

Chapter 7

Negative Messages



Introduction

- **A message that wouldn't receive positive feedback.**
- **One has to be careful to compose such messages to avoid effecting one's feelings.**

Resolving Business Problems(If Simple)

- **Call the individual involved.**
- **Describe the problem and apologize.**
- **Explain**
 - **Why the problem occurred**
 - **What you are doing to resolve it**
 - **How you will prevent the problem from happening again**

Resolving Business Problems

- **Follow up with a letter that**
 - **Documents details discussed in the phone call**
 - **Promotes goodwill**



The Indirect Strategy (Inductive Strategy)

- 1. Buffer**
- 2. Reasons**
- 3. Bad News**
- 4. Closing**

WHAT IS A BUFFER?

Buffer is a neutral statement that must establish a common bond between receiver and the sender.

Things to remember.....

- **Accept that your bad news represents a firm decision**
- **Understand that, under the circumstances, your decision was fair and reasonable**
- **Remain well disposed towards your business**
- **Preserve your pride**

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages (Page 165-166)

- **Best news**
- **Appreciation**
- **Agreement**
- **Facts**
- **Understanding**
- **Apology**

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Best News:**

- **Start with the part of the message that represents the best news.**

- **From Fall 2019, all the courses at MAJU will be taught by the Ph.Ds. Hence, MAJU would be the only university with 100% Ph.D. faculty members.**

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Compliment**

□ Praise the receiver's accomplishments, organization, or efforts, but do so with honesty and sincerity.

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- Compliment

□ For instance, in a letter declining an invitation to speak, you could write:

- *The Thaliens have my sincere admiration for their fundraising projects on behalf of hungry children. I am honored that you asked me to speak Friday, November 5.*

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Appreciation:**

□ Convey thanks to the reader for:

- 1. doing business**
- 2. sending something**
- 3. conveying confidence in your organization**
- 4. expressing feelings**
- 5. or simply for providing feedback.**

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Appreciation:**

- ☐ Suppose you had to draft a letter that refuses employment. You could say:

- ✓ *I appreciated learning about the hospitality management program at Cornell and about your qualifications in our interview last Friday.*

- ☐ Avoid thanking the reader, however, for something you are about to refuse.

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Agreement:**

□ Make a relevant statement with which both reader and receiver can agree. A letter that rejects a loan application might read:

- *We both realize how much the export business has been affected by the relative weakness of the dollar in the past two years.***

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Fact:**

- ☐ **Provide objective information that introduces the bad news. For example, in a memo announcing cutbacks in the hours of the employees' cafeteria, you might say:**

- ***During the past five years the number of employees eating breakfast in our cafeteria has dropped from 32 percent to 12 percent.***

Possible Buffers for Opening Bad-News Messages

- **Understanding:**

- ☐ Show that you care about the reader:

- *We know that you expect superior performance from all the products you purchase from OfficeCity. That's why we are writing personally about the Exell printer cartridges you recently ordered.*

- One of your customers requested to repair or replace a broken Camera. Prepare a buffer message.

Presenting the Reasons

- **Be cautious in explaining.**
- **Cite reader benefits, if possible.**
- **Explain company policy, if relevant.**
- **Choose positive words.**
- **Show that the matter was treated seriously and fairly.**

Presenting the Reasons

- **Be cautious in explaining.**
 - **If the reasons are not confidential and if they will not create legal liability, you can be specific:**
 - ***Growers supplied us with a limited number of patio roses, and our demand this year was twice that of last year.***

Presenting the Reasons

- **Be cautious in explaining.**
 - In responding to a billing error, explain what happened:
 - *After you informed us of an error on your January bill, we investigated the matter and admit the mistake was ours.*

Presenting the Reasons

- **Cite Readers' Benefits if Possible.**
 - **Readers are more open to bad news if in some way, even indirectly, it may help them.**
 - **In refusing a customer's request for free hemming of skirts and slacks, Lands' End wrote:**

Presenting the Reasons

- **Cite Readers' Benefits if Possible.**
 - ☐ We tested our ability to hem skirts a few months ago. This process proved to be very time-consuming. We have decided not to offer this service because the additional cost would have increased the selling price of our skirts substantially, and we did not want to impose that cost on all our customers.

Presenting the Reasons

- **Explain Company's Policy.**
 - Readers resent blanket policy statements prohibiting something:
 - ☐ *Company policy prevents us from making cash refunds or*
 - ☐ *Contract bids may be accepted from local companies only or*
 - ☐ *Company policy requires us to promote from within.*

Presenting the Reasons

- **Choosing Positive Words.**
 - **Stay away from such words as:**

☐ ***cannot, claim, denied, error, failure, fault, impossible, mistaken, misunderstand, never, regret, rejected, unable, unwilling, unfortunately, and violate.***

Presenting the Reasons

- **Showing That the Matter Was Treated Seriously and Fairly.**
 - In canceling funding for a program, board members provided this explanation:
 - *As you know, the publication of Urban Artist was funded by a renewable annual grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.*

Presenting the Reasons

- *Recent cutbacks in federally sponsored city arts programs have left us with few funds. Because our grant has been discontinued, we have no alternative but to cease publication of Urban Artist.*

Techniques for Deemphasizing Bad News

- **Avoid the spotlight.** (Page 167)
 - Instead of spotlighting it, sandwich the bad news between other sentences, perhaps among your reasons.
 - **Use a long sentence**

Techniques for Deemphasizing Bad News

- **Avoid the spotlight.** (Page 167)

- *Although another candidate was hired, we appreciate your interest in our organization and wish you every success in your job search.*

Subordinate clauses often begin with words such as *although, as, because, if, and since.*

Techniques for Deemphasizing Bad News

- Use the passive voice. (Page 169)

Instead of this:

We cannot make a contribution at this time.

Try this:

A contribution cannot be made at this time.

Techniques for Deemphasizing Bad News

- **Be clear but not overly graphic.** (Page 169)

Instead of this:

Our investigation reveals that you owe three creditors large sums and that you were fired from your last job.

Try this:

Our investigation reveals that your employment status and your financial position are unstable at this time.

Techniques for Deemphasizing Bad News

- **Imply the refusal.**

Instead of this:

We cannot contribute to your charity this year.

Try this:

Although all our profits must be reinvested in our company this year, we hope to be able to support your future fund-raising activities.

Techniques for Deemphasizing Bad News

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- **Suggest an alternative.**
- *Although private tours of the grounds are not given, we do open the house and its gardens for one charitable event in the fall.*

Using the Passive Voice

- **Passive-voice verbs focus attention on actions rather than on personalities. They are useful in being tactful.**

Active voice:

*I cannot allow you to
return the DVD player
because*

Passive voice:

*Return of the DVD
player is not allowed
because*

Using the Passive Voice

- **Passive-voice verbs focus attention on actions rather than on personalities. They are useful in being tactful.**

Active voice:

Ryan checked the report, but he missed the error.

Passive voice:

The report was checked, but the error was missed.

Using the Passive Voice

- **Examples of “helper” verbs forming passive voice:**
 - The report was checked.
 - The schedule is being revised.
 - Invitations were sent.

Closing Bad-News Messages

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Avoid endings that sound canned, insincere, inappropriate, or self-serving. Try to personalize the closing with

- + Forward Look**
- + An alternative to the refusal**
- + Resale or sales promotion**
- + Good wishes**
- + Freebies**



Writing Plan for Refusing Requests or Claims

Buffer

- Start with a neutral statement on which both reader and writer can agree, such as a compliment, an expression of appreciation, a quick review of the facts, or an apology.
- Try to include a key idea or word that acts as a transition to the explanation.

Writing Plan for Refusing Requests or Claims

Reasons

- Present valid reasons for the refusal, avoiding words that create a negative tone.
- Include resale or sales promotion, if appropriate.

Bad News

- Soften the blow by positioning the bad news strategically, using the passive voice, accentuating the positive, or implying a refusal.
- Suggest a compromise or substitute, if possible.

Writing Plan for Refusing Requests or Claims

Closing

- Renew good feelings with a positive statement.
- Look forward to continued business.
- Avoid referring to the bad news.



Writing Plan for Announcing Bad News to Customers and Employees

Buffer

- **Open with a compliment, appreciation, facts, or some form of good news.**
- **Include a key idea that leads from the opening to the reasons.**

Writing Plan for Announcing Bad News to Customers and Employees

Reasons

- Explain the logic behind the bad news.
- Use positive words.
- Try to show reader benefits, if possible.

Bad News

- Position the bad news so that it does not stand out. Consider implying the bad news.
- Suggest a compromise or substitute, if possible.

Writing Plan for Announcing Bad News to Customers and Employees

Closing

- **Look forward positively.**
- **Provide information about an alternative, if appropriate.**