

> SUMMARY

LO1 Plan a bad-news message.

When writing a bad-news message, your goal is to convey the bad news and, at the same time, maintain the reader's goodwill. Consider the communication context, audience, and media choice before writing your message.

LO2 Write components of a bad-news message.

As you begin drafting, decide how to organize the message based on the content, importance, reader's expectations, and your relationship with the reader. Explain the decision by focusing on the reasons and reader benefits. Deliver the news using positive or neutral language, and close on a friendly, helpful note.

LO3 Write a bad-news reply.

When rejecting someone's idea, tact is especially important. Devote most of your message to presenting reasons based on business, not personal, beliefs. Most requests for favors are routine and should receive a routine response written in the direct organizational plan. Typically use the indirect plan when refusing a customer's request. The tone of your refusal must convey respect and consideration for the customer, even when the customer is at fault. When rejecting a job offer, maintain professionalism and consider the relationships you developed during the selection process. As a manager, follow up with everyone who interviewed for an open position. You may use a form rejection letter unless your employer has a different process.

LO4 Write a bad-news announcement.

Announcements of bad news may be either internal (addressed to employees) or external (addressed to those outside the organization) and may be about normal operations, the organization, or jobs. When people are affected personally, more time and care needs to be put into crafting a message that treats the reader with respect and dignity.

LO5 Give and receive constructive performance feedback.

Telling employees what they could do differently gives them the chance to improve their job performance. Use a direct approach and allow for a conversation in which the employee has time and space to react. When receiving feedback, try to stay open-minded and view the feedback as a good learning opportunity, even if it's painful or you don't, at first, agree with what you hear.

> EXERCISES

1. Analyze a situation when you received bad news.

In groups of three or four, discuss a time when you received bad news. This could be anything work related or personal that is appropriate for you to discuss in class. What communication context is relevant to the message (organizational culture, ethical responsibilities, legal requirements, level of urgency, and so on)? What is important about the audience that should have been considered? What medium (or media) was used to convey the message?

Given this background information, did you find the message effective? Why or why not? If not, what would have been a better approach?

2. Analyze an audience to receive bad news.

For the situation you discussed in Exercise 1, complete an audience analysis using the questions from Chapter 4: Who is the audience? What is your relationship with the

LO1 Plan a bad-news message.

audience? How will the audience likely react? What does the audience already know? What is unique about the audience?

If these questions had been considered, how might they have influenced how the communication was handled?

3. Consider media choices for bad-news message.

Discuss these situations in small groups, and decide what medium to use for each message. There are no perfect answers; just listen to each other's perspective and try to come to consensus.

- If you managed a restaurant and had to tell 18 employees that the restaurant would be closed tonight because of allegations of food poisoning, how would you deliver the news?
- If you lay off a manager and his or her entire department of eight people who work in four different countries, how would you deliver the news to the employees?
- If an employee works in California, and you (the manager) work in New York, how would you tell her that you're leaving the company?
- If you were a manager visiting a client in Qatar and learned from Human Resources that one of your employees in Boston was hospitalized, how would you communicate with the employee? How would you communicate with his coworkers?

LO2 Write components of a bad-news message.

4. Organize a bad-news message.

For the following situations, would you use a more direct or a more indirect organizational plan for a written message? When you choose an organizational plan, you're making assumptions about your readers and how they might react. Discuss your ideas in small groups.

- After three on-site job interviews, you decline an offer for a summer internship with an alumnus of your college.
- After meeting a CEO at an on-campus job fair, you decline an interview with the company because it is not in your hometown.
- You decline a lunch invitation from a college friend who works for a competitor.
- ✓ You decline an employee's vacation request because he wants to be away during your busy season.
- You inform a supplier that you do not plan to renew your contract.
- You inform customers that a product has been discontinued.

5. Practice writing buffers.

For the situations in Exercise 4 for which you chose a more indirect plan, write a buffer statement. Then compare your buffers with those of two other students. Which work best and why?

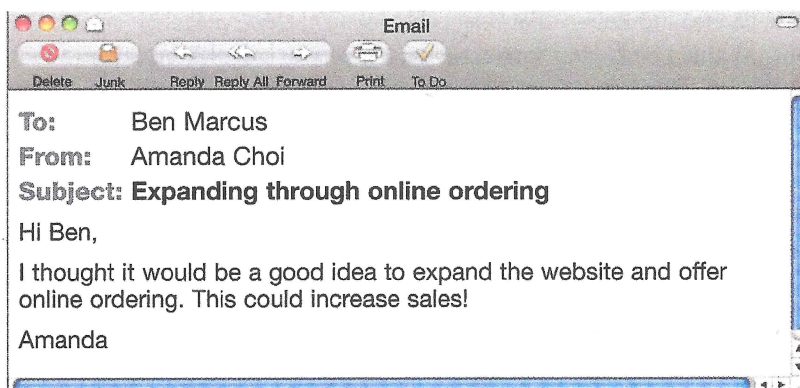
6. Rewrite a layoff email.

When Microsoft sent an email to employees announcing layoffs, the company was criticized for using an indirect style.²⁶ Analyze the message and read a reporter's critique at nym.ag/WjXnvU. Then, rewrite the email using a more direct style that employees might better receive.

7. Send an email rejecting an idea for online ordering.

Imagine that you run a local used bookstore, where you receive this email from a new employee:

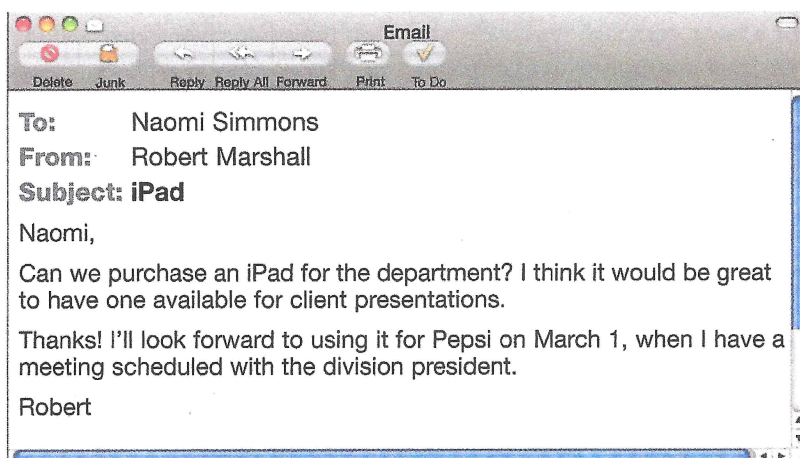
LO3 Write a bad-news reply.



Write an email response to this employee rejecting the suggestion. You can invent whatever rationale you'd like, and keep in mind that this employee did not put a lot of thought into the suggestion.

8. Write an email refusing an employee's request.²⁷

You manage the conventions department for a hotel, where you supervise an employee named Robert. Robert is responsible for meeting with companies that hold events at the hotel. This morning, you received the following email from Robert:



You won't be able to approve this request for the following reasons:

- You have no budget for this capital expense. It's possible to budget for this next year, but you're not sure an iPad just for client presentations would be worth the expense. You really don't see the point because you recently spent a lot on printing beautiful materials, which Robert takes to clients with him.
- Robert started work at your company only one month ago. Although you encourage ideas, you do not like Robert's presumptuous tone.
- Also, you'd like to encourage Robert to put more time and thought into his ideas. Although not a huge expense, an iPad for your department would need to be justified—and Robert would benefit from supporting his suggestions more convincingly.
- His preliminary marketing plan was due two days ago, but he hasn't submitted it yet. You'd like him to focus on his current responsibilities as a priority.
- On the other hand, you hired Robert because of his strong work background and excellent skills, and you *hope* he will have a long career with your company. Also, the hiring process was lengthy and expensive, and you have no desire to go through it again. You don't want to discourage him.

Write an email to Robert that rejects his request. Next, exchange emails with another student. At this point, your instructor may give you more information about Robert's perspective. If you were Robert, how would you react to the email? Provide feedback to the original writer.

9. Write an email denying a request for a salary advance.

Imagine that you own a website design firm, and an employee asks you for a favor: a one-month salary advance. This is one of your best employees, someone who has worked with you for more than five years, and you know she's buying a house. But you cannot advance her the money for these reasons:

- It's against your company policy (according to your employee handbook).
- You want to be fair to everyone and cannot accommodate others' requests.
- You don't want to set a precedent for this employee.
- You don't believe it's your responsibility.

Decide how you'll organize the email and which of these reasons you will present to the employee. You don't need to include everything unless you believe it will explain your rationale and maintain the employee's goodwill.

10. Write an email rejecting an exception.

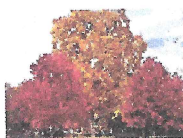
Imagine that you work for a *Fortune* 500 investment bank. It's two weeks before the annual Take Our Sons and Daughters to Work Day, and one of your employees asks you for a favor. Although it's clearly stated on the company intranet and in the email reminder that employees may bring only two children to work, this employee wants to bring a third child.

The employee explains that his youngest child, Emanuel, has a strong interest in finance and would get a lot out of the experience of visiting you at work. He also wants to bring his two older children, who have participated for the past three years.

Acting as the HR Director for the investment bank, write an email denying the employee's request.

11. Write an email refusing a customer's request for a refund.

On Twitter, a Whole Foods customer posted this tweet:



bbkendel Barb Kendel
Whole Foods' salad bar made me sick! Was ill all afternoon
at work. Want \$9.59 back.
5 Jun

TWITTER.COM

As a representative for Whole Foods, you find this tweet and send the customer a direct message (DM). In your message, reject her request for a refund. You may invent your own rationale for the decision. Also try including a subtle sales promotion in your closing paragraph.

Exchange drafts with a partner in class and give each other feedback on your approach.

12. Write an email refusing a customer's request to waive a fee.

Imagine that you work for Bank of America's credit card division, and you're trying to resolve a complaint from a customer. Through an online form on the website, you receive a customer's message, requesting that the bank waive \$75 of overdraft fees accrued over the past three months.

Your policy doesn't require you to waive these fees, although you have for some customers. However, you deny this customer's request for two primary reasons:

- The customer had similar overdraft fees in the previous quarter, so the customer is aware of these fees.
 - The customer's account is overdue; a bill has not been paid in two months.
- Write an email to communicate your decision to the customer.

13. Decline a job offer.

Imagine that you interviewed for your dream job, but alas, you received an offer to be the supporting actor for a movie starring Jennifer Lawrence. You cannot pass up the opportunity. Write an email to the hiring manager turning down the job. Invent whatever details you would like.

14. Write a job rejection email—to yourself.

Think about a recent job for which you applied but weren't offered a position. If you received a generic or template rejection, write something more specific and personal. Even if you weren't the best candidate for the job, what would you have liked to have received from the employer?

15. Write a memo announcing employee layoffs.

You are the SVP of human resources for a financial software company that has 7,500 employees. The company has decided to sell AccountSoft, one of its major products. The software has suffered declining sales for the past two years, and it no longer fits with the new mission of the company, which is to sell to small businesses and individuals, rather than larger accounting firms (currently 95% of AccountSoft's buyers).

You will have individual conversations with employees who are affected by the layoffs, but first you advise the CEO to send an email to all employees to announce the decision to sell AccountSoft and to prepare employees for the downsizing and what will happen next.

As you write this memo for the CEO to send under his name, consider that not all employees from the AccountSoft division will be laid off. The sales and marketing staff (about 150 people) will be leaving the firm, but the software developers will go to the acquiring firm, Accounting Support Services, Inc. This was your agreement with Accounting Support Services, as part of the acquisition deal.

Write the memo to communicate the decision clearly and help employees understand and accept the message.

16. Write an email to tell employees about a product recall.

As the vice president of public relations at Wilton Industries, you need to communicate to staff that one of your products has been recalled. The notice from the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission explains the potential burn hazard associated with your Chefmate Tea Kettle. Customers should return the kettle to Target to receive a full refund. Address an email to all Wilton employees to explain the situation.

17. Write a memo announcing no bonus.

You are the manager of a fitness equipment manufacturing plant called Muscles Galore. 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% from last year. Your projections indicate that the economy is recovering, and sales should be up about 20% next year. If the projections are accurate, you should be able to offer the bonus again next year—but you won't make any promises.

Write an email to your employees letting them know the bad news. Add details to make your message complete.

LO4 Write a bad-news announcement

18. Write a letter announcing a decision not to renew a lease.

Assume the role of Gene Harley, the leasing manager of Northern Shopping 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.

19. Write an email about a party cancellation.

Nobody likes a party more than Edgar Dunkirk, the president of Rockabilly Enterprises, a record label. In the early days, the company's holiday parties were legendary for their splendid food arrangements and outstanding entertainment (featuring the label's popular singing stars). Employees performed elaborate skits and competed for valuable prizes. These days, however, sales of the company's country and rockabilly recordings are down. In fact, Dunkirk recently had to lay off 150 of the company's 350 employees, the most severe austerity measure in the company's history.

Because so many employees had to be let go, including some who had helped Dunkirk found the company a decade ago, the president has decided that a lavish party would be inappropriate. He has therefore canceled the traditional holiday party. As Dunkirk's vice president of human resources, write an email communicating the news to Rockabilly's employees.

LO5 Give and receive constructive performance feedback.

You'll find the Aggresshop situation at www.bizcominthenews.com/aggresshop.

20. Role-play giving and receiving feedback.

Imagine that you own one of the Aggresshop stores you read about in the Company Scenario in Chapter 1 (and at the end of this chapter). Management changed the compensation plan that was too generous, which was causing sales associates to be overly aggressive with customers. At your store, you have encouraged associates to take a more service-oriented approach, and most have—offering help but not pushing unless customers ask for more personalized attention.

However, Brittany is still making customers feel uncomfortable in the store. Yesterday, you saw her ask someone twice if she needed help, and when the customer said, "No, thanks. I'm just looking," Brittany brought over an item for her to consider. Even after the customer refused the item, Brittany brought two more. The customer then said, "I'd like to look on my own. Is that OK here?" Then Brittany was curt with her, saying, "Well, OK. I was just trying to help you." The woman left the store soon after.

You would like to talk to Brittany about her idea of customer service and coach her to see the customer's perspective.

Role-play this situation with another student playing the role of Brittany. Have a third student observe the interaction, take notes, and give feedback using principles for giving and receiving feedback discussed in the chapter.

21. Reflect on feedback you received in the past.

In groups, talk about a time when you received negative performance feedback from a manager. How well did he or she convey the feedback, and how well did you receive it? Consider the questions in Figure 15. In retrospect, could you have handled the feedback differently?

COMPANY SCENARIO

Aggresshop

Let's revisit Aggresshop, the company struggling to improve customer service in its retail stores. As you read at the end of Chapter 1 and online, Aggresshop has received several customer complaints, and CEO Andrea Jewel is taking action.

Imagine that you are part of the company management team and receive this email from Andrea about a change in compensation structure:



COURTESY OF AMY NEWMAN

You'll find the Aggresshop situation at www.bizcominthenews.com/aggresshop.

Email

Delete Junk Reply Reply All Forward Print To Do

To: Aggresshop Managers
From: Andrea Jewel
Subject: New Commission Structure and Service Standards for Sales Associates

Aggresshop Managers,

As you know, Rob Cuervo, our HR director, has been working diligently to redesign the compensation structure for our sales associates. We appreciate all of your help during the past three months, particularly the store managers and associates we have consulted during this process.

At this point, we are ready to communicate the new guidelines. I realize that most of our sales associates will be unhappy about these changes. But we must stay true to our mission and customer commitment and, of course, be financially responsible. This email answers the following questions you may have:

- Why are we making this change?
- What is the new compensation structure?
- What are the new customer service standards?
- How will we communicate these changes?

Why are we making this change?

Most of you understand the impetus of this change, but I'd like to review this so we're giving consistent messages to sales associates in all 16 stores. Primarily, this change was inspired by two discoveries: negative feedback on the Aggresshop customer blog and large compensation payouts.

As we have all read on the customer blog, comments are overwhelmingly negative and surprisingly consistent about our associates' behavior in the stores. The YouTube video, in particular, has been an embarrassment to us. To make short-term sales transactions, our associates are being overly aggressive with customers and fighting with each other. We must fix this and the negative perception of our service.

The compensation structure for sales associates is likely contributing to the problem. When we designed the commission and bonus plans five years ago, we had all good intentions. We wanted to reward our associates generously, with a clear focus on selling more expensive items. The strategy worked: we have grown tremendously and now sell only high-end, luxury items. But now that we have such highly priced items, this structure is overly generous and pays far more than we intended. The bonus plan only exacerbates the problem.

What is the new compensation structure?

We have created a new commission plan more in line with industry standards and have eliminated the bonus plan entirely. Unlike other luxury boutique shops, we have decided to keep some commission-based compensation because we still want our sales associates engaged with our customers, and we see value in encouraging sales. The new commission structure for employees who work at least 35 hours per week is below.

New Commission Structure (based on the dollar amount sold per store, per month)			
\$100,000 – \$150,000	\$150,001 – 200,000	\$200,001 – \$250,000	Over \$250,000
.5%	1%	1.5%	2%

Continued

Resources

Each of these resources was mentioned as helpful by the people on our panel of experts. As panelists noted, remember to include parents in any awareness outreach or training about these issues

Articles and books

Caring for Adolescents Experiencing Cyberbullying
by Jesse Florang

<https://nursing.ceconnection.com/public/modules/11995>

Geared to nursing but relevant for the classroom

How to Handle Aggressive, Intimidating and Controlling People by Preston Ni Communication Coaching

<https://nipreston.com/new/project/how-to-successfully-handle-aggressive-intimidating-and-controlling-people/>

What Every BODY Is Saying by Joe Navarro

<https://www.amazon.com/What-Every-Body-Saying-Speed-Reading/dp/0061438294>

Why Should We Hire You? by Brooks Harper.

<https://www.brooksharper.com/main/books>

You Say More Than You Think by Janine Driver and Mariska Van Aalst

<https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/6705323-you-say-more-than-you-think>

Websites

"It's On Us"

<https://www.itsonus.org/>

Combating college sexual assault with resources for prevention training

Pacers National Bullying Prevention Center

<https://www.pacer.org/bullying/>

Information about how to address and prevent peer-to-peer bullying, with resources for educators

Pennsylvania Coalition Against Rape (PCAR)

<https://pcar.org/>

Sexual harassment prevention facilitators' manual and curriculum for grades one through 12. Completely free, available online.

RAINN (Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network)

<https://www.rainn.org/>

The nation's largest anti-sexual violence organization; created and operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline (800.656.HOPE) (chat is available at online.rainn.org). RAINN also operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense and carries out programs to prevent sexual violence, help survivors, and ensure that perpetrators are brought to justice.

"SafeColleges Training" by Vector Solutions

(they also have SafeSchools for K-12)

<https://www.safecolleges.com/>

Education, training, and administrative programs purchased by universities for making campuses safer places to work and learn. Educational modules cover discrimination, bullying, sexual harassment, Title IX, LGBTQ, and customer service.

Stopbullying.gov

How to identify bullying and stand up to it on the spot

Stop Sexual Assault in Schools

<http://ssais.org>

A 501(c)(3) non-profit that features information and resources to proactively address the epidemic of traumatic sexual violence/harassment impacting our nation's students.

"Youth at Work" by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC)

<https://www.eeoc.gov/youth/>

Teaching youth about some of their rights and responsibilities as an employee. Resources include videos, fact sheets, real cases, advice on filing complaints, and other tips for navigating unfair and harassing treatment for both employees and managers.