

Organizational Plans for Business Letters

	Direct Approach	Indirect Approach	AIDA
Used for	Direct requests (that do not require convincing), Good news messages	Bad news messages (that give news favorable to the reader)	Persuasive requests (that need to convince in the reader); Sales
Situations such as:	complaints and claims; reservations; appointments; orders; requests for action; inquiries about goods, people, or services; good news about hiring, credit, claims, other good news	refuse claims, refuse credit, decline services and favors, negative news about orders; turn down applicant; other bad news	persuasive requests for help, favors, donations, cooperation, special privileges, exceptions to company policy and warranties
Start with	Main Idea: request: <i>Please send me your latest catalog.</i> good news: <i>Good news! Your loan is approved.</i>	Buffer: appreciation: <i>Thank you for your letter.</i> other positive opening: <i>You are right to expect good service.</i>	Attract the reader's favorable attention: <i>No, you will not be paying higher taxes this year.</i>
Then	Explanation: details to help the reader respond correctly, devices for easy-reading like bulleted lists and numbered questions, development of you attitude, positive emphasis and reader benefit	Explanation and Alternatives: needed details, answers to questions, tactful imbedded bad news, counterproposal, ideas for getting needed help or for future changes; sales promotion for other products available	Arouse the reader's interest to continue reading the letter: In fact, thanks to Fred More, your taxes are lower this year. Create desire to help: needed details, clear benefits to reader,
End with	Motivation and Polite Closure: clear and easy action, appreciation, polite closure to build goodwill	Positive, Friendly Closure: appreciation, invitation to future action, good wishes, forward look	Easy Action: clear and easy action, appreciation, closure to build goodwill
Include as needed:	visual aids, catalog pages, brochures	application blanks, stamped envelopes	visual aids, stamped envelopes

Direct Requests

The direct request message asks the reader to do something that s/he is inclined to do:

- placing an order
- making business reservations and appointments
- requesting action related to routine business procedures
- making claims requests for adjustment (about damaged, faulty, wrong or late goods)
- making complaints (about poor service, unfair billing, impolite letters)
- inquiring about products and services
- inquiring about persons (references by a person interested in an applicant.)

Since we don't need to convince the reader to fulfill our request, we use the direct approach:

I. Main Idea	Introduce your request, major statement or question (such as your reason for writing to this person, purpose of adjustment, statement of order or reservation)
	State reason(s) if desirable justifying the request (such as reasons for interest in product or service, why you're interested in the applicant, why you want a particular action done)
	Reason for writing to this particular reader (especially when inquiring about a person/applicant)
II. Explanation	Details to help the reader respond to your request correctly (such as cost, size, color, quantity, catalog number, payment method, deposit, shipment, special instructions, all facts pertaining to order or claim)
	Devices for easy reading and easy answering (such as numbered questions, bulleted lists, use of charts)
	Development of you attitude (such as emphasizing company's/product's/ service's qualities or your faith in the reader instead of anger, threats, sarcasm, or exaggeration)
III. Motivation and Polite Closure	Clear action (what action you want the reader to take and when), easy action (enclosing reply envelope, phone number office hours or other helpful info), appreciation, polite closure to build goodwill

Good news and neutral messages

Good news messages convey good news for the reader. These are messages that will be received favorably by our reader. Good news messages say "yes":

Good News Messages, Cont.

- granting requests for claims adjustments
- approving credit
- acknowledging orders
- granting favors
- making announcements
- responding favorably to requests for action and information
- writing positive letters of recommendations
- giving favorable news about hiring or other applications
- conveying other good news

Because we know our reader will be happy with the news we have to convey, we use the direct approach:

I. Main Idea	Positive opening telling the reader what s/he wants to hear first (credit granted, shipment sent, favor accepted, request granted)
	Courteous comment, thanks for remittance/order, congratulations
	Verification of information: description, costs, quantity, charges, dates, delivery
II. Explanation, which may include	All needed details (answer all questions, including 5 W's, give complete instructions, stress reader benefits, positive emphasis, helpful)
	Resale material, with reader benefit, when appropriate (emphasize what company can do for the reader, give reader choices)
	Educational material (explain product use, legal aspects, confidentiality, directions for filling out forms, instructions)
	For claims letters, start with a telephone call. If that doesn't work, then begin keeping records of receipts, the dates and times of phone calls, the names of people you speak to, and all letters. Base your claim on fact and avoid threats, laying blame or exaggeration. Explain what you think the problem is and say what you'd like done to be satisfied (refund? replacement? repair?) Have faith in the reader's fairness – that once you've explained the problem, you're reader try to satisfy you and keep you as a customer.
	Sales promotion, if appropriate (give needed details on products and services)
III. Positive, Friendly Closure	Appreciation to reader; clear statement of action desired; easy action (offer of further help, enclosed forms or envelope); willingness to help further; forward look to future use of goods and services, good wishes, compliment or request; reader benefit and courtesy

Bad news Messages

Bad news messages convey bad news for the reader. These are messages that will not be received favorably by our reader. Bad news messages say “no”:

- conveying negative news about claims adjustments
- refusing credit
- declining requests or favors
- conveying bad news about requests
- turning down an applicant for a job, scholarship, promotion, etc.
- requiring minimum deposits or orders
- conveying news about price increases
- conveying other negative news

Bad news messages must be written carefully so as not to cause the reader to break off relations completely. Since we know that reader will be irritated, angry or disappointed, we use the indirect approach:

I. Buffer	
	Don't begin with the bad news! Start positively (appreciation, agreement, assurance and understanding, good news, neutral courtesy, sympathy)
II. Explanation/ Analysis of Circumstances	Needed details (general to specific), answer all questions, tactful and logical statements of reasons, details about requirements, details about what's wrong
	Pertinent and tactful favorable then unfavorable facts (record, duties, habit, deliveries, deadlines); company policy, legal aspects, procedures, emphasis on desired goal
III. Decision and Alternatives	Imbedded bad news (stated just once clearly, tactfully, concisely and positively); helpful counterproposal and alternatives, ideas for getting needed help, possible future changes; sales promotion and other products available
IV. Positive, Friendly Closure	Appreciation, invitation to future action, easy action and motivation (enclosed reply forms and envelope), willingness to help further, good wishes, hope for improvement, forward look

Persuasive Request Messages

Persuasive requests are messages that ask the reader to do something that s/he is inclined NOT to do:

Persuasive Messages, Cont.

- request for favors and help
- request for donations
- request for cooperation (on projects and goals)
- requests that require special privilege (such as for credit or adjustments not covered by the warranty)
- requests that require the company to make an exception for you or change in policy or performance
- sales letters

Since the reader automatically wants to refuse our request, we need to convince him/her of the benefits of doing what we're asking. Therefore, the direct approach will not be effective. Instead, use the AIDA formula: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action

AIDA Formula for Routine Persuasive Requests	
I.	Attract the reader's favorable attention in the very first sentence. Convince the reader right at the start that you have something useful or interesting to say. Make the opening statement brief and engaging without making extravagant claims.
II.	Arouse the reader's interest so that s/he will continue to read the letter. This section explains the relevance of your message to the reader. Continuing the theme you started with, paint a more detailed picture with words. Your goal is to get the reader to think, "This is an interesting idea; could it possibly solve my problems?"
III.	Create desire to help. These letters always emphasize how the reader will benefit from doing what we're asking. In letters asking for donation, emphasize doing good for the community, having his/her name connected with the writer or the event, or publicity. In letters asking for favors and help, emphasize how the request will help his/.her reputation or will help the writer's good cause.
IV.	Make clear the action the reader needs to take. This section offers a good opportunity for one last reminder of the main benefit the reader will realize from the action you want. Tell the reader what to do to help, such as supplying a name of a contact, a phone number, reply forms, stamped envelope. End with a statement of appreciation.

Non-Routine Persuasive Requests	
Sales Letters	Open by capturing the reader's attention: pose a question, state a terrific offer, announce important news
	Emphasize a central selling point. Appeal to the needs of the reader and show how your product or service can help solve the reader's problems. Introduce the price strategically and show how the item is worth its price
	Stimulate the reader to act and provide easy action (phone number, stamped envelope). Express appreciation.

Persuasive Messages, Cont.

Fundraising Letters	Remember that you're not the only organization asking for a donation. Prove that your organization is worthy, that the donor's money will affect the community positively.
	Begin by catching the reader's attention with a story, question or quotation. Avoid starting with "Let me introduce ourselves. We..." Your letter will look like everyone else's.
	Motivate the reader to solve the problem by describing the specific people in need. Show that the problem can be solved – with your group's help. Show in detail how your organization is helping. Prove private funds are needed. Show what the money will go for, perhaps showing what specific items cost.
	Show how your organization will "pay back" the donor: publicity (<i>Your name will be prominently displayed on a banner... in a program... for our many friends and family to see</i>), having their name connected with your organization, doing good for the community.
	End with you phone number and say someone will call back within a certain time (1 – 2 weeks). Express appreciation.

Goodwill Messages

Goodwill messages are special messages. Unlike good news message that say "yes" to the reader related to business, goodwill messages are meant to build goodwill. These messages usually come as a pleasant surprise and are always appreciated.

Finding the right words to express feelings is sometimes more difficult than writing ordinary messages. Yet a ready-made card does not have the same impact as a personalized letter. Dr. Mary Ellen Guffey, best-selling author, recommends these 5 W's of Goodwill Messages:

1. **Be selfless.** Focus on the reader, not on the sender
2. **Be specific.** Instead of vague statements (You did a good job), include special details (Your strategy for approaching customers proved to be outstanding)
3. **Be sincere.** Show your honest feelings with conversational, everyday language.
4. **Be spontaneous.** Strive to make the message natural, fresh and direct. Avoid canned phrases (If I may be of service, please do not hesitate...)
5. **Be short.** Goodwill messages are fairly brief.

Goodwill Messages, Cont.

Goodwill messages convey congratulations (personal and professional), show appreciation, extend sympathy and condolence, and show recognition and special continuing concern.

Conveying Congratulations	Send congratulatory messages for highlights in people's personal lives (weddings, births, graduations, success in non-business competitions) or in their professional lives (new job, promotion, other business accomplishment)
	As appropriate, express your pride in the reader's accomplishment or state how the reader deserves the honor without being gushy.
Showing Appreciation	Cover three points in gift thank-you's (1) identify the gift, (2) tell why you appreciate it, and (3) explain how you will use it.
	Be sincere in sending thanks for a favor or for hard work. Tell what the favor means to you. Avoid superlatives and gushiness. Maintain credibility with sincere, simple statements.
	Offer praise in expressing thanks for hospitality. Compliment, as appropriate, (1) fine food, (2) charming surrounding, (3) warm hospitality, (4) excellent hosts, and (company)
Extending Sympathy	Refer to the loss or tragedy directly but sensitively. In the first sentence mention the loss and your personal reaction. Unlike other business letters, this letter may start with "I" since you are expressing personal feelings.
	For deaths, praise the deceased. Describe positive personal characteristics (<i>Howard was a forceful by caring leader.</i>)
	Offer assistance. Suggest your availability, especially if you can do something specific.
	End on a reassuring, positive note. Perhaps refer to the strength the reader finds in friends, family, colleagues or religion.
Showing Recognition	Write promptly. don't procrastinate in recognizing accomplishments and significant events in the lives of friends, customers, and fellow workers.
	Personalize the message. Include specific details, anecdotes, and meaningful tidbits that show your thoughtfulness and feelings,

sources: M.E. Guffey, *Essentials of Business Communication*; Kitty Locker, *Business and Administrative Communication*, Leslie Munro *Eng 209 Booklet*; Bull's Eye Business Writing Tips <http://www.basic-learning.com/wbw/tip03.htm>

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