

## 2.4.6: Writing Business Messages

### Learning Objectives

- Write a business message based on an outline using the appropriate components of a business message

It's also helpful to remember at this stage that you're **not** actually starting from a blank page, even with your first draft. You've got the raw materials of your pre-writing, outlining, and source gathering at hand to build from.

### From Planning to Writing



At this stage of the process, the purpose and organization of your message is already decided. Now you need to craft the words and phrasing for each part of the message.

Whichever outline you've started with, it can seamlessly morph into a first draft simply by choosing an area to attack. Start fleshing it out with full sentences, complete thoughts, and relevant sources.

The format for the communication matters. Letter formats and layout are discussed at the end of this module.

Before examining types of messages, there are skills to have in hand.

### Writing Skills

#### Subject Line

The subject line is surprisingly important in business communications. It is found in both email and memo formats. Subject lines are a mini introduction to the message. However, they do not replace the need for subject to be addressed in the first paragraph of the communication.

What	Avoid	Try
Subject Line	Regarding next Tuesday's meeting	Items to bring for Next Tuesday's meeting
First line of the message	Will you bring the pens and pencils?	Will you bring pens and pencils to next Tuesday's meeting?

Subject lines are succinct introductions to a direct, negative, or persuasive message

What	Avoid	Try
Direct Message	Conference Dates	Please confirm conference dates
Negative Message	Problem!	Confirmation needed Order 3145
Persuasive Message	Need a Speaker	Speaking Opportunity for You

Check to see if your subject lines pass a simple list of questions:

- Is the main idea apparent from the subject line?
- Is it more a phrase than full sentence?

- Can the receiver judge the urgency with respect to whether they must read the message now or can leave it for later?
- Will the receiver be able to find this message again easily based on your subject line?

### Constructing Buffers

Buffers are a specific component of negative messages. They allow the writer to start the message without fully disclosing the bad news that is coming. Buffers must be more than an unrelated hello such as “How about those Broncos?” They must lead in to the topic while avoiding negative overtones. At the same time, a buffer shouldn’t promote an untruth or raise the recipient’s hopes only to dash them. For example, in writing to a job applicant, the subject line, “You are our best candidate” only to follow in the body with “but unfortunately, we needed to hire from within the company, so you didn’t get the job” is needlessly cruel. On the other hand, “You are one of many impressive candidates,” is both honest and appropriately complimentary while serving as a buffer.

Buffer Topic	Sample	Reason for the “No”
Item of Agreement	Planning a 250 person wedding is quite an undertaking.	The larger ballroom is booked on that date.
Compliment	The American Cancer Society provides excellent support to the community of Centennial, MO.	The organization cannot fund the charity golf tournament this year.
Reasons	With the increase in interest rates, there is a decline of 5% in new client calls.	There are account reassignments planned.

### Negative Words and Tone

Business relationships are like all relationships. There are ups and downs. At times employees, customers, and others must hear news that is not to their choosing. Two important skills save the relationship while delivering the bad news. In all situations, the sender works to avoid negative words and tones. These words and tone can overshadow even the best message, like gray clouds on a warm summer day.

With negative messages there comes a time where the bad news must be stated. A skilled writer who plans the message well has this part of the message contained to a single area of the communication. Yet, when saying “no,” the meaning must be clear. Sometimes the most diplomatic form of clarity is achieved with a skilled “implied no.” Consider how the following are clear, yet avoid a negative word or tone.

Avoid	Try
April 23 is not available.	Rooms are available April 20–22 or April 24–29.
Snakes are not allowed on the plane.	Please see our pet policy that allows cats, dogs, and peacocks. (Add “only” if needed—only cats, dogs, and peacocks.)

### You-View

In defining positive messages, both good news and expected news fit the category. However, some expected news may not please the receiver. The you-view in writing helps the sender keep an overall good relationship to the receiver. Consider the following:

Avoid	Try	Why
Do not park in Lot C. It is being resurfaced.	While Lot C is resurfaced, Lots A and B should be used.	The direct object “you” is assumed with the instruction of “do not.” Coupling a “you” with a “no” in the same sentence is likely to annoy or feel accusatory to the receiver, thus damaging the relationship. State what is possible rather than what is not.
I can’t wait to help you.	I look forward to helping you.	Here is something the sender wants to do, but the example clouds the positive desire with the negative “can’t.” If you as the sender are eager, then be eager rather than confusing the issue with a negative.

Avoid	Try	Why
The claim is forthcoming, however, another form is needed.	Another form is needed before the claim is processed.	“However” is frequently considered a negative word since it contradicts what comes before. The word “but” works in a similar fashion.

## Writing a Positive Message

Consider the following example outline constructed in the planning process:

News	Need quote on security components
Detail	4 PCs, 2 printers, 1 wireless router. Need itemized cost, warranty/mtc, installations date
Goodwill and Action	2 year contract in place. Hope for April 15.

With this outline in place, the message is formatted as a business letter or email as the situation warrants.

Comments on Section	As Written
<p>First Paragraph: Start the message with the news. This is a positive message. Focus on the receiver and realize all she wants to know is “what do I need to do”.</p> <p>The message opens with a you-view. The “Please” is saying “you need to” but in a positive manner.</p> <p>The main idea is easy to find. It is not hidden by unnecessary phrasing or preamble that does not advance the purpose of the message.</p>	<p>Please provide a quote for updated security systems.</p>
<p>Second Paragraph: Using paragraphs respects the reader by providing white spacing thus making the message easier to read. Paragraphs provide logical breaks to aid in understanding and retention.</p> <p>Bullets do not exist except as part of a paragraph. There is the introduction to the paragraph and then the lists.</p> <p>Lists are easier on the eyes through use of white space. They aid in retention. It will be easy for the receiver to mark off items as completed. List items are constructed in a parallel fashion.</p>	<p>With your familiarity of our system, please maintain compatibility and quote for the following items.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 PCs</li> <li>• 2 printers</li> <li>• 1 wireless router</li> </ul> <p>In the response, please address the following questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How much is the total and itemized cost?</li> <li>• How much is the warranty and maintenance cost?</li> <li>• When is the earliest installation date?</li> </ul>
<p>Final paragraph: Encourages the relationship with a specific note of goodwill. Provides a crisp reminder of the action needed.</p>	<p>Thank you for being so easy to work with over the past two years. If possible, please provide this quote by April 15. If it will be later, please call to let us know.</p>

## Writing a Negative Message

Assume that the outline for this negative message constructed in the Planning process is the following. Notice that there is a typo where “april” is not capitalized. For the outline, that is just fine. These are organizational notes that only the writer sees:

Buffer	Long relationship of mid-april conventions. Past relationship
Reasons	New personnel. Competitive month and rates
News	Conference date must move earlier or back one week
Goodwill and Action:	Discount. Must hear by March 5

With this outline in place, the message is formatted as a business letter or email, as the situation warrants.

Comments on Section	As Written
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Comments on Section	As Written
<p>Buffer: First paragraph — Start the message with a note that relates to the message, one that both agree on.</p> <p>Do not be so cheerful as to mislead the audience, nor set a dark tone that may cause additional trepidation in someone is about to be disappointed.</p> <p>By not immediately confirming availability, the reader can begin to prepare for the upcoming news.</p>	<p>Your organization has been a longtime partner of Aspen Lodge, and we have been honored to be your location of choice for your annual April conference. Thank you for your recent letter regarding next month's availability.</p>
<p>Reason: Second paragraph. It is so tempting to write reasons for a no from the perspective of the sender. "We are all full."</p> <p>"Company policy says." Reasons in a negative message offer the reader a way to see it from the writer's standpoint. If the message is well written, by the time the "no" comes, the receiver will be in complete agreement.</p>	<p>With such a warm winter, your choice of Aspen Lodge remains one desired by many organizations eager to come west. The Lodge is always popular with local organizations due to the low off-season rates, which means facilities book quickly and early.</p>
<p>Reason continued: Either second or third paragraph.</p> <p>Here is the hardest part of the message. The reader is likely anticipating being turned down by now. It is up to the sender to make the "no" clear, but not harsh. This may be done directly or with an Implied no.</p> <p>This writing assumes the group always comes on and had requested the second weekend.</p> <p>One key issue to watch out for when delivering negative messages in this way is that you might work to avoid negative words so intently that you make the message hard to understand. In this case, talking about the weekends that <i>are</i> available leaves the message pretty clear.</p>	<p>With the second weekend already reserved, would you prefer the first or third weekend?</p>
<p>Final paragraph: Encourages the relationship with a specific note of goodwill. Provide a crisp reminder of the action needed.</p>	<p>Please call by Friday March 31st, to confirm which of the two remaining weekends best suit your needs. Aspen Lodge is booking quickly, and we hope to have good friends like ABC company here again this year. Because you have been such a loyal partner, we are offering a 5% discount for whichever weekend you do end up choosing.</p>

## Writing a Persuasive Message

With persuasive messages, the audience analysis in the planning stage will point you in the right direction. This example outline assumes that the receiver needs a push to accept the solution being presented. In this example, a marketing team has planned to do some focus groups in Manhattan among a difficult-to-find consumer segment (let's say, left-handed teenage girls who like both crocheting and motocross racing). The facility that's finding and scheduling the participants is having a hard time finding enough of these girls in Manhattan, so they want to loop in a partner facility just across the river in New Jersey. It's going to cost the marketing team more money, which they've anticipated but still won't like, and it will involve extra travel. Here's one way to present that news.

Buffer / Attention	More diverse research participants in Manhattan and Newark
Reasons / Interest	A more diverse set of participants in two locations
News	We can't find enough qualified people in Manhattan, so we're adding our Newark location
Goodwill and Action:	Travel between locations on a deluxe chartered coach bus at no extra cost

With this outline in place, the message is formatted as a business letter or email, as the situation warrants.

Comments on Section	As Written
<p>Buffer: First paragraph— Start the message with a note that relates to the message, one that both agree on.</p> <p>Do not be so cheerful as to mislead the audience, nor set a dark tone that may cause additional anger in someone is about to be disappointed.</p> <p>By starting with the good news, the writer can offset any disappointment or annoyance at the bad news.</p>	<p>Thank you for entrusting us with this interesting and challenging recruit. We're calling on all of our experience to make sure we find you the best participants to meet your research needs and finding girls who not only meet the specifications but also represent a range of ethnicities and income levels.</p>
<p>Reasons: Second paragraph— It is so tempting to write reasons for a no from the perspective of the sender. "We are all full." "Company policy says." What reasons in a negative message do are to offer the reader a way to see it from the writer's standpoint. If well written by the the time the "no" comes the receiver will be in complete agreement.</p>	<p>As you've known from the start of the project, finding participants that meet your specifications was going to be difficult, and we are about halfway recruited. We have placed ads in the newspapers and online, and we have asked motocross courses to recommend members who might qualify.</p>
<p>Reasons continued: Either second or third paragraph— Here is the hardest part of the message. The reader is likely anticipating some sort of bad news by now. It is up to the sender to make the difficulty clear but not harsh. Even with the Goodwill action, there's likely to be some annoyance on the part of the receiver.</p>	<p>However, we seem to have stalled in finding people to come to our Manhattan facility. As we see it, we have two choices. We can relax the specifications, which might water down your data, or we can reach out to a partner company in Newark. Between the two facilities, we believe we can fully recruit your research study. As we discussed at the proposal stage, this will incur extra cost, and we recognize that you had not built travel to Newark into your schedule. Therefore, we have taken the liberty of reserving a deluxe coach bus and driver at our expense to move your team from their base in Manhattan to the facility in Newark on the days you will be there.</p>
<p>Final paragraph: Encourages the relationship with a specific note of goodwill. Provide a crisp reminder of the action needed.</p>	<p>Please let us know whether this solution is acceptable or whether you would like to loosen your participant specifications. Please also tell us whether we can help with anything else, including changing hotel accommodations using our corporate discount. We are very much looking forward to hosting you and your team for this groundbreaking research. If I hear from you by Wednesday morning, I can lock in whichever option you choose and move forward with the work.</p>

### ? Practice question

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