion of our budget has already been used to upgrade design software for the engineering staff. In addition, we have some prior commitments for training office staff in August. Therefore, there is not enough money available to send all sales reps to Cincinnati.

 Perhaps there's another way. If we sent two of your key staff to the seminar, they could then train others in your department. Or we

could plan an extensive in-house training session for your entire group.

I'd be happy to explore these or other options with you. With a little creativity, I think that we could get your reps the training they need. Just call or email me (ext. 3957).

Sincerely,
Jim

Avoid the following words and phrases when rejecting a request:

- I am surprised
- I question/take issue with
- company policy prohibits
- you apparently overlooked
- are not able to
- you obviously failed to
- must refuse/reject
- I cannot understand your
- you claim/complain
- contrary to what you say
- has never happened before
- unjustified
- misinformed
- I trust you will agree

Writing Suggestion Rejections

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To:

DuaneBolten@rnkn.com

Subject:

Offering Telecommuting to Employees

Hi, Duane:

Thanks for suggesting that Rankin create work-at-home possibilities for staff. I've been intrigued with this work concept for some time.

I asked Melissa St. James in Human Resources about the costs and benefits of telecommuting. She said that her department conducted a feasibility study on telecommuting three years ago and concluded that it would not benefit the company for these reasons:

1. Employees could become isolated.
2. Few tasks could be efficiently performed away from the plant.
3. Home offices could prove too costly.

Perhaps the situation has changed since that study. Melissa said that she would be willing to discuss the idea with you.



Please follow up on that offer, Duane. In addition, please continue to submit suggestions for improving operations here at Rankin. I appreciate your work!

Best wishes,
Art

Checklist

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Bad News

Writing

Your goal when sending bad news is to write a message that is clear, fair, and courteous.

My writing . . .

[Ideas \(/book/write-business/chapter-1-ideas\)](/book/write-business/chapter-1-ideas)

is clear yet tactful.

presents all the facts accurately and focuses on solutions.

[Organization \(/book/write-business/chapter-2-organization\)](/book/write-business/chapter-2-organization)

begins with a buffer statement that

explains the message's purpose.

establishes common ground.

builds sensitively (indirectly) to the bad news.

develops a middle that

provides well-supported reasons without overexplaining.

states the bad news tactfully in the middle of a paragraph.

offers the reader a compromise or an alternative, if possible.

closes in a manner that

clarifies steps needed for an alternative solution.

looks forward to future work or contact, without sounding too upbeat.

follows the **BEBE** organization pattern.

[Voice \(/book/write-business/chapter-3-voice\)](/book/write-business/chapter-3-voice)

uses an understanding yet firm voice that is not defensive or angry.

[Words \(/book/write-business/chapter-4-words\)](/book/write-business/chapter-4-words)

conveys the bad news clearly but tactfully.

avoids the pronoun "you" if it sounds accusatory.

[Sentences \(/book/write-business/chapter-5-sentences\)](/book/write-business/chapter-5-sentences)

reads well aloud; sentences aren't awkward or wordy.

uses passive voice to soften negative or difficult statements.

[Correctness \(/book/write-business/chapter-6-correctness\)](/book/write-business/chapter-6-correctness)

is free of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and keyboarding.

[Design \(/book/write-business/chapter-7-design\)](/book/write-business/chapter-7-design)

features an attractive layout with ample white space.

organizes points and details with numbers, bullets, or graphics.

“Nothing travels faster than the speed of light with the possible exception of bad news, which obeys its own special laws.”

—Douglas Adams

Template Files:

Bid Rejection

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Claim Denial

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Complaint (Basic)

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Complaint (Serious)

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Credit or Loan Application Denial

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Crisis Management Message

(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1tBPbhwVv6LcfmwEshBG_-6tMMTOLpaSTEyW5Yu86z-M0/template/preview)

Negative Change Announcement

(https://docs.google.com/document/d/17QPm73JBOSNneHDeyh_AHbOYbLEqtmVRPP0e2PJ07HyY/template/preview)

Poor Results Explanation

(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1BA9NR0J4xALU41m6GYJb7jly9-zDzUsUHvyYWCQkDLQ/template/preview>)

Proposal Rejection

(https://docs.google.com/document/d/1kqXOWM4RzpmIHWPZi3l8MAKo-4lUJ9nRtdABg9_fGi4/template/preview)

Donation-Request Denial

(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1wutazMighWbvRlbWFSFJwi6n1ul8SvJv52D7OTm-RKY/template/preview>)

Funding-Request Denial

(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1zkSlfkM4nL3oTE6RTgVyOtVWrLElzkQdFIokFVv3IU8/template/preview>)

Suggestion Rejection

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Checklist: Writing Bad News

(<https://docs.google.com/document/d/11awJGtXqQr82qvgPKewhIVwE3bpsEHCwIBRzG4F16hM/template/preview>)

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