

GLOSSARY

Business Writing Strategies

Judy Steiner-Williams

Use these terms and definitions below to understand concepts taught in the course.

Transcript Search: Note that you can search for terms directly within the course. To search video text, switch to the *Transcripts* tab, then press Cmd/Ctrl + F on your keyboard to run a search within the active transcript.

Term	Definition
adjustment grant	A piece of writing that relays good news and explains it with facts and reasons
adjustment refusal	A piece of writing that refuses someone's request
bad news outline	A template to follow when reporting bad news
claim letter	A piece of writing designed to resolve an issue with another entity
direct strategy	A writing strategy that begins with the message's specific purpose
persuasive message	A type of message whose purpose is to convince someone of something
routine inquiry	A piece of writing that seeks answers to direct questions

Exercise File: Business Writing Strategies

The first four documents below are the complete documents analyzed in the routine request and the routine response lesson (07-01). You might want to review direct order in that lesson. Then five new situations are provided: routine inquiry, routine response, good news, bad news, and persuasion. For each, an ineffective document, questions to think about before revising, and a revision are available.

Here is the complete routine inquiry document analyzed:

When are you available to meet with our team?

Our team has reached a stalemate on the best advertising methods to include in our response to the Ryal Company's RFP for its new advertising campaign. Basically, we aren't certain about the percent of time and resources to commit to traditional advertising channels such as television and print versus social and electronic media.

We appreciate your input and guidance on helping us prepare a selling proposal to the Ryal Company.

Here is the complete routine response examined:

I can meet with your team tomorrow at 4:00.

I'll bring the Paulson file—that company we worked with last year is similar to the Ryal Company. If you'll send me the exact breakdowns you are considering by noon tomorrow, I can analyze them before our meeting.

I appreciate the opportunity to give input on this important deal and am certain we can reach a consensus on the advertising budget.

This third document is also a routine inquiry:

Which of the following do you prefer for our new company logo?

Please rank order your top three choices and what you like/dislike about each. This information will be tallied, and the top three will then be voted on by all the managers.

Please send this logo information to Sam before EOD Friday.

This document is a second example of a routine response discussed in the course:

My top three choices in rank order for our new company logo are B, E, and A.

Here are my reasons for those choices:

The color combination for Logo B is eye-catching and the picture clearly represents the message our company's current branding campaign is trying to project.

Logo E is also acceptable, although it has more of a retro look and the color combination is more muted.

Logo A has a more sophisticated look and the design is hard to read. With a slight change of color hue, the design would be more prominent.

If you need any help on selecting the best logo, or in collecting and analyzing the survey results, let me know.

Now it's your turn to practice. Read the situation for each of the following five situations, analyze the ineffective document, and use the questions to guide you as you analyze how to revise to improve the documents. Finally, compare your revision to the one provided. Of course, they won't be exact, but were you able to apply the basic strategies discussed?

Routine Inquiry

Situation: Your company is trying to improve its merchandise return procedure and wants input from customers who have recently returned merchandise.

Poor Example:

Subject: Questions

As you recall, you recently returned merchandise to us. We sincerely hope that this transaction was satisfactory. In fact, we are in the process of making changes that will insure that such transactions are more favorably handled.

We would like the answers for some questions about your experiences returning merchandise to us. We'd like to know if you were served promptly and courteously and whether the adjustment was satisfactory and in accordance with your wishes. Also, we need to know whether or not the salesperson offered assistance to you in selecting other merchandise.

You may write your comments on the form provided, and return it in the enclosed addressed, stamped envelope. If you prefer, go to our website at www.williams.com and give us your answers. We thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Before you revise, think about the following aspects:

- What about the subject line? It doesn't give the reader any idea of what the questions are about.
- How many questions are in that inquiry document? Look carefully. If you said it contains no questions, you are correct. It has hints of questions, such as "We'd like to know," but no exact questions.
- Now, even if you count the hints, how many intended questions is the writer asking? Two, three, four? That's part of the problem—determining the exact number of questions is difficult.
- Next, what is the reader benefit? What does the reader get from taking her time to answer these questions?
- Thank you in advance (what a presumptuous ending)—the writer is assuming we will respond.

Now revise it. Then compare/contrast your revision to the one below.

Routine Inquiry Revision:

Subject: Inquiry about Experience Returning Merchandise

Will you please help us to serve you better by answering the following questions.

When you returned merchandise at our store recently:

- 1. Were you served promptly and courteously?*
- 2. Was the adjustment satisfactory?*
- 3. Did the salesperson offer to assist you in selecting other merchandise?*

Please write your answers and any other comments you may wish to make about the service of the store on the provided form, and return it in the enclosed stamped, addressed envelope. If you prefer, go to our website at www.williams.com and give us your answers.

Your honest answers will help us to give you the best service possible.

As you compare/contrast your version with the revision provided, ask yourself these questions:

- Did your new subject line identify what the questions are about?
- Are the questions specific and clear?
- Is it reader focused? Notice specifically the opening and closing. Do they include the reader benefit of better service? That's why we want answers, so that our customers will receive better service.

Routine Response

Situation: Now you are the customer who received the inquiry about the service you received when returning merchandise and you decide to reply.

Poor Example:

I received your letter about the service I received when I returned merchandise last week. You asked me to tell you about my experience. I'm glad you asked. I was upset that the salesperson wouldn't give me a refund without a receipt—all I got was an in-store credit. She kept telling me that that procedure was company policy. So, no the adjustment wasn't satisfactory. She did tell me some similar items that were on sale for which I could apply my in-store credit. I also had to wait in line for about ten minutes; only two service desk people were available around 2 o'clock, which is probably one of your busiest times of the day. I suggest you have more personnel available.

Before you revise, think about the following aspects:

If you worked for the company receiving this response, you would probably feel a little defensive, and you would have to wade through the wordy opening and rambling answers.

Now revise it—making it meet all the strategies for a routine response. Then compare/contrast your revision to the one below.

Routine Response Revision:

Here are the answers to your questions about my recent service when I returned a pair of trousers and a blender—the trousers were the incorrect size for my son and the person for whom the blender was a gift already had one.

- 1. My wait in line was approximately ten minutes; two service desk employees were available when I was there about 2 o'clock. Approximately six customers were in line the entire time I was there.*
- 2. My customer service employee explained to me that since I didn't have a receipt with me, company policy was that I could get only an in-store credit. Receiving a refund would have made me a more satisfied customer. I inquired about exceptions to that company policy and why that was company policy, but no reason was given and no exception was offered.*
- 3. The rep did tell me about some similar items that were on sale for which I could apply my in-store credit. I immediately checked out the suggestions and did use part of the credit on another pair of trousers.*

I appreciate that you value customer input to improve your customers' return experiences.

Notice these key points: This revision still identifies the concerns you have about the less-than-acceptable service. However, the reader quickly sees the three key issues and the facts, rather than an emotional response, which makes the overall tone much more positive.

Both responses contain the same basic information, but the wording and the format make a huge difference in the reader reaction to the messages.

Good News

Situation: You received notice that one of your customers received a shipment of defective products, and the customer wants replacement items. You immediately investigated the situation and found that the seals on the devices were not installed correctly, they leaked during shipment, and you will send a replacement shipment. Here's a possible adjustment-grant (good news) message.

Poor Example:

Subject: Defective Shipment Complaint

We have received your claim reporting that our shipment of medical devices arrived in badly damaged condition. We regret the inconvenience caused you and can understand your unhappiness. Please accept our apologies.

Following our standard practice, we investigated the situation thoroughly. Apparently the fault was in our failure to check the seals carefully. As a result, fluid escaped in transit, damaging the exteriors of the devices. We have taken corrective measures to assure that future shipments will be more carefully checked.

I am pleased to report that we are sending a replacement order. It will be shipped today by Crimson Line Motor Freight.

Again, we regret any inconvenience.

Before you revise, think about the following aspects:

- What about the subject line? Does it give good news or remind the reader of the bad situation?
- Is the focus on the writer or the reader?
- Is the tone positive or negative?
- Do the apologies help?
- Where is the good news? Direct or indirect order?

Now revise it—making it meet all the strategies for a claim letter. Then compare/contrast your revision to the one below.

Good News Revision:

Subject: Replacement of Medical Device #2380 Shipment

Your replacement order of medical device #2380 will arrive Saturday. It was shipped today by Crimson Line Motor Freight.

Because we want all of our products to arrive in perfect condition, we investigated the returned shipment thoroughly. Even though each device goes through three checks during production, a fourth final check of the seals has already been started. This additional check is being taken to help assure that all future shipments will meet your and our high expectations.

These devices will continue to be a big seller for your company as they were just ranked Class 2 by the FDA. If you need another shipment, contact us at 201-333-4456 (ext. 23) or ourcompany@medartificial.org. You will receive the shipment within 24 hours.

Bad News

Situation: A potential customer has asked for samples of your product: artificial flowers and trees. Because of rising production costs and shipping costs, you have to give that potential customer the bad news that free samples are not available. But you also want to get the reader to buy from you.

Poor Example:

REFUSAL OF REQUEST FOR FREE ARTIFICIAL TREE SAMPLES

We are sorry to inform you that we do not give away free samples of artificial trees. If you want to try the product, you will have to pay for it.

The cost for the item you requested is \$125, plus \$20 for postage and handling. We do give qualified companies (yours qualifies) 10% off if an order totals \$300 or more.

We also have other items such as polish for artificial leaves and vases that you might be interested in purchasing. An order form is enclosed. Again, we are sorry that we have to charge you.

Before you revise, think about the following aspects:

- What about the subject line? Do you want the reader to know the answer before reading any of the letter?
- Should the direct or indirect strategy be used? Which is used in this letter?
- Is the focus on the writer or the reader?
- Is the tone positive?
- What is emphasized (first and last)?
- How well is the secondary purpose met—to make the reader understand the reason for the bad news and to accept it?

Now revise it—making it meet all the strategies for a bad news letter. Then compare/contrast your revision to the one below.

Bad News Revision:

YOUR INTEREST IN POPULAR ARTIFICIAL PLANTS

The artificial tree and plants that you requested are very popular as evidenced by the high sales of these products. These products were rated #1 by Landscaping, Inc., as the most lifelike artificial plants on the market.

Keeping the costs of these popular trees, as well as all other decorating supplies we sell, as low as possible for you and all our customers is our goal. Although your account will be charged \$125 for each tree (plus \$20 for shipping and handling), landscapers who use these trees recommend them highly for their natural appearance, color-retaining quality, and easy maintenance. Your company qualifies for a 10% discount if your order totals \$300 or more.

Enclosed is a price list of a variety of available artificial products and supplies, such as polish and vases. Use the attached order form, order online at flowers@ourcompany.com, or call 1-800-500-7825 to place an order. All orders will arrive within seven days.

Persuasion

Situation: A portion of your company's parking lot is going to be used for an outdoor picnic space for employees next to the company building. This picnic area will reduce the number of available parking spaces by 50 (and the lot is already being used to its maximum), which means that not all employees will be able to park in the lot. So your goal is to try to persuade more employees to carpool.

Poor Example:

Subject: Not enough parking spaces, so carpool!

Once work on the outdoor picnic area begins, the parking lot will lose 50 of its spaces. We know that the current parking lot is full now. Once those 50 spaces are no longer available, not everyone's car will be able to park in the lot. You'll need to carpool so we'll have enough spaces for all employees. Let us know by next Friday who is going to carpool, so we can give you a special permit that will allow you to park in an area reserved for carpoolers.

Before you revise, think about the following aspects:

- What about the subject line? What type of reaction will the reader probably have?
- Is the focus on the writer or the reader?
- Is the tone positive?
- Where are the persuasion elements?
- Direct or indirect order? Is the AIDA obvious?

Now revise it—making it meet all the strategies for a persuasive message. Then compare/contrast your revision to the one below.

Persuasive Revision:

Subject: Want a special, front-row parking space?

Ever wish you could have a reserved parking spot? That wish has the potential of becoming reality! Beginning Monday, parking rows A, B, C, and D will be reserved for certain employees.

As you know, the northeast corner of the parking lot is being used for the new employee outdoor picnic area. This new picnic area is one of the requested "perks" from our last employee survey. It will be ready by midmonth. The new picnic area will, however, remove 50 of the available parking spaces. More employees' carpooling will help ensure that all vehicles have a space. To encourage carpooling, the first four rows (A, B, C, D) will be reserved exclusively for those vehicles with three or more employees.

The names of employees who live within a 5-miles radius of you are available on the company intranet. Let HR know as soon as you have a carpooling group, and you will receive a special hangtag to park in the reserved rows.

Space for everyone to park, reduced gas expenses, less wear and tear on your vehicle, and a reserved parking space—carpooling is a win/win situation.