

Technical communication and Soft Skills – Unit 4



Institute of Sciences, Humanities & Liberal Studies

Department of Languages

Compiled by: Prof. Aashna Shah

Things to be kept in mind to avoid negative email writing:

- One must avoid using negative words in the subject line. Usage of such words in the subject line may compel the receiver to not open the mail. This may cause delay in response.
- While writing an email one should follow reader-centric attitude. The thought process and the ideology of the recipient must be kept in mind while drafting the response.
- While drafting business email, one should avoid extreme use of adjectives. Words overwhelmed with emotions like anger, sadness, joy, etc. must be avoided.
- One should avoid the usage of negative words like fault, unavoidable, failure, irresponsible, neglect, delay, limited, unfortunately, etc. Usage of such words may create unnecessary business tension and negative atmosphere.
- One should not break negative news right at the beginning or at the end of the email. Even if one wants to convey the negative news, one should mold them in a positive fashion so as to avoid negative tone.
- One should focus on solution and not on problem. Once the problem is stated, focus on the things which can be done to deal with the problem rather than the things which cannot be done.

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- While writing an official email, one must avoid playing blame game. Because pointing fingers is something that is not appreciated in the thread of mails.
- The foremost and the most important step to avoid negative tone in one's email is to reread email before sending it to the recipient.

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Compiled by: Prof. Mamta Pillai

Samples of positive email writing and negative email writing are as follows.

Figure 7-7 (3) *Poor Example of a Claim Denial*

BAD

Your message questioning your statement has been received. I am sorry but we cannot adjust your account as you requested. Clearly, the statement is correct.

Each of the order forms you have completed states that returns are subject to a 15 percent restocking charge. Surely you saw this information printed in **bold** print on the order forms, and our telephone operators also explain our return policy thoroughly when customers place orders. I am sure you can appreciate the cost and effort we incur to restock merchandise after the winter ski season is over.

Thank you for doing business with us. If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to call or message us.

- Begins with obvious idea (receipt of request could be implied).
- Includes unnecessary apology for justified decision and provides refusal before reasons.
- Uses patronizing tone that may offend receiver.
- Presents explanation that focuses on sender and is too brief to be understood.
- Uses clichés that may undermine decision and may lead to unnecessary correspondence.

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GOOD Good Example of a Claim Denial

NEWPORT LEISURE INDUSTRIES
860 MONMOUTH STREET
NEWPORT, KY 41071-6218
TELEPHONE: 800-424-6000
FAX: 800-424-0583

June 14, 2010

Leela Srinivas
Snowcap Limited
1905 Southhaven Street
Mussorie-248179

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Restocking of Returned Merchandise

The HighFly skis you stocked this past season are skillfully crafted and made from the most innovative materials available. Maintaining a wide selection of quality skiing products is an excellent strategy for developing customer loyalty and maximizing your sales.

Our refund policies provide you the opportunity to keep a fully stocked inventory at the lowest possible cost. You receive full refunds for merchandise returned within 10 days of receipt. For unsold merchandise returned after the primary selling season, a modest 15 percent restocking fee is charged to cover our costs of holding this merchandise until next season. The enclosed check for ₹20,069.76 covers merchandise you returned at the end of February.

While relaxing from another great skiing season, take a look at our new HighFly skis and other items available in the enclosed catalog for the 2009 season. You can save 10 percent by ordering premium ski products before May 10.

Sincerely,
Lokesh Wanga
Lokesh Wanga
Credit Manager

Enclosures: Check and catalog

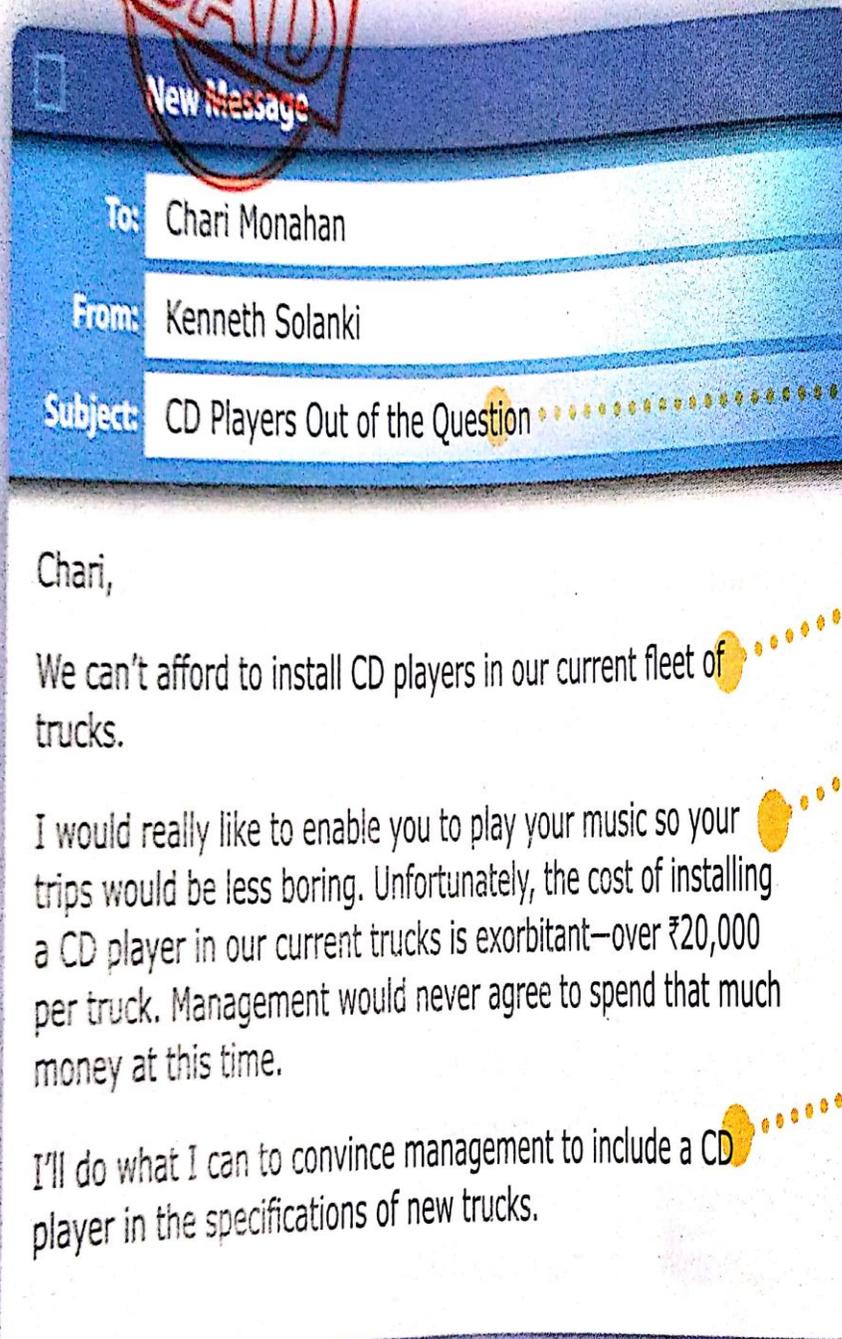
Legal and Ethical Constraints
Avoids corrective language that might insult, belittle, or offend.

- Uses subject line that provides subject of letter without revealing refusal.
- Uses resale to cushion bad news and lead into explanation.
- Presents clear explanation of reasons behind restocking policy with emphasis on ways reader benefits from policy.
- Implies refusal by stating the amount of enclosed check.
- Shifts emphasis away from refusal by presenting silver lining sales promotion on next season's merchandise.

Format Pointers
Specifies enclosure to emphasize importance of exact items.

Figure 7-5

Poor Example of a Refusal to an Employee's Request



• Reveals refusal in subject line.

• States refusal before explanation.

• Uses negative language and condescending tone without providing complete explanation for refusal.

• Offers possible alternative, but reluctant tone doesn't seem sincere.

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Figure 7-6 **GOOD** Good Example of a Refusal to an Employee's Request

New Message

To: Chari Monahan
From: Kenneth Solanki
Subject: Request to Install CD Players in Truck Fleet

Chari,

Because providing our drivers a pleasant and productive work environment is a priority, your suggestion to install CD players in our current fleet of trucks has been carefully considered. Listening to your favorite music while trucking down the highway is a sure way to shorten a long haul.

Installing a quality sound system in any vehicle can be a surprisingly complex and expensive task. The estimated cost for installing a CD player in one of our current trucks is ₹20,000. In contrast, installing a CD player as original equipment adds only ₹2,000 to the truck's cost, a much more realistic expenditure for the company.

Chari, in response to your feedback, I've submitted a proposal seeking approval for a change in the specifications for new trucks to include a CD player. With the normal frequency that trucks are rotated within the fleet, you should be trucking down the highway soon with your favorite CD playing in the background.

Later,

Ken
Kenneth Solanki
Production Manager
2650 Delhi
(011) 555-6300, Ext. 59 Fax (011) 555-6306

- Sends message by email, medium preferred by recipient.
- Cushions bad news with sincere compliment for suggestion.
- Transitions to reasons and provides complete explanation for refusal.
- Restates reason for saying "No" to de-emphasize refusal.
- Includes logical alternative and closes with positive look to future enjoyment when plan is implemented.
- Includes .sig file to identify writer and provide additional contact information.

7-8 GOOD (3) Good Example of a Credit Denial



1500 Tolly Ho Street ★ Reno, NV 89510-1800 ★ Telephone: (702) 555-3200 Fax: (702) 555-1039

May 16, 2010

Ms. Sara Mani
Purchasing Agent
Union Office Supply
1600 Main Street
Hyderabad-500001

Dear Ms. Mani:

The items listed in your order of May 6 have been selling very rapidly in recent weeks. Supplying customers' demands for the latest in electronic technology is sound business practice.

Another sound practice is careful control of indebtedness, according to specialists in accounting and finance. Their formula for control is to maintain at least a 2-to-1 ratio of current assets to current liabilities. Experience has taught us that, for the benefit of all concerned, credit should be available only to purchasers who meet that ratio. Because your ratio is approximately 1 1/4 to 1, you are encouraged to make cash purchases and take advantage of a 1 percent discount.

By continuing to supply your customers with timely merchandise, you should be able to improve the ratio. Then, we would welcome an opportunity to review your credit application. Use the enclosed envelope to send us your check for ₹11,487.53 to cover your current order, and your order will be shipped promptly.

Other timely items (such as the most recent in video games) are shown in the enclosed folder.

Sincerely,

Kunal Dorsey
Kunal Dorsey
Credit Manager

Legal and Ethical Constraints Assures compliance with laws by including reason for denial.

- *Implies receipt of order and uses resale to confirm applicant's good choice. Leads to explanation by implying approval of applicant's practice.*
- *Leads to discussion of basis for refusal and continues with explanation.*
- *De-emphasizes refusal by using positive language recommending counterproposal.*
- *Looks confidently to future and reminds applicant of commendable practice discussed earlier.*
- *Encourages subsequent application and thus implies continued business. Reminds merchant of counterproposal.*
- *Closes with sales promotion.*

Figure 7-9 **BAD** (4) Poor Example of a Constructive Criticism

Mallaya Wig, a junior accountant in your firm, has been working with us on site for about three weeks, and her conduct is deplorable. Her demeanor is absolutely unprofessional; her “no-problem” attitude has generated so much friction that a valued employee refuses to work in the same room with her.

Although extensive knowledge of auditing is important, Wig’s personal shortcomings far outweigh her technical expertise. I seriously hope Wig is able to take steps to correct the situation.

- Lacks adequate buffer to create fair-minded tone.
- Uses judgmental terms and overly negative words and the employee’s last name to accent negative.
- Provides no justification for claims.
- Ends with reminder of negative factors and lacks elaboration of “steps to correct the situation.”

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Figure 7-10 **GOOD** (4) Good Example of a Constructive Criticism

FSC
FREEMAN STEEL CORPORATION
2500 Lincoln Green Road / Austin, TX 78710-2500 / Phone: 512.555.9000 / Fax: 512.555.6573
February 17, 2008

Mr. Prasad Loni
N. R. Larsen & Co.
8640 Hazel Park Drive
Aurangabad-415570

Dear Prasad:

Mallaya Wig, a junior accountant in your firm, has been working with us on site for about three weeks. She is a very proficient auditor and did an excellent job of straightening out a technical tangle in our electronic accounting system last week.

Her demeanor, while friendly and open, has caused some of our employees to complain that she does not take her work seriously. She jokes with other members of the audit team, which disrupts the attention of our employees. Two or three of our managers also commented on Mallaya's dress—more appropriate for a round of tennis than a business office.

Mallaya is obviously quite good at her job; I know from conversations with her that she is sincere and has sound judgment. Please convey my concerns to Mallaya confidentially so that the rest of her time in our office will go more smoothly for her and for us.

Sincerely,
Janvi Nathan
Janvi Nathan
Controller

- *Tries to convey fair-mindedness and establish credibility by acknowledging good as well as bad points.*
- *Introduces discussion of the audit work underway.*
- *Presents verifiable statements without labeling them in negative, judgmental terms.*
- *Ends on pleasant note that seeks to add credibility to preceding negatives.*

*Legal and Ethical Constraints
Conveys positive intent to help—not to hurt or get even.*

Avoids potential litigation charges by including specific, verifiable facts and avoiding evaluative, judgmental statements.

Uses "confidential" as safeguard; information is intended for professional use only, not designed to hurt or to be thought of as gossip.

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e 7-11 (5)

BAD

Poor Example of a Bad-News Message
Announcing Negative Organizational News

New Message

To: <company employees>

From: Wesley Moskal

Subject: COMPANY WILL RELOCATE MARCH 5

September 14, 2007

Effective March 5, 2008, we will relocate our plant facility to Mason, Ohio. Approved by the Board of Director at its last meeting, this relocation will enable the company to reduce its operating expenses by 15 percent.

All employees wishing to relocate should notify their supervisors by the end of next week. We appreciate your support in this move.

- Reveals bad news before explanation.
- Begins bluntly with bad news.
- Explains company benefits but omits any explanation that might help employees understand or accept decision.
- Is clear on next step but shows no empathy for employees' feelings.
- Ends with insincere cliché and no assurance that the door is open for future discussions.

Format Pointer
Sends highly sensitive message through email without prior communication to prepare employees.

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Figure 7-12 **GOOD** Good Example of a Bad-News Message
Announcing Negative Organizational News

TO: All Employees
FROM: Wesley Moskal, President WM
DATE: September 14, 2007
SUBJECT: Proposed Plan for Increasing Manufacturing Capacity

Growth presents its challenges. As projected, increased demand for our product will soon exceed the capabilities of present production facilities as you know from information included on the company intranet. For some time we have been studying whether to expand our current manufacturing facility or relocate to another site.

High property taxes and transportation cost increases each year are compelling reasons to consider alternative sites. Likewise, attracting new talent into this high-cost metro area has become more difficult each year. In fact, both of our newly-hired unit supervisors are commuting over one hour just to obtain affordable housing.

While relocating could provide a long-term economic benefit to the company, moving out of New York City could enhance the quality of life for us all. In a suburban city, we could enjoy day-to-day living in a relaxed, small-town environment with all the benefits of a large city only a short drive away. These factors have convinced us that moving the manufacturing facility to Mason, Ohio, a thriving suburb located approximately ten miles north of Cincinnati, would benefit the company and our employees.

You may resume your duties at the same structure should you choose to relocate. Your supervisor will explain the logistics of the relocation at your unit's next meeting. In the meantime, visit the Mason link on the company intranet to read preliminary information about the move and more about what Ohio can offer us and our families. You'll also want to visit this link periodically for relocation updates and to check the FAQ page we're compiling daily to respond to your concerns as they arise. Now let us all work together for a smooth transition to many challenging opportunities awaiting us in Mason.

• Uses subject line to introduce topic but does not reveal bad news.

• Uses buffer to introduce topic familiar to employees through previous communication and lead into reasons.

• Provides rational explanation including benefits.

• Presents bad news while reminding receiver of benefits.

• Shows empathy by giving assurance.

• Follows up assuring continued exchange of timely information through discussions and web pages.

• Ends with positive appeal for unity.

Legal and Ethical Constraints
Uses memo channel rather than email for conveying sensitive message.