Bad News Letters

The Indirect Approach

What is a 'bad news' message?

- A bad-news message is a letter, memo, or email that conveys negative or unpleasant information
- information that is likely to disappoint, upset, or even anger a reader.
- Also called an indirect message or a negative message.
- Bad-news messages include rejections (in response to job applications, promotion requests, and the like)
- negative evaluations
- announcements of policy changes that don't benefit the reader.

The indirect plan/strategy

- 1. Intro the message with a positive/neutral buffer statement
- 2. Delve into the disappointing news do not sugar coat this
- 3. Closing statement with recommendations/alternatives

The CRUCIAL introductory Paragraph

- provide a buffer to cushion the bad news that will follow,
- let the receiver know what the message is about without stating the obvious
- serve as a transition into the discussion of reasons without revealing the bad
 news or leading the receiver to expect good news.

Carol M. Lehman and Debbie D Dufrene, Business Communication, 15th ed. Thomson, 2008

The body paragraph

- Deliver the bad news in the body of the message.
- State it clearly and concisely, and explain the reasons briefly and unemotionally.
- Avoid apologies; they weaken your explanation or position.
- Try to embed the bad news in a supporting, not the topical, sentence of a paragraph.
- The purpose is not to conceal the bad news, but to soften its impact.

Stuart Carl Smith and Philip K. Piele, School Leadership: Handbook for Excellence in Student Learning. Corwin Press, 2006

The closing

- The purpose of the closing is to maintain or rebuild good will.
- Should be courteous and helpful.
- Should have a sincere tone. Avoid overused closings such as If you have any questions, please don't hesitate to call....
- Offer the receiver another option. . . . Presenting another option shifts the emphasis from the negative news to a positive solution.

Thomas L. Means, Business Communications, 2nd ed. South-Western Educational, 2009)

<u>Samples</u>

On behalf of the members of the Research & Scholarship Committee, thank you for submitting an application for this year's Research & Scholarship grants competition.

I'm sorry to report that your grant proposal was among those that were not approved for funding in the spring. With the reduction in grant funds caused by budget cuts and the record number of applications, I'm afraid that many worthwhile proposals could not be supported.

Although you did not receive a grant this year, I trust that you will continue to pursue both internal and external funding opportunities.

	Parts of the Negative News Message	Example
	Buffer or Cushion	Thank you for your order. We appreciate your interest in our product.
	Explanation	We are writing to let you know that this product has been unexpectedly popular, with over 10,000 requests on the day you placed your order.
/	Negative News	This unexpected increase in demand has resulted in a temporary out-of-stock/backorder situation. We will fulfill your order, received at 11:59 p.m. on 09/09/2009, in the order it was received.
	Redirect	We anticipate that your product will ship next Monday. While you wait, we encourage you to consider using the enclosed \$5 off coupon toward the purchase of any product in our catalog. We appreciate your business and want you to know that our highest priority is your satisfaction.

Thank you so much for your interest in our "Elevator Etiquette" seminar. This seminar was new to our course list this term and was met with overwhelming interest.

Due to such a phenomenal response, however, we are not able to accommodate everyone this term. Enrollment was on a first come, first serve basis and, unfortunately, I did not receive your application and check until after the deadline. Therefore, we will not be able to accept you at this time.

We would love to accept more applicants this term, especially those as qualified as you, but several restrictions prevent us from doing so. First, we have had to turn individuals away whose application and check were received well before the deadline. Second, we are limited in both classroom space and elevator capacity to twenty students. Finally, extensive work in pairs prevents us from accepting an odd number of people.

Enclosed, in addition to your check, you will find a brochure listing our other seminars that are being offered this term. The "Escalator Safety" and "Stairs 101" seminars are also very popular and each have a couple openings left. In addition, "Elevator Etiquette" is being offered again next term, which begins in three months. The application and payment deadline for next term is November 15, 2000.

Mr. Jones, once again, we thank you for your interest. We hope to see you in one of our Essential Seminars either this term or in the future!

Class activity

Write 'bad news' letters to any of the following recipients;

- 1. a job applicant that was not hired
- 2. a vendor whose services you will no longer be using
- 3. a client who applied for credit with your company