

Refusing

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- Writing sensitive or negative messages requires careful thought. You must decide how direct or indirect your message should be and then choose words that maintain a professional relationship despite the problems
- Research has shown that people form their impressions and attitudes very early when reading. At the same time, bad news is easier to accept when the reasons behind it are explained first

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- For this reason, presenting bad news or refusals indirectly is often more effective than presenting them directly, especially if the stakes are high
- Furthermore, when drafting international correspondence, keep in mind that many cultures are much less direct in their communications than Americans

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An effective bad news pattern is:

1. Context (or "buffer")
2. Explanation
3. Bad news
4. Goodwill closing

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- The opening (often called a "buffer") should provide a context for the subject and establish a professional tone
- The body should provide an explanation by reviewing the details or facts that lead to the negative decision or refusal. Give the negative message simply, based on the facts. Do not belabor the bad news or provide an inappropriate apology

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- Neither the details nor an overdone apology can turn bad news into something positive. Your goal should be to establish for the reader that you have been reasonable given the circumstances. You need to organize the explanation carefully and logically
- The closing should establish (or reestablish) a positive relationship through goodwill or helpful information

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- When you receive a request to which you must give a negative reply, you may need to write a *refusal message* containing bad news—something your reader does not want to receive
- Refusals often vary with what is at stake for the writer or the reader

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Use the following pattern for refusals:

1. **Context.** In the opening ("buffer"), introduce the subject and establish a professional tone
2. **Explanation.** Review the facts that lead logically to the bad news, but try to see things from your reader's point of view
3. **Bad news.** State your refusal, based on the facts, concisely and without apology
4. **Goodwill.** In the closing, establish or reestablish a positive relationship by providing an option, assure the reader of your high opinion of his or her product or service, offer a friendly remark, or merely wish the reader success

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Tips for Success:

- Unless the stakes are low, opening with bad news can affect your reader negatively. The ideal refusal says "no" in such a way that you avoid antagonizing your reader while maintaining goodwill. You must convince your reader that the reasons for refusing are logical or understandable before you present the bad news

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Tips for Success:

- For a rejected proposal, express appropriate and genuine appreciation for the reader's time, effort, and interest. Thoroughly detail the reasons for the refusal with the goal of convincing the reader that the conclusion is reasonable. State the negative message concisely, clearly, and as positively as possible. Close by working to reestablish goodwill and avoid rehashing the bad news

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Here's an example of a poorly structured refusal letter:

Dear Ms. Espinoza:

Your application for the position of dental hygienist is rejected. We found someone more qualified than you.

Good luck,

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(To quote Thomas Hobbes) this letter is nasty, brutish, and short. The writer has not even tried to consider how the recipient feels. The pattern of the letter is:

1. Bad news
2. Curt explanation
3. Kiss-off close