



Positive Messages

OBJECTIVES

After studying this chapter, you should be able to

- Explain why business letters are important in delivering positive messages outside an organization.
- Write letters that make direct requests for information or action.
- Write letters that make direct claims.
- Write letters that reply to requests.
- Write adjustment letters to customers.
- Write goodwill messages that express thanks, recognition, and sympathy.

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Sending Positive Written Messages Outside Your Organization

Most of the workplace messages you write will probably be positive. That is, they will deal with routine matters that require straightforward answers using the direct method. As communication channels continue to evolve, you will be using both electronic and paper-based channels to send positive, routine messages.

This chapter focuses on positive external messages. The principal channel for external messages is business letters.

The principal channel for delivering messages outside an organization is business letters.

Understanding the Power of Business Letters

Letters are a primary channel of communication for delivering messages *outside* an organization. Positive, straightforward letters help organizations conduct everyday business and convey goodwill to outsiders. Such letters go to suppliers, government agencies, other businesses, and, most important, customers. The letters to customers receive a high priority because these messages encourage product feedback, project a favorable image of the organization, and promote future business.

Business letters are important for messages that require a permanent record, confidentiality, formality, sensitivity, and a well-considered presentation.

Business letters are necessary when (a) a permanent record is required; (b) confidentiality is paramount; (c) formality and sensitivity are essential; and (d) a persuasive, well-considered presentation is important.

Business Letters Produce a Permanent Record.

Business Letters Can Be Confidential.

Business Letters Convey Formality and Sensitivity.

Business Letters Deliver Persuasive, Well-Considered Messages.

Direct Requests for Information or Action

The majority of your business letters will involve routine messages organized directly. Before you write any letter, though, consider its costs in terms of your time and workload. Whenever possible, don't write! Instead of asking for information, could you find it yourself? Would a telephone call, e-mail message, instant message, or brief visit to a coworker solve the problem quickly? If not, use the direct pattern to present your request efficiently.

Many business messages are written to request information or action. Although the specific subjects of inquiries may differ, the similarity of purpose in routine requests enables writers to use the following writing plan:

Writing Plan for an Information or Action Request

- **Opening:** Ask the most important question first or express a polite command.
- **Body:** Explain the request logically and courteously. Ask other questions if necessary.
- **Closing:** Request a specific action with an end date, if appropriate, and show appreciation.

Open Your Request Directly

The most emphatic positions in a letter are the opening and closing. Readers tend to look at them first. The writer, then, should capitalize on this tendency by putting the most significant statement first. The first sentence of an information request is usually a question or a polite command. It should not be an explanation or justification, unless resistance to the request is expected.

A letter inquiring about hotel accommodations, shown in Figure 6.1, begins immediately with the most important idea: Can the hotel provide meeting rooms and accommodations for 250 people? Instead of opening with an explanation of who the writer is or how the writer happens to be writing this letter, the letter begins more directly.

If several questions must be asked, you have two choices. You can ask the most important question first, as shown in Figure 6.1. An alternate opening begins with a summary statement, such as *Will you please answer the following questions about providing meeting rooms and accommodations for 250 people from March 20 through March 24.* Notice that the summarizing statement sounds like a question but has no question mark. That is because it is really a command disguised as a question. Rather than bluntly demanding information (*Answer the following questions*), we often prefer to soften commands by posing them as questions. Such statements,

Because business letters are costly, avoid writing them unless absolutely necessary.

Readers find the openings and closings of letters most interesting and often read them first.

Begin an information request letter with the most important question or a summarizing statement.

FIGURE 6.1 Letter That Requests Information

Letterhead — Paragon Communication Solutions
1909 Avenue of the Stars, Seventh Floor
Los Angeles, CA 90067
Phone: (310) 391-8901 Fax: (310) 391-7893 Web: www.pcs.com

Dateline — September 12, 200x

Inside address — Ms. Bridget Rosales, Manager
Meeting and Events Department
The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino
3355 Las Vegas Boulevard South
Las Vegas, NV 89109

Salutation — Dear Ms. Rosales:

Body — Can The Venetian Resort Hotel Casino provide meeting rooms and accommodations for about 250 PCS sales representatives from March 20 through March 24?
Your hotel received strong recommendations because of its excellent resort and conference facilities. Our spring sales conference is scheduled for next March, and I am collecting information for our planning committee. Will you please answer these additional questions regarding The Venetian:

- Does the hotel have (a) a banquet room that can seat 250 plus (b) four smaller meeting rooms each to accommodate a maximum of 75?
- What computer facilities are available for electronic presentations?
- What is the nearest airport, and do you provide transportation to and from it?
- Do you have a special room rates for groups at this time of the year?

Answers to these questions and any other information you can provide will help us decide which conference facility to choose. Your response before September 18 would be most appreciated since our planning committee meets September 25.

Complimentary close — Sincerely yours,

Author's name and identification — *Richard M. Mahar*
Richard M. Mahar, Associate
Corporate Travel Department

Reference initials — RMM:gdr

Tips for Formatting Letters

- Start the date 2 inches from the top or 1 blank line below the letterhead, whichever position is lower.
- For block style, begin all lines at the left margin.
- Leave side margins of 1 to 1.5 inches depending on the length of the letter and font size.
- Single-space the body and double-space between paragraphs.
- Use left, not right, justification.
- Place the title of the receiver wherever it best balances the inside address.
- Place the title of the author wherever it best balances the closing lines.

called rhetorical questions, should not be punctuated as questions because they do not require answers.

Put Details in the Body

The body of a letter that requests information should provide necessary details. Remember that the quality of the information obtained from a request letter depends on the clarity of the inquiry. If you analyze your needs, organize your ideas, and frame your request logically, you are likely to receive a meaningful answer that doesn't require a follow-up message. Whenever possible, itemize the information to improve readability. Notice that the questions in Figure 6.1 are bulleted, and they are parallel. That is, they use the same balanced construction.

The body of a request letter may contain an explanation or a list of questions.

Close With an Action Request

Use the final paragraph to ask for specific action, to set an end date if appropriate, and to express appreciation. As you learned in working with e-mail messages and memos, a request for action is most effective when an end date and reason for that date are supplied, as shown in Figure 6.1.

Ending a request letter with appreciation for the action taken is always appropriate. However, don't fall into a cliché trap, such as *Thanking you in advance, I remain . . .* or the familiar *Thank you for your cooperation*. Your appreciation will sound most sincere if you avoid mechanical, tired expressions.

The ending of a request letter should tell the reader what you want done and when.

Direct Claims

In business many things can go wrong—promised shipments are late, warranted goods fail, or service is disappointing. When you as a customer must write to identify or correct a wrong, the letter is called a *claim*.

Claim letters register complaints and usually seek correction of a wrong.

Writing Plan for a Direct Claim

- **Opening:** Describe clearly the desired action.
- **Body:** Explain the nature of the claim, tell why the claim is justified, and provide details regarding the action requested.
- **Closing:** End pleasantly with a goodwill statement and include an end date and action request, if appropriate.

Open Your Claim With a Clear Statement of What You Want

If you have a legitimate claim, you can expect a positive response from a company. Smart businesses today want to hear from their customers. They know that retaining a customer is far less costly than recruiting a new customer. That is why you should open a claim letter with a clear statement of the problem or with the action you want the receiver to take. You might expect a replacement, a refund, a new order, credit to your account, correction of a billing error, free repairs, free inspection, or cancellation of an order.

When the remedy is obvious, state it immediately (*Please send us 24 Sanyo digital travel alarm clocks to replace the Sanyo analog travel alarm clocks sent in error with our order shipped January 8*). When the remedy is less obvious, you might ask for a change in policy or procedure or simply for an explanation (*Because three of our employees with confirmed reservations were refused rooms September 16 in your hotel, would you please clarify your policy regarding reservations and late arrivals*).

The direct strategy is best for simple claims that require no persuasion.

Explain and Justify Your Claim in the Body

In the body of a claim letter, explain the problem and justify your request. Provide the necessary details so that the difficulty can be corrected without further correspondence. Avoid becoming angry or trying to fix blame. Bear in mind that the person reading your letter is seldom responsible for the problem. Instead, state the facts logically, objectively, and unemotionally; let the reader decide on the causes.

Providing details without getting angry improves the effectiveness of a claim letter.

Include copies of all pertinent documents such as invoices, sales slips, catalog descriptions, and repair records. (By the way, be sure to send copies and *not* your originals, which could be lost.) When service is involved, cite names of individuals spoken to and dates of calls. Assume that a company honestly wants to satisfy its customers—because most do. When an alternative remedy exists, spell it out (*If you are unable to send 24 Sanyo digital travel alarm clocks immediately, please credit our account now and notify us when they become available*).

Written claims submitted promptly are taken more seriously than delayed ones.

Close Your Claim With a Specific Action Request

End a claim letter with a courteous statement that promotes goodwill and summarizes your action request. If appropriate, include an end date. (*We realize that mistakes in ordering and shipping sometimes occur. Because we have enjoyed your prompt service in the past, we hope that you will be able to send us the Sanyo digital travel alarm clocks by January 15.*) Finally, in making claims, act promptly. Delaying claims makes them appear less important. Delayed claims are also more difficult to verify. By taking the time to put your claim in writing, you indicate your seriousness. A written claim starts a record of the problem, should later action be necessary. Be sure to keep a copy of your letter.

Before responding to requests, gather facts, check figures, and seek approval if necessary.

Direct Replies

Often your messages will reply directly and favorably to requests for information or action. A customer wants information about a product. A supplier asks to arrange a meeting. Another business inquires about one of your procedures or about a former employee. In complying with such requests, you will want to apply the same direct pattern you used in making requests.

Writing Plan for Direct Replies

- **Subject line:** Identify previous correspondence or refer to the main idea.
- **Opening:** Deliver the most important information first.
- **Body:** Arrange information logically, explain and clarify it, provide additional information if appropriate, and build goodwill.
- **Closing:** End pleasantly.

Letters responding to requests may open with a subject line to identify the topic immediately.

A customer reply letter that starts with a subject line, as shown in Figure 6.3 on page 140, helps the reader recognize the topic immediately. Usually appearing one blank line below the salutation, the subject line refers in abbreviated form to previous correspondence and/or summarizes a message (*Subject: Your December 1 Letter Inquiring About Our Investigator 360 Program*). It often omits articles (*a, an, the*), is not a complete sentence, and does not end with a period. Knowledgeable business communicators use a subject line to refer to earlier correspondence so that in the first sentence, the most emphatic spot in a letter, they are free to emphasize the main idea.

FIGURE 6.2 Direct Claim Letter

Before

Dear Good Vibes:

You call yourself Good Vibes, but all I'm getting from your service is bad vibes! I'm furious that you have your salespeople slip in unwanted service warranties to boost your sales.

When I bought my Panatronic DVR from Good Vibes, Inc., in August, I specifically told the salesperson that I did NOT want a three-year service warranty. But there it is on my Visa statement this month! You people have obviously billed me for a service I did not authorize. I refuse to pay this charge.

How can you hope to stay in business with such fraudulent practices? I was expecting to return this month and look at HD TVs, but you can be sure I'll find an honest dealer this time.

Angrily,

Sounds angry; jumps to conclusions

Forgets that mistakes happen

Fails to suggest a solution

After

Personal business letter style

325 Quail Ridge Road
Delray Beach, FL 33628
August 25, 200x

Ms. Ernestine Sanborn
Manager, Customer Satisfaction
Good Vibes, Inc.
2003 53rd Street
West Palm Beach, FL 33407

Dear Ms. Sanborn:

Explains objectively what went wrong

Please credit my Visa account to correct an erroneous charge of \$299.

States simply and clearly what to do

Documents facts

On August 1, 2009, I purchased a Panatronic DVR from Good Vibes, Inc. Although the salesperson discussed a three-year extended warranty with me, I decided against purchasing that service for \$299. However, when my credit card statement arrived this month, I noticed an extra \$299 charge from Good Vibes, Inc. I suspect that this charge represents the warranty I declined. Enclosed is a copy of my sales invoice along with my Visa statement on which I circled the charge.

Doesn't blame or accuse

Summarizes request and courteously suggests continued business once problem is resolved

Please authorize a credit immediately and send a copy of the transaction to me at the above address. I'm enjoying all the features of my Panatronic DVR and would like to be shopping at Good Vibes for an HD TV shortly.

Sincerely,

Christopher Kapper

Christopher A. Kapper

Enclosure

FIGURE 6.3 Direct Reply Letter

Workplace Security Systems, Inc.
501 Ravenswood Avenue
Menlo Park, CA 94025
(650) 312-9059 FAX (650) 312-6950 Web: www.workplacesecurity.com

December 5, 200x

Ms. Angela Singleton, Manager
Kinetic Technologies International
3115 Parklawn Plaza
Oklahoma City, OK 73013

Dear Ms. Singleton:

Subject: Your December 1 Letter Inquiring About Our Investigator 360 Program

Yes, we do offer monitoring programs that detect inappropriate employee behavior on PCs and on the Internet. Thank you for visiting our Web site and following up with this inquiry about our service. Here are answers to your questions:

1. Our Investigator 360 program can monitor employee activity regardless of the size of your organization.
2. No, our program does not require your organization to train technology specialists to install or run the program.
3. Yes, it does reveal the transfer of files to removable media such as flash/USB drives, DVDs, and CDs. It also records instant messages, chat conversations, and e-mails sent and received. It checks Web sites visited, network traffic, and even Google searches.
4. Yes, we can have a representative visit you and demonstrate the program for your management staff.

Like you, many companies worry about employees who abuse the Internet. Some spend hours surfing news, shopping, sports, gambling, and sex sites. Others leak confidential information, download software and music illegally, hog network bandwidth, or harass coworkers.

The enclosed brochure further explains our Investigator 360 program. See page 3 for information about how removable files can harm your organization. To schedule a demonstration, please call (650) 312-9059 or write to Derrick Wright (derrick.wright@workplacesecurity.com). We look forward to providing a program that can maximize productivity and minimize liability for Kinetic Technologies International.

Sincerely,
Marshall Huggins
Marshall Huggins
Product Manager

Enclosure

Identifies previous correspondence and subject

Lists answers to sender's questions in order asked

Closes pleasantly with a forward-looking statement that also promotes product

Places most important information first

Helps reader find additional information by citing pages

Announce the good news promptly.

Open Directly With Information the Reader Wants

In the first sentence of a direct reply letter, deliver the information the reader wants. Avoid wordy, drawn-out openings (*I have before me your letter of December 1, in which you request information about . . .*). More forceful and more efficient is an opener that answers the inquiry (*Here is the information you wanted about . . .*). When agreeing to a request for action, announce the good news promptly (*Yes, I will be happy to speak to your business communication class about . . .*).

Arrange Your Information Logically and Make It Readable

In the body of your reply, supply explanations and additional information. Because a letter written on company stationery is considered a legally binding contract, be

sure to check facts and figures carefully. If a policy or procedure needs authorization, seek approval from a supervisor or executive before writing the letter.

When answering a group of questions or providing considerable data, arrange the information logically and make it readable by using lists, tables, headings, boldface, italics, or other graphic devices. When customers or prospective customers inquire about products or services, your response should do more than merely supply answers. Try to promote your organization and products. Often, companies have particular products and services they want to spotlight. Thus, when a customer writes about one product, provide helpful information that satisfies the inquiry, but consider using the opportunity to introduce another product as well. Be sure to present the promotional material with attention to the “you” view and to reader benefits (*You can use our standardized tests to free you from time-consuming employment screening*). You will learn more about special techniques for developing marketing and persuasive messages in Chapter 8.

In concluding, make sure you are cordial and personal. Refer to the information provided or to its use. (*The enclosed list summarizes our recommendations. We wish you all the best in redesigning your Web site.*) If further action is required, describe the procedure and help the reader with specifics (*The Small Business Administration publishes a number of helpful booklets. Its Web address is . . .*).

Close Pleasantly and Personally

To avoid abruptness, include a pleasant closing remark that shows your willingness to help the reader. Provide extra information if appropriate. Tailor your remarks to fit this letter and this reader. Because everyone appreciates being recognized as an individual, avoid form-letter closings such as *If we may be of further assistance, . . .*

OFFICE INSIDER

“People unable to express themselves clearly in writing limit their opportunities for professional, salaried employment.”

Adjustment Letters

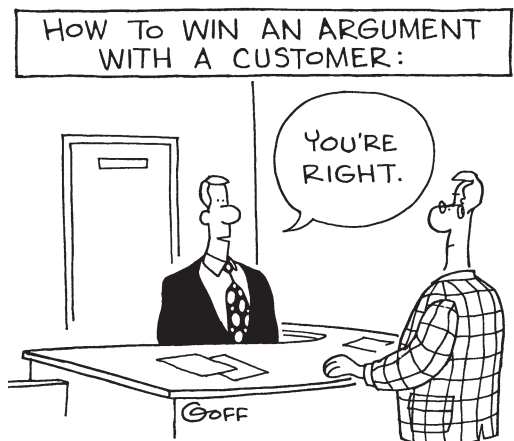
Even the best-run and best-loved businesses occasionally receive claims or complaints from consumers. When a company receives a claim and decides to respond favorably, the letter is called an *adjustment* letter. In these messages, you have three goals:

- To rectify the wrong, if one exists
- To regain the confidence of the customer
- To promote future business and goodwill

A positive adjustment letter represents good news to the reader. Therefore, use the direct strategy described in the following writing plan:

Writing Plan for Adjustment Letters

- **Subject line:** (optional) Identify the previous correspondence and refer to the main topic.
- **Opening:** Grant the request or announce the adjustment immediately.
- **Body:** Provide details about how you are complying with the request. Try to regain the customer’s confidence. Apologize if appropriate, but don’t admit negligence.
- **Closing:** End positively with a forward-looking thought; express confidence in future business relations. Include sales promotion, if appropriate. Avoid referring to unpleasantness.



WORKPLACE IN FOCUS

Airline troubles continue to mount as weary air travelers complain of lost luggage, long delays, canceled flights, and soaring ticket prices. In one customer-service debacle, major U.S. carriers shut down 3,700 flights in a single month after failing to meet safety inspections mandated by the Federal Aviation Administration. The grounded flights affected hundreds of thousands of passengers, underscoring the airline industry's last-place finish in a Consumer Satisfaction Index survey conducted by the University of Michigan. *What guidelines should airline companies follow when writing adjustment letters to disgruntled customers?*



CARLOS BARRIA / REUTERS / LANDOV

Readers want to learn the good news immediately.

Reveal the Good News in the Opening

Instead of beginning with a review of what went wrong, present the good news immediately. When Kimberly Patel responded to the claim of customer Yonkers Digital & Wireless about a missing shipment, her first draft, shown at the top of Figure 6.4, was angry. No wonder. Yonkers Digital apparently had provided the wrong shipping address, and the goods were returned. But once Kimberly and her company decided to send a second shipment and comply with the customer's claim, she had to give up the anger and strive to retain the goodwill and the business of this customer. The improved version of her letter announces that a new shipment will arrive shortly.

If you decide to comply with a customer's claim, let the receiver know immediately. Don't begin your letter with a negative statement (*We are very sorry to hear that you are having trouble with your dishwasher*). This approach reminds the reader of the problem and may rekindle the heated emotions or unhappy feelings experienced when the claim was written. Instead, focus on the good news. The following openings for various letters illustrate how to begin a message with good news.

You're right! We agree that the warranty on your American Standard Model UC600 dishwasher should be extended for six months.

You will be receiving shortly a new slim Nokia cell phone to replace the one that shattered when dropped recently.

Please take your portable Admiral microwave oven to A-1 Appliance Service, 200 Orange Street, Pasadena, where it will be repaired at no cost to you.

The enclosed check for \$325 demonstrates our desire to satisfy our customers and earn their confidence.

In announcing that you will make an adjustment, try to do so without a grudging tone—even if you have reservations about whether the claim is legitimate. Once you decide to comply with the customer's request, do so happily. Avoid halfhearted or reluctant responses (*Although the American Standard dishwasher works well when used properly, we have decided to allow you to take yours to A-1 Appliance Service for repair at our expense*).

Explain How You Are Complying in the Body

In responding to claims, most organizations sincerely want to correct a wrong. They want to do more than just make the customer happy. They want to stand behind their products and services; they want to do what's right.

Be enthusiastic, not grudging, when granting a claim.

FIGURE 6.4 Customer Adjustment Letter

Before

Dear Sir:

I have before me your recent complaint about a missing shipment. First, let me say that it's very difficult to deliver merchandise when we have been given the wrong address.

After receiving your complaint, our investigators looked into your problem shipment and determined that it was sent immediately after we received the order. According to the shipper's records, it was delivered to the warehouse address given on your stationery: 451 Main Street, Yonkers, NY 10708. Unfortunately, no one at that address would accept delivery, so the shipment was returned to us. I see from your current stationery that your company has a new address. With the proper address, we probably could have delivered this shipment.

Although we feel that it is entirely appropriate to charge you shipping and restocking fees, as is our standard practice on returned goods, in this instance we will waive those fees. We hope this second shipment finally catches up with you at your current address.

Sincerely,

After

DD

DIGITAL DEPOT
1405 Chambersburg Road
Trenton, NJ 08619-3590

Phone: (619) 839-2202
Fax: (619) 839-3320
Web: www.ddepot.com

April 24, 200x

Mr. Christopher Durante
Yonkers Digital & Wireless
359 South Broadway Avenue
Yonkers, NY 10705

Dear Mr. Durante:

Subject: Your April 19 Letter About Your Purchase Order

You should receive by April 26 a second shipment of the speakers, VCRs, headphones, and other digital equipment that you ordered April 2.

The first shipment of this order was delivered April 10 to 451 Main Street, Yonkers, NY. When no one at that address would accept the shipment, it was returned to us. Now that I have your letter, I see that the order should have been sent to 359 South Broadway Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10705. When an order is undeliverable, we usually try to verify the shipping address by telephoning the customer. Somehow the return of this shipment was not caught by our normally painstaking shipping clerks. You can be sure that I will investigate shipping and return procedures with our clerks immediately to see if we can improve existing methods.

Your respect is important to us, Mr. Durante. Although our rock-bottom discount prices have enabled us to build a volume business, we don't want to be so large that we lose touch with valued customers like you. Over the years our customers' respect has made us successful, and we hope that the prompt delivery of this shipment will retain yours.

Sincerely,
Kimberly Patel
Kimberly Patel
Distribution Manager

c Emanuel Chavez
Shipping Department

Uses customer's name in salutation

Announces good news immediately

Regains confidence of customer by explaining what happened and by suggesting plans for improvement

Closes confidently with genuine appeal for customer's respect

Fails to reveal good news immediately and blames customer

Creates ugly tone with negative words and sarcasm

Sounds grudging and reluctant in granting claim

In the body of the letter, explain how you are complying with the claim. In all but the most routine claims, you should also seek to regain the confidence of the customer. You might reasonably expect that a customer who has experienced difficulty with a product, with delivery, with billing, or with service has lost faith in your organization. Rebuilding that faith is important for future business.

How to rebuild lost confidence depends on the situation and the claim. If procedures need to be revised, explain what changes will be made. If a product has defective parts, tell how the product is being improved. If service is faulty, describe genuine efforts to improve it. Notice in Figure 6.4 on page 143 that the writer promises to investigate shipping procedures to see whether improvements might prevent future mishaps.

Sometimes the problem is not with the product but with the way it is being used. In other instances customers misunderstand warranties or inadvertently cause delivery and billing mix-ups by supplying incorrect information. Remember that rational and sincere explanations will do much to regain the confidence of unhappy customers.

In your explanation avoid emphasizing negative words such as *trouble*, *regret*, *misunderstanding*, *fault*, *defective*, *error*, *inconvenience*, and *unfortunately*. Keep your message positive and upbeat.

Decide Whether to Apologize

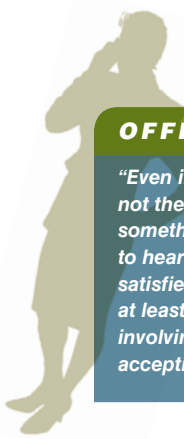
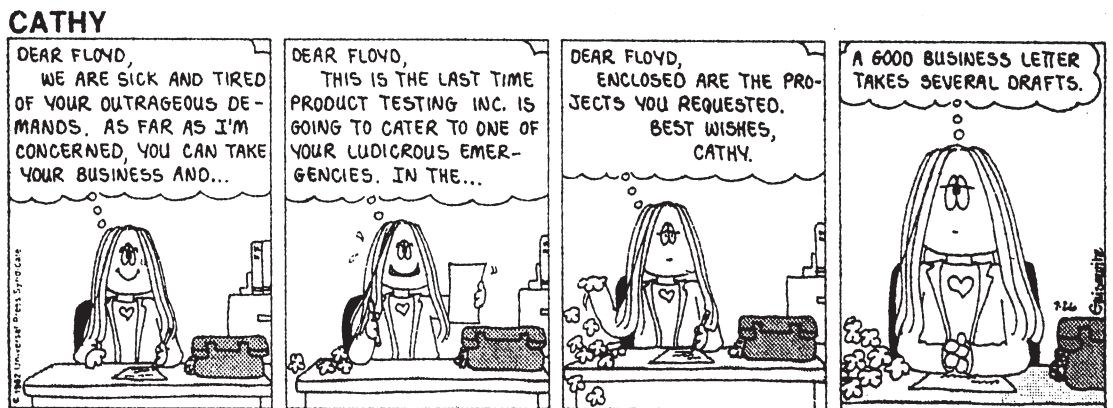
Whether to apologize is a debatable issue. Some writing experts argue that apologies remind customers of their complaints and are therefore negative. These writers avoid apologies; instead they concentrate on how they are satisfying the customer. Real letters that respond to customers' claims, however, often include apologies.² If you feel that your company is at fault and that an apology is an appropriate goodwill gesture, by all means include it. Be careful, though, not to admit negligence.

Show Confidence and Helpfulness in the Closing

End positively by expressing confidence that the problem has been resolved and that continued business relations will result. You might mention the product in a favorable light, suggest a new product, express your appreciation for the customer's business, or anticipate future business. It is often appropriate to refer to the desire to be of service and to satisfy customers. Notice how the following closings illustrate a positive, confident tone.

You were most helpful in informing us of this situation and permitting us to correct it. We appreciate your thoughtfulness in writing to us.

Thanks for writing. Your satisfaction is important to us. We hope that this refund check convinces you that service to our customers is our No. 1 priority. Our goals are to earn your confidence and continue to merit that confidence with quality products and excellent service.



OFFICE INSIDER

"Even if the problem is not the company's fault, something like 'I'm sorry to hear that you're not satisfied with our service' is at least conciliatory, without involving the company [in] accepting any liability."

Your Inspiron 1420 HD widescreen laptop will come in handy whether you are working at home or on the road. What's more, if you desire an even bigger screen, you can upgrade to a 17-inch widescreen notebook for only \$150. Take a look at the enclosed booklet detailing the big savings for essential technology on a budget. We value your business and look forward to your future orders.

Although the direct pattern works for many requests and replies, it obviously won't work for every situation. With more practice and experience, you will be able to alter the pattern and adapt your skills to other communication problems.

Goodwill Messages

Goodwill messages, which include thanks, recognition, and sympathy, seem to intimidate many communicators. Finding the right words to express feelings is sometimes more difficult than writing ordinary business documents. Writers tend to procrastinate when it comes to goodwill messages, or else they send a ready-made card or pick up the telephone. Remember, though, that the personal sentiments of the sender are always more expressive and more meaningful to readers than are printed cards or oral messages. Taking the time to write gives more importance to our well-wishing. Personal notes also provide a record that can be reread, savored, and treasured.

In expressing thanks, recognition, or sympathy, you should always do so promptly. These messages are easier to write when the situation is fresh in your mind, and they mean more to the recipient. Don't forget that a prompt thank-you note carries the hidden message that you care and that you consider the event to be important. You will learn to write various goodwill messages that deliver thanks, congratulations, praise, and sympathy. Instead of learning writing plans for each of them, we recommend that you concentrate on the five Ss. Goodwill messages should be:

- **Selfless.** Be sure to focus the message solely on the receiver not the sender. Don't talk about yourself; avoid such comments as *I remember when I . . .*
- **Specific.** Personalize the message by mentioning specific incidents or characteristics of the receiver. Telling a colleague *Great speech* is much less effective than *Great story about McDonald's marketing in Moscow*. Take care to verify names and other facts.
- **Sincere.** Let your words show genuine feelings. Rehearse in your mind how you would express the message to the receiver orally. Then transform that conversational language to your written message. Avoid pretentious, formal, or flowery language (*It gives me great pleasure to extend felicitations on the occasion of your firm's twentieth anniversary*).
- **Spontaneous.** Keep the message fresh and enthusiastic. Avoid canned phrases (*Congratulations on your promotion, Good luck in the future*). Strive for directness and naturalness, not creative brilliance.
- **Short.** Although goodwill messages can be as long as needed, try to accomplish your purpose in only a few sentences. What is most important is remembering an individual. Such caring does not require documentation or wordiness. Individuals and business organizations often use special note cards or stationery for brief messages.

Expressing Thanks

When someone has done you a favor or when an action merits praise, you need to extend thanks or show appreciation. Letters of appreciation may be written to customers for their orders, to hosts and hostesses for their hospitality, to individuals for kindnesses performed, and especially to customers who complain. After all, complainers are actually providing you with "free consulting reports from the field." Complainers who feel that they were listened to often become the greatest promoters of an organization.

Because the receiver will be pleased to hear from you, you can open directly with the purpose of your message. The letter in Figure 6.5 thanks a speaker who

Messages that express thanks, recognition, and sympathy should be written promptly.

Goodwill messages are most effective when they are selfless, specific, sincere, spontaneous, and short.

Send letters of thanks to customers, hosts, and individuals who have performed kind acts.

FIGURE 6.5 Thank-You Letter for a Favor

1 Prewriting

Analyze: The purpose of this letter is to express appreciation to a business executive for presenting a talk before professionals.

Anticipate: The reader will be more interested in personalized comments than in general statements showing gratitude.

Adapt: Because the reader will be pleased, use the direct pattern.

2 Writing

Research: Consult notes taken during the talk.

Organize: Open directly by giving the reason for writing. Express enthusiastic and sincere thanks. In the body provide specifics. Refer to facts and highlights in the talk. Supply sufficient detail to support your sincere compliments. Conclude with appreciation. Be warm and friendly.

Compose: Write the first draft.

3 Revising

Revise: Revise for tone and warmth. Use the reader's name. Include concrete detail but do it concisely. Avoid sounding gushy or phony.

Proofread: Check the spelling of the receiver's name; verify facts. Check the spelling of *persistence*, *patience*, and *advice*.

Evaluate: Does this letter convey sincere thanks?

International Marketing Association
225 West 17th Street
New York, New York 10029
<http://www.ima.com>

February 26, 200x

Mr. Michael T. Reese
Marketing Manager
Toys "R" Us, Inc.
One Geoffrey Way
Wayne, NJ 07470-2030

Dear Michael:

Thank you for providing the Manhattan chapter of the IMA with one of the best presentations our group has ever heard.

Your description of the battle Toys "R" Us waged to begin marketing products in Japan was a genuine eye-opener for many of us. Nine years of preparation establishing connections and securing permissions seems an eternity, but obviously such persistence and patience pay off. We now understand better the need to learn local customs and nurture relationships when dealing in Japan or other Asian countries.

In addition to your good advice, we particularly enjoyed your sense of humor and jokes—as you must have recognized from the uproarious laughter. What a great routine you do on faulty translations!

We're grateful, Michael, for the entertaining and instructive evening you provided our marketing professionals.

Cordially,
Rosetta H. Johnson
Rosetta H. Johnson
Program Chair, IMA
RHJ:mef

Personalizes the message by using specifics rather than generalities

Concludes with compliments and thanks

Tells purpose and delivers praise

Spotlights the reader's talents

addressed a group of marketing professionals. Although such thank-you notes can be quite short, this one is a little longer because the writer wants to lend importance to the receiver's efforts. Notice that every sentence relates to the receiver and offers enthusiastic praise. By using the receiver's name along with contractions and positive words, the writer makes the letter sound warm and conversational.

Written notes that show appreciation and express thanks are significant to their receivers. In expressing thanks, you generally write a short note on special note-paper or heavy card stock. The following messages provide models for expressing thanks for a gift, for a favor, and for hospitality.

To Express Thanks for a Gift

Thanks, Laura, to you and the other members of the department for honoring me with the elegant Waterford crystal vase at the party celebrating my twentieth anniversary with the company.

The height and shape of the vase are perfect to hold roses and other bouquets from my garden. Each time I fill it, I will remember your thoughtfulness in choosing this lovely gift for me.

To Send Thanks for a Favor

I sincerely appreciate your filling in for me last week when I was too ill to attend the planning committee meeting for the spring exhibition.

Without your participation much of my preparatory work would have been lost. It's comforting to know that competent and generous individuals like you are part of our team, Mark. Moreover, it's my very good fortune to be able to count you as a friend. I'm grateful to you.

To Extend Thanks for Hospitality

Matt and I want you to know how much we enjoyed the dinner party for our department that you hosted Saturday evening. Your charming home and warm hospitality, along with the lovely dinner and sinfully delicious chocolate dessert, combined to create a truly memorable evening.

Most of all, though, we appreciate your kindness in cultivating togetherness in our department. Thanks, Lisa, for being such a special person.

Responding to Goodwill Messages

Should you respond when you receive a congratulatory note or a written pat on the back? By all means! These messages are attempts to connect personally; they are efforts to reach out, to form professional and/or personal bonds. Failing to respond to notes of congratulations and most other goodwill messages is like failing to say "You're welcome" when someone says "Thank you." Responding to such messages is simply the right thing to do. Do avoid, though, minimizing your achievements with comments that suggest you don't really deserve the praise or that the sender is exaggerating your good qualities.

To Answer a Congratulatory Note

Thanks for your kind words regarding my award, and thanks, too, for sending me the newspaper clipping. I truly appreciate your thoughtfulness and warm wishes.

To Respond to a Pat on the Back

Your note about my work made me feel good. I'm grateful for your thoughtfulness.

Conveying Sympathy

Most of us can bear misfortune and grief more easily when we know that others care. Notes expressing sympathy, though, are probably more difficult to write than any other kind of message. Commercial "In sympathy" cards make the task easier—but they are far less meaningful. Grieving friends want to know what you think—not what

Identify the gift, tell why you appreciate it, and explain how you will use it.

Tell what the favor means using sincere, simple statements.

Compliment the fine food, charming surroundings, warm hospitality, excellent host and hostess, and good company.

Take the time to respond to any goodwill message you may receive.

Sympathy notes should refer to the misfortune sensitively and offer assistance.

Hallmark's card writers think. To help you get started, you can always glance through cards expressing sympathy. They will supply ideas about the kinds of thoughts you might wish to convey in your own words. In writing a sympathy note, (a) refer to the death or misfortune sensitively, using words that show you understand what a crushing blow it is; (b) in the case of a death, praise the deceased in a personal way; (c) offer assistance without going into excessive detail; and (d) end on a reassuring, forward-looking note.

In condolence notes mention the loss tactfully and recognize the good qualities of the deceased.

Conclude on a positive, reassuring note.

To Express Condolences

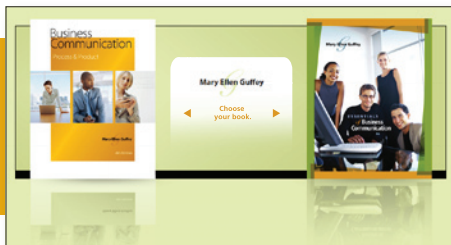
We are deeply saddened, Gayle, to learn of the death of your husband. Warren's kind nature and friendly spirit endeared him to all who knew him. He will be missed.

Although words seem empty in expressing our grief, we want you to know that your friends at QuadCom extend their profound sympathy to you. If we may help you or lighten your load in any way, you have but to call.

We know that the treasured memories of your many happy years together, along with the support of your family and many friends, will provide strength and comfort in the months ahead.

Is E-Mail Appropriate for Goodwill Messages?

In expressing thanks or responding to goodwill messages, handwritten notes are most impressive. However, if you frequently communicate with the receiver by e-mail and if you are sure your note will not get lost, then sending an e-mail goodwill message is acceptable, according to the Emily Post Institute.³ To express sympathy immediately after learning of a death or accident, you might precede a phone call or a written condolence message with an e-mail. E-mail is a fast and nonintrusive way to show your feelings. But, advises the Emily Post Institute, immediately follow with a handwritten note. Remember that e-mail messages are quickly gone and forgotten. Handwritten or printed messages remain and can be savored. Your thoughtfulness is more lasting if you take the time to prepare a handwritten or printed message on notepaper or personal stationery.



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Summing Up and Looking Forward

Although e-mail is becoming an important communication channel for brief messages, business letters are still important. They are necessary for messages that must produce a permanent record, are confidential, convey formality and sensitivity, and deliver persuasive ideas. In this chapter you learned to write direct letters that request information or action. You also learned to write direct claims, direct replies,

adjustment letters, and a variety of goodwill messages. All of these routine letters use the direct strategy. They open immediately with the main idea followed by details and explanations. But not all letters will carry good news. Occasionally, you must deny requests and deliver bad news. In the next chapter you will learn to use the indirect strategy in conveying negative news.

Critical Thinking

1. An article in a professional magazine carried this headline: "Is Letter Writing Dead?"⁴ How would you respond to such a question?
2. In promoting the value of letter writing, a well-known columnist recently wrote, "To trust confidential information to e-mail is to be a rube."⁵ What did he mean? Do you agree?