

I regret to inform you that you were not selected for our summer intern program at Equifax. We had over a thousand résumés and cover letters to go through and simply could not get to them all. We have been asked to notify everyone that we have already selected students for the 25 positions based on those who applied early and were qualified.

We're sure you will be able to find a suitable position for summer work in your field and wish you the best of luck. We deeply regret any inconvenience associated with our reply.

Expand Your Skills

Critique the Professionals

Locate an example online of a negative-news message from any company. Possible examples include announcements of product recalls, poor financial results, layoffs, and fines or other legal troubles. Analyze the approach the company took; was it the most effective strategy possible? Did the company apologize, if doing so would have been appropriate under the circumstances, and does the apology seem

sincere? Does the tone of the message match the seriousness of the situation? Does the message end on a positive note, as appropriate? Using whatever medium your instructor requests, write a brief analysis of the message (no more than one page), citing specific elements from the piece and support from the chapter.

Sharpen Your Career Skills Online

Bovée and Thill's Business Communication Web Search, at <http://websearch.businesscommunicationnetwork.com>, is a unique research tool designed specifically for business communication research. Use the Web Search function to find a website, video, PDF document, podcast, or presentation that offers advice on conveying negative news in business messages. Write a brief email message to your instructor or a post for your class blog, describing the item that you found and summarizing the career skills information you learned from it.

CASES

NEGATIVE MESSAGES ON ROUTINE BUSINESS MATTERS

IM SKILLS

1. Message Strategies: Refusing Claims and Requests for Adjustment; Media Skills: Instant Messaging [LO-4], Chapter 6 Your company has learned that selling instructional videos presents a difficult business dilemma. For its first five years of operation, the company had a generous return policy in which customers could return any DVD after 10 days, even if it had been opened. However, as return rates began to climb, management began to suspect that some customers were abusing the policy by watching DVDs long enough to learn whatever they wanted to learn and then returning them and asking for refunds. The company disliked penalizing the majority of its customer base by changing the policy, but returns cost money, and the company's profits were taking a bigger and bigger hit every year. Starting last year, the company now accepts returns only if the product packaging has not been opened.

Your task Team up with two other students. One of you will play the role of a customer who purchased the "Kickboxing Fundamentals" DVD two weeks ago. One of you will play the role of a service agent who assists customers with orders and returns.

Using Facebook's chat function or any other free IM service, role-play an exchange in which the customer initiates the conversation and asks for a refund, saying that the program doesn't meet his or her needs. The reason offered is that the

techniques shown in the video are quite basic, and he or she is already past that skill level.

Early in the exchange, the service agent needs to ask whether the DVD package has been unsealed. The customer replies that it has, after which the agent will respond that the company can accept only unopened DVDs for refund or exchange. The customer can continue to argue that there is no way to truly evaluate a DVD without watching the entire program, because every person might have a different understanding of what "fundamentals" means. However, the company's policy is firm.

Make up whatever details you need to complete the exchange, keeping in mind the following points:

- The video title and the product description on the website clearly indicate that this kickboxing program is intended for beginners.
- The website clearly states that DVDs can be returned only if they are unopened.
- In addition, the online shopping cart requires customers to check a box to indicate that they have read the return policy.
- The agent might suggest to the customer that he or she could offer it for sale on Craigslist, sell to a store that buys used movies, or donate it to a library.

The third member of the team should sit beside either the customer or the agent and evaluate the IM exchange, without participating. If possible, capture the IM stream for offline analysis. The evaluator will then give both participants written feedback on the content and tone of their messages, offering suggestions for improvement. Be prepared to discuss the experience and the analysis with your class.

Expand Your Skills

Critique the Professionals

Company websites function as multidimensional informational reports, with numerous sections and potentially endless ways for visitors to navigate through all the various pages. Locate the website of a public corporation with a fairly complex website. Imagine that you are approaching the site as (a) a potential employee, (b) a potential investor (purchaser of stock), (c) a member of one of the local communities in which this company operates, and (d) a potential customer of the company's products and services. Analyze how easy or difficult it is to find the information each of these four visitors would typically be seeking. Using

whatever medium your instructor requests, write a brief analysis of the information architecture of the website, describing what works well and what doesn't.

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CASES



Learn how to get started on Facebook. Visit <http://real-timeupdates.com/bceb>, click on "Student Assignments" and then click on "Facebook Screencast."

INFORMATIONAL REPORTS

1. Message Strategies: Informational Reports [LO-5]

Success in any endeavor doesn't happen all at once. For example, success in college is built one quarter or semester at a time, and the way to succeed in the long term is to make sure you succeed in the short term. After all, even a single quarter or semester of college involves a significant investment of time, money, and energy.

Your task Imagine you work for a company that has agreed to send you to college full time, paying all your educational expenses. You are given complete freedom in choosing your courses, as long as you graduate by an agreed-upon date. All your employer asks in return is that you develop your business skills and insights as much as possible so that you can make a significant contribution to the company when you return to full-time work after graduation. To make sure that you are using your time—and your company's money—wisely, the company requires a brief personal activity report at the end of every quarter or semester (whichever your school uses). Write a brief informational report that you can email to your instructor, summarizing how you spent your quarter or semester. Itemize the classes you took, how much time you spent studying and working on class projects, whether you got involved in campus activities and organizations that help you develop leadership or communication skills, and what you learned that you can apply in a business career. (For the purposes of this assignment, your time estimates don't have to be precise.)

2. Message Strategies: Informational Reports [LO-5]

You've put a lot of work into your college classes so far—make sure you don't have any glitches as you get ready to claim your certificate or degree.

Your task Prepare an interim progress report that details the steps you've taken toward completing your graduation or certification requirements. After examining the requirements listed in your college catalog, indicate a realistic schedule for completing those that remain. In addition to course requirements, include steps such as completing the residency requirement, completing all necessary forms, and paying fees. Use a memo format for your report and address it to anyone who is helping or encouraging you through school.

WIKI SKILLS / TEAM SKILLS

3. Message Strategies: Informational Reports; Media Skills: Wiki Writing [LO-1], [LO-2] The use of social networks by employees during work hours remains a controversial topic, with some companies encouraging networking, some at least allowing it, and others prohibiting it.

Your task Using the free wiki service offered by Zoho (www.zoho.com/wiki/) or a comparable system, collaborate on a report that summarizes the potential advantages and disadvantages of allowing social network use in the workplace.

BLOGGING SKILLS / TEAM SKILLS

4. Message Strategies: Informational Reports [LO-5]

If you're like many other college students, your first year was more than you expected: more difficult, more fun, more frustrating, more expensive, more exhausting, more rewarding—more of everything, positive and negative. Oh, the things you know now that you didn't know then!

Your task With several other students, identify five or six things you wish you would've realized or understood better before you started your first year of college. These can relate to your school life (such as "I didn't realize how much work I would have for my classes" or "I should've asked for help as

soon as I got stuck”) and your personal and social life (“I wish I would’ve been more open to meeting people”). Use these items as the foundation of a brief informational report you could post on a blog that is read by high school students and their families. Your goal with this report is to help the next generation of students make a successful and rewarding transition to college.

WEB WRITING SKILLS

5. Message Strategies: Online Content [LO-5] As you probably experienced, trying to keep all the different schools straight in one’s mind while researching and applying for colleges can be rather difficult. Applicants and their families would no doubt appreciate a handy summary of your college or university’s key points as they relate to the selection and application process.

Your task Adapt content from your college or university’s website to create a one-page “Quick Facts” sheet about your school. Choose the information you think prospective students and their families would find most useful. (Note that adapting existing content would be acceptable in a real-life scenario like this, because you would be reusing content on behalf of the content owner. Doing so would definitely *not* be acceptable if you were using the content for yourself or for someone other than the original owner.)

ANALYTICAL REPORTS

6. Message Strategies: Analytical Reports [LO-6] Mistakes can be wonderful learning opportunities if we’re honest with ourselves and receptive to learning from the mistake.

Your task Identify a mistake you’ve made—something significant enough to have cost you a lot of money, wasted a lot of time, harmed your health, damaged a relationship, created serious problems at work, prevented you from pursuing what could’ve been a rewarding opportunity, or otherwise had serious consequences. Now figure out why you made that mistake. Did you let emotions get in the way of clear thinking? Did you make a serious financial blunder because you didn’t take the time to understand the consequences of a decision? Were you too cautious? Not cautious enough? Perhaps several factors led to a poor decision.

Write a brief analytical report to your instructor that describes the situation and outlines your analysis of why the failure occurred and how you can avoid making a similar mistake in the future. If you can’t think of a significant mistake or failure that you’re comfortable sharing with your instructor, write about a mistake that a friend or family member made (without revealing the person’s identity or potentially embarrassing him or her).

7. Message Strategies: Analytical Reports [LO-6] Assume that you will have time for only one course next term. Identify the criteria you will use to decide which of several courses to take. (This is the yardstick approach mentioned in the chapter.)

Your task List the pros and cons of four or five courses that interest you and use the selection criteria you identified to choose the one course that is best for you to take at this time. Write your report in memo format, addressing it to your academic adviser.

8. Message Strategies: Analytical Reports [LO-6] Visit any restaurant, possibly your school cafeteria. The workers and fellow customers will assume that you are an ordinary customer, but you are really a spy for the owner.

Your task After your visit, write a short letter to the owner explaining (a) your actions and observations, (b) any possible violations of policy you observed, and (c) your recommendations for improvement. The first part of your report (what you did and what you observed) will be the longest. Include a description of the premises, inside and out. Tell how long it took for each step of ordering and receiving your meal. Describe the service and food thoroughly. You are interested in both the good and bad aspects of the establishment’s décor, service, and food. For the second section (violations of policy), use some common sense: If all the servers but one have their hair covered, you may assume that policy requires hair to be covered; a dirty window or restroom obviously violates policy. The last section (recommendations for improvement) involves professional judgment. What management actions will improve the restaurant?

9. Message Strategies: Analytical Reports [LO-6] Imagine you are a consultant hired to improve the customer service of your campus bookstore.

Your task Visit the bookstore and look critically at its operations. Then draft a letter that could be sent to the bookstore manager, offering recommendations that would help the store service customers more effectively, perhaps suggesting products it should carry, hours that it should remain open, or added services that it should make available to students. Be sure to support your recommendations.

10. Message Strategies: Analytical Reports [LO-6] Spurred in part by the success of numerous do-it-yourself (DIY) TV shows, homeowners across the country are redecorating, remodeling, and rebuilding. Many people are content with superficial changes, such as new paint or new accessories, but some are more ambitious. These homeowners want to move walls, add rooms, redesign kitchens, convert garages to home theaters—the big stuff.

Publishers try to create magazines that appeal to carefully identified groups of potential readers and the advertisers who’d like to reach them. The DIY market is already served by numerous magazines, but you see an opportunity in the homeowners who tackle the heavy-duty projects. Case Tables 10.1 through 10.3 summarize the results of some preliminary research you asked your company’s research staff to conduct.

Your task You think the data show a real opportunity for a “big projects” DIY magazine, although you’ll need more extensive research to confirm the size of the market and refine the editorial direction of the magazine. Prepare a brief analytical report that presents the data you have, identifies the opportunity or opportunities you’ve found (suggest your own ideas, based on the data in the tables), and requests funding from the editorial board to pursue further research.

CASE TABLE 10.1 ROOMS MOST FREQUENTLY REMODELED BY DIYERS

Room	Percentage of Homeowners Surveyed Who Have Tackled or Plan to Tackle at Least a Partial Remodel
Kitchen	60
Bathroom	48
Home office/study	44
Bedroom	38
Media room/home theater	31
Den/recreation room	28
Living room	27
Dining room	12
Sun room/solarium	8

CASE TABLE 10.2 AVERAGE AMOUNT SPENT ON REMODELING PROJECTS

Estimated Amount	Percentage of Surveyed Homeowners
Under \$5k	5
\$5k–\$10k	21
\$10k–\$20k	39
\$20k–\$50k	22
More than \$50k	13

CASE TABLE 10.3 TASKS PERFORMED BY HOMEOWNER ON A TYPICAL REMODELING PROJECT

Task	Percentage of Surveyed Homeowners Who Perform or Plan to Perform Most or All of This Task Themselves
Conceptual design	90
Technical design/architecture	34
Demolition	98
Foundation work	62
Framing	88
Plumbing	91
Electrical	55
Heating/cooling	22
Finish carpentry	85
Tile work	90
Painting	100
Interior design	52

PROPOSALS

EMAIL SKILLS

11. Message Strategies: Proposals [LO-7] One of the banes of apartment living is those residents who don't care about the condition of their shared surroundings. They might leave trash

all over the place, dent walls when they move furniture, spill food and beverages in common areas, destroy window screens, and otherwise degrade living conditions for everyone. Landlords obviously aren't thrilled about this behavior, either, because it raises the costs of cleaning and maintaining the facility.

Your task Assume you live in a fairly large apartment building some distance from campus. Write an email proposal you could send to your landlord, suggesting that fostering a sense of stronger community among residents in your building might help reduce incidents of vandalism and neglect. Propose that the little-used storage area in the basement of the building be converted to a community room, complete with a simple kitchen and a large-screen television. By attending Super Bowl parties and other events there, residents could get to know one another and perhaps forge bonds that would raise the level of shared concern for their living environment. You can't offer any proof of this in advance, of course, but share your belief that a modest investment in this room could pay off long term in lower repair and maintenance costs. Moreover, it would be an attractive feature to entice new residents.

12. Message Strategies: Proposals [LO-7] Select a product you are familiar with and imagine you are the manufacturer, trying to get a local retail outlet to carry it. Use the Internet and other resources to gather information about the product.

Your task Write an unsolicited sales proposal in letter format to the owner (or manager) of the store, proposing that the item be stocked. Use the information you gathered to describe some of the product's features and benefits. Then make up some reasonable figures, highlighting what the item costs, what it can be sold for, and what services your company provides (return of unsold items, free replacement of unsatisfactory items, necessary repairs, and so on).

13. Message Strategies: Proposals [LO-7] You are a sales manager for Air-Trak, and one of your responsibilities is writing sales proposals for potential buyers of your company's Air-Trak tracking system. The system uses the global positioning system (GPS) to track the location of vehicles and other assets. For example, the dispatcher for a trucking company can simply click a map display on a computer screen to find out where all the company's trucks are at that instant. Air-Trak lists the following as benefits of the system:

- Making sure vehicles follow prescribed routes, with minimal loitering time
- "Geofencing," in which dispatchers are alerted if vehicles leave assigned routes or designated service areas
- Route optimization, in which fleet managers can analyze routes and destinations to find the most time- and fuel-efficient path for each vehicle
- Comparisons between scheduled and actual travel
- Enhanced security, protecting both drivers and cargos

Your task Write a brief (unsolicited) proposal to Doneta Zachs, fleet manager for Midwest Express, 338 S.W. 6th, Des Moines, Iowa 50321. Introduce your company, explain the benefits of the Air-Trak system, and propose a trial deployment in which you would equip five Midwest Express trucks. For the purposes of this assignment, you don't need to worry about the cost or technical details of the system; focus on promoting the benefits and asking for a decision regarding the test