

ASSIGNMENT 1: NEGATIVE MESSAGE WITH POSITIVE EMPHASIS

Due Dates: Peer-Review Draft: Monday, October 15 (three paper copies, in class)

Final Draft: Monday, October 22 (in class, both paper and electronic copies)

Assignment Format: Letter to Lyn Smith and Memorandum to Rita Simmons

Primary Audience: Lyn Smith (for the letter) and Rita Simmons (for the memorandum)

Length: up to 1000 words (total; i.e., for the letter and memorandum together)

Note: This assignment consists of two parts: a letter and a memorandum. Be sure to include both when you submit the assignment, placing the memorandum at the front of your submission. Staple both parts of the assignment together. Failure to include one of the elements will result in your assignment being graded out of 50%.

Value: 20% of your final grade

Background

Go back to the Globe Airlines case and review it. In particular, review the criteria for the reply to Lyn Smith set out by your immediate supervisor, Rita Simmons, and confirm your assessment of Ms. Smith. Simmons has now told you that you cannot offer the E-TUVs to the customers.

Part 1: The Memorandum

Write a short memorandum to Rita Simmons, in which you submit your draft letter to her for review, give a very brief explanation of your approach, and ask her for comment and approval to proceed to send the letter to the customer. This document does not need to exceed three sentences.

As the message of transmittal, this document should appear before the letter.

Part 2: The Letter

Write a letter to Lyn Smith, in which you refuse her specific requests while doing everything you can (within the criteria and limitations you are working under) to persuade her to return to Globe as a customer in the future.

Be sure to use the information that you gathered about Ms. Smith for the first assignment and everything that you have learned about negative messages from the lecture notes and your text.

You are writing the letter on behalf of Rita Simmons, so you should use her name in both the address and signature blocks.

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ASSIGNMENT 1

Format

Once again, please double-space your assignment, indenting the first sentence of each new paragraph (so that you do not need to leave extra space between paragraphs). Include both documents in the same file, opening with the memorandum of transmittal.

Genre

The memorandum of transmittal is a common genre in professional writing. It is often very short (e.g., it might contain only a few sentences); this semester, only the final assignment, a formal report, will feature a page-long memo of transmittal. As with the diagnostic assignment, open the memo with a “To/From” block, identifying the recipient, the writer, the date (again following the date of Smith’s original letter), and the subject. The letter to Smith will open with an address block containing the addresses of the company and of Smith. You should make up both addresses. Unlike the memorandum, the letter features both a salutation and a signature block.

Structure / Content

As noted above, the memorandum of transmittal will be brief. It should contain three sentences: the first will identify the attached letter, the second will offer a succinct overview of the letter’s contents, and the third will solicit suggestions for improvement. (This structure is conventional for a memorandum of transmittal, and you will use it again for the next assignment.)

As for the letter, the negative message with positive emphasis is a specific genre, so it features particular conventions both of structure and of content. The introduction—known in this genre as a buffer—should be short; in this case, two sentences will suffice: you should acknowledge the receipt of Smith’s letter and comment on the value of such a document. The former establishes your ethos as a detail-oriented person (an important consideration for this audience), and the latter establishes a positive tone that encourages the reader to continue reading and that (one hopes) makes the reader more amenable to the negative message. Essential to the positive tone is the absence of negative diction, including euphemisms like “situation” (which we commonly use in place of “problem”).

The first body paragraph of the letter will offer an explanation for Smith’s concerns. It will be based on facts: these facts constitute the evidence that inform the negative message, the refusal that appears at the end of this paragraph and that stands as the

logical conclusion to your presentation of evidence. A discussion of feelings has no place in this exercise. If you think that Smith deserves an apology, place it early in this paragraph; do not repeat it. Also, do not offer a general apology: if it is necessary, it must refer to a specific incident. Again, the specificity of your evidence boosts your credibility and will help the reader to understand and accept (if not celebrate) your refusal of her requests. The negative message must appear at the end of this paragraph: it is the logical conclusion of your presentation of compelling evidence. A deference to policy is not compelling evidence; were you tempted merely to cite policy, you should instead discuss the rationale for that policy (i.e., indicate why it exists and what brought it into being). Do not place the refusal in the next paragraph (where it will create paragraph incoherence), and neither apologize for it nor repeat it elsewhere.

The second body paragraph of the letter should offer alternatives to the refusal, and it should open with a topic sentence that identifies its purpose. It will be shorter than the first body paragraph, but it should contain at least four sentences (the standard number for a well-developed body paragraph). Smith has asked at least one question not related to compensation, and you can answer that question in this paragraph.

The goodwill ending will be concise: two sentences will suffice. As always, it should be positive, personal, and forward-looking, so it must say something specific about Smith's relation to Globe while avoiding negative diction. An apology is particularly inappropriate in this paragraph, where it appears as an admission of liability. Do not invite further correspondence unless you believe it to be necessary (i.e., germane to Globe's relationship with Smith).