

# Chapter 5

## Bad-News Messages

# Bad-news messages

- Plan the bad-news message.
- Compose a message that rejects an idea.
- Compose a message that refuses a favor.
- Compose a message that refuses a claim.
- Compose a bad-news announcement.

# Planning the Bad-News Message

- Your purpose in writing a bad-news message is twofold:
  1. To say “no” or to convey bad news ?
  2. To retain the reader’s goodwill
- To achieve these goals:
  1. Communicate your message politely, clearly, and firmly.
  2. Show the reader you have seriously considered the request.

# Organizing to Suit Your Audience

- 1. The reader's needs, expectations, and personality-and the writer's relationship with the reader-determine the content and organization of a bad-news message.
- 2. To determine whether to use the direct or indirect organizational plan, take your cue from the sender's original message.
- ◆ Use the direct plan when responding to a routine request.
- ◆ Use the indirect plan when answering a persuasive request.
- ◆ Messages written to one's supervisor are typically direct.

- 3. A direct message presents the major idea (the bad news) first, follows with any needed explanation, and concludes with a friendly closing.
- 4. An indirect message emphasizes the reasons for the bad news first, rather than beginning with the bad news itself. Again, follow up with a friendly closing.

# Prefer the direct plan when

- Writing to superiors
- The bad news involves a small routine matter, and the reader is not likely to be emotionally involved.
- The reader prefers directness
- The reader expects a “no” response
- The writer wants to emphasize the bad news
- The reader-writer relationship is either extremely close or extremely poor.

- Direct messages often are shorter than indirect messages because the direct plan typically is used for simpler situations.
- A direct message begins with the major idea (the bad news), followed by an explanation and then a friendly close.

# Presenting bad news directly

- Present a brief rationale along with the bad news.
- Follow with needed explanation.
- End with a friendly, off-the-topic closing.



- **Not:** The annual company picnic originally scheduled for August 3 at Riverside Park has been canceled.
- **But:** Because ongoing construction at Riverside Park might present safety hazards to our employees and their families, the annual company picnic originally scheduled for August 3 has been canceled.
  
- **Not:** Our departmental compliance report will be late next month.(too blunt)
- **Not:** I am pleased to announce that our departmental compliance report will be submitted on March 15. (too positive)
- **But:** The extra time required to resolve the Baton Rouge refinery problem means that our departmental compliance report will be submitted on March 15 rather than on March 1.



# Discussion questions

1. Which is less desirable: an impatient reader or angry reader?
2. Why is a poorly written refusal worse than an unsatisfactory oral one?

Source: Adapted from: <http://www.stanford.edu/~harryg/protected/secured6/Chapter10.htm>, accessed 10/1/07.



# Possible answers

1. If the receiver becomes impatient while reading a well-written explanation, that impatience is less damaging than would be the anger that often results from encountering bad news in the first sentence.
2. A poorly written letter can be worse than an unsatisfactory oral response because the receiver has the “document on file.”

# Prefer the indirect plan when

- Writing to colleagues and subordinates
- Writing to someone outside the organization
- The reader prefers the indirect approach
- You don't know the reader

In an indirect plan, you are emphasizing the reasons for the bad news, not the bad news itself. Therefore you should present the reasons first and then present the negative news.

# Presenting bad news indirectly

- Begin with a buffer.
- Justify your decision.
- Present the bad news.
- Close on a positive note.

- An indirect message should begin with an opening buffer that lessens the impact of bad news and helps establish or strengthen the reader-writer relationship.
  - An effective opening buffer for a bad-news message will be
    - ◆ neutral
- Not neutral:** Stores like Parker Brothers benefit from our policy of not providing in-store demonstrators for our line of microwave ovens.
- Misleading:** Your tenth-anniversary sale would be a great opportunity for us to promote our products.

- ◆ Relevant

**Irrelevant:** Our new apartment-sized microwave oven means that young couples, retirees, and students can enjoy the convenience of microwave cooking.

- ◆ Supportive

**Unsupportive:** You must realize how expensive it would be to supply an in-house demonstrator for anniversary sales such as yours.

- ◆ interesting

**Obvious:** We have received your letter requesting an in-store demonstrator for your upcoming tenth-anniversary.

- ◆ Short

**Too long:** As you may remember, for many years we provided in-store demonstrators for our line of microwave ovens. We were happy to do this because we felt that customers needed to see the spectacular results of our new browning element, which made microwaved food look as if it had just come from a regular oven. We discontinued this practice five years ago because ...



# Types of buffers

- Agreement

I agree with you that full-color visual aids are more effective and attractive than black-and-white ones.

- Appreciation

Thanks, Tony, for taking the initiative to research the feasibility of purchasing a color printer for our training department.

# Types of buffers

- Compliment

Congratulations, Tony, on the 95 percent approval rating from our seminar participants. That's a first for our department.

- Facts

Last week's approval of our Westinghouse proposal will mean a dramatic increase in the number of technical seminars we'll sponsor next year.

# Types of buffers

- General principle

I believe in furnishing our trainers with the tools that they need to fulfill our company's training needs.

- Good news

The new Barco projection system that I approved yesterday will enable us to produce multimedia training sessions for the first time.

# Types of buffers

- Understanding

I want you to know that I support your efforts to increase the effectiveness of our training mission.

# Justifying Your Decision

- You have reached your decision by analyzing all the relevant information. Explaining your analysis honestly will help convince the reader that your decision is reasonable. The major part of your message should focus on the reasons and reader benefits, rather than on the bad news. Show the reader that your decision was a business decision, not a personal one. But do not hide behind company policy: explain it.

- **Not:** Company policy prohibits our providing an in-store demonstrator for your tenth-anniversary sale.
- **But:** A survey of our dealers three years ago indicated they felt the space taken up by in-store demonstrators and the resulting traffic problems were not worth the effort; they were also concerned about the legal liability of having someone cooking in their stores.

# Giving the Bad News

- If you have done a convincing job of explaining the reasons, the bad news should come as no surprise. It should appear to be logical and reasonable.
- 1. Use positive or neutral language. Stress what you can do, not what you cannot do.
- 2. Subordinate the bad news by placing it in the middle of a paragraph with another discussion of your reasons.
- 3. Use impersonal language.
- 4. Do not apologize for your decision.
- 5. Do not be evasive.

# Giving the bad news

- To enable us to have the funds needed to finance our move into multimedia presentations, we're delaying all other capital equipment purchases for six months. These presentations are projected directly from the computer itself, thereby avoiding the need to print color transparencies.





# Discussion question

Roy Jacobson suggests that three basic qualities should be used in delivering bad news: honesty, sensitivity, and humanity, as indicated by these guidelines:

- Be as honest as you can be.
- Be sensitive to the sound of the words.
- Speak person-to-person.

*From your perspective, which one is the most important? Why?*

Source: Adapted from: Jacobsen, R., "Delivering Bad News," *The Editorial Eye*, Alexandria, VA, Vol. 29, No. 2), 2006.

# Closing on a positive note

- Best wishes

Best wishes, Tony, as you continue your efforts to strengthen the training mission of our organization.

- Counterproposal

To help ensure the timely printing of your transparencies, I would be happy to authorize courier service to and from the print shop until we're able to consider this matter further.

# Closing on a positive note

- Other sources of help

In the meantime, Marc Dye has indicated that we can use the Kodak color copier in the marketing department for making one or two color copies at a time.

- Resale or subtle sales promotion

Comments that I hear from my colleagues in other departments reinforce my own belief that the training department contributes substantially to the overall success of our firm. Thanks for your help, Tony.



# Quiz

What are the four elements of a bad news message that uses the indirect approach?

- a. Bad news, apology, explanation, and close.
- b. Buffer, apology, bad news, and explanation.
- c. Buffer, explanation, bad news, and close.
- d. Bad news, alternative, apology, and close.



# Quiz

What are the four elements of a bad news message that uses the indirect approach?

- a. Bad news, apology, explanation, and close.
- b. Buffer, apology, bad news, and explanation.
- c. Buffer, explanation, bad news, and close.  
(correct)
- d. Bad news, alternative, apology, and close.



# Quiz

What is the goal of a buffer statement in a bad news message?

- a. To establish or strengthen the reader-writer relationship.
- b. To apologize for the bad news.
- c. To summarize the bad news.
- d. To hint at the bad news.



# Quiz

What is the goal of a buffer statement in a bad news message?

- a. To establish or strengthen the reader-writer relationship. (correct)
- b. To apologize for the bad news.
- c. To summarize the bad news.
- d. To hint at the bad news.

# Key term

- buffer 缓冲



# Bad-News Replies

- **Rejecting an Idea**

One of the most difficult bad-news messages to write is one that rejects someone's idea; this is because of the time and energy the person put into developing the proposal.

1. The key here is to educate the reader by carefully explaining the reasons for the rejection.
2. The objective of all bad-news messages that are written using the indirect organizational plan is to persuade the reader that the decision you have made is reasonable.

在你4月3日的备忘录中，启发了我考虑员工们的停车习惯。我原先并不知道我们的员工开的汽车种类有这么多。

外国制造的汽车日益受欢迎，使得管理层意识到我们要利用这个市场。威瑞德总裁下达了一项任务，研究如何将公司的电子系统推向亚洲的汽车制造商，包括福特公司。

我们成功进军国际市场意味着我们员工开的外国制造的汽车会由纽顿提供零部件，因此，继续让这些车停在我们所有的停车场对公司有利。

你的信让我想到，詹森，我们可能错失向各公司总部参观的人推销产品的机会。请你想一个能够显示我们员工支持公司所销售产品的有意识的行动。希望在5月3日，我能收到关于你的想法的备忘录，这样我就可以将这个计划包含在明年的营销活动中。

Your April 3 memo certainly enlightened me regarding the automobile habits of our employees. I had no idea that our workers drive such a variety of models.

The increasing popularity of foreign-made vehicles recently led management to conclude that we should consider taking advantage of this expanding market. President Wrede has appointed a task force to determine how we might also promote our electrical systems to Asian automakers, as well as to Ford.

Our successful push into the international market will mean that many of the foreign-made vehicles our employees drive will, in fact, be supplied with Newton components. Thus, our firm will benefit from the continuing presence of these cars in all our lots.

Your memo got me to thinking, Jenson, that we might be missing an opportunity to promote our products to headquarters visitors. Would you please develop some type of awareness campaign that shows our employees support the products we sell. I would appreciate having a memo with your ideas by May 3 so that I might include this project in next year's marketing campaign.

# In-class writing: Refusing an Idea--Oversized Dressing Rooms

- You are Rebecca Chavez and you certainly appreciate Robert Kilcline's memo recommending oversized dressing rooms for your new store in Fashion Square Mall. Robert has always been very customer-conscious, a trait you try to instill and nurture in all your employees. After checking with the facility planner for the new store, you find that the Fashion Square Mall management has only a certain amount of space available for your store. Thus, any space taken up by the dressing rooms would have to be at the expense of the public store areas.
- Write a memo to Robert, giving him this information. Perhaps he can suggest other ways to enhance customer service.

- **Refusing a Favor**

- 1. If someone tries to persuade you to do a “big” favor that you cannot do, you probably should present your refusal indirectly.
- 2. Most requests for favors are routine, and a routine request should receive a routine written response following the direct organizational plan. Buffer the bad news somewhat by providing a reasonable rationale for declining.

薄，旺达：

你介绍的执行官驻扎计划非常吸引人，使得我也想申请参加这个计划。

但为了使我有选择，我希望你另选他人在委员会任职。

既然我自己可能会是一个申请者，我想我不大合适推荐委员会成员人选。

到7月1日我就会知道我的工作量是否适合申请这个项目。如果我没有申请的话，我到时会联系你，看看是否能帮上什么忙，帮助计划取得圆满成功。

彼得

彼得·盖茨 (pgates@kempman)

西部地区经理

Hi, Wanda:

You did such a good job of explaining the merits of our new Executive-in-Residence program that I've tentatively decided to apply for the program myself. To keep my options open, then, I would ask you to select someone else to serve on this committee.

Since I may be an applicant myself, I believe it would be inappropriate for me to suggest an alternative committee member.

I will know by July 1 whether my workload will allow me to apply. If I decide not to apply, I'll be back in touch with you to see if there is some way I can assist you in getting this important program off to a successful start.

Peter

Peter Gates (pgates@kempman)

Western Regional Manager

818-555-3854

# In-class writing: Refusing a Favor-Summer Internship

- Assume the role of vice president of operations for Kolor Kosmetics, a small manufacturer in Biloxi, Mississippi.
- One of your colleagues from the local chamber of commerce, Dr. Andrea T. Mazzi, has written asking whether your firm can provide a summer internship in your department for her son Peter, a college sophomore who is interested in a manufacturing career. Kolor Kosmetics has no provisions for temporary summer employees and does not currently operate an intern ship program. Further, the factory shuts down for a two-week vacation every July.
- Write Dr. Mazzi to let her know this information. Perhaps there are other ways that her son can gain firsthand experience in manufacturing during the

summer



- **Refusing a Claim**
- 1. The indirect plan almost always is used when refusing an adjustment request, because the reader is emotionally involved in the situation. If you refuse the claim immediately, you risk losing the customer's goodwill.
- 2. The tone of your refusal should convey respect and consideration for the customer, even when the customer is at fault.

- 3. When explaining the reasons for denying the claim, do not accuse or lecture the reader. At the same time, do not appear to accept responsibility for the problem if the customer is at fault.

**Not:** The reason the handles ripped off your Samsonite luggage is that you overloaded it. The tag on the luggage clearly states that you should use the luggage only for clothing, with a maximum of 40 pounds. However, our engineers concluded that you had put at least 65 pounds of items in the luggage.

**But:** On receiving your piece of Samsonite luggage, we sent it to our testing department. The engineers there found stretch marks on the leather and a frayed nylon stitching cord. They concluded that such wear could have been caused only by contents weighing substantially more than the 40-pound maximum weight that is stated on the luggage tag. Such use is beyond the "normal wear and tear" covered in our warranty.

- 4. In impersonal, neutral language, explain why you are denying the claim.
- 5. If you can, offer a compromise.
- 6. If possible, somewhere in the letter include a subtle pitch for resale.

亲爱的阿尔宾先生

主题：关于 126 次航班的进一步信息

如果我们的顾客在长途旅行时，不得不开车而不是乘坐北方航空，我们并没有赚钱。当这种事情发生时，我们就要找出原因。

由于天气原因，原定于晚上 8 点起飞的 126 次航班不得不取消了。我们要求客户留在登机区。那些这样做的旅客重新预定了 3321 次航班，这趟航班于晚上 9:15 分起飞，只比原先的航班迟了 75 分钟。在这种情况下，我们能够拒绝对任何不可退款的机票退款。

因为您经常乘坐飞机，我已经让我的部门将您列入我们的邮寄名单，这样您就可以免费获得我们的航班时刻表。信封内有目前的航班时刻表。从现在起，您能够准确知道每一个北方航空的航班起飞和降落时间了。

诚挚地

*Madelyn Masarani*

梅德林·马萨拉尼

服务代表

Dear Mr. Arbin

Subject: Further Information About Flight 126

We make no money when our customers are forced to take long trips by car rather than by flying Northern Airlines, and when that happens, we want to find out why.

Flight 126 was scheduled to depart at 8 p.m. but was canceled because of bad weather. Passengers were asked to remain in the area. Those who did were rebooked on Flight 3321, which departed at 9:15 p.m. and arrived at 10:40 p.m., just 75 minutes later than the scheduled arrival. Under these circumstances, the ticket agent was correct in disallowing any refund on non-refundable tickets.

Because you're a frequent traveler, I've asked our scheduling department to add you to the mailing list to receive a free subscription to our quarterly Saginaw flight schedule. A copy of the current schedule is enclosed. From now on, you'll know exactly when every Northern flight arrives at and departs from Tri-Cities Airport.

Sincerely

*Madelyn Masarani*

- **In-class writing -Refusing a Claim-No Refund**

You are the fulfillment representative at Paperbacks by Post. Roberto Velazquez, a customer, has written to request that you take back a book he received three months ago. The problem is not the book itself, which he read and enjoyed, but the value for the money. He complains that the book is too short (162 pages) to justify the amount he paid (\$10.95). Velazquez wants his money back, and he also wants the book club to refund the cost of shipping the book back.

This is the fourth time in five months that Velazquez has returned a book. Each time he had a different complaint-once he didn't like the cover illustration, another time he found the language offensive-and you agreed to send him his refunds. At this point, however, you believe that he is simply reading the books and then making up an excuse to avoid paying for them.

You decide not to refund his money on this occasion (the number of pages and price of the book were both clearly noted in the announcement Velazquez received before the book was shipped). You also decide to cancel his member-

# Bad News About Normal Operations

- 1. When the news is going to have little or no effect on the audience, give it directly-in the first sentence-and follow it with details.
- 2. Where an explanation is necessary, you can use the direct organizational plan or the indirect organizational plan.
- 3. When the news is going to have an adverse effect on the audience, do not hurry the discussion.
- 4. Associate your readers with good news; separate them from bad news.

感谢大家的努力，总裁亚当斯会通知销售额截止到6月30日为止增长了13%。七个部门中，有六个达到或者超过了他们今年的份额，很好地展现了布罗克巴斯特的精神。

虽然我们的销售额增长了13%，但是我们的支出也增长了很多。额外福利，尤其是保险，是最大的因素。去年，医疗保险费用增长了23%，在过去的三年里增加了58%。

为了继续给公司员工及其家属提供所需的保险，也为了控制成本，我们分析了每一种福利的使用和成本。去年，有89%的员工使用了健康保险。显然，这个福利对你们很重要，因此对我们也很重要。并且，虽然只有6%的员工用了医疗保险，但是让员工不用付高昂的医疗费用也是我们关心的头等大事。

另一方面，只有9%的员工用了牙科保险，而牙科保险占了保险费的19%。我们相信这部分资金能够更好地用来给所有员工支付日益攀升的医疗费用。因此，从1月1日起，保险项目只包含健康保险和主要的医疗保险。在12月31日前，所有的牙科保险费用均可报销。

7月28日下午2点到3点，福利办公室会召开公开论坛，征集你们对员工福利各个方面的意见。你们的参与能让我们更好地为员工及家属提供服务。



Thanks to you, President Adams will announce a 13 percent increase in sales for the year that ended June 30. Six of the seven divisions met or exceeded their sales quotas for the year. What an example of the Blockbuster spirit!

Our pleasure at the 13 percent increase in sales is somewhat tempered by a major increase in expenditures. Fringe benefits, especially insurance, were the largest factor. Medical insurance costs increased 23 percent last year and have risen 58 percent in the past three years.

To continue providing needed coverage for our employees and their families and still hold down costs, we've analyzed the use and cost of each benefit. Last year, 89 percent of you used your health insurance. Clearly, this benefit is important to you and, therefore, to us. Similarly, although only 6 percent used your major medical insurance, protecting our employees from devastating health-care costs remains a top priority for us.

On the other hand, only 9 percent of you used dental coverage; yet dental insurance represented 19 percent of our insurance costs. We believe the funds now being used for dental care for a small minority of our employees can better be used to pay the escalating costs of medical coverage for all employees. Thus, effective January 1, insurance programs will include only health and major-medical coverage. All requests for reimbursement for dental bills submitted on or before December 31 will be paid at the normal rates.

The Benefits Office will hold an open forum on July 28 from 2 to 3 p.m. in the auditorium to solicit your views on all areas of employee benefits. Your input will enable us to continue to provide our family of employees the kind of protection they deserve.

# In-class writing: Work-team

## Communication-A Slow Economy-No Bonus

- You are the manager of a fitness equipment manufacturing plant called Muscles Galore located in Gary, Indiana. The plant has been in operation for seven years. Over the years your employees have been very productive, and sales have been high. Therefore, Muscles Galore has been able to give generous holiday bonuses (usually more than \$1,000) to all of its employees for the last five years.
- This year, however, because of a slow economy, you will not be able to offer the holiday bonus. Although the workers have been very productive, fitness equipment sales are down about 15 percent from last year. Your projections indicate that the economy is recovering, and sales should be up about 20 percent next year. If the projections are accurate, you should be able to offer the bonus again next year.
- Write a memo to your employees letting them know the bad news. Add any additional details to make your message complete.

# Bad News About the Organization

- 1. If your organization is experiencing serious problems, your employees, customers, and stock-holders should hear the news from you-not from newspaper accounts or rumors.
- 2. Where the problem is extremely serious, the company's public relations department probably will issue a news release.
- 3. Be sure that the overall tone of the letter is appropriate and that individual sentences cannot be misinterpreted if they are lifted out of context.

- 4. Choose your words with care. Be positive.
- 5. If the reader already has learned about the situation from other sources, use the direct organizational plan. Confirm the bad news quickly, and immediately begin to explain the situation.
- 6. If the reader is hearing the news for the first time, use the indirect organizational plan. Open with a buffer and then stress the most positive aspects of the situation.

亲爱的洛夫蒂斯女士：

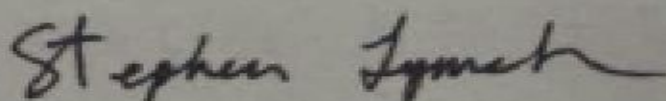
12月5日下午3点，太平洋实验室将在公园酒店发布在控制生育方面的重要进展，这将为 Crosslanes 药店提供巨大的商机。我很高兴届时您能参加。

和其他的科学突破一样，我们的新产品引起了媒体的广泛关注。已经有 12 家报纸和电视台希望报道这个事件。我们欢迎媒体的报道并且相信这样能够使消费者放心购买。

所以在那天，我们不会在公园酒店外采取任何措施阻止任何的游行。可能一些团体将进行游行抗议，分发传单。只要他们采取和平的方式，他们完全可以这么做。我们也有权利举办会议，不受任何干扰，到时现场会有很多工作人员确保一切顺利地运行。我们希望您能带邀请函原件（或者这封信）来确定身份。

我们期待展示我们的员工五年研究的成果。这个产品安全可靠、价格合理，相信会在您的药店里大卖的。

真诚地，



斯蒂芬·林奇，总裁

Dear Ms. Loftis:

The breakthrough in over-the-counter birth control that Pacific Laboratories will announce at 3 p.m. on December 5 at the Park Inn will present a substantial marketing opportunity for Crosslanes Pharmacies. I'm pleased you can be with us for the event.

Like many scientific breakthroughs, our new product is generating quite a bit of media interest. Already, 12 newspapers and television stations have requested permission to cover this announcement. We welcome such coverage and believe that an open discussion will lead to more informed decisions by consumers.

In the same spirit, we have taken no steps to prevent any demonstrations outside the Park Inn on that day. It is likely that some groups will march and distribute leaflets. So long as they do so peacefully, they are perfectly within their rights. We also are within our rights to hold a meeting without disruption, and there will be adequate security personnel on hand to ensure that everything runs smoothly. We do ask that you bring your original invitation (or this letter) to identify yourself.

We look forward to showing off the efforts of five years of research by our staff. The safety, convenience, and price of this product will make it a very popular item on your pharmacy shelves.

# In-class Writing: Bad-News Announcement-No Renewal

- Assume the role of Gene Harley, the leasing manager of Northern Plaza. You have decided not to renew the lease of T-shirts Plus, which operates a tiny T-shirt decorating outlet in the mall. Three times in the past 13 months, the store's employees have left their heat-transfer machinery switched on after closing. Each time, the smoke activated the mall's smoke alarms and brought the fire department to the mall during the late-night hours. Although no damage has occurred, your insurance agent warns that the mall's rates will rise if this situation continues.
- The lease that T-shirts Plus signed five years ago specifies that either party can decide not to renew. All that is required is written notification to the other party at least 90 days in advance of the yearly anniversary of the contract date. By writing this week, you will be providing adequate notice. Convey this information to the store's manager, Henry D. Curtis