**Soft Skills and Personality Development**

**Unit 4**

**Revisiting Technical Writing & Listening Comprehension**

**1. Writing e-mails: -**

• Do Pay Attention to The Subject Line

• Do Use a Proper Salutation

• Do Use an Introduction

• Do Know the Culture

• Don't Include Humour and Sarcasm

• Do Double-Check Your Attachments

• Don't Hit “Reply All”

• Do Reply Expediently

• Do proofread

• Do know your tone

• Do check the length of your email

• Don’t overuse exclamatory marks and emotions

• Do use a professional email address

**2. Writing Good and Bad messages: -**

**Positive and Routine Messages**

The vast majority of business messages sent every day are short messages of a routine nature

such as asking for and sharing information, requesting action, or thanking someone for

something given. Most of the time these are positive or neutral messages even when they

involve small complaints or claims where you request that an error be corrected. These are all

direct approach messages, in which the main idea comes right up front and details follow.

Occasionally, you must communicate bad news in writing, which requires a more careful,

indirect approach. All of these situations involve conventions that business professionals

follow to minimize miscommunication and its fallout, and thus keep their operation running

smoothly.

**Positive (Goodwill) Messages**

Goodwill messages are as essential to healthy professional relationships as they are to

personal ones. Thank-you, congratulatory, and sympathy notes add an important, feel-good

human touch in a world that continues to embrace technology that isolates people while being

marketed as a means of connecting them. The goodwill that such messages promote makes

both the sender and receiver feel better about each other and themselves. In putting smiles on

faces, such notes are effective especially because many people don't send them--either

because they feel that they are too difficult to write or because it does not even occur to them

to do so. Since praise for someone can be harder to think of and write than criticism, a brief

guide on how to do it right may be of help.

**Type of Message Characteristics**

***Thank-You Notes***

Such messages should be short and simple as well as quick and easy to write. not sending them appears ungrateful, rude, and inconsiderate. Sending a thank you is just extra thoughtful but close to being an expected formality. In most situations, email or text is an appropriate medium for messages.

***Congratulatory Messages***

Celebrating the successes of your professional peers shows class and tact. Such messages create positive energy in the workplace about the person you are congratulating.

***Expressions of Sympathy***

Few situations require such sincerity and care with words as expressions of sympathy. Misfortune comes upon us all, and it becomes more tolerable with the support of our friends, family, and community. For instance, expressing sympathy for their loss is customary, often with a card, rather than an email or text, signed by everyone who knows the bereaved. You can't appreciate email messages the same way you can a collection of cards from people showing they care.

Remember that these messages should be selfless. Offering your condolences in the most respectful, sensitive manner possible

**Information Shares**

Perhaps the simplest and most common routine message type is where the sender offers up

information that helps the receiver.

**Information Share Email**

To: smitha@gmail.com

Subject: CFP info you might find interesting

Hi Karin,

I just saw a CFP for a new funding opportunity you can apply for via the Department of

Agriculture.

Find it on the Greenbelt Fund's Local Food Literacy Grant Stream page. If you haven't

already been doing this, you should also check out the Department of Agriculture's general

page on Funding Programs and Support to connect with any other grants etc. relevant to the

good work you do.

It looks like the deadline for proposals is at the end of the week, though, so you might want to

get on it right away.

Good luck!

Rima

Replies to such information shares involve either a quick and concise thank-you message or

carry the conversation on if it's part of an ongoing project, initiative, or conversation. If you

are using email, remember to change the subject line as the topic evolves. Information shares

to a larger group, such as a departmental memo to 60 employees, don't usually require

acknowledgment and would be slightly more formal in tone. If everyone wrote the sender just

to say thanks, the barrage of reply notifications would frustrate them as they try to carry on

their work while sorting out replies with valuable information from mere acknowledgments.

Only respond if you have valuable information to share with all the recipients or just the

sender. Pay attention whether you need to Reply All or whether it is sufficient to reply just to

the sender. Do not burden others with messages not directly relevant to them.

**Information or Action Requests**

Managers, clients, and co-workers alike send and receive requests for information and action

all day. Because these provide the recipient with direction on what to do, the information that

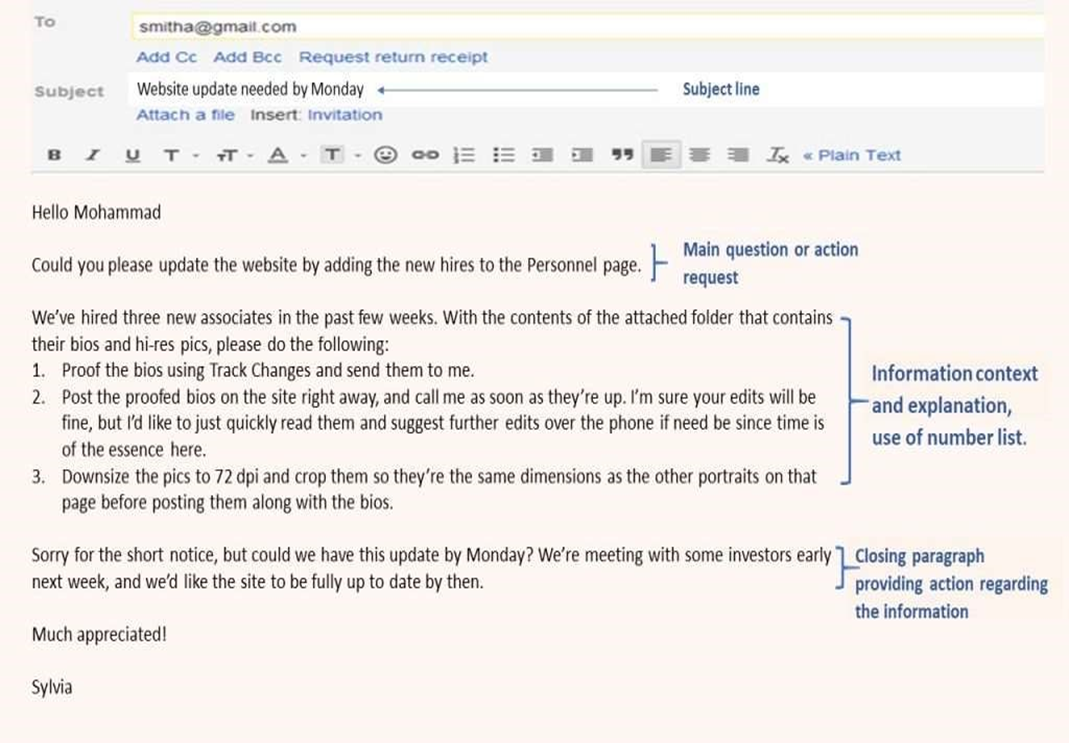
comes back or action that results from such request can only be as good as the instructions

given. Such messages must be well organized and clear about expectations, opening directly

with a clearly stated general request (unless you anticipate resistance to the request) and

proceeding with background and more detailed instructions if necessary. Figure 1 below

provides an example of a request email.



Note that, because we expect action to come of the request rather than a yes or no answer, the

opening question does not require a question mark. Never forget, however, the importance of

saying "please" when asking someone to do something. Notice also that the list in the

message body helps break up dense detail, so the request message is more reader friendly. All

of the effort that the writer of the above message made to deliver a reader-centered

message will pay off when the recipient performs the requested procedure exactly according

to these clearly worded expectations.

If you expect resistance to your request, an indirect approach is more effective. Ideally,

you'll make such persuasive pitches in person or on the phone so that you can use a full range

of verbal and non-verbal cues. When it's important to present your argument in writing,

however, such requests should be clear and easy to spot but buffered by goodwill statements

and reasonable justifications.

When responding to information or action requests, simply deliver the needed information or

confirm that the action has been or will be completed unless you have good reasons for

refusing. Ensure the accuracy of all details and utilize the "you-attitude." Note that sometimes

manager approval may be necessary before providing the information. Organizationally, a

positive response to an information request delivers the main answer in the opening, proceeds

to give more detail in the body if necessary, and ends politely with appreciation and goodwill

statements.

**Complaints and Claims**

Business doesn't always go smoothly and bad customer experience can have long-lasting

consequences. Customers can be disappointed with a faulty product or poor service;

shipments might get damaged, lost, or arrive late; or one business might infringe on the rights

and freedoms of another. In all such cases, customers or clients are likely to make your

company aware of what went wrong and what they want o be done about it. Indeed, it's their

consumer right to do so and the business or organization receiving such a message should

take it as valuable intelligence on customer expectations that must be met for the business to

be viable.

A claim explains what went wrong and demands compensation from the offending party

while a complaint explains what went wrong and merely demands correction or apology.

Minor complaints are best communicated in person, on the phone, or by email (if it's

important to have them in writing) so they can be dealt with quickly. More serious complaints

or claims are delivered as formal letters to lay down a paper trail in case they need to be used

as evidence in a lawsuit.

When customers are reasonable about communicating a problem with a situation or business

transaction, the customer service representative or manager dealing with the matter is more

likely to respond positively and meet the needs of the client. However, ineffective complaints

or claims often merely vent frustrations, issue threats, don'ts say what they want or only

vaguely imply it, or demand completely unreasonable compensation. Assume that a business

will take your complaint or claim seriously if it's done right because, no matter the industry,

companies are rightfully afraid of losing business to negative online reviews. In this day of

social media, good customer service is crucial to business survivability. A complaint provides

a business with both valuable information about customer expectations and an opportunity to

win back a customer--as well as their social network if a good endorsement comes of it from

the now-satisfied customer--or else risk losing much more than just the one customer.

Effective complaints or claims are politely worded and motivated by a desire to right wrongs

and save the business relationship. They are best if they remind the business that you have

been a loyal customer (if that's true) and really want to keep coming back, but you need them

to prove that they value your business after whatever setback prompted the complaint. If the

writer of such message strikes the right tone, they can end up getting more than they

originally bargained for.

Complaints and claims take the direct approach of message organization even though they

arise from dissatisfaction. They follow the usual three-part message organization.

**Complaint/Claim Organization**

***1. Opening*** - To be effective at writing a complaint or claim, be clear, precise, and polite

about what you want in the opening. If you want financial compensation or a

replacement product in the case of a claim, be clear about the amount or model. You

could also suggest equivalent or alternative compensation if you stand a poor chance

of getting exactly what you want. If you want an error corrected or an apology in

response to your complaint, be upfront about it.

***2. Body*** - The message body justifies the request with a narrative account of what should

have happened versus what happened instead. Be objective in writing the

account because an angry tone coming through in negative words, accusations, and

exaggerations will only undermine the validity of your complaint or claim. Be precise

in such details as names, dates and times, locations (addresses), and product names

and numbers. Whenever possible, provide and refer to evidence. For instance, you

may include copies (definitely not originals) of documentation such as receipts,

invoices, work orders, bills of lading, emails (printed), phone records, photographic

evidence, and even video (e.g., of a malfunctioning product).

***3. Closing*** - No matter what prompted the complaint or claim, the closing must be

politely worded with action requests (e.g., a deadline) and goodwill statements. Nasty

parting shots, even if merely passive-aggressive, may lower your chances of getting

what you are asking for. By complimenting the recipient's company, however, you

increase your chances of getting not only what you wanted, but perhaps a little extra.

In damage-control mode, the business wants you to feel compelled to tell your friends

that the company really turned it around.

**Claim Email**

**To:** customerservice@FScomputers.com

**Subject:** Refund for unwanted warranty purchase

Hello,

please refund me for the $89.99 extended warranty that was charged to my Visa despite being

declined at the point of sale.

This past Tuesday (June 15, 2021), I purchased a Dell laptop at the Belleville location of

Future Shock Computers and was asked by the sales rep if I would like to add a 3-year

extended warranty to the purchase. I declined and we proceeded with the sale, which included

some other accessories. When I got home and reviewed the receipt (the PDF scan of the

receipt is attached), I noticed the warranty that I had declined was added to the bill after all.

Please apply the cost of the warranty to the Visa account associated with the purchase by the

end of the week and let me know when you've done so. I have enjoyed shopping at Future

Shock for the great prices and friendly customer service. I would sincerely like to return to

purchase a printer soon.

I appreciate your assistance in this matter,

Samantha Nguyen

**Adjustment Letters**

If a company grants what the customer has asked for, communicating this is called

an adjustment message. An adjustment letter or email is heavy on courtesy in letting the

disappointed customer know that they are valued and will be (or have already been) awarded

what they were asking for, and possibly even a little extra. In the case of coupons for

discounts on future purchases, the little extras help smooth things over and win back the

customer's confidence, hopefully so they will tell their friends that the store or company is

worthy of their business after all.

An adjustment message takes the direct approach by immediately delivering the good

news about granting the customer's request. You may start with an apology, but starting on a

purely positive note is more effective, especially in a written message. Tone is also important

here; resist the urge to shame the customer--even if they are partly to blame or if part of you

still suspects that the claim is fraudulent. If you are going to grant the claim, write it whole

heartedly as if others will be able to see it and judge whether your company has good

customer service or if you are going to be difficult about it.

Though a routine adjustment letter might skip a message body, a more serious one may need

to go into more detail about how you are complying with the request or take the time to

explain what your company is doing to prevent the error again. Doing this makes the reader

feel as though making the effort to write will have made a positive impact in the world,

however small, because it will benefit not only them but also everyone else who will not have

to go through what they did. Do not make empty promises, though.

An apology might also be appropriate in the body of the message, but be aware that

apologizing is tricky. It is essential to winning back customer confidence in some situations,

but it also leaves you or your company open to legal action in others. For minor matters,

admitting fault with an apology usually helps vindicate or validate the customer. In more

serious matters, especially involving injury or damage to property or even someone's

reputation (and thus their earning potential), a written apology might be read as admitting

fault and be used as evidence in court. For this reason, it is best to ask a manager or legal

department for guidance on apologizing to a customer or other stakeholder in writing.

If apologizing is appropriate because you genuinely erred, no legal repercussions are

expected, and it is the right thing to do when trying to calm an angry response and mend a

damaged business relationship, ensure that the apology has the following characteristics:

*** Sincere*** - Saying "We are genuinely sorry that you were disappointed with the

customer service experience" is a good first step, but it requires some additional

assurances to prove it.

*** Responsible*** - Own the error by admitting fault (again, only if you are at fault and it

does not open you to litigation). Say what should have happened versus what actually

happened and acknowledge that you were wrong.

*** Specific*** - To be sincere, an apology must refer to a specific error by briefly

describing it, possibly including dates, locations, and the names of product or service.

The worst apologies are blanket, generic statements such as "We are sorry if anyone

was offended by our actions." On the other hand, it is unprofessional to throw your

employees under the bus or to vent about the situation in your company that might

have contributed to the problem. These issues should be dealt with within the

business.

*** Improvement-focused*** - An apology is useless unless it includes some assurances

that you will make every effort for the error to not happen again. Simply saying it

won't happen again is not convincing and might sound as an empty promise. Instead,

describe what will be done to ensure improvement. When Starbucks apologized for a

racist incident at one of its locations in 2018, for instance, it followed through on a

plan for improving customer service by shutting down all of its stores for a half-day

racial sensitivity training for employees.

**Adjustment Email**

**To:** snguyen@gmail.com

**Subject:** Refund for unwanted warranty purchase

Hello Samantha,

We would be happy to refund you for the $89.99 warranty mistakenly charged

along with your purchase of the Dell laptop. For your inconvenience, we will also offer you

a $20 gift card for future purchases at our store.

To receive your refund and gift card, please return to our Belleville location with your receipt

and the credit card that was charged so that we can credit the same card (For consumer

protection reasons, we are unable to complete any transactions without the card.)

We are sorry for inconveniencing you and will speak with all sales staff about the importance

of carefully checking the accuracy of any bill of sale before sending the order for payment.

We appreciate your choosing Future Shock for your personal electronics and look forward to

seeing you soon to credit your Visa card and provide you with the best deal in town on the

printer you were looking to purchase.

Have a great day,

Melissa

**Negative Messages**

Just as in life, the workplace is not always sunny. Sometimes things do not go according to

plan, and it is your job to communicate about them in a way that does not ruin your

relationships with customers, co-workers, managers, the public, and other stakeholders. When

doing damage control, bad news messages require care, diplomacy, and skilful language

because your main point will meet resistance. Rarely are people okay being told they are

laid off, their application has been rejected, their shipment got lost, prices or rates are

increasing, their appointment has to be moved back several months, or they are losing their

benefits. Though some people prefer that the messenger be blunt about it, in most cases, you

can assume that the receiver will appreciate or even benefit from a more tactful, indirect

approach. The list below provides several tips for delivering bad news in person or in writing:

 Be clear and concise to avoid being asked for additional clarification.

 Help the receiver understand and accept the news.

 Reduce the anxiety associated with the bad news as much as possible by expressing

sympathy or empathy.

 Maintain trust and respect between you and your audience to ensure the possibility of

good future relations.

 Deliver the bad news in a timely fashion through the appropriate medium.

 Avoid the legal liability that comes with admitting negligence or guilt.

 Achieve the designated business outcome.

The key to helping the receiver understand and accept information they don't want to hear or read

is organizing the message using the indirect approach. For example, this is effective when

you need to refuse a claim because the customer's complaint is not justified. Suppose you tactlessly

provide your audience with really bad news. In that case, you run the risk of them rejecting or

misunderstanding it because they may be reeling from the blow and be too distracted with

anger or sadness to rationally process the explanation or instructions for what to do about the

bad news. To avoid misunderstandings when delivering bad news, follow this organization.

**Bad News Message Organization**

***1. Buffer (Acknowledgment of the Claim) -*** Begin with a neutral or positive statement

that sets a good tone and serves as a buffer for the information to come. A buffer

softens the blow of bad news. The idea here is not to fool the audience into thinking

that only good news is coming but to put them in a receptive frame of mind for

understanding the explanation that follows. Note that if you raise the expectation that

they are going to hear the good news that they are going to get what they want, only to let

them down near the end, they are going to be even more disappointed for being led

on. For that reason, be careful not to create false hope.

***2. Justification (Explanation) -*** The justification explains the background or context for

the bad news before delivering the bad news itself. Let's say that you must reject an

application, claim a refund, or request information. In such cases, the

explanation could describe the strict acceptance criteria and high quality of

applications received in the competition, the company policy on refunds, or its policy

on allowable disclosures and the legalities of contractually obligated confidentiality.

Your goal with the explanation is to be convincing so that the reader thinks, "That

sounds reasonable" or "I understand their point" and accepts the bad news as

inevitable given the situation you describe. If you make the bad news seem like

a mysterious or arbitrary decision making, your audience will most likely feel like

they've been treated unfairly. Such situations usually escalate further, which we

always try to avoid. While an explanation is ethically necessary, never admit or imply

responsibility without written authorization from your company cleared by legal

counsel if there is any indication that the justification might be seen as actionable.

***3. Bad News -*** We usually use the indirect approach to delay the bad news message so

that it can be properly understood and its negative impact minimized. Be clear while

also being sensitive to your reader's feelings. Consider using passive voice when

delivering this news.

***4. Redirection (Alternative)*** - This quickly shifts the reader's attention to an alternative to what they are seeking. Some kind of consolation prize (e.g., a coupon or store credit) helps soothe the pain and will

be appreciated as being better than nothing, at least. Even if you are not able to offer

the reading anything of value, you could at least say something nice or provide some

useful information. If your redirection involves some alternative, remember to also

offer some follow-up details. For example, if you are offering coupon or store credit,

explain how the customer should redeem this offer.

***5. Positive Closing -*** The goal of the closing is to leave on a positive note. You need to

ensure that the reader understands the bad news without rehashing it. Remain

courteous, positive, and forward looking. End the conversation in such a way that you

do not invite further communication unless it is necessary with respect to the

alternative that you have offered.

Although it is usually preferable to deliver negative messages using the indirect approach,

there are several occasions when you can or should be upfront about the bad news:

 Wen the bad news does not have a high emotional impact

 When you know that the recipient prefers or requires the direct approach

 When the reader may miss the bad news (e.g., if your reader doesn't have a strong

command of English, they may not pick up on the buried bad news past the midpoint

of a challenging message)

 When you are short on time or space

 When the indirect approach has not worked.

Delivering bad news can be dangerous if it angers the reader so much that they are motivated

to fight back. If you are not careful with what you say and how you say it, that message can

be used as evidence in a court case that, when read by a judge or jury, could compromise

your position. You can lower the risk of being sued by following the general principles given

below when delivering bad news.

*** Avoid negative or abusive language*** - sarcasm, profanity, harsh accusations, and

abusive or insulting language may feel good to write in a fit of anger but, in the end,

make everyone's lives more difficult. When someone sends an inflammatory message

and it's interpreted by the reader as harmful to their reputation, it could legally qualify

as legitimately actionable libel. Even if you write critically about a rival

company's product or service by stating (as if factually) that it's dangerous, whereas

your version of the product or service is safer and better, this can be considered

***Example***

**1. Buffer**: Thank you for your order. We appreciate your interest in our product and are confident you will love it.

**2. Explanation**: We are writing to let you know that this product has been unexpectedly popular with over 10,000 orders submitted on the day you placed yours.

**3. Bad news + redirect**: This unexpected increase in demand has resulted in a temporary out 3 weeks; we will fulfil your order as it was received at 11:57 p.m. on October 9, 2018, as well as gift you a $5 coupon toward your next purchase.

**4. Positive action closing**: While you wait for your product to ship, we encourage you to use the enclosed $5 coupon toward the purchase of any product in our online catalog. We appreciate your continued business and want you to know your satisfaction.

** Avoid oversharing but tell the truth -** When your job is providing a convincing

rationale that might make the recipient of bad news accept it as reasonable, be careful

with what details you disclose. When rejecting a job applicant, for instance, you must

be especially careful not to share the scoring sheets of the winning and rejected

candidates, nor even summarize them.

** Respect the recipient's privacy -** criticizing an employee in a group email or memo-

even if the criticism is fair- being extremely unprofessional. People who call out others in

front of a group creates a chilly climate in the workplace, one that leads to fear,

loathing, and a loss of productivity among employees. Always maintain respect and

privacy when communicating bad news as a matter of workplace professionalism.

**General Positive and Negative Messages Tips**

 Follow best practices when sharing information, requesting information or action, and

replying to such messages.

 Be courteous both when complaining and responding to complaints and claims.

 Write carefully when addressing negative situations, such as delivering bad news,

usually by using the indirect approach.

**4. Developing Active Listening**

 Face the speaker and have eye contact. ...

 “Listen” to non-verbal cues too. ...

 Don't interrupt. ...

 Listen without judging, or jumping to conclusions. ...

 Don't start planning what to say next. ...

 Don't impose your opinions or solutions. ...

 Stay focused. ...

 Ask questions.

**5. Reading/Listening to understand the gist & detailed information**

Reading and listening sub-skills When we read or listen to a text, we usually do so with a particular purpose in mind. This purpose will determine the manner in which we read or listen, the sub-skill we use, on any particular occasion. Three sub-skills which are commonly practised in course books are: •reading/listening for gist – when we read or listen to get a general idea of the content of a text. Reading for gist, sometimes known as skimming, is done at high speed. Examples of texts we often read/listen to in this way: articles, emails, radio news.

**Case Studies and Appropriate Responses**

**1. Writing Effective Emails**

***Case Study: Poor Email Communication***

**Scenario:**

Sarah, a project manager, sends an email to her team about an urgent meeting. The email reads:

"Hey team, let's meet tomorrow. We need to discuss the project. Be on time."

Issues:

• No subject line

• No clear agenda

• No time and location

• Unclear tone

**Corrected Version:**

Subject: Urgent Meeting – Project Discussion (March 3, 10 AM)

Dear Team,

I hope you are doing well. We need to discuss the next steps of our project. Please join the meeting tomorrow at 10 AM in the conference room.

Agenda:

• Project updates

• Task allocations

• Deadline revisions

Please confirm your availability.

Best,

Sarah

Lesson Learned: Proper email etiquette ensures clarity, professionalism, and effective communication.

**2. Good vs. Bad Messages**

Situation: Positive Message - Congratulating a Colleague

**Scenario:**

John, an employee, hears that his colleague, Priya, has been promoted.

Good Message:

Subject: Congratulations on Your Promotion, Priya!

Dear Priya,

Congratulations on your well-deserved promotion! Your hard work and dedication truly inspire our team. Wishing you continued success in your new role.

Best,

John

Bad Message:

"Hey, you got lucky! Now you owe us a party!"

Lesson Learned: A well-crafted message boosts goodwill, while an informal or negative tone can damage relationships.

**3. Complaint and Claim Writing**

**Case Study:** Product Refund Request

Scenario:

David buys a smartphone online, but he receives a defective product. He writes to customer service.

Good Complaint Email:

Subject: Request for Refund – Defective Smartphone

Dear Customer Support,

I recently purchased a smartphone (Order #12345) from your website, but unfortunately, it is not working. The screen is unresponsive, and the device does not charge.

I have attached photos and the invoice for reference. Kindly process a refund or provide a replacement. I appreciate your prompt assistance.

Best regards,

David

Bad Complaint Email:

"Your product is terrible! I want my money back now!"

Lesson Learned: A polite and well-structured complaint increases the chances of a favorable response.

**4. Delivering Bad News**

**Situation:** Job Application Rejection

**Scenario:**

A company must inform a candidate that they were not selected for a job.

Good Response:

Subject: Application Status – Marketing Manager Position

Dear Alex,

Thank you for applying for the Marketing Manager position at XYZ Corp. We appreciate your effort and interest in our company.

While we were impressed with your experience, we have selected another candidate for this role. However, we would love to stay in touch for future opportunities.

Wishing you success in your career.

Best regards,

HR Team

Bad Response:

"We found a better candidate. Thanks for applying."

Lesson Learned: A well-structured bad news message softens disappointment while maintaining goodwill.