Writing Letters, Memos, E-Mails, and Instant Messages

Writing Routine and Positive Messages

Writing Negative Messages

Writing Persuasive Messages

chapter 7

Writing Routine and Positive Messages

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you will be able to

- Apply the three-step writing process to routine and positive messages
- Illustrate an effective strategy for writing routine requests
- Explain how to ask for specific action in a courteous manner
- Illustrate a strategy for writing routine replies and positive messages
- Discuss the importance of knowing who is responsible when granting claims and requests for adjustment
- Explain how creating informative messages differs from responding to information requests
- Describe the importance of goodwill messages and explain how to make them effective

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COMMUNICATION CLOSE-UP AT CONE, INC.

www.coneinc.com

Considering the number of corporate scandals in recent years, you might assume that all businesses are up to no good. Although a few companies fill headlines with bad news, thousands of other companies continue to conduct business ethically, and even more than that, they work to make significant contributions in their communities. Ready to help them in their efforts to help others is Cone, Inc., a Boston-based agency that specializes in "cause marketing." CEO Carol Cone explains: "Consumers no longer have trust in anything, so they look to companies for a lot more. They look to see what companies stand for."

One of Cone's clients, ConAgra Foods, took up the cause of child hunger in the United States through its Feeding Children Better program. By writing positive messages and news releases, Cone helps ConAgra spread the message about its program, which began when ConAgra became a national sponsor of Kids Cafés, an after-school program that serves free, hot, nutritious meals to kids in need. Company contributions funded over 130 new Kids

ConAgra's Feeding Children Better program supports thousands of children every year, and the company's public relations agency uses these successes to focus nationwide attention on the problem of childhood hunger.

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Cafés, each one providing more than 10,000 meals a year. Then to improve distribution of food to the cafés, ConAgra bought 100 refrigerated trucks from Webvan (after the dot-com grocer failed) and donated them to America's Second Harvest, a national network of food banks and food-rescue programs that helps a variety of organizations, including Kids Cafés.

Cone focuses her news releases on the three main goals of ConAgra's Feeding Children Better program: (1) getting food to children who need it, (2) repairing breakdowns in food distribution, and (3) raising national awareness about child hunger. ConAgra and Cone have received numerous awards for their good work and effective communication, such as the 2002 Corporate Citizenship Award from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the 2003 Cause Marketing Halo Award.

What makes Cone's messages so effective? Simply trumpeting ConAgra's good deeds would be positive enough, but Cone puts her press releases to work by highlighting ConAgra's progress toward each goal. She focuses attention on ConAgra's activities to highlight the problems of childhood hunger, thereby helping her client accomplish even more positive outcomes through the use of positive messages.

Regardless of the subject matter of your business messages, you can make them more effective by following Cone's advice to stay focused on your overall business goals and to emphasize the audience's concerns whenever you write.[1]

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1 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Apply the three-step writing process to routine and positive messages

USING THE THREE-STEP WRITING PROCESS FOR ROUTINE AND POSITIVE MESSAGES

Like Carol Cone, chances are you will compose numerous routine and positive messages during the typical business day. Most of a typical employee's communication is about routine matters: orders, information, company policies, claims, credit, employees, products, operations, and so on. Such messages are rarely long or complex. Even so, to produce the best messages possible, you'll want to apply the three-step writing process.

Communication Solution

Balancing several message goals is the secret to Cone, Inc.'s successful use of positive messages in its work for ConAgra's Feeding Children Better program. Cone's messages help ConAgra maintain a positive image in the marketplace as they help solve the problem of childhood hunger.

Step 1: Plan Your Message

Even though planning routine and positive messages may take only a few minutes, the four tasks of planning still apply. First, analyze the situation, making sure that your purpose is clear and that you know enough about your audience to craft a successful message. Second, gather whatever information your audience needs to know. Even something as simple as a team meeting can involve dozens of details, from presentation setups to lunch arrangements to parking. Including all necessary information the first time saves you and your audience the time and trouble of additional messages to fill in the gaps. Third, select the right medium for the message and the audience. Both routine and positive messages are often sent via e-mail and instant messaging, but printed memos and letters are still common. Fourth, organize your information effectively. This task includes defining your main idea, limiting your scope, selecting a direct or an indirect approach, and outlining your content. Throughout this chapter, you'll learn more about performing all four of these tasks for a variety of routine and positive message types.

Step 2: Write Your Message

Start by adapting your approach to your audience. Be sensitive to your audience's needs by maintaining a "you" attitude, being polite, emphasizing the positive, and using bias-free language. To strengthen your relationship with your audience, establish your credibility and project your company's image. Also, even though your tone is usually conversational, some messages may need to be more formal than others. You'll want to use plain English and make your writing as active as possible.

With some practice, you'll be able to compose most routine messages quickly. In fact, the ability to generate such messages quickly is a key skill for most business executives. Your main idea is probably well defined already; just be sure you stick to it by limiting the scope of your message.

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Communicating Across Cultures

How Direct Is Too Direct?

The direct mode of communication generally valued in the United States and other high-context cultures is often viewed as abrupt, rude, and intrusive in high-context cultures found in France, Mexico, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Italy, and the Philippines (see discussion of context in Chapter 3). When making requests in such cultures, determine whether to use a direct or an implied approach by considering audience attitudes toward destiny, time, authority, and logic:

- **Destiny.** Do audience members believe they can control events themselves? Or do they see events as predetermined and uncontrollable? If you're supervising employees who believe that fate controls a construction deadline, an e-mail asking them to stay on schedule might be confusing or even insulting.
- **Time.** Do audience members view time as precise and not to be wasted? Or do they see time as relative and relaxed? If you ask for a response by a specific time, is it reasonable to expect your audience to comply?
- **Authority.** Do audience members conduct business more autocratically or more democratically? In Mexico, rank and status are highly valued, so when communicating downward, you may need to be even more direct than you're used to being in the United States. And when communicating upward, you may need to be much less direct than usual.
- **Logic.** Do audience members pursue logic in a straight line, from point A to point B? Or do they communicate in circular or spiral patterns of logic? If you organize a speech or letter in a straightforward and direct manner, your message may be considered illogical, unclear, and disorganized.

By finding out how much or how little a culture tends toward high-context communication, you'll know whether to be direct or to rely on nuance.

CAREER APPLICATIONS

1. Research a high-context culture such as may be found in Japan, Korea, or China, and write a one- or two-paragraph summary of how someone in that culture would go about requesting information.
2. When you are writing in American English to someone in a high-context culture, would it be better to (a) make your request directly in the interest of clarity or (b) try to match your audience's unfamiliar logic and make your request indirectly? Explain your answer.

Also, your readers in most cases will be interested or at least neutral, so you can usually adopt the direct approach for routine and positive messages: Open with a clear statement of the main idea, include all necessary details in the body, and then close cordially. However, even though these messages are the least complicated to write, communicating across cultural boundaries can be a challenge, especially if you're not familiar with the cultural differences involved (see "Communicating Across Cultures: How Direct Is Too Direct?").

Step 3: Complete Your Message

No matter how brief or straightforward your message, maximize its impact by giving yourself plenty of time to revise, produce, proofread, and distribute it. First, revise your message by evaluating content and organization to make sure you've said what you want to in the order you want to say it. Review your message's readability. Edit and rewrite to make it concise and clear. Second, design your document to suit your purpose and your audience. Even simple e-mails and instant messages can benefit from careful font selection, the use of white space, and other design choices. Next, proofread the final version of your message, looking for typos, errors in spelling and mechanics, alignment problems, poor print quality, and so on. Finally, choose a distribution method that balances cost, convenience, time, security, and privacy. Increasingly, routine and positive messages are delivered electronically, on intranets (for internal audiences), extranets (for restricted external audiences), or websites (for general external audiences), or via e-mail and instant messaging.

Just as you do for other messages, you need to revise, produce, and proofread routine messages.

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Perry Klebahn's firm, Atlas Snow-Shoe Company, sells high-end showshoes in more than 1,000 stores across the United States, ringing up annual sales of about $12 million. Klebahn tells his employees to establish a good relationship with their audience by learning what they need to know and by using language that is positive and polite.

For routine requests and positive messages

- State the request or main idea
- Give necessary details
- Close with a cordial request for specific action

2 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Illustrate an effective strategy for writing routine requests

MAKING ROUTINE REQUESTS

Making requests—for information, action, products, adjustments, or other matters—is a routine part of business. In most cases, you're audience will be prepared to comply, as long as you're not being unreasonable or asking someone to do something they would expect you to do yourself. By applying a clear strategy and tailoring your approach to each situation, you'll be able to generate effective requests quickly.

Strategy for Routine Requests

Like all business messages, routine requests have three parts: an opening, a body, and a close. Using the direct approach, open with your main idea (a clear statement of your request). Use the body to give details and justify your request. Then close by requesting specific action (see Figure 7.1).

State Your Request Up Front

Begin routine requests by placing your request first—up front is where it stands out and gets the most attention. Of course, getting right to the point should not be interpreted as a license to be abrupt or tactless:

- **Pay attention to tone.** Even though you expect a favorable response, the tone of your initial request is important. Instead of demanding action ("Send me your latest catalog"), soften your request with words such as *please* and *I would appreciate.*
- **Assume your audience will comply.** An impatient demand for rapid service isn't necessary. You can generally make the assumption that your audience will comply with your request once the reason for it is clearly understood.
- **Punctuate questions and polite requests differently.** A polite request in question form requires no question mark: "Would you please help us determine whether Kate Kingsley is a suitable applicant for this position." A direct question within your message does require a question mark: "Did Kate Kingsley demonstrate an ability to work smoothly with clients?"
- **Be specific.** State precisely what you want. For example, if you request the latest market data from your research department, be sure to say whether you want a one-page summary or a hundred pages of raw data.

Explain and Justify Your Request

Take care that your direct approach doesn't come across as abrupt or tactless.

Use the body of your message to explain your initial request. Make the explanation a smooth and logical outgrowth of your opening remarks. If possible, point out how complying with the request could benefit the reader. For instance, if you would like some assistance interpreting complex quality-control data, point out how a better understanding of quality-control issues would improve customer satisfaction and ultimately lead to higher profits for the entire company.

In the body of the request, give the details of your request.

Whether you're writing a formal letter or a simple instant message, you can use the body of your request to list a series of questions. This list of questions helps organize your message and helps your audience identify the information you need. Just keep in mind a few basics:

Using lists help readers sort through multiple related items or multiple requests.

- **Ask the most important questions first.** If cost is your main concern, you might begin with a question such as "What is the cost for shipping the merchandise by air versus truck?" Then you may want to ask more specific but related questions about, say, discounts for paying early.
- **Ask only relevant questions.** To help expedite the response to your request, ask only those questions that are central to your main request. Doing so will generate an answer sooner and make better use of the other person's time.

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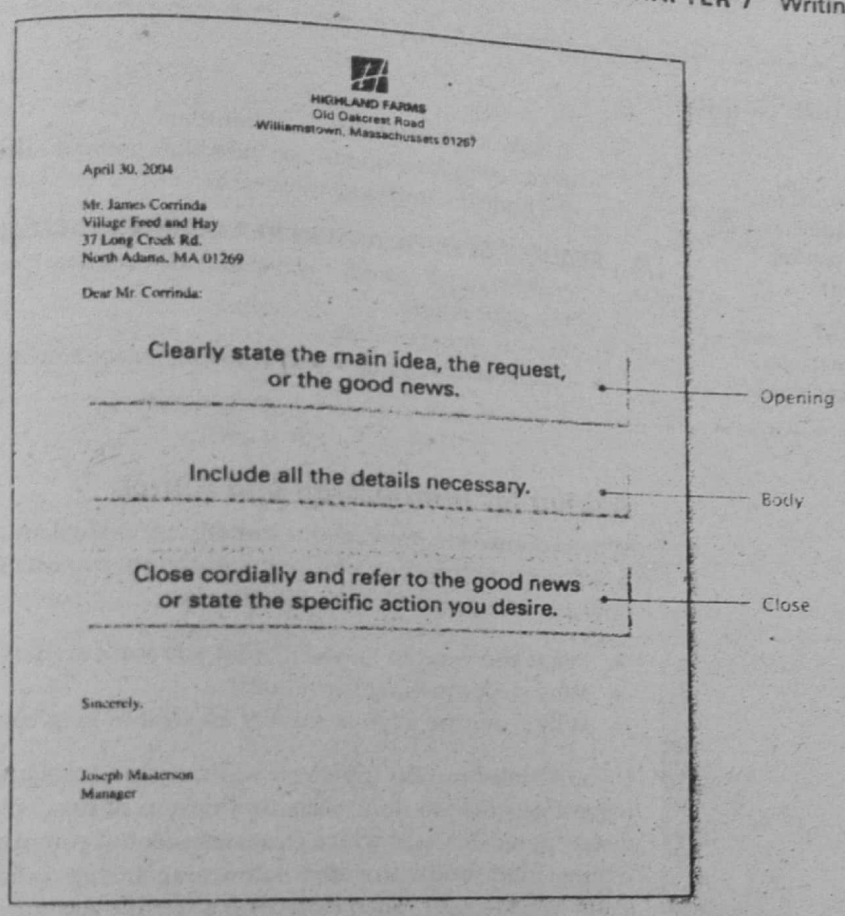

FIGURE 7.1
Organizing Routine and Positive Messages

- **Deal with only one topic per question.** If you have an unusual or complex request, break it down into specific, individual questions so that the reader can address each one separately. Don't put the burden of untangling a complicated request on your reader. This consideration not only shows respect for your audience's time but also gets you a more accurate answer in less time.

Request Specific Action in a Courteous Close

3 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Explain how to ask for specific action in a courteous manner

Close your message with three important elements: (1) a specific request, (2) information about how you can be reached (if it isn't obvious), and (3) an expression of appreciation or goodwill. When you ask readers to perform a specific action, ask that they respond by a specific time, if appropriate ("Please send the figures by April 5 so that I can return first-quarter results to you before the May 20 conference"). Plus, by including your phone number, e-mail address, office hours, and other contact information, you help your readers respond easily.

Conclude your message by sincerely expressing your goodwill and appreciation. However, don't thank the reader "in advance" for cooperating. If the reader's reply warrants a word of thanks, send it after you've received the reply. To review, see "Checklist: Writing Routine Requests."

Close with
- A request for some specific action
- Information about how you can be reached
- An expression of appreciation

Common Examples of Routine Requests

The various types of routine requests are innumerable, from asking favors to requesting credit. However, many of the routine messages that you'll be writing will likely fall into a few main categories. The following sections discuss three of these categories: asking for information and action, asking for recommendations, and making claims and requesting adjustments.

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CHECKLIST: Writing Routine Requests

A. STATE YOUR REQUEST UP FRONT

- Write in a polite, undemanding, personal tone.
- Use the direct approach, since your audience will probably respond favorably to your request.
- Be specific and precise in your request.

B. EXPLAIN AND JUSTIFY YOUR REQUEST

- Justify the request or explain its importance.
- Explain any potential benefits of responding.
- Ask the most important questions first.
- Break complex requests into individual questions that are limited to only one topic each.

C. REQUEST SPECIFIC ACTION IN A COURTEOUS CLOSE

- Make it easy to comply by including appropriate contact information.
- Express your gratitude.
- Clearly state any important deadlines for the request.

Jyoti Gupta, owner of Jyoti Cuisine India, doesn't spend her entire day making specialty frozen meals for passengers of British Airways and US Airways. Most of the time she's running her business and communicating with her suppliers, customers, and employees. Gupta routinely sends memos to these parties requesting information and action or responding to their information requests. For routine communications, Gupta uses a direct approach and a cordial tone.

Asking for Information and Action

When you need to know about something, to elicit an opinion from someone, or to request a simple action, you usually need only ask. In essence, simple requests say

- What you want to know or what you want readers to do
- Why you're making the request
- Why it may be in your readers' interest to help you

If your reader can do what you want, such a straightforward request gets the job done with a minimum of fuss. Follow the direct approach: Open with a clear statement of your reason for writing. In the body, provide whatever explanation is needed to justify your request. Then close with a specific account of what you expect, and include a deadline if appropriate. In more complex situations, readers might be unwilling to respond unless they understand how the request benefits them, so be sure to include this information in your explanation.

Naturally, you'll adapt your request to your audience and the situation. Requests to fellow employees are usually casual and sometimes spoken rather than written. However, as long as you avoid writing frequent, long, or unneeded messages, sending a thoughtfully written memo or e-mail message can save time and questions by helping readers understand precisely what you want. The memo in Figure 7.2 was sent to all employees of Ace Hardware. It seeks employee input about a new wellness and benefits program. The tone is matter-of-fact, and the memo assumes some shared background, which is appropriate when communicating about a routine matter to someone in the same company. (For more information on formatting memos and other business messages, see Appendix A.)

In contrast to requests sent internally, those sent to people outside the organization usually adopt a more formal tone. You'll most likely be in a position to ask businesses, customers, or others outside your organization to provide information or to take some simple action (attend a meeting, return an information card, endorse a document, confirm an address, supplement information on an order). Such requests are often in letter form, although some are sent via e-mail. These messages are usually short and simple, but still formal and professional, like the following request for information:

Makes overall request in polite, no-question mark/question form

- **Would you please supply me with information about the lawn services you provide. Pralle Realty owns 27 pieces of rental property in College Station, and we're looking for a lawn service to handle all of them. We are making a commitment to provide**

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Plan

Analyze the Situation
Purpose is to request feedback from fellow employees.

Gather Information
Gather accurate, complete information on program benefits and local gyms.

Select the Right Medium
Office memo is appropriate for this message since the document needs to be signed and returned.

Organize the Information
The main idea is saving money while staying healthy. Save time and meet audience expectations by using a direct approach.

Write

Adapt to Your Audience
Show sensitivity to audience needs with a "you" attitude, politeness, positive emphasis, and bias-free language. Writer already has credibility as manager of the department.

Compose the Message
Style is conversational but still businesslike, using plain English and appropriate voice.

Complete

Revise the Message
Evaluate content and review readability; avoid unnecessary details.

Produce the Message
Simple memo format is all the design this message needs.

Proofread the Message
Review for errors in layout, spelling, and mechanics.

Distribute the Message
Deliver the message via the company's interoffice mail delivery system.

1 2 3

FIGURE 7.2 Effective Memo Requesting Action from Company Insiders

ACE Ace Hardware Corporation

INTERNAL MEMORANDUM

Routes message efficiently, with all needed information

TO: All Employees
FROM: Tony Ramirez, Human Resources
DATE: October 10, 2005
SUBJ: New Wellness Program Opportunity

States purpose in opening to avoid wasting busy readers' time

The benefits package committee has asked me to contact everyone about an opportunity to save money and stay healthier in the bargain. As you know, the committee has been to decide on changes in our benefits package. Last week, we sent you a memo detailing the Synergy Wellness Program.

Presents the situation that makes the inquiry necessary

In addition to the package as described in the memo (life, major medical, dental, hospitalization), Synergy has sweetened the pot by offering IDD a 10 percent discount. To meet the requirements for the discount, we have to show proof that at least 25 percent of our employees participate in aerobic exercise at least three times a week for at least 20 minutes. (Their actuarial tables show a resulting 10 percent reduction in claims.)

After looking around, we discovered a gymnasium just a few blocks south on Haley Boulevard. Sports Midwest will give our employees unlimited daytime access to their indoor track, gym, and pool for a group fee that comes to approximately $4.50 per month per employee if at least half of us sign up.

Lists reader benefits and requests action

In addition to using the track and pools, we can play volleyball, Jazzercise, form our own intramural basketball teams, and much more. Our spouses and children can also participate at a deeply discounted monthly fee. If you have questions, please e-mail or call me (or any member of the committee). Let us know your wishes on the following form.

Sign and return the following no later than Friday, October 29.

Provides an easy-to-use response form

_____ Yes, I will participate in the Synergy Wellness program and pay $4.50 a month.
_____ Yes, I am interested in a discounted family membership.
_____ No, I prefer not to participate.

Signature _____

Employee ID Number _____

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Keeps reader's interest by hinting at possibility of future business → quality housing in this college town, and we are looking for an outstanding firm to work with us.

Avoids making an overly broad request by using a series of specific questions →

1. **Lawn care:** What is your annual charge for each location for lawn maintenance, including mowing, fertilizing, and weed control?

Itemizes questions in a logical sequence →

2. **Shrubbery:** What is your annual charge for each location for the care of deciduous and evergreen bushes, including pruning, fertilizing, and replacing as necessary?

Avoids useless yes-or-no answers by including open-ended questions →

3. **Contract:** How does Agri-Lawn Service structure such large contracts? What additional information do you need from us?

Specifies a time limit in the courteous close → Please let us hear from you by February 15. We want to have a lawn-care firm in place by March 15.

A more complex request might require not only greater detail but information on how responding will benefit the reader.

The purpose of some routine requests to customers is to reestablish communication.

Sometimes you may need to reestablish a relationship with former customers or suppliers. In many cases, when customers are unhappy about some purchase or about the way they were treated, they don't complain; they simply stay away from the offending business. Thus, a letter of inquiry might encourage customers to use idle credit accounts, offering them an opportunity to register their displeasure and then move on to a good relationship. In addition, a customer's response to such an inquiry may give you insights into ways to improve your products and customer service. Even if they have no complaint, customers still welcome the personal attention.

Asking for Recommendations

The need to inquire about people arises often in business. For example, before awarding credit, contracts, jobs, promotions, scholarships, and so on, some companies ask applicants to supply references. If you're applying for a job and your potential employer asks for references, you may want to ask a close personal or professional associate to write a letter of recommendation. Or, if you're an employer considering whether to hire an applicant, you may want to write directly to the person the applicant named as a reference.

Always ask for permission before using someone's name as a reference.

Companies ask applicants to supply references who can vouch for their ability, skills, integrity, character, and fitness for the job. Before you volunteer someone's name as a reference, ask that person's permission. Some people won't let you use their names, perhaps because they don't know enough about you to feel comfortable writing a letter or because they have a policy of not providing recommendations. In any event, you are likely to receive the best recommendation from people who agree to write about you, so check first.

Refresh the memory of any potential reference you haven't been in touch with for a while.

Because requests for recommendations and references are routine, you can assume your reader will honor your request, and you can organize your inquiry using the direct approach. Open your message by clearly stating that you're applying for a position and that you would like your reader to write a letter of recommendation. If you haven't had contact with the person for some time, use the opening to recall the nature of the relationship you had, the dates of association, and any special events that might bring a clear, favorable picture of you to mind.

If you're applying for a job, a scholarship, or the like, include a copy of your résumé to give the reader an idea of the direction your life has taken. After reading the résumé, your reader will know what favorable qualities to emphasize and will be able to write the recommendation that best supports your application. If you don't have a résumé, use the body of your letter to include any information about yourself that the reader might use to support a recommendation, such as a description of related jobs you've held.

Close your letter with an expression of appreciation and the full name and address of the person to whom the letter should be sent. When asking for an immediate recommendation, you should also mention the deadline. You'll make a response more likely if you enclose a stamped, preaddressed envelope, which is a considerate step in any event. The letter from Joanne Tucker in Figure 7.3 covers all these points and adds important

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Plan

Analyze the Situation
Purpose is to request a recommendation letter from a college professor.

Gather Information
Gather information on classes and dates to help the reader recall you and to clarify the position you seek.

Select the Right Medium
The letter format gives this message an appropriate level of formality, although many professors prefer to be contacted by e-mail.

Organize the Information
Messages like this are common and expected, so a direct approach is best.

Write

Adapt to Your Audience
Show sensitivity to audience needs with a "you" attitude, politeness, positive emphasis, and bias-free language.

Compose the Message
Style is respectful and businesslike, while still using plain English and appropriate voice.

Complete

Revise the Message
Evaluate content and review readability; avoid unnecessary details.

Produce the Message
Emphasize a clean, professional appearance. Enclose your résumé and a preaddressed envelope.

Proofread the Message
Review for errors in layout, spelling, and mechanics.

Distribute the Message
Deliver the message via postal mail or e-mail if you have the professor's e-mail address.

1 2 3

FIGURE 7.3 Effective Letter Requesting a Recommendation

1181 Ashport Drive
Tate Springs, TN 38101
March 14, 2005

Professor Lyndon Kenton
School of Business
University of Tennessee, Knoxville
Knoxville, TN 37916

Dear Professor Kenton:

May I have a letter of recommendation from you? I recently interviewed with Strategic Investments and have been called for a second interview for their Analyst Training Program (ATP). They have requested at least one recommendation from a professor, and I immediately thought of you.

Opens with the request, assumes the reader will honor the request, and names the potential employer

As you may recall, I took BUS 485, Financial Analysis, from you in the fall of 2003. I enjoyed the class and finished the term with an "A." Professor Kenton, your comments on assertiveness and cold-calling impressed me beyond the scope of the actual course material. In fact, taking your course helped me decide on a future as a financial analyst.

Includes information in the opening to refresh reader's memory about this former student

My enclosed résumé includes all my relevant work experience and volunteer activities. But I'd also like to add that I've handled the financial planning for our family since my father passed away several years ago. Although initially, I learned by trial and error, I have increasingly applied my business training in deciding what stocks or bonds to trade. This, I believe, has given me a practical edge over others who may be applying for the same job.

Refers to résumé in the body and mentions experience that could set applicant apart from other candidates

If possible, Ms. Blackmon in Human Resources at Strategic Investment needs to receive your letter by March 30. For your convenience, I've enclosed a preaddressed, stamped envelope.

Gives a deadline for response in the closing and includes information about the person expecting the recommendation

I appreciate your time and effort in writing this letter of recommendation for me. It will be great to put my education to work, and I'll keep you informed of my progress.

Sincerely,

Joanne Tucker

Joanne Tucker

Enclosure

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information about some qualifications that might be of special interest to her potential employer.

Making Claims and Requesting Adjustments

If you're dissatisfied with a company's product or service, you can opt to make a **claim** (a formal complaint) or request an **adjustment** (a claim settlement). In either case, it's important to maintain a professional tone in all your communication, no matter how angry or frustrated you might be. Keeping your cool will help you get the situation resolved sooner. In addition, be sure to document your initial complaint and every correspondence after that.

In your claim letter
- Explain the problem and give details
- Provide backup information
- Request specific action

In most cases, and especially in your first letter, assume that a fair adjustment will be made, and follow the plan for direct requests. Open with a straightforward statement of the problem. In the body, give a complete, specific explanation of the details. Provide any information an adjuster would need to verify your complaint. In your close, politely request specific action or convey a sincere desire to find a solution. And if appropriate, suggest that the business relationship will continue if the problem is solved satisfactorily.

Be prepared to document your claim. Send copies and keep the original documents.

Companies usually accept the customer's explanation of what's wrong, so ethically it's important to be entirely honest when filing claims. Also, be prepared to back up your claim with invoices, sales receipts, canceled checks, dated correspondence, catalog descriptions, and any other relevant documents. Send copies and keep the originals for your files.

Be as specific as possible about what you want to happen next.

If the remedy is obvious, tell your reader exactly what will return the company to your good graces—for example, an exchange of merchandise for the right item or a refund if the item is out of stock. In some cases you might ask the reader to resolve a problem. However, if you're uncertain about the precise nature of the trouble, you could ask the company to make an assessment. Supply your contact information so that the company can discuss the situation with you if necessary.

The following letter was written to a utility company. As you read it, compare its tone with the tone of the letter in Figure 7.4. If you were the person receiving the complaint, which version would you respond to more favorably?

FIRST DRAFT

We have been at our present location only three months, and we don't understand why our December utility bill is $815.00 and our January bill is $817.50. Businesses on both sides of us, in offices just like ours, are paying only $543.50 and $545.67 for the same months. We all have similar computer and office equipment, so something must be wrong.

Small businesses are helpless against big utility companies. How can we prove that you read the meter wrong or that the November bill from before we even moved in here got added to our December bill? We want someone to check this meter right away. We can't afford to pay these big bills.

Most people would react much more favorably to the version in Figure 7.4. A rational, clear, and courteous approach is best for any routine request. To review the tasks involved in making claims and requesting adjustments, see "Checklist: Making Claims and Requesting Adjustments."

CHECKLIST: Making Claims and Requesting Adjustments

- Maintain a professional tone, even if you're extremely frustrated.
- Open with a straightforward statement of the problem.
- Provide specific details in the body.
- Present facts honestly and clearly.
- Politely summarize desired action in the closing.
- Clearly state what you expect as a fair settlement, or ask the reader to propose a fair adjustment.
- Explain the benefits of complying with the request, such as your continued patronage.

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FIGURE 7.4 Effective Claim Letter

The European Connection
Specialist Purveyors of European Antiques
for over 30 years

P.O. Box 804 • Cayucos, California 93430
Telephone: (805) 979-7727 Fax: (805) 979-2828
EuroConnect@nemesis.net

February 23, 2005

Customer Service Representative
City of San Luis Obispo Utilities
955 Morro St.
San Luis Obispo, CA 93401

Dear Customer Service Representative:

The utility meter in our store may not be accurate. Please send someone to check it.

The European Connection has been at our current location since December 1, almost three months. Our monthly bill is nearly triple those of neighboring businesses in this building, yet we all have similar storefronts and equipment. In December we paid $815.00, and our January bill was $817.50—the highest bills that neighboring businesses have paid were $543.50 and $545.67.

If your representative could visit our store, he or she could do an analysis of how much energy we are using. We understand that you regularly provide this helpful service to customers.

We would appreciate hearing from you this week. You can reach me by calling 979-7727 during business hours.

Sincerely,

Laura Covington

Laura Covington
Proprietor

Opens by clearly and calmly stating the problem

Presents details clearly, concisely, and completely

Explains details in the body so that reader can understand why Covington thinks a problem exists

Requests specific action in the closing and provides contact information to make responding easy

SENDING ROUTINE REPLIES AND POSITIVE MESSAGES

Just as you'll make numerous requests for information and action throughout your career, you'll also respond to similar requests from other people. When responding positively to a request, sending routine announcements, or sending a positive or goodwill message, you have several goals: to communicate the information or the good news, answer all questions, provide all required details, and leave your reader with a good impression of you and your firm. Even though you may be doing someone a favor by responding to a request, you want to be courteous and upbeat and maintain a you-oriented tone.

Strategy for Routine Replies and Positive Messages

4 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Illustrate a strategy for writing routine replies and positive messages

Like requests, routine replies and positive messages have an opening, a body, and a close. Since readers receiving these messages will generally be interested in what you have to say, you'll usually use the direct approach. Place your main idea (the positive reply or the good news) in the opening. Use the body to explain all the relevant details, and close cordially, perhaps highlighting a benefit to your reader.

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Use the direct organizational plan for positive messages.

Prepare your audience for the detail that follows by beginning your positive message with the main idea or good news.

Start with the Main Idea

By opening your routine and positive messages with the main idea or good news, you're preparing your audience for the detail that follows. Try to make your opening clear and concise. Although the following introductory statements make the same point, one is cluttered with unnecessary information that buries the purpose, whereas the other is brief and to the point:

INSTEAD OF THIS	WRITE THIS
I am pleased to inform you that after deliberating the matter carefully, our human resources committee has recommended you for appointment as a staff accountant.	Congratulations. You've been selected to join our firm as a staff accountant, beginning March 20.

Before you begin, have a clear idea of what you want to say.

The best way to write a clear opening is to have a clear idea of what you want to say. Before you put one word on paper, ask yourself, "What is the single most important message I have for the audience?"

Provide Necessary Details and Explanation

The body of routine and positive messages is typically the longest. You need the space to explain your point completely so that your audience will experience no confusion or lingering doubt. In addition to providing details in the body, maintain the supportive tone established in the opening. This tone is easy to continue when your message is entirely positive, as in this example:

> Your educational background and internship have impressed us, and we believe you would be a valuable addition to Green Valley Properties. As discussed during your interview, your salary will be $4,300 per month, plus benefits. In that regard, you will meet with our benefits manager, Paula Sanchez, at 8 A.M. on Monday, March 21. She will assist you with all the paperwork necessary to tailor our benefit package to your family situation. She will also arrange various orientation activities to help you acclimate to our company.

Embed any negative information in a positive context.

However, if your routine message is mixed and must convey mildly disappointing information, put the negative portion of your message into as favorable a context as possible:

INSTEAD OF THIS	WRITE THIS
No, we no longer carry the Sportsgirl line of sweaters.	The new Olympic line has replaced the Sportsgirl sweaters that you asked about. Olympic features a wider range of colors and sizes and more contemporary styling.

The more complete description is less negative and emphasizes how the audience can benefit from the change. Be careful, though: You can use negative information in this type of message *only* if you're reasonably sure the audience will respond positively. Otherwise, use the indirect approach (discussed in Chapter 8).

If you are communicating to customers, you might also want to use the body of your message to assure the customer of the wisdom of his or her purchase selection (without being condescending or self-congratulatory). Talking favorably about something the customer has bought even though it may not have been delivered yet is a good way to build customer relationships. Such favorable comments are commonly included in order acknowledgments and routine announcements to customers, and they are most effective when they are relatively short and specific:

> The zipper on the carrying case you purchased is double-stitched and guaranteed for the life of the product.

> The Kitchen Aid mixer you ordered is our best-selling model. It should meet your cooking needs for many years.

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CHECKLIST: Writing Routine Replies and Positive Messages

A. START WITH THE MAIN IDEA
- Be clear and concise.
- Identify the single most important message before you start writing.

B. PROVIDE NECESSARY DETAILS AND EXPLANATION
- Explain your point completely to eliminate any confusion or lingering doubts.
- Maintain a supportive tone throughout.
- Embed negative statements in positive contexts or balance them with positive alternatives.
- Talk favorably about the choices the customer has made.

C. END WITH A COURTEOUS CLOSE
- Let your readers know that you have their personal well-being in mind.
- If further action is required, tell readers how to proceed and encourage them to act promptly.

End with a Courteous Close

Your message is most likely to succeed if your readers are left feeling that you have their personal welfare in mind. You can accomplish this task either by highlighting a benefit to the audience or by expressing appreciation or goodwill. If follow-up action is required, clearly state who will do what next. See "Checklist: Writing Routine Replies and Positive Messages" to review the primary tasks involved in this type of business message.

Make sure the audience understands what to do next and how that action will benefit them.

Common Examples of Routine Replies and Positive Messages

As with routine requests, you'll encounter the need for a wide variety of routine replies and positive messages. You can expect to write letters for most routine messages directed to people outside the company, although e-mail and instant messaging (with live operators or automated bots) are gaining in popularity in customer-service applications. Most routine and positive messages fall into six main categories: answers to requests for information and action, grants of claims and requests for adjustment, recommendations, informative messages, good-news announcements, and goodwill messages.

Answering Requests for Information and Action

Every professional answers requests for information and action from time to time, and some business functions answer such requests many times a day. If the response to a request is a simple yes or some other straightforward information, the direct plan is appropriate. A prompt, gracious, and thorough response will positively influence how people think about you and the organization you represent. Depending on the resources your company offers, you might use letters, memos, e-mail, or instant messaging to answer these requests (see Figure 7.5)

Many requests can be similar. For example, a human resources department gets numerous routine inquiries about job openings. To handle repetitive queries like these quickly and consistently, companies usually develop form responses. To avoid coming across as cold and impersonal in such form messages, put extra care into the standardized wording of the message as you try to accommodate as many individual situations and concerns as you can. Thus, a computerized form letter prepared with care may actually be more personal and sincere than a hastily typed "personal" reply.

With a form message as the starting point, you can then personalize it for each recipient by using the mail merge capability in your word processor. For example, instead of addressing a form reply to "Dear Applicant," you can have the computer insert the recipient's name. If you have time and the message is important, go beyond this and revise the content of each letter with unique information about each recipient.

E-mail messages may be standardized as well. For example, when Julian Zamakis sent an e-mail to Herman Miller asking for information about employment opportunities, he received the encouraging e-mail reply in Figure 7.6 on page 195.

DOCUMENT MAKEOVER

IMPROVE THIS E-MAIL MESSAGE

To practice correcting drafts of actual documents, visit www.prenhall.com/onekey on the web. Click "Document Makeovers," then click Chapter 7. You will find an e-mail message that contains problems and errors relating to what you've learned in this chapter about routine, good-news, and goodwill messages. Use the Final Draft decision tool to create an improved version of this e-mail. Check the message for skilled presentation of the main idea, clarity of detail, proper handling of negative information, appropriate use of resale, and a courteous close.

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FIGURE 7.5 Effective Instant Messaging Response to Information Request Using AOL's Instant Messenger

From Janice (customer service)

New Instant Message

Send File Webcam Invite

To: Walt Stanton (customer)

Hi, this is Janice. How can I help you?

From Walt Stanton (customer)

New Instant Message

Send File Webcam Invite

To: Janice (customer service)

Hi Janice. I need to get a copy of your selection guide, but for some reason I can't download it from your website.

New Instant Message

Send File Webcam Invite

To: Walt Stanton (customer)

I'm sorry to hear that you're having trouble. I can e-mail you an electronic copy or mail you a printed copy, whichever you prefer.

New Instant Message

Send File Webcam Invite

To: Janice (customer service)

The printed copy would be handy, actually.

New Instant Message

Send File Webcam Invite

To: Walt Stanton (customer)

Sounds great. I see that we have your mailing address on file already. I'll get that out to you today. Thanks for stopping by our site, and we look forward to hearing from you again.

B I U Memphis 12 Send

New Instant Message

Send File Webcam Invite

To: Janice (customer service)

You bet. Thanks for your help.

B I U Memphis 12 Send

When you're answering requests and a potential sale is involved, you have three main goals: (1) to respond to the inquiry and answer all questions, (2) to leave your reader with a good impression of you and your firm, and (3) to encourage the future sale. The following letter meets all three objectives:

Starts with a clear, statement of the main point

Here is the brochure "Entertainment Unlimited" that you requested. This booklet describes the vast array of entertainment options available to you with an Ocean Satellite Device (OSD).

Presents key information immediately, along with resale and sales promotion

On page 12 of "Entertainment Unlimited" you'll find a list of the 338 channels that the OSD brings into your home. You'll have access to movie, sport, and music channels; 24-hour news channels; local channels; and all the major television networks. OSD gives you a clearer picture and more precise sound than those old-fashioned dishes that took up most of your yard—and OSD uses only a small dish that mounts easily on your roof.

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FIGURE 7.6 Effective E-Mail Replying to Request for Information

Employment Information

Reply | Reply All | Forward | Flag | Print | Edit | Inbox

To: Julian Zamakis <jzamakis@aol.com>
From: Haley Middleton <haley.middleton@hermanmiller.com>
Subject: Employment information
Cc:
Bcc:
Attached:

Dear Mr. Zamakis:

Thank you for your interest in Herman Miller, Inc. Although we currently have no openings matching your qualifications, our needs are continually changing, and we would like to retain a copy of your resume for one year.

As a leading global manufacturer and marketer of quality furniture systems, products, and services, we are often in need of qualified candidates. When an opening does occur, we review our files to match our needs with candidates' qualifications.

At Herman Miller, we cultivate a working environment that is conducive to the creative process. Our corporate culture develops and rewards those who acquire new skills and take charge of their careers. Be sure to keep us posted with updates on your progress as you gain experience and skills.

Please feel free to check back with us. Our website is continually updated with the most recent employment information. Just follow the links to investigate career opportunities, the variety of benefits we extend to our employees, the corporate culture at Herman Miller, and the quality of life in West Michigan.

Sincerely,

Haley Middleton
Human Resources
Herman Miller
haley.middleton@hermanmiller.com
www.hermanmiller.com
888 443 4357 (USA and Canada only).

Herman Miller, Inc.
855 East Main Ave.
PO Box 302
Zeeland, Michigan 49464-0302
USA

Uses typical e-mail format

Explains in the body how the company uses résumés that are kept on file

Closes on a warm, positive note

Includes plenty of contact information, in keeping with the friendly audience focus

States purpose immediately—that no positions are currently open—but buries the bad news mid-paragraph and balances it with the positive idea that a position may open up

Gives reader a glimpse into the corporate culture and encourages Zamakis to keep in touch

More music, more cartoons, more experts, more news, and more sports are available to you with OSD than with any other cable or satellite connection in this region. Yes, it's all there, right at your fingertips.

Just call us at 1-800-786-4331, and an OSD representative will come to your home to answer your questions. You'll love the programming and the low monthly cost. Call us today!

Encourages readers to take one more step toward a purchase by highlighting product benefits

Points toward the sale confidently

Granting Claims and Requests for Adjustment

In some cases, even the best-run companies make occasional mistakes, from shipping the wrong order to billing the customer's credit card inaccurately. In other cases, the reason for a claim might be the fault of the customer who is asking your company for restitution. In still other cases, a third party may be the cause of a claim, such as a delivery company dropping a fragile package or a company's subcontractor assembling a product incorrectly. Whatever the reason, each of these events represents a turning point in your relationship with your customer. If you handle the situation well, your customer will likely be even more loyal than before because you've proven that you're serious about customer satisfaction. However, if a customer believes that you mishandled a complaint, you'll make the situation even worse—sometimes much worse. Dissatisfied customers often take their business elsewhere without notice; moreover, they tend to tell numerous friends and colleagues about the negative experience. A transaction that might be worth only a few dollars by itself could

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cost you many times that amount in lost business over time. In other words, every mistake is an opportunity to improve a relationship.

Few people go to the trouble of requesting an adjustment unless they actually have a problem, so most businesses start from the assumption that the customer is correct. From there, your response to the complaint depends on both your company's policies for resolving such issues and your assessment of whether the company, the customer, or some third party is at fault.

5 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Discuss the importance of knowing who is responsible when granting claims and requests for adjustment

When Your Company Is at Fault Whenever you communicate about a mistake your company has made, do so carefully. Before you respond, make sure you know your company's policies in such cases, which might even dictate specific legal and financial steps to be taken. For serious problems that go beyond routine errors, your company should have a *crisis management plan* that outlines communication steps both inside and outside the organization (see Chapter 8).

Most routine responses should take your company's specific policies into account and address the following points:

- **Acknowledge receipt of the customer's claim or complaint.** Just knowing that somebody is listening goes a long way toward soothing frayed nerves. Even if you can't solve the problem immediately, at least let the other party know that you're listening and that you've heard the complaint.
- **Take (or assign) personal responsibility for setting matters straight.** Customers don't want their complaints to fall into a bureaucratic black hole. In larger companies with hundreds or thousands of transactions a month, identifying a specific person at this stage might be impossible.
- **Sympathize with the customer's inconvenience or frustration.** Letting the customer see that you're on his or her side helps defuse the emotional element of the situation.
- **Explain precisely how you have resolved, or plan to resolve, the situation.** The customer may have wasted time, lost money, or suffered in other ways, and he or she will want to know how you plan to make the situation right. If you are able to respond exactly as the customer requested, be sure to communicate that. If you can't respond exactly as the customer asked, explain the reasons behind your response, rather than leaving the customer to wonder why.
- **Take steps to repair the relationship.** Keeping your existing customers is almost always less expensive than acquiring new customers, so look for ways to go beyond simply granting the claim or fixing the problem. Many companies offer coupons or gift certificates that not only give the customer more than they asked for but also encourage continued business.
- **Keep the lines of communication open.** Make sure you haven't compounded the customer's frustration by solving the wrong problem or solving the right problem in the wrong way.
- **Follow-up to verify your response was correct.** Follow-up not only helps improve customer service but also gives you another opportunity to show how much you care about your customer.

In addition to these positive steps, maintain professional demeanor by avoiding some key negative steps as well:

- Don't blame anyone in your organization by name
- Don't make exaggerated apologies
- Don't imply that the customer is at fault
- Don't promise more than you can deliver

As with requests for information or action, some claims are likely to occur again and again, such as claims made against insurance policies or requests to correct orders. A form letter is an efficient way to begin the communication process. In the following example, a large mail-order clothing company created a form letter to respond to customers who complain that they haven't received exactly what was ordered. The form letter can easily be customized through word processing (perhaps to state the good news in the opening) and then individually signed:

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Your letter concerning your recent Klondike order has arrived and has been forwarded to our director of order fulfillment. Your complete satisfaction is our goal, and a customer service representative will contact you within 48 hours to assist with the issues raised in your letter.

Acknowledges receipt of the customer's communication

Explains what will happen next and when, without making promises the writer can't keep

In the meantime, please accept the enclosed $5 gift certificate as a token of our appreciation for your business. Whether you're skiing or driving a snowmobile, Klondike Gear offers you the best protection from wind, snow, and cold—and Klondike has been taking care of customers' outdoor needs for over 27 years.

Takes steps to repair the relationship and ensure continued business

Thank you for taking the time to write to us. Your input helps us better serve you and all our customers.

Closes with statement of company's concern for all its customers

In contrast, a response letter written as a personal answer to a unique claim would open with a clear statement of the good news: the settling of the claim according to the customer's request. The following is a more personal response from Klondike Gear:

Here is your heather-blue wool-and-mohair sweater (size large) to replace the one returned to us with a defect in the knitting. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to correct this situation. Customers' needs have come first at Klondike Gear for 27 years.

I've enclosed our newest catalog and a $5 gift certificate that's good toward any purchase from it. Whether you are skiing or driving a snowmobile, Klondike Gear offers you the best protection available from wind, snow, and cold. Please let us know how we may continue to serve you and your sporting needs.

When the Customer Is at Fault Communication about a claim is a delicate matter when the customer is clearly at fault. You can (1) refuse the claim and attempt to justify your refusal or (2) simply do what the customer asks. If you refuse the claim, you may lose your customer—as well as many of the customer's friends and colleagues, who will hear only one side of the dispute. You must weigh the cost of making the adjustment against the cost of losing future business from one or more customers.

If you choose to grant the claim, you can open with the good news: You're replacing the merchandise or refunding the purchase price. However, the body needs more attention. Your job is to make the customer realize that the merchandise was mistreated, but you want to avoid being condescending ("Perhaps you failed to read the instructions carefully") or preachy ("You should know that wool shrinks in hot water"). The dilemma is this: If the customer fails to realize what went wrong, you may commit your firm to an endless procession of returned merchandise; but if you insult the customer, your cash refund will have been wasted because you'll lose your customer anyway. Close in a courteous manner that expresses your appreciation for the customer's business. Without being offensive, the letter in Figure 7.7 educates a customer about how to treat his in-line skates.

When complying with an unjustified claim, let the customer know that the merchandise was mistreated, but maintain a respectful and positive tone.

When a Third Party Is at Fault Sometimes neither your company nor your customer is at fault. An overnight delivery service could lose a package, or the windows that your construction company installed could fail to perform as the manufacturer promised. Even a simple transaction can involve several parties; for example, ordering a music CD from Amazon.com involves not only Amazon.com but also a distribution service such as Federal Express or the U.S. Postal Service, the manufacturer of the CD, and a credit card issuer. Any one of these other partners might be at fault, but the customer is likely to blame Amazon.com, since that is the entity that receives the customer's payment. In some transactions, the customer might not even be aware that third parties were involved.

No general scheme applies to every case involving a third party, so evaluate the situation carefully and know your company's policies before responding. An online retailer and the companies that manufacture its merchandise might have an agreement specifying that the manufacturers automatically handle all complaints about product quality. The retailer and its delivery company may have a separate agreement specifying that the delivery companies

When a third party is at fault, your response depends on your company's agreements with that organization.

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Plan

Analyze the Situation
Purpose is to grant the customer's claim, tactfully educate him, and encourage further business.

Gather Information
Gather information on product care, warranties, and resale information.

Select the Right Medium
The letter format gives this message an appropriate level of formality, which shows respect for the reader.

Organize the Information
You're responding with a positive answer, so a direct approach is best.

Write

Adapt to Your Audience
Shows sensitivity to audience needs with a "you" attitude, politeness, positive emphasis, and bias-free language.

Compose the Message
Style is respectful while still managing to educate the customer on product usage and maintenance.

Complete

Revise the Message
Evaluate content and review readability; avoid unnecessary details.

Produce the Message
Emphasize a clean, professional appearance appropriate for a letter on company stationery.

Proofread the Message
Review for errors in layout, spelling, and mechanics.

Distribute the Message
Deliver the message via postal mail.

1 — 2 — 3

FIGURE 7.7 Effective Letter Responding to a Claim When the Buyer Is at Fault

Skates Alive!
20901 El Dorado Hills
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
(714) 332-7474 • Fax: (714) 336-5297
skates@speed.net

February 7, 2005

Mr. Steven Cox
1172 Amber Court
Jacksonville, FL 32073

Dear Mr. Cox:

Thank you for contacting Skates Alive! about your in-line skates. Even though your six-month warranty has expired, Skates Alive! is mailing you a complete wheel assembly replacement free of charge. The enclosed instructions make removing the damaged wheel line and installing the new one relatively easy.

Acknowledges reader communication, keeps opening positive by avoiding words such as "problem," and conveys the good news right away

The "Fastrax" (model NL 562) you purchased is our best-selling and most reliable skate. However, wheel jams may occur when fine particles of sand block the smooth rotating action of the wheels. These skates perform best when used on roadways and tracks that are relatively free of sand. We suggest that you remove and clean the wheel assemblies (see enclosed directions) once a month and have them checked by your dealer about every six months.

Explains the problem without blaming the customer by avoiding the pronoun "you" and by suggesting ways to avoid future problems

Because of your Florida location, you may want to consider our more advanced "Glisto" (model NL 988) when you decide to purchase new skates. Although more expensive than the Fastrax, the Glisto design helps shed sand and dirt quite efficiently and should provide years of carefree skating.

Includes sales promotion in the body, encouraging the customer to "trade up"

Enjoy the enclosed copy of "Rock & Roll," with our compliments. Inside, you'll read about new products, hear from other skaters, and have an opportunity to respond to our customer questionnaire.

Adds value by enclosing a newsletter that invites future response from customer

We love hearing from our skaters, so keep in touch. All of us at Skates Alive! wish you good times and miles of healthy skating.

Closes positively ending on a "feel good" note that conveys an attitude of excellent customer service

Sincerely,

Candace Parker

Candace Parker
Customer Service Representative

Enclosure

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CHECKLIST: Granting Claims and Adjustment Requests

A. RESPONDING WHEN YOUR COMPANY IS AT FAULT

- Be aware of your company's policies in such cases before you respond.
- For serious situations, refer to the company's crisis management plan.
- Start by acknowledging receipt of the claim or complaint.
- Take or assign personal responsibility for resolving the situation.
- Sympathize with the customer's frustration.
- Explain how you have resolved the situation (or plan to).
- Take steps to repair the customer relationship.
- Verify your response with the customer and keep the lines of communication open.

B. RESPONDING WHEN THE CUSTOMER IS AT FAULT

- Weigh the cost of complying with or refusing the request
- If you choose to comply, open with the good news.
- Use the body of the message to respectfully educate the customer about steps needed to avoid a similar outcome in the future.
- Close with an appreciation for the customer's business.

C. RESPONDING WHEN A THIRD PARTY IS AT FAULT

- Evaluate the situation and review your company's policies before responding.
- Avoid placing blame; focus on the solution.

Regardless of who is responsible for resolving the situation, let the customer know what will happen to resolve the problem.

handle all complaints related to shipping. In other cases, the retailer might have a blanket policy of resolving all grievances itself. However, regardless of who eventually resolves the problem, if customers contact you, you need to respond with messages that explain how the problem will be solved. Pointing fingers is both unproductive and unprofessional. Resolving the situation is more important to customers than learning who made the mistake in the first place. See "Checklist: Granting Claims and Adjustment Requests" to review the tasks involved in these kinds of business messages.

Providing Recommendations

When writing a letter of recommendation, your goal is to convince readers that the person being recommended has the characteristics necessary for the job, project assignment, or other objective the person is seeking. A successful recommendation letter contains a number of relevant details:

- The candidate's full name
- The position or other objective the candidate is seeking
- The nature of your relationship with the candidate
- An indication of whether you're answering a request from the person or taking the initiative to write
- Facts and evidence relevant to the candidate and the opportunity
- A comparison of this candidate's potential with that of peers, if available (for example, "Ms. Jonasson consistently ranked in the top 10 percent of her class")
- Your overall evaluation of the candidate's suitability for the opportunity

As surprising as this might sound, the most difficult recommendation letters to write are often those for truly outstanding candidates. Your audience will have trouble believing uninterrupted praise for someone's talents and accomplishments. To enhance your credibility—and the candidate's—illustrate your general points with specific examples that point out the candidate's abilities and fitness for the job opening.

Most candidates aren't perfect, however, and you'll need to decide how to handle each situation that comes your way. Omitting a reference to someone's shortcomings may be tempting, especially if the shortcomings are irrelevant to the demands of the job in question. Even so, you have an obligation to refer to any serious shortcoming that could be related to job performance. You owe it to your audience, to your own conscience, and even to better-qualified candidates. You don't have to present the shortcomings as simple criticisms, however. A good option is to list them as areas for improvement, even as areas the person might be working on now.

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A serious shortcoming cannot be ignored, but beware of being libelous:

- Include only relevant, factual information
- Avoid value judgments
- Balance criticisms with favorable points

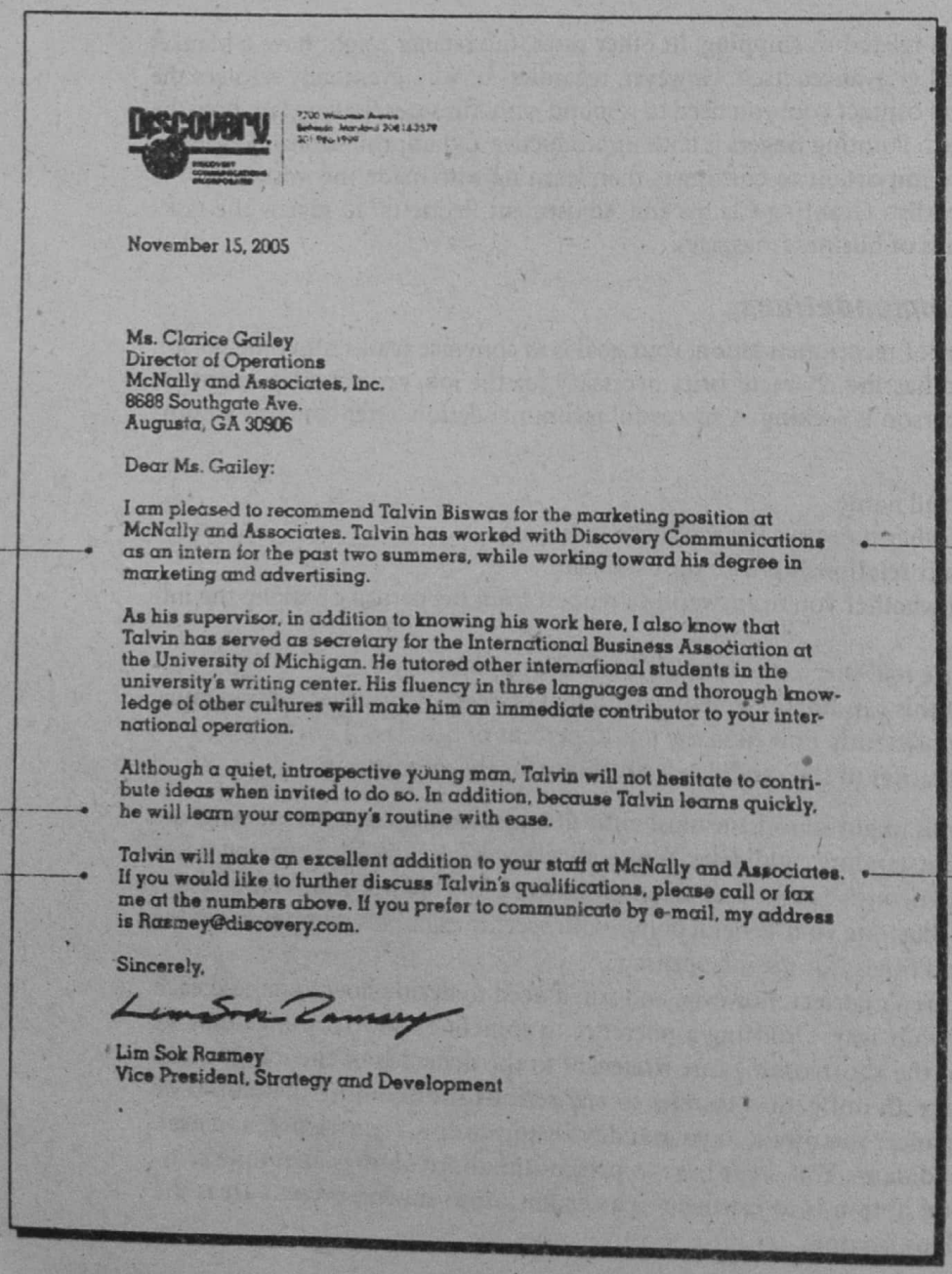
A recommendation letter presenting negatives can be carefully worded to satisfy both the candidate and the person or company requesting information.

The danger in writing a critical letter is that you might inadvertently engage in libel, publishing a false and malicious written statement that injures the candidate's reputation. On the other hand, if that negative information is truthful and relevant, it may be unethical and illegal to omit it from your recommendation. So if you must refer to a shortcoming, you can best protect yourself by sticking to the facts, avoiding value judgments, and placing your criticism in the context of a generally favorable recommendation, as in Figure 7.8. In this letter, the writer supports all statements with facts and steers clear of vague, critical judgments.

You can also avoid trouble by asking yourself the following questions before mailing a recommendation letter:

- Does the person receiving this personal information have a legitimate right to it?
- Does all the information I've presented relate directly to the job or benefit being sought?
- Have I put the candidate's case as strongly and as honestly as I can?
- Have I avoided overstating the candidate's abilities or otherwise misleading the reader?
- Have I based all my statements on firsthand knowledge and provable facts?

FIGURE 7.8 Effective Recommendation Letter



Discovery

November 15, 2005

Ms. Clarice Gailey
Director of Operations
McNally and Associates, Inc.
8688 Southgate Ave.
Augusta, GA 30906

Dear Ms. Gailey:

I am pleased to recommend Talvin Biswas for the marketing position at McNally and Associates. Talvin has worked with Discovery Communications as an intern for the past two summers, while working toward his degree in marketing and advertising.

As his supervisor, in addition to knowing his work here, I also know that Talvin has served as secretary for the International Business Association at the University of Michigan. He tutored other international students in the university's writing center. His fluency in three languages and thorough knowledge of other cultures will make him an immediate contributor to your international operation.

Although a quiet, introspective young man, Talvin will not hesitate to contribute ideas when invited to do so. In addition, because Talvin learns quickly, he will learn your company's routine with ease.

Talvin will make an excellent addition to your staff at McNally and Associates. If you would like to further discuss Talvin's qualifications, please call or fax me at the numbers above. If you prefer to communicate by e-mail, my address is Rasmey@discovery.com.

Sincerely,

Lim Sok Rasmey
Vice President, Strategy and Development

Clearly states candidate's full name and main point in the opening

Specifies duration and nature of relationship in the body to give weight to the evaluation

Closes by inviting reader to discuss the candidate further

Begins the close by summarizing the supportive evaluation

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Ethics Detective

Inflating the Truth for a Friend

You had bills to pay right after college, so you joined the marketing department of Durango Biotech. Your friend Jonathan declined two good job offers and spent six months backpacking around Europe.

Shortly after his return, Jonathan called you to exchange news. The long-winded retelling of his European adventures was just a prelude to the real reason for his call: He was applying for a software job at Durango and wanted you to write a letter of recommendation. You agreed, thinking, "It'd be great to have him working here."

When you started writing the letter, you were struck by a realization. In school, Jonathan's grades had fallen steadily as he lost interest in his programming classes and struggled with working in groups. At Durango, successful software projects depend on having team players who work well in small groups.

Ultimately, you decided to praise Jonathan's abilities as a team player. As evidence, you highlighted his team's success in the school's annual "Battling Robots" competition. After receiving your letter, the hiring manager, Tom, asked your boss, Sandra, about your judgment. Sandra praised your work habits and suggested that your recommendation be taken seriously. This helped Jonathan get the interview; he did well and was offered the job.

Shortly after Jonathan joined Durango, he started taking long lunch breaks, often asking you to go along. During one two-hour lunch, he boasted that the job at Durango was temporary: He was saving up enough cash to spend six months traveling in Asia.

Three months later, Tom stopped Sandra in the hall to tell her that your recommendation was way off the mark—and that he now doubted not only your credibility but hers as well. Jonathan had proven to be a poor team player and, worse, his lack of commitment was delaying an important project.

ANALYSIS

Was your recommendation ethical? Why or why not? How did your decision affect the company and your co-workers?

If the person's shortcomings are so pronounced that you don't think he or she is a good fit for the job, the only choice is to not write the letter at all. Unless your relationship with the person warrants an explanation, simply suggest that someone else might be in a better position to provide a recommendation.

Before you dash off any recommendation letter, even for someone you know closely and respect without reservation, keep in mind that every time you write a recommendation, you're putting your own reputation on the line (see "Ethics Detective: Inflating the Truth for a Friend"). Your recommendation influences a decision that has long-term consequences for the hiring organization as well as for the candidate, so make sure you truly believe what you'll be writing.

Creating Informative Messages

6 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Explain how creating informative messages differs from responding to information requests

When writing informative messages:

- State the purpose at the beginning and briefly mention the nature of the information you are providing
- Provide the necessary details
- End with a courteous close

All companies send routine informative messages such as reminder notices and policy statements. You may need to inform employees of organizational changes, upcoming events, new procedures, and changing policies. Similarly, you may need to tell customers and suppliers about shipping and return policies, sales discount procedures, and company developments that might be helpful when doing business with your company or when using your company's products. When you write informative messages, use the opening of the message to state the purpose (to inform) and briefly mention the nature of the information you are providing. Unlike the replies discussed earlier, informative messages are not solicited by your reader, so make it clear up front why the reader is receiving this particular message. In the body, provide the necessary details and end your message with a courteous close.

Most informative communications are neutral. That is, they stimulate neither a positive nor a negative response from readers. For example, when you send departmental meeting announcements and reminder notices, you'll generally receive a neutral response from your readers (unless the purpose of the meeting is unwelcome). Simply present the factual information in the body of the message and don't worry too much about the reader's attitude toward the information.

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Some informative messages may require additional care. For instance, policy statements or procedural changes may be good news for a company (perhaps by saving money); however, it may not be obvious to employees that such savings may make available additional employee resources or even raises. In instances where the reader may not initially view the information positively, use the body of the message to highlight the potential benefits from the reader's perspective.

Announcing Good News

A letter telling someone that she or he got the job is a legal document, so make sure all statements are accurate.

To develop and maintain good relationships, smart companies recognize that it's good business to spread the word about positive developments, whether the company is opening new facilities, appointing a new executive, introducing new products or services, or sponsoring community events. Because good news is always welcome, use the direct approach.

Writing to a successful job applicant is one of the most pleasant good-news messages you might have the opportunity to write. The following example uses the direct approach and provides information that the recipient needs:

Announces news in a friendly, welcoming tone

Welcome to Lake Valley Rehabilitation Center. A number of excellent candidates were interviewed, but your educational background and recent experience at Memorial Hospital make you the best person for the position of medical records coordinator.

Explains all necessary details

As we discussed, your salary is $29,200 a year. We would like you to begin on Monday, February 1. Please come to my office at 9 a.m. I will give you an in-depth orientation to Lake Valley and discuss the various company benefits available to you. You can also sign all the necessary employment documents.

Explains first day's routine to ease new employee's uncertainty

After lunch, Vanessa Jackson will take you to the medical records department and help you settle into your new responsibilities at Lake Valley Rehabilitation Center. I look forward to seeing you first thing on February 1.

Between her nationally syndicated television series, books on entertaining, three restaurants, and collection of products for the home, former fashion model B. Smith generates numerous informative messages. Like all successful communicators, she emphasizes efficient, objective transfer of information.

Although letters like these are pleasant to write, they constitute a legal job offer. You and your company may be held to any promises you make. So attorneys sometimes recommend stating salary as a monthly amount and keeping the timing of performance evaluations and raises vague; you want to avoid implying that the newly hired employee will be kept on, no matter what, for a whole year or until the next scheduled evaluation.[2] Your company's legal staff can provide specific advice and guidelines.

Good-news announcements are usually communicated via a letter or a **news release**, a specialized document used to share relevant information with the local or national news media. In most companies, news releases are usually prepared (or at least supervised) by specially trained writers in the public relations department (see Figure 7.9). The content follows the customary pattern for a positive message: good news, followed by details and a positive close. However, news releases have a critical difference: you're not writing directly to the ultimate audience (such as the readers of a newspaper); you're trying to interest an editor or reporter in a story, and that person will then write the material that is eventually read by the larger audience. To write a successful news release, keep the following points in mind:[3]

- Make sure your information is newsworthy and relevant. Editors at most media outlets are overwhelmed with news releases, so those with little or no news content quickly find their way into the recycling bin.
- Put your most important idea first. (Don't say "Calco's president James Grall announced today that the company will move its headquarters to the Main Street office." Instead, start with the news: "Calco will move its headquarters to the Main Street office, President James Grall announced today.")
- Be brief: Break up long sentences and keep paragraphs short.
- Eliminate clutter such as redundancy and extraneous facts.

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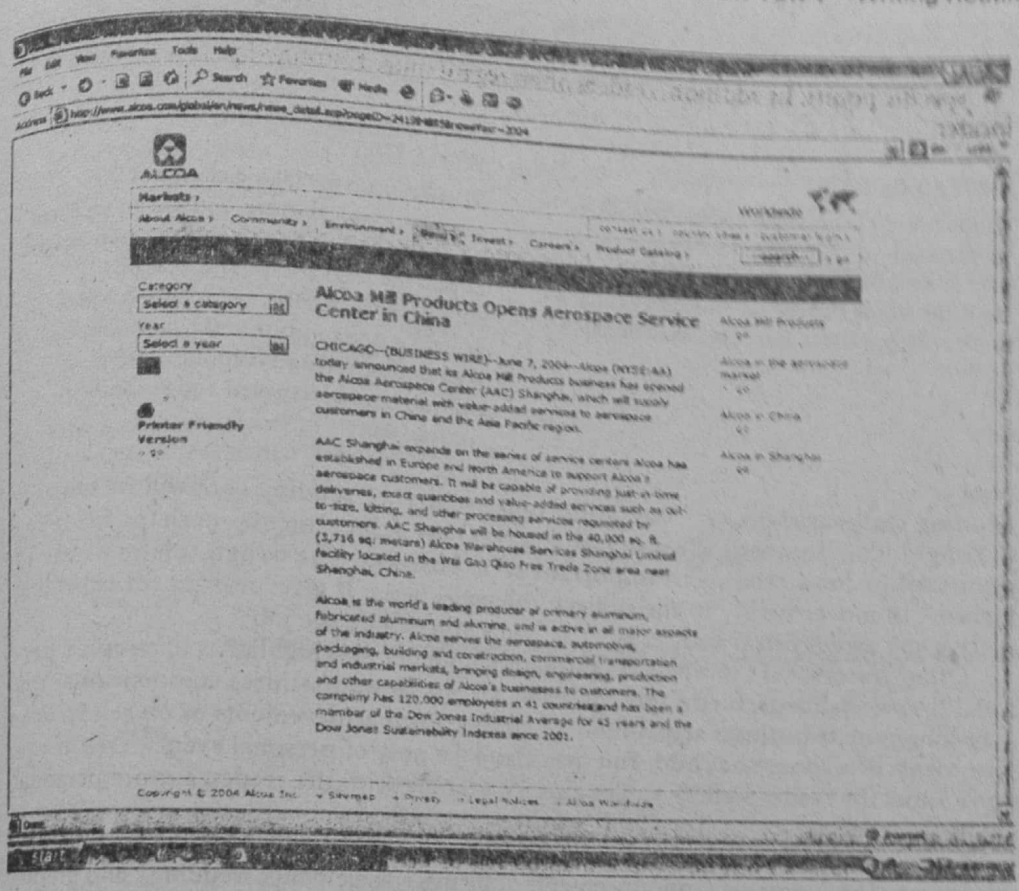

FIGURE 7.9
Online News Release

- Be as specific as possible.
- Minimize self-congratulatory adjectives and adverbs; if the content of your message is newsworthy, the media professionals will be interested in the news on its own merits.

As with many aspects of business communication, the process of creating and distributing news releases and other media materials is continually improved by technological advances. Online distribution systems such as PR Newswire and BusinessWire make it easy for even the smallest companies to reach editors and reporters at the most prominent publications around the world. *Webcasts*, an online alternative to press conferences, lets you reach stock market analysts, reporters, and potential customers with a combination of *streaming audio* and *streaming video* presentations that bring voice and video to anyone with Internet access. Many companies also create special media pages on their websites that contain their latest news releases, background information on the company, and archives of past news releases.

Fostering Goodwill

7 LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Describe the importance of goodwill messages and explain how to make them effective

All business messages should be written with an eye toward fostering goodwill among business contacts, but some messages are written primarily and specifically to build goodwill. You can use these messages to enhance your relationships with customers, colleagues, and other businesspeople by sending friendly, even unexpected notes with no direct business purpose. Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, is known for his handwritten notes to all employees, from managers to hourly workers. He once wrote a note to one manager who had turned down a promotion because he didn't want to move his teenager to a different school: "Bill," wrote Welch, "we like you for a lot of reasons—one of them is that you are a very special person. You proved it again this morning. Good for you and your lucky family. . . ."[4]

Goodwill is the positive feeling that encourages people to maintain a business relationship.

Effective goodwill messages must be sincere and honest. Otherwise, you'll appear to be interested in personal gain rather than in benefiting customers, fellow workers, or your

Make sure your compliments are grounded in reality.

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organization. To come across as sincere, avoid exaggerating, and back up any compliments with specific points. In addition, readers often regard more restrained praise as being more sincere:

INSTEAD OF THIS	WRITE THIS
Words cannot express my appreciation for the great job you did. Thanks. No one could have done it better. You're terrific! You've made the whole firm sit up and take notice, and we are ecstatic to have you working here.	Thanks again for taking charge of the meeting in my absence. You did an excellent job. With just an hour's notice, you managed to pull the legal and public relations departments together so that we could present a united front in the negotiations. Your dedication and communication abilities have been noted and are truly appreciated.

Taking note of significant events in someone's personal life helps cement the business relationship.

Sending Congratulations One prime opportunity for sending goodwill messages is to congratulate someone for a significant business achievement—perhaps for being promoted or for attaining an important civic position. The congratulatory note in Figure 7.10 moves swiftly to the subject: the good news. It gives reasons for expecting success and avoids extravagances such as "Only you can do the job!"

Other reasons for sending congratulations include the highlights in people's personal lives—weddings, births, graduations, success in nonbusiness competitions. You may congratulate business acquaintances on their own achievements or on the accomplishments of a spouse or child. You may also take note of personal events, even if you don't know the reader well. If you're already friendly with the reader, a more personal tone is appropriate.

Some companies even develop a mailing list of potential customers by assigning an employee to clip newspaper announcements of births, engagements, weddings, and graduations or to obtain information on real estate transactions in the local community. Then they introduce themselves by sending out a form letter that might read like this:

> Congratulations on your new home! All of us at Klemper Security Solutions hope it brings you and your family many years of security and happiness.
>
> Please accept the enclosed *Homeowner's Guide to Home Security* with our compliments. It lists a number of simple steps you can take to keep your home, your family, and your possessions safe.

This simple message has a natural, friendly tone, even though the sender has never met the recipient.

An effective message of appreciation documents a person's contributions.

Sending Messages of Appreciation An important business quality is the ability to recognize the contributions of employees, colleagues, suppliers, and other associates. Your praise does more than just make the person feel good; it encourages further excellence. Moreover, a message of appreciation may become an important part of someone's personnel file. So when you write a message of appreciation, try to specifically mention the person or people you want to praise. The brief message that follows expresses gratitude and reveals the happy result:

> Thank you for sending the air-conditioning components by overnight delivery. You allowed us to satisfy the needs of two customers who were getting very impatient with the heat.
>
> Special thanks to Susan Brown, who answered our call for help and never said, "It can't be done." Her initiative on our behalf is greatly appreciated.

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Plan

Analyze the Situation
Purpose is to foster goodwill with industry associates.

Gather Information
Gather information on specific accomplishments by the reader's firm.

Select the Right Medium
The letter format gives this message an appropriate level of formality.

Organize the Information
The main idea is to offer congratulations; a direct approach is perfect for letters such as this.

Write

Adapt to Your Audience
Show sensitivity to audience needs with a "you" attitude, politeness, positive emphasis, and bias-free language.

Compose the Message
Style is positive but still respectful and businesslike.

Complete

Revise the Message
Evaluate content and review readability; avoid unnecessary details.

Produce the Message
Emphasize a clean, professional appearance appropriate for a letter on company stationery.

Proofread the Message
Review for errors in layout, spelling, and mechanics.

Distribute the Message
Deliver the message via postal mail.

1 2 3

FIGURE 7.10 Effective Letter Congratulating a Business Acquaintance

Office DEPOT, Inc.
1900 Old Germantown Road, Delray Beach, FL 33445 407/878-4800

March 3, 2005

Mr. Ralph Lambert, President
Lambert, Cutchen & Brown, Inc.
14355 Pasadena Parkway
Pasadena, TX 74229

Dear Mr. Lambert:

Congratulations on your firm's recent selection to design and print media advertisements for the National Association of Business Suppliers (ABS). Your appointment was announced at the national convention in Atlanta last month, and here at Office Depot, we can think of no better firm to help our industry achieve wide recognition.

Your success has been admirable in promoting associations of other industries, such as soft drinks, snack foods, and recycling. Your "Dream Vision 2004" ads for the bottling industry were both inspirational and effective in raising consumer awareness. The campaign you design for ABS is sure to yield similar positive responses.

You can be sure we will follow your media campaign with great interest.

Sincerely,

Janice McCarthy

Janice McCarthy
Director, Media Relations

tw

Opens by immediately expressing the reason for congratulating the reader

Uses body to make compliment more effective by showing knowledge of the reader's work—without exaggeration

Closes by expressing interest in following the future success of the firm

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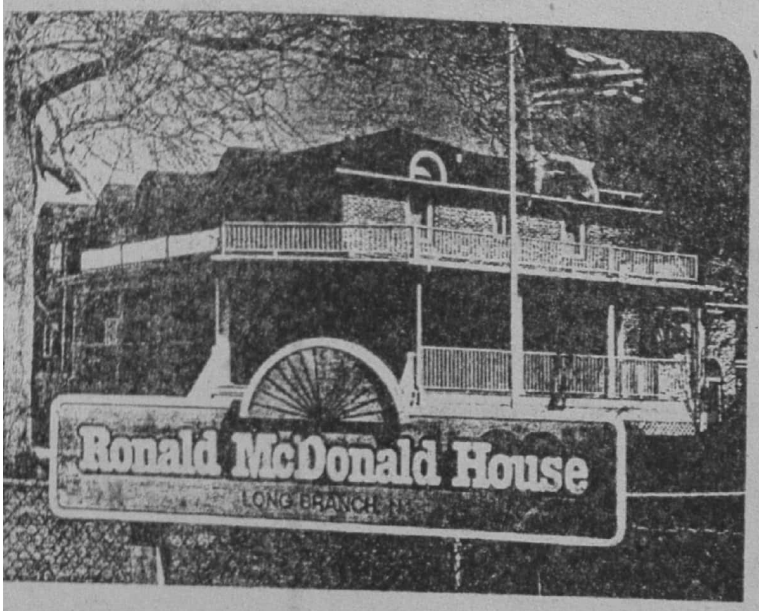
The primary purpose of condolence messages is to let the audience know that you and the organization you represent care about the person's loss.

Offering Condolences In times of serious trouble and deep sadness, well-written condolences and expressions of sympathy can mean a great deal to people who've experienced loss. Granted, this type of message is difficult to write, but don't let the difficulty of the task keep you from responding promptly. Those who have experienced a health problem, the death of a loved one, or a business misfortune appreciate knowing that others care.

Open condolences with a brief statement of sympathy, such as "I was deeply sorry to hear of your loss." In the body, mention the good qualities or the positive contributions made by the deceased. State what the person or business meant to you. In closing, you can offer your condolences and your best wishes. One considerate way to end this type of message is to say something that will give the reader a little lift, such as a reference to a brighter future. Here are a few general suggestions for writing condolence messages:



Ronald McDonald House has become known worldwide as a home away from home for the families of seriously ill children. But when employees of the global office send congratulations, thank-you notes, or condolences to associates inside or outside the organization, they don't boast about all the good their organization accomplishes; they focus on the situation of the person receiving the message.

- **Keep reminiscences brief.** Recount a memory or an anecdote (even a humorous one), but don't dwell on the details of the loss, lest you add to the reader's anguish.
- **Write in your own words.** Write as if you were speaking privately to the person. Don't quote "poetic" passages or use stilted or formal phrases. If the loss is a death, refer to it as such rather than as "passing away" or "departing."
- **Be tactful.** Mention your shock and dismay, but remember that bereaved and distressed loved ones take little comfort in lines such as "Richard was too young to die" or "Starting all over again will be so difficult." Try to strike a balance between superficial expressions of sympathy and painful references to a happier past or the likelihood of a bleak future.
- **Take special care.** Be sure to spell names correctly and to be accurate in your review of facts. Try to be prompt.
- **Write about special qualities of the deceased.** You may have to rely on reputation to do this, but let the grieving person know you valued his or her loved one.
- **Write about special qualities of the bereaved person.** A pat on the back helps a bereaved family member feel more confident about handling things during such a traumatic time.[5]

Supervisor George Bigalow sent the following condolence letter to his administrative assistant, Janice Case, after learning of the death of Janice's husband:

> My sympathy to you and your children. All your friends at Carter Electric were so very sorry to learn of John's death. Although I never had the opportunity to meet him, I do know how very special he was to you. Your tales of your family's camping trips and his rafting expeditions were always memorable.

To review the tasks involved in writing goodwill messages, see "Checklist: Sending Goodwill Messages."

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CHECKLIST: Sending Goodwill Messages

- Be sincere and honest.
- Don't exaggerate or use vague, grandiose language; support positive statements with specific evidence.
- Use congratulatory messages to build goodwill with clients and colleagues.
- Send messages of appreciation to emphasize how much you value the work of others.
- When sending condolence messages, open with a brief statement of sympathy, followed by an expression of how much the deceased person meant to you or your firm (as appropriate), then close by offering your best wishes for the future.

COMMUNICATION CHALLENGES AT CONE, INC.

In addition to serving hot meals, the Kids Café program also provides a safe, nurturing environment that keeps kids out of trouble during the risky afternoon hours from 3:00 to 6:00. To make that time more valuable, many Kids Cafés have started offering sports, crafts, mentoring, and tutoring. These activities require qualified volunteers who are willing to spend a few hours each week working with the kids.

Individual Challenge: To staff the tutoring program, ConAgra has asked Cone to create a recruiting campaign that will attract volunteers qualified to help with math, English, and science homework. One of the most important recruiting tools will be a letter addressed to current monetary donors, asking them to give as little as three hours a month. Carol has asked you, her executive assistant, to draft the request letter. What key points should you include in the introduction, body, and close of the letter? Make a brief outline for your instructor.

Team Challenge: It's nine months later and the recruiting program has been a success: most Kids Cafés are now offering more tutoring sessions. Carol now asks you to draft a letter of appreciation, which is reviewed by executives at ConAgra. During this review process, ConAgra executives have suggested using the letter to ask volunteers to increase the amount of time they spend tutoring each month. With a small group, discuss the pros and cons of adding this request to your letter. In a brief paragraph, explain your team's conclusions.

SUMMARY OF LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1 **Apply the three-step writing process to routine and positive messages.** Even though routine messages are usually short and simple, they benefit from the three-step writing process. Planning routine messages may take only a few moments to (1) analyze your purpose and audience, (2) investigate your readers' needs and make sure that you have all the facts to satisfy them, and (3) adapt your message to your audience through your choice of medium and your use of the "you" attitude. When writing routine messages, use the direct approach, as long as your readers will be positive (or neutral) and have minimal cultural differences. Completing routine messages means making them as professional as possible by (1) revising for clarity and conciseness, (2) selecting appropriate design elements and delivery methods, and (3) careful proofreading.

2 **Illustrate an effective strategy for writing routine requests.** When writing a routine request, open by stating your specific request. At the same time, avoid being abrupt or tactless: pay attention to tone, assume your audience will comply, avoid personal introductions, end polite requests with a period, and be specific. Use the middle of a routine request to justify your request and explain its importance. Close routine requests by asking for specific action (including a deadline as often as possible), and expressing goodwill. Be sure to include all contact information so that your reader can respond easily.

3 **Explain how to ask for specific action in a courteous manner.** A courteous close contains three important elements: (1) a specific request, (2) information about

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how you can be reached (if it isn't obvious), and (3) an expression of appreciation or goodwill.

4 Illustrate a strategy for writing routine replies and positive messages. First, open your message with a clear and concise statement of the main idea or your good news. Second, in the body of your message, provide the details and explanations necessary to meet the audience's information needs. If your message has a mix of positive and negative information, try to put the negative news in a positive context. If you are communicating with customers, you can also use the body of the message to share marketing and customer relationship information. Third, end your message with a courteous close that indicates to your audience that you have their best interests at heart.

5 Discuss the importance of knowing who is responsible when granting claims and requests for adjustment. Your response to a claim or a request for an adjustment can vary significantly depending on which party you determine to be at fault. If your company is at fault, your message should acknowledge receipt of the customer's claim or complaint, take responsibility, sympathize with the customer, explain how you will resolve the situation, take steps to repair the relationship, and keep the lines of communication open. If the customer is at fault, you have to decide whether to grant the claim in the interest of keeping the customer's business. If a third party is at fault, your response will be determined by whatever arrangements are in place between your company and the third party.

6 Explain how creating informative messages differs from responding to information requests. The key difference between creating informative messages and responding to information requests is a matter of who initiates the communication. When you create an informative message, your audience may or may not be expecting it and may or may not be motivated to read it, so you need to gauge their potential reaction and plan your message accordingly. In contrast, when someone else initiates the request, they will obviously be anticipating your response. The person may or may not like what you have to say, of course, but at least your message will not be unexpected.

7 Describe the importance of goodwill messages, and explain how to make them effective. Goodwill messages are important for building relationships with customers, colleagues, and other businesspeople. These friendly, unexpected notes have no direct business purpose, but they make people feel good about doing business with the sender. To make goodwill messages effective, make them honest and sincere. Avoid exaggerating, back up compliments with specific points, and give restrained praise.

Test Your Knowledge

1. When is a request routine?
2. What are some of the guidelines for asking a series of questions in a routine request?
3. What information should be included in an order request?
4. Should you use the direct or indirect approach for most routine messages? Why?
5. Where in a routine message should you state your actual request?
6. How does a claim differ from an adjustment?
7. How does the question of fault affect what you say in a message granting a claim?
8. What is the appropriate strategy for responding to a request for a recommendation about a job candidate whose performance was poor?
9. How can you avoid sounding insincere when writing a goodwill message?
10. What are some of the guidelines for writing condolence messages?

Apply Your Knowledge

1. When organizing request messages, why is it important to know whether any cultural differences exist between you and your audience? Explain.
2. Your company's error cost an important business customer a new client; you know it and your customer knows it. Do you apologize, or do you refer to the incident in a positive light without admitting any responsibility? Briefly explain.
3. You've been asked to write a letter of recommendation for an employee who is disabled and uses a wheelchair. The disability has no effect on the employee's ability to do the job, and you feel confident about writing the best recommendation possible. Nevertheless, you know the prospective company and its facilities aren't well suited to wheelchair access. Do you mention the employee's disability in your letter? Explain.
4. Every time you send a direct-request memo to Ted Jackson, who works in another department in your company, he delays or refuses to comply. You're beginning to get impatient. Should you send Jackson a memo to ask what's wrong? Complain to your supervisor about Jackson's uncooperative attitude? Arrange a face-to-face meeting with Jackson? Bring up the problem at the next staff meeting? Explain.
5. **Ethical Choices** You have a complaint against one of your suppliers, but you have no documentation to back it up. Should you request an adjustment anyway? Why or why not?

Practice Your Knowledge

Documents for Analysis

Read the following documents, then (1) analyze the strengths and weaknesses of each sentence, and (2) revise each document so that it follows this chapter's guidelines.

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Document 7.A: Requesting Routine Information from a Business

Our college is closing its dining hall for financial reasons, so we want to do something to help the students prepare their own food in their dorm rooms if they so choose. Your colorful ad in *Collegiate Magazine* caught our eye. We need the following information before we make our decision.

- Would you be able to ship the microwaves by August 15th? I realize this is short notice, but our board of trustees just made the decision to close the dining hall last week and we're scrambling around trying to figure out what to do.
- Do they have any kind of a warranty? College students can be pretty hard on things, as you know, so we will need a good warranty.
- How much does it cost? Do you give a discount for a big order?
- Do we have to provide a special outlet?
- Will students know how to use them, or will we need to provide instructions?

As I said before, we're on a tight time frame and need good information from you as soon as possible to help us make our decision about ordering. You never know what the board might come up with next. I'm looking at several other companies, also, so please let us know ASAP.

Document 7.B: Making Claims and Requests for Adjustment

At a local business-supply store, I recently purchased your *Negotiator Pro* for my computer. I bought the CD because I saw your ad for it in *MacWorld* magazine, and it looked as if it might be an effective tool for use in my corporate seminar on negotiation.

Unfortunately, when I inserted it in my office computer, it wouldn't work. I returned it to the store, but since I had already opened it, they refused to exchange it for a CD that would work or give me a refund. They told me to contact you and that you might be able to send me a version that would work with my computer.

You can send the information to me at the letterhead address. If you cannot send me the correct disk, please refund my $79.95. Thanks in advance for any help you can give me in this matter.

Document 7.C: Responding to Claims and Adjustment Requests When the Customer Is at Fault

We read your letter requesting your deposit refund. We couldn't figure out why you hadn't received it, so we talked to our maintenance engineer as you suggested. He said you had left one of the doors off the hinges in your apartment in order to get a large sofa through the door. He also confirmed that you had paid him $5.00 to replace the door since you had to turn in the U-Haul trailer and were in a big hurry.

This entire situation really was caused by a lack of communication between our housekeeping inspector and the maintenance engineer. All we knew was that the door was off the hinges when it was inspected by Sally Tarnley. You know that our policy states that if anything is wrong with the apartment, we keep the deposit. We had no way of knowing that George just hadn't gotten around to replacing the door.

But we have good news. We approved the deposit refund, which will be mailed to you from our home office in Teaneck, New Jersey. I'm not sure how long that will take, however. If you don't receive the check by the end of next month, give me a call.

Next time, it's really a good idea to stay with your apartment until it's inspected as stipulated in your lease agreement. That way, you'll be sure to receive your refund when you expect it. Hope you have a good summer.

Document 7.D: Letter of Recommendation

Your letter to Kunitake Ando, President of Sony, was forwarded to me because I am the human resources director. In my job as head of HR, I have access to performance reviews for all of the Sony employees in the United States. This means, of course, that I would be the person best qualified to answer your request for information on Nick Oshinski.

In your letter of the 15th, you asked about Nick Oshinski's employment record with us because he has applied to work for your company. Mr. Oshinski was employed with us from January 5, 1995, until March 1, 2005. During that time, Mr. Oshinski received ratings ranging from 2.5 up to 9.6, with 10 being the top score. As you can see, he must have done better reporting to some managers than to others. In addition, he took all vacation days, which is a bit unusual. Although I did not know Mr. Oshinski personally, I know that our best workers seldom use all the vacation time they earn. I do not know if that applies in this case.

In summary, Nick Oshinski performed his tasks well depending on who managed him.

Exercises

For live links to all websites discussed in this chapter, visit this text's website at www.prenhall.com/bovee. Just log on, select Chapter 7, and click on "Featured Websites." Locate the page or the URL related to the material in the text.

7.1 Revising Messages: Directness and Conciseness Revise the following short e-mail messages so that they are more direct and concise; develop a subject line for each revised message.

a. I'm contacting you about your recent order for a High Country backpack. You didn't tell us which backpack you wanted, and you know we make a lot of different ones. We have the canvas models with the plastic frames and vinyl trim and we have the canvas models with leather trim, and we have the ones that have more pockets than the other ones. Plus they come in lots of different colors. Also they make the ones that are large for a big-boned person and the smaller versions for little women or kids.

b. Thank you for contacting us about the difficulty you had collecting your luggage at Denver International Airport. We are very sorry for the inconvenience this has caused you. As you know, traveling can create problems of this sort regardless of how careful the airline personnel might be. To receive compensation, please send us a detailed list of the items that you lost and complete the following questionnaire. You can e-mail it back to us.

c. Sorry it took us so long to get back to you. We were flooded with résumés. Anyway, your résumé made the final ten, and after meeting three hours yesterday, we've decided we'd like to meet with you. What is your schedule like for next week? Can you come in for an interview on June 15 at 3:00 P.M.? Please get back to us by the end of this work week and let us know if you will be able to attend. As you can imagine, this is our busy season.

d. We're letting you know that because we use over a ton of paper a year and because so much of that paper goes

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into the wastebasket to become so much more environmental waste, starting Monday, we're placing white plastic bins outside the elevators on every floor to recycle that paper and in the process, minimize pollution.

7.2 **Revising Messages: Directness and Conciseness** Rewrite the following sentences so that they are direct and concise.

a. We wanted to invite you to our special 40% off by-invitation-only sale. The sale is taking place on November 9.
b. We wanted to let you know that we are giving a tote bag and a free Phish CD with every $50 donation you make to our radio station.
c. The director planned to go to the meeting that will be held on Monday at a little before 11 A.M.
d. In today's meeting, we were happy to have the opportunity to welcome Paul Eccelson. He reviewed some of the newest types of order forms. If you have any questions about these new forms, feel free to call him at his office.

7.3 **Internet** Visit the Career eCards section of the Blue Mountain site at www.bluemountain.com and analyze one of the electronic greeting cards bearing a goodwill message of appreciation for good performance. Under what circumstances would you send this electronic message? How could you personalize it for the recipient and the occasion? What would be an appropriate close for this message?

7.4 **Teamwork** With another student, identify the purpose and select the most appropriate format for communicating these written messages. Next, consider how the audience is likely to respond to each message. Based on this audience analysis, determine whether the direct or indirect approach would be effective for each message, and explain your reasoning.

a. A notice to all employees about the placement of recycling bins by the elevator doors
b. The first late-payment notice to a good customer who usually pays his bills on time

7.5 **Revising Messages: Conciseness, Courteousness, and Specificity** Critique the following closing paragraphs. How would you rewrite each to be concise, courteous, and specific?

a. I need your response sometime soon so I can order the parts in time for your service appointment. Otherwise your air-conditioning system may not be in tip-top condition for the start of the summer season.
b. Thank you in advance for sending me as much information as you can about your products. I look forward to receiving your package in the very near future.
c. To schedule an appointment with one of our knowledgeable mortgage specialists in your area, you can always call our hotline at 1-800-555-8765. This is also the number to call if you have more questions about mortgage rates, closing procedures, or any other aspect of the mortgage process. Remember, we're here to make the home-buying experience as painless as possible.

7.6 **Ethical Choices** Your small supermarket chain has received dozens of complaints about the watery consistency of the ketchup sold under the chain's brand name. You don't want your customers to stop buying other store-brand foods, which are made and packaged for your chain by various suppliers, but you do want to address their concerns about the ketchup. In responding to these complaints, should you explain that the ketchup is actually manufactured by a local supplier and then name the supplier, who has already started bottling a thicker ketchup?

Expand Your Knowledge

For live links to the websites that follow, go to www.prenhall.com/bovee. When you log on, select Chapter 7, then select "Featured Websites," click on the URL of the website you wish to visit, and review the website to complete these exercises.

Exploring the Best of the Web

Recommended Advice for Recommendation Letters
www.about.com

Whether you're continuing on to graduate school or entering the workforce with your undergraduate degree, recommendation letters could play an important role in the next few steps of your career. From selecting the people to ask for recommendation letters to knowing what makes an effective letter, About.com extends the advice offered in this chapter with real-life examples and suggestions. Visit the site for "recommendation letters," read the advice you find, then answer the following questions:

1. What's a good process for identifying the best people to ask for recommendation letters?
2. What information should you provide to letter writers to help them produce a credible and compelling letter on your behalf?
3. What are the most common mistakes you need to avoid with recommendation letters?

Exploring the Web on Your Own

1. Learn how to write effective thank-you notes by reviewing the steps at www.globaltowne.com/aresume/thankyounotes.htm. (Looking for an easy way to stand out from other job candidates? Note the survey on this site that shows that only 12 percent of candidates bother to send a thank-you note after an interview.)
2. Need to write a press release but don't have time to become an expert? Learn from any expert at www.stetson.edu/~rhansen/prguide.html.
3. Get advice on writing sensitive condolence letters at www.ABusinessResource.com (search for "condolence letter").

Learn Interactively

Interactive Study Guide

Go to the Companion Website at www.prenhall.com/bovee. For Chapter 7, take advantage of the interactive "Study Guide" to test your knowledge of the chapter. Get instant feedback on whether you need additional studying.

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Also, visit this site's "Study Hall," where you'll find an abundance of valuable resources that will help you succeed in this course.

Peak Performance Grammar and Mechanics

To improve your skill with sentences, visit www.prenhall.com/onekey, click "Peak Performance Grammar and Mechanics" then click "Sentences." Take the Pretest to determine whether you have any weak areas. Then review those areas in the Refresher Course. Take the Follow-Up Test to check your grasp of sentences. For an extra challenge or advanced practice, take the Advanced Test. Finally, for additional reinforcement in sentences, go to www.prenhall.com/bovee, where you will find "Improve Your Grammar, Mechanics, and Usage" exercises.

CASES

Applying the Three-Step Writing Process to Cases

Apply each step to the following cases, as assigned by your instructor

Plan

Analyze the Situation
Identify both your general purpose and your specific purpose. Clarify exactly what you want your audience to think, feel, or believe after receiving your message. Profile your primary audience, including their backgrounds, differences, similarities, and likely reactions to your message.

Gather Information
Identify the information your audience will need to receive, as well as other information you may need in order to craft an effective message.

Select the Right Medium
Make sure your medium is both acceptable to the audience and appropriate for the message.

Organize the Information
Choose a direct or indirect approach based on the audience and the message; most routine requests and routine and positive messages should use a direct approach. Identify your main idea, limit your scope, then outline necessary support points and other evidence.

Write

Adapt to Your Audience
Show sensitivity to audience needs with a "you" attitude, politeness, positive emphasis, and bias-free language. Understand how much credibility you already have—and how much you may need to establish. Project your company's image by maintaining an appropriate style and tone.

Compose the Message
Draft your message using powerful words, effective sentences, and coherent paragraphs.

Complete

Revise the Message
Evaluate content and review readability; then edit and rewrite for conciseness and clarity.

Produce the Message
Use effective design elements and suitable layout for a clean, professional appearance.

Proofread the Message
Review for errors in layout, spelling, and mechanics.

Distribute the Message
Deliver your message using the chosen medium; make sure all documents and all relevant files are distributed successfully.

1 2 3

ROUTINE REQUESTS

1. Step on it: Letter to Floorgraphics requesting information about underfoot advertising. You work for Alberta Greenwood, owner of Better Bike and Ski Shop. Yesterday, Alberta met with the Schwinn sales representative, Tom Beeker, who urged her to sign a contract with Floorgraphics. That company leases floor space from retail stores, then creates and sells floor ads to manufacturers like Schwinn. Floorgraphics will pay Alberta a fee for leasing the floor space, as well as a percentage for every ad it sells. Alberta was definitely interested, and turned to you after Beeker left.

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