

CHAPTER 10

Informative and Positive Messages

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know:

- 1 When to use common business media.
- 2 How to use the chosen channel effectively.
- 3 How to write letters and memos.
- 4 How to compose some of the common varieties of informative and positive messages.

IN THE NEWS

All in a Day's (Communication) Work



Jim Donald, CEO and president of Starbucks, knows the value of informative and positive messages. His days are full of them. On the day of his *Fortune* magazine interview, around 6 AM he left a voice mail for 100 regional managers, wrote personal thank-you notes to 25 employees, and signed 500 birthday cards. He will sign more than 3,500 in the year. He gets 200–250 e-mails daily and responds personally to 75% of them.

“He gets 200–250 emails daily and responds personally to 75% of them.”

He is also known for visiting his stores, where he dons the green apron, goes behind the counter, and talks with employees. When he is in Seattle, he visits about 20 Starbucks a week; when he is traveling, about 10 a day.

Although you probably don't want his e-mail load, you might appreciate his meeting time limits. He books meetings for an hour and insists they be finished in 45 minutes, leaving everyone with 15 minutes to process ideas and maybe even cope with that e-mail load.

Source: Patricia Sellers, “A Double Shot of Productivity: Jim Donald, CEO and President, Starbucks,” *Fortune*, October 16, 2006, 51.

Chapter Outline

Information Overload

Common Media

- Face-to-Face Contacts
- Phone Calls
- Instant Messages

Writing E-Mails, Letters, and Paper Memos

Organizing Informative and Positive Messages

Subject Lines for Informative and Positive Messages

- Making Subject Lines Specific
- Making Subject Lines Concise
- Making Subject Lines Appropriate for the Pattern of Organization
- Pointers for E-Mail Messages

Managing the Information in Your Messages

Using Benefits in Informative and Positive Messages

Ending Informative and Positive Messages

Humor in Informative Messages

Varieties of Informative and Positive Messages

- Transmittals
- Summaries
- Thank-You and Positive Feedback Notes
- Adjustments and Responses to Complaints

Solving a Sample Problem

- Problem
- Analysis of the Problem
- Discussion of the Sample Solutions

Summary of Key Points

Business messages must meet the needs of the sender (and the sender's organization), be sensitive to the audience, and accurately reflect the topic being discussed. Informative and positive messages are the bread-and-butter messages in organizations.

When we need to convey information to which the receiver's basic reaction will be neutral, the message is **informative**. If we convey information to which the receiver's reaction will be positive, the message is a **positive** or **good news message**. Neither message immediately asks the receiver to do anything. You usually do want to build positive attitudes toward the information you are presenting, so in that sense, even an informative message has a persuasive element. Chapter 11 will discuss messages where the receiver will respond negatively; Chapter 12 will discuss messages where you want the receiver to change beliefs or behavior.

Informative and positive messages include acceptances; positive answers to requests; information about procedures, products, services, or options; announcements of policy changes that are neutral or positive; and changes that are to the receiver's advantage.

Even a simple informative or good news message usually has several purposes:

Primary purposes:

To give information or good news to the receiver or to reassure the receiver.
To have the receiver view the information positively.

Secondary purposes:

To build a good image of the sender.
To build a good image of the sender's organization.
To cement a good relationship between the sender and the receiver.
To deemphasize any negative elements.
To reduce or eliminate future messages on the same subject.

Informative and positive messages are not necessarily short. Instead, the length of a message depends on your purposes, the audience's needs, and the complexity of the situation.

Information Overload

Although obviously some business communications must be longer, one of the realities of communication today is information overload. People are bombarded with junk mail, sales calls, spam, and other advertisements. On another level, even more routine communications are becoming overwhelming. With fast and cheap e-mails, plus the genuine belief in more transparent business procedures, businesses send more announcements of events, procedures, policies, services, and employee news. Departments send newsletters. Employees send announcements of and best wishes for births, birthdays, weddings, and promotions. Customers send comments about products, service, policies, and advertisements.

With this flood of information, you need to protect your communication reputation. You do not want to be the person whose e-mails or voice-mail messages are opened last because they take so long to get to the point, or even worse, the person whose messages are rarely opened at all.

Common Media

In the office, most informative and positive communications are made through five channels: face-to-face contacts, phone calls, instant messages, e-mails, and letters. Many people have personal preferences that need to be recognized. They may keep up with their e-mail but avoid listening to voice-mail messages; they may enjoy drop-in visitors but think instant messages are silly. Similarly, some channels seem better fitted for some situations than others.

Face-to-Face Contacts

Some businesses are encouraging their employees to write fewer e-mails and drop in each other's offices to conduct business.¹ Visits are a good choice when

- You know a colleague welcomes your visits.
- You are building a business relationship with a person.
- A real-time connection saves multiple phone calls or e-mails (e.g., setting a meeting agenda).
- Your business requires dialogue or negotiation.
- You need something immediately (like a signature).



Phone Answering Machine Pet Peeves

- Callback numbers that are mumbled or given too quickly.
- Messages longer than 30 seconds.
- Messages that require serious note taking (when an e-mail would have been better).
- Too much or too little information.
- Demands to contact people without saying why.
- Messages expecting an immediate response.
- Angry messages.

Part 3 Basic Business Messages

- Discretion is vital and you do not want to leave a paper trail.
- The situation is complex enough that you want as many visual and aural cues as possible.

Use these tips for effective face-to-face contact:

- Ensure the timing is convenient for the recipient.
- If you are discussing something complex, have appropriate documents in hand.
- Don't usurp their space. Don't put your papers on top of their desk or table without their permission.
- Look for "time to go" signs. Some people have a limited tolerance for small talk, especially when they are hard at work on a task.

Phone Calls

Phone calls provide fewer contextual cues than face-to-face visits, but more cues than electronic or paper messages. Phone calls are a good choice when

- Tone of voice is important.
- A real-time connection saves multiple phone calls or e-mails (e.g., setting a meeting time).
- You need something immediately (like an OK).
- You do not want to leave a paper trail (but remember that phone records are easily obtained, as we all know from Hewlett-Packard's use of board member phone records).

Use these tips for effective phone calls:

- Ensure the timing is convenient for the recipient; promptly return calls to your machine.
- Speak clearly, especially when giving your name and phone number (even more important when leaving your name and phone number on an answering machine).
- Use an information hook: I am calling about. . . .
- Keep the call short and cordial. If you need to leave a message, keep it brief: 1–2 sentences.
- Focus on the call; do not do other work. Most people can tell if you are reading e-mail or Web pages while talking to them, and they get the message that their concern is not important to you.

Instant Messages

Formerly limited primarily to students, instant messages are beginning to gain acceptance in the business world. However, you will probably find more enthusiasm for them among your younger colleagues. But not always! Many parents have been initiated to instant messages by their children. Because they are less intrusive than phone calls or visits, instant messages are good for running commentary or questions on tasks you and your colleagues are working on simultaneously. Even here, audience is important. Some people will not recognize common abbreviations; others will not appreciate ones like OMG (oh my God). Remember that like e-mails, instant messages can be saved, forwarded, and printed. They too leave a paper trail.

Writing E-Mails, Letters, and Paper Memos

When people think of business communications, many think of e-mails, letters, and paper memos. **Letters** go to someone outside your organization; **paper** memos go to someone in your organization; e-mails can go anywhere. Today most memos are sent as e-mails rather than paper documents. A study by Rogen International reports that executives spend at least two hours a day on e-mail.²

E-mails, letters, and memos use different formats. The most common formats are illustrated in Appendix A. The AMS Simplified letter format is very similar to memo format: it uses a subject line and omits the salutation and the complimentary close. Thus, it is a good choice when you don't know the reader's name. Two obvious differences between the formats of e-mails and paper memos are that (1) paper memos frequently have a company name or logo, and (2) writers generally initial the "From" line on a paper memo.

The differences in audience and format are the only differences among these documents. All of these messages can be long or short, depending on how much you have to say and how complicated the situation is. All of these messages can be informal when you write to someone you know well, or more formal when you write to someone you don't know, to several audiences, or for the record. All of these messages can be simple responses that you can dash off in 15 minutes; they can also take hours of analysis and revision when you're facing a new situation or when the stakes are high.

E-mails are commonly used for these purposes:

- To accomplish routine, noncontroversial business activities (setting up meetings/appointments, reminders, notices, quick updates, information sharing).
- To save time: many people can look through 60–100 e-mails an hour.
- To save money: one e-mail can go to many people, including global teams.
- To allow readers to deal with messages at their convenience, when timing is not crucial.
- To communicate accurately.
- To provide readers with details for reference (meetings).
- To create a paper trail.

With the increasing volume of e-mails, writers need to be careful with their messages. In their research on e-mail overload, Professors Gail Fann Thomas and Cynthia L. King noted that length was not the problem: most e-mails in their study were short, four lines or less. Rather, they found three factors that contributed to the perception of e-mail overload. The first, unstable requests, included requests that got refined in the process of e-mail correspondence and frequently morphed into requests for more work. The second, pressure to respond, included requests for information within hours. People in the study noted that they were never away from their e-mail, and that these requests could come any time. The third factor, delegation of tasks and shifting interactants, included tasks that were indirectly delegated (Could anyone get me the figures on X for the noon meeting?) or that recipients of the group e-mail then gave to their own subordinates.³

An e-mail survey found yet another factor in overload: inappropriate e-mails. This group included jokes, personal information, and non-job-related e-mails, as well as e-mails that were unnecessarily long, trivial, and irrelevant.⁴ However, another study found that as people became more comfortable working together on projects, their e-mails became more informal and personal and included such content as family commitments and personal health information. As their relationships developed, they also became more tolerant of spelling and grammar errors. When outsiders joined the project, however, e-mails went back to a formal, correct level.⁵



E-Mail Pet Peeves

- Missing or vague subject lines.
- Copying everyone rather than just the people that might find the information useful/interesting.
- Too much information/too little information.
- Too many instant messaging acronyms.
- Lack of capitalization and punctuation.
- Long messages without headings or bullets.
- Delayed response e-mails that don't include the original message. Sometimes readers have no idea what the e-mails are responding about.
- People who never respond to queries.
- People who expect an immediate answer.
- People who don't read their e-mail carefully enough to absorb a simple message.
- Superfluous images and attachments.
- Flaming.

In general, try to avoid another major problem with e-mail: using it for negative content. Negative critiques, bad news, and arguments generally have better outcomes when delivered in person. Sarcasm and irony are too frequently misinterpreted to be safely used. Similarly, avoid passing on gossip in your e-mails. The chances of having your gossip forwarded with your name attached are just too great.

Organizing Informative and Positive Messages

The patterns of organization in this chapter and others follow standard conventions of business. The patterns will work for 70 to 90% of the writing situations most people in business and government face. Using the appropriate pattern can help you compose more quickly, create a better final product, and demonstrate you know the conventions.

- Be sure you understand the rationale behind each pattern so that you can modify the pattern when necessary.
- Not every message that uses the basic pattern will have all the elements listed.
- Sometimes you can present several elements in one paragraph. Sometimes you'll need several paragraphs for just one element.

In real life, writing problems don't come with labels that tell you which pattern to use. Chapters 10, 11, and 12 offer advice about when to use each pattern.

Figure 10.1 shows how to organize informative and positive messages. Figures 10.2 and 10.3 illustrate two ways that the basic pattern can be applied.

The letter in Figure 10.2 announces a change in a magazine's ownership. Rather than telling subscribers that their magazine has been acquired, which sounds negative, the first two paragraphs describe the change as a merger that will give subscribers greater benefits from the combined magazine. Paragraph 3 provides details about how the arrangement will work,

Figure 10.1 How to Organize Informative and Positive Messages

1. **Start with good news or the most important information.** Summarize the main points. If the reader has already raised the issue, make it clear that you're responding.
2. **Give details, clarification, background.** Answer all the questions your reader is likely to have; provide all the information necessary to achieve your purposes. If you are asking or answering multiple questions, number them. Enumeration increases your chances of giving or receiving all the necessary information. Present details in the order of importance to the reader or in some other logical order.
3. **Present any negative elements—as positively as possible.** A policy may have limits; information may be incomplete; the reader may have to satisfy requirements to get a discount or benefit. Make these negatives clear, but present them as positively as possible.
4. **Explain any benefits.** Most informative memos need benefits. Show that the policy or procedure helps readers, not just the company. Give enough detail to make the benefits clear and convincing. In letters, you may want to give benefits of dealing with your company as well as benefits of the product or policy.
In a good news message, it's often possible to combine a short benefit with a goodwill ending in the last paragraph.
5. **Use a goodwill ending: positive, personal, and forward-looking.** Shifting your emphasis away from the message to the specific reader suggests that serving the reader is your real concern.

Figure 10.2 A Positive Letter

eBusCompanyToday

P.O. Box 12345
Tampa, FL 33660
813-555-5555

Dear Ms. Locker,

We're excited to share some great news! *eBusCompanyToday* has merged with another business magazine, *High-Tech Business News*. This merged publication will be called *High-Tech Business News* and will continue to be edited and published by the *eBusCompanyToday* staff.

The "new" *High-Tech Business News* is a great tool for navigating today's relentlessly changing marketplace, particularly as it's driven by the Internet and other technologies. It reports on the most innovative business practices and the people behind them; delivers surprising, useful insights; and explains how to put them to work. Please be assured that you will continue to receive the same great editorial coverage that you've come to expect from *eBusCompanyToday*.

You will receive the "new" *High-Tech Business News* in about 4 weeks, starting with the combined August/September issue. If you already subscribe to *High-Tech Business News*, your subscription will be extended accordingly. And if you'd rather not receive this publication, please call 1-800-555-5555 within the next 3 weeks.

Thank you for your continued loyalty to *eBusCompanyToday*; we're confident that you will enjoy reading *High-Tech Business News* every month.

Sincerely,
Alan Schmidt
Alan Schmidt, Editor and President

High-Tech Business News is published monthly except for two issues combined periodically into one and occasional extra, expanded or premium issues.

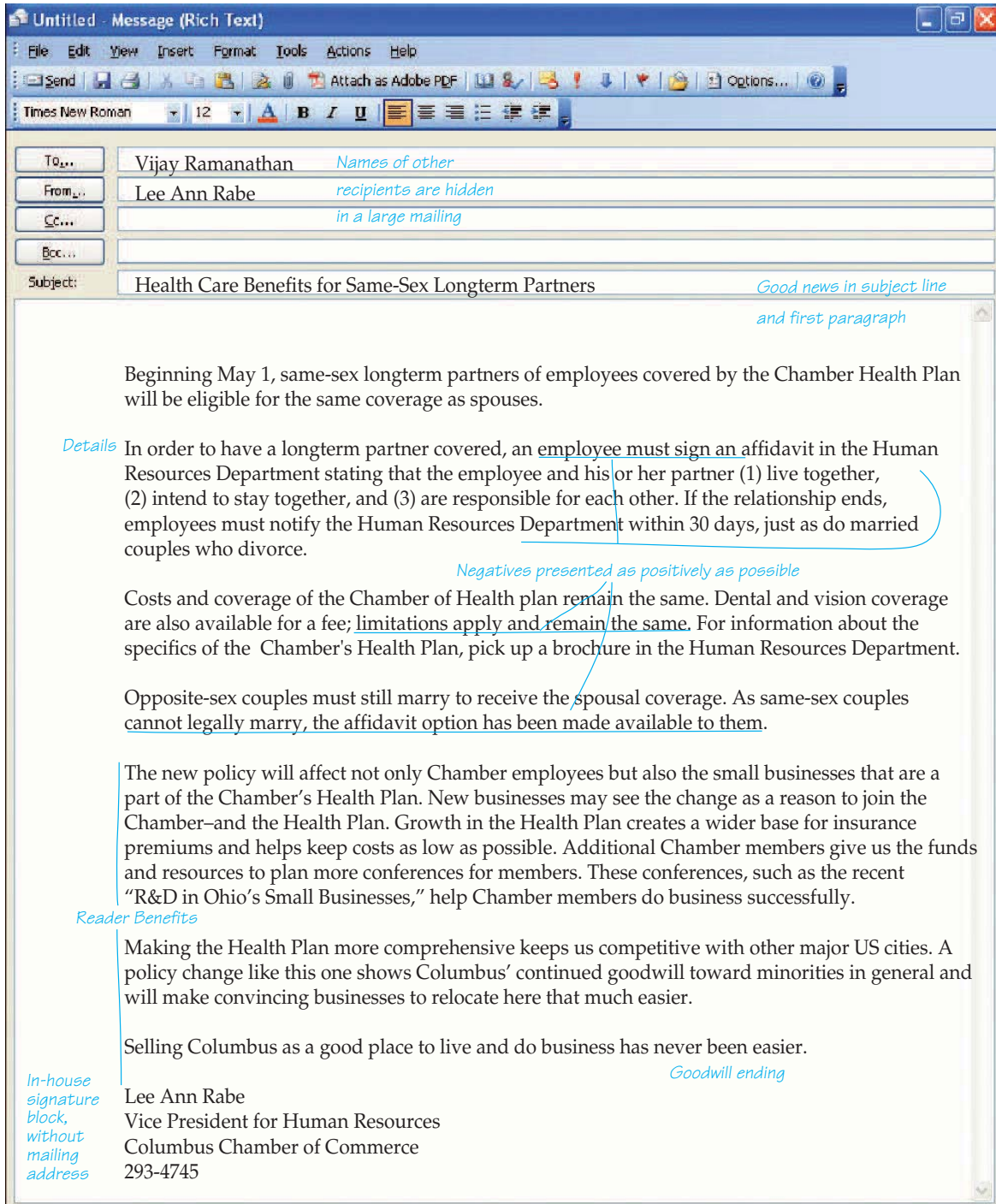
Main point presented as good news

Details focus on benefits to the reader

Positive, personal, forward-looking ending

Option to cancel is offered but not emphasized

Figure 10.3 A Positive Memo, Sent to Chamber of Commerce Employees and Members



along with a way to opt out. A possible negative is that readers who already have subscriptions to both magazines will now receive only one. The company addresses this positively by extending the subscription to the jointly published magazine. The goodwill ending has all the desired characteristics: it is positive (“we’re confident”), personal (“your continued loyalty”), and forward-looking (“you will enjoy”).

The memo in Figure 10.3 announces a new employee benefit. The first paragraph summarizes the policy. Paragraphs 2–4 give details. Negative elements are stated as positively as possible. The last section of the memo gives benefits and a goodwill ending.



Use To/CC/BCC Lines to Your Advantage

To

Send your e-mail only to people who will really want or need it. If you are sending to multiple people, decide in which order to place the names. Is organizational rank important? Should you alphabetize the list? Don't hit “reply to all” unless all will appreciate your doing so.

CC

CC stands for “carbon copy,” from the days of typewriters when carbon paper was used to make multiple copies. CC people who are not directly involved in the business of the e-mail but are interested in it. Marketing may not be helping you produce your new software, but they may want to stay abreast of the changes so they can start generating marketing ideas. A committee might CC a secretary who does not attend committee meetings but does maintain the committee's paper records.

Sometimes the CC line is used politically. For example, an administrative assistant doing routine business may CC the boss to give added weight to the e-mail.

BCC

BCC stands for “blind carbon copy,” a copy that the listed receivers do not know is being sent. Blind copies can create ill will when they become known, so be careful in their use.

Subject Lines for Informative and Positive Messages

A **subject line** is the title of a document. It aids in filing and retrieving the document, tells readers why they need to read the document, and provides a framework in which to set what you're about to say. Subject lines are standard in memos and e-mails. Letters are not required to have subject lines (see Appendix A, Formats for Letters, Memos, and E-Mail Messages).

A good subject line meets three criteria: it is specific, concise, and appropriate to the kind of message (positive, negative, persuasive).

Making Subject Lines Specific

The subject line needs to be specific enough to differentiate that message from others on the same subject, but broad enough to cover everything in the message.

- Too general: [Training Sessions](#)
- Better: [Dates for 2008 Training Sessions](#)
- or: [Evaluation of Training Sessions on Conducting Interviews](#)
- or: [Should We Schedule a Short Course on Proposal Writing?](#)

Making Subject Lines Concise

Most subject lines are relatively short. MailerMailer, a Web-based e-mail management service, found that e-mails whose subject lines were 35 characters or less were significantly more likely to be opened by readers than subject lines with more than 35 characters.⁶

- Wordy: Survey of Student Preferences in Regards to Various Pizza Factors
- Better: Students' Pizza Preferences

If you can't make the subject both specific and short, be specific.

Making Subject Lines Appropriate for the Pattern of Organization

Since your subject line introduces your reader to your message, it must satisfy the psychological demands of the situation; it must be appropriate to your purposes and to the immediate response you expect from your reader. In general, do the same thing in your subject line that you would do in the first paragraph.

When you have good news for the reader, build goodwill by highlighting it in the subject line. When your information is neutral, summarize it concisely for the subject line.



Fired for an E-mail

"[In November 2006] Justen [sic] Deal, a 22-year-old Kaiser Permanente employee, blasted an email throughout the giant health maintenance organization. His message charged that HealthConnect—the company's ambitious \$4 billion project to convert paper files into electronic medical records—was a mess.

"In a blistering 2,000-word treatise, Mr. Deal wrote: 'We're spending recklessly, to the tune of over \$1.5 billion in waste every year, primarily on HealthConnect. . . .

"For me, this isn't just an issue of saving money,' he wrote. 'It could very well become an issue of making sure our physicians and nurses have the tools they need to save lives.'"

Mr. Deal, who had believed he would be protected by Kaiser's policy encouraging people to report ethical problems, was fired. The CIO resigned, although the HMO said the timing was a coincidence. The appropriate California watchdog agency is now monitoring the system, and the Los Angeles *Times* ran a story with some of the same criticisms Mr. Deal had made.

Would you risk your job for an ethics issue this large? A smaller ethics issue? How could Mr. Deal have handled differently the problem he saw?

Source: Rhonda L. Rundle, "Critical Case: How an Email Rant Jolted a Big HMO: A 22-Year-Old's Tirade Made Trouble for Kaiser; Mr. Deal Got Fired, Famous," *Wall Street Journal*, April 24, 2007, A1, A16.

Subject: Discount on Rental Cars Effective January 2

Starting January 2, as an employee of Amalgamated Industries you can get a 15% discount on cars you rent for business or personal use from Roadway Rent-a-Car.

Subject: Update on Arrangements for Videoconference with France

In the last month, we have chosen the participants and developed a tentative agenda for the videoconference with France scheduled for March 21.

Pointers for E-Mail Messages

Many people skim through large lists of e-mails daily, so subject lines in e-mails are even more important than those in letters and memos. Subject lines must be specific, concise, and catchy. In these days of spam, some e-mail users get so many messages that they don't bother reading messages if they don't recognize the sender or if the subject doesn't catch their interest. Create a subject line that will help your e-mail get read:

- Use important information in the subject line. Many people delete blanks and generic tags such as "hello," "your message," "thank you," and "next meeting," if they don't recognize the sender, especially now that so much spam has common business tags.
- Put good news in the subject line.



E-mail messages are no longer received only on computers. The range of devices where users can access e-mail means creating messages that are clear, cordial, complete, concise, and correct is even more important.

- Name drop to make a connection: Our Director gave me your name.
- Make e-mail sound easy to deal with: Two Short Travel Questions.

The following subject lines would be acceptable for informative and good news e-mail messages:

- Travel Plans for Sales Meeting
- Your Proposal Accepted
- Reduced Prices During February
- Your Funding Request Approved

When you reply to a message, check to see that the automatic subject line “Re: [subject line of message to which you are responding]” is still appropriate. If it isn’t, you may want to create a new subject line. And if a series of messages arises, you probably need a new subject line. “Re: Re: Re: Re: Question” is not an effective subject line.

Many people read their e-mails very quickly. They may read for only a few seconds or lines to decide if the e-mail is pertinent. Value your readers’ time: Put the most important information in the first sentence. If your e-mail is more than one screen long, use headings and enumeration to help draw readers to successive screens.

Managing the Information in Your Messages

Information control is important. You want to give your audience the information they need, but you don’t want to overwhelm them with information. Sometimes you will have good reasons for not providing all the information they want.

When you are the person in the know, it is easy to overestimate how much your audience knows. As a patient seeking medical treatment, you understand how much you would appreciate being told how long the wait is. When you leave a medical facility, you know how difficult it is to remember accurately those complicated instructions given to you orally by a doctor or nurse. Unfortunately, most of the huge medical industry seems to be just discovering these facts now. Medical offices are beginning to communicate waiting times and send patients home with written instructions for self-care and follow-up visits.⁷

But, of course, information management is not always that simple. Pharmaceutical companies struggle with how much information to provide about their drugs. In 2004, the FDA publicized an analysis showing that young people on antidepressants had a 2% risk of suicidal thoughts. There were no actual suicides reported in the studies, just suicidal thoughts. Nevertheless, the FDA put a Black Box warning—the strongest possible warning—on antidepressants. Parents and physicians began backing away from the medications. Use of SSRI (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors) medications in young people declined 14%, and suicides increased 18% among young people the first year of the warnings.⁸

Other concerns about managing information are more prosaic. If you send out regularly scheduled messages on the same topic, such as monthly updates of training seminars, try to develop a system that lets people know immediately what is new. Use color for new or changed entries. Put new material at the top.

If you send messages with an attachment, put the most vital information in the e-mail too. Don’t make readers open an attachment merely to find out the time or location of a meeting.

Check your message for accuracy and completeness. Remember all the e-mails you receive about meetings that forget to include the time, place, or



You—A Most Important Subject

On the job, one of the most important subjects you can communicate about is your own performance. Make sure your boss knows what you are doing. You don’t have to brag; simply noting your accomplishments is usually enough, because many employees do not take the time to do so.

Remember that raises are based not on the hard work you actually do, but the hard work your boss knows about. Furthermore, bosses count the work they want done, which is not always the work employees emphasize.

Provide your boss with paper copies of your work; CC him/her on major e-mails, if appropriate. Have 30-second blurbs ready for times when you and your boss are alone in the elevator or break room: “We got the McCluskey contract ready a day early” or “the new G7 database is going to IT tomorrow.”



Wacky Warnings

[In his book, *Remove Child before Folding:*

The 101 Stupidest, Silliest, and Wackiest Warning Labels Ever, Bob Dorigo Jones provides these examples of wacky warnings:]

- “May cause drowsiness” (on a sleeping aid).
- “Never use when sleeping” (on a propane torch).
- “Do not eat toner” (on a printer cartridge).
- “Never iron clothes while they are being worn” (on a household iron).
- “Caution: This is not to be used by children under 3 years of age” (on a child’s toy badge that proclaims “I am 2”).
- “Harmful if swallowed” (on a fishing lure with a three-pronged hook).

“The most recent winner [is] a toilet-cleaning brush that comes with the warning, ‘Do not use for personal hygiene.’”

Quoted from Ron Berthel, “Weird Warnings: Close Cover Before Striking This Book,” *Des Moines Register*, February 4, 2007, 5op.

date, and don’t let your e-mails fall in that incomplete category. Make a special effort to ensure that promised attachments really are attached. Be particularly careful with the last messages you send for the day or the week, when haste can cause errors.

Remember that e-mails are public documents, and may be widely forwarded. Save lowercase and instant message abbreviations for friends, if you use them at all. Never put anything in an e-mail that would embarrass you or harm your career if your employer, colleague, parent, or child saw it. An American employee responded to a request for floor mats from an American GI in Iraq by saying “We would NEVER ship to Iraq. If you were sensible, you and your troops would pull out of Iraq.” The e-mail quickly circulated on the Internet, getting the employee fired and the business boycotted.⁹ Starbucks had a different e-mail problem. An e-mail coupon for a free grande iced beverage was sent to some Atlanta employees to forward to family and friends. The coupon made its way to the Web, where it became an Internet star. It spread so widely that Starbucks stopped honoring the coupon.¹⁰

Using Benefits in Informative and Positive Messages

Not all informative and positive messages need benefits (◀ p. 57). You don’t need benefits when

- You’re presenting factual information only.
- The audience’s attitude toward the information doesn’t matter.
- Stressing benefits may make the audience sound selfish.
- The benefits are so obvious that to restate them insults the audience’s intelligence.

You do need benefits when

- You are presenting policies.
- You want to shape your audience’s attitudes toward the information or toward your organization.
- Stressing benefits presents the audience’s motives positively.
- Some of the benefits may not be obvious.

Messages to customers or potential customers sometimes include a sales paragraph promoting products or services you offer in addition to the product or service that the audience has asked about. Sales promotion in an informative or positive message should be low-key, not “hard sell.”

Benefits are hardest to develop when you are announcing policies. The organization probably decided to adopt the policy because it appeared to help the organization; the people who made the decision may not have thought at all about whether it would help or hurt employees. Yet benefits are most essential in this kind of message so employees see the reason for the change and support it.

When you present benefits, be sure to present advantages *to the audience*. Most new policies help the organization in some way, but few workers will see their own interests as identical with these of the organization. Employees’ benefits need to be spelled out, as do those of customers. To save money, an organization may change health care providers, but the notice to employees should spell out new benefits for employees and their families. Airlines announced their new check-in kiosks to customers as a way to avoid lines and save travelers’ time.

To develop benefits for informative and positive messages, use the steps suggested in Chapter 3. Be sure to think about benefits that come from the activity or policy itself, apart from any financial benefits. Does a policy improve customers' experience or the hours employees spend at work?



April Fool's Hoaxes: Famous (Mis) Information

"In 1996, the Taco Bell Corp. announced that it had bought the Liberty Bell from the federal government and was renaming it the Taco Liberty Bell. Hundreds of outraged citizens called up the National Historic Park in Philadelphia where the bell is housed to express their anger.

"In 1998 Burger King published a full page advertisement in *USA Today* announcing the introduction of a new item to their menu: a 'Left-Handed Whopper' specially designed for the 32 million left-handed Americans. According to the advertisement, the new whopper included the same ingredients as the original Whopper (lettuce, tomato, hamburger patty, etc.), but all the condiments were rotated 180 degrees for the benefit of their left-handed customers. The following day Burger King issued a follow-up release revealing that although the Left-Handed Whopper was a hoax, thousands of customers had gone into restaurants to request the new sandwich. Simultaneously, according to the press release, 'many others requested their own "right handed" version.'"

What benefits did these companies gain from their hoaxes? How could this misinformation backfire?

Hoaxes quoted from "The Top 100 April Fool's Day Hoaxes of All Time," <http://www.museumofhoaxes.com/hoax/aprilfool/index> (accessed April 27, 2007).

Ending Informative and Positive Messages

Ending a letter or memo gracefully can be a problem in short informative and positive messages. In a one-page memo where you have omitted details and proof, you can tell readers where to get more information. In long messages, you can summarize your basic point. In persuasive messages, as you'll learn in Chapter 12, you can tell readers what you want them to do. In a short message containing all the information readers need, either write a goodwill paragraph that refers directly to the reader or the reader's organization, or just stop. In many short e-mails, just stopping is the best choice.

Goodwill endings should focus on the business relationship you share with your reader rather than on the reader's hobbies, family, or personal life. Use a paragraph that shows you see your reader as an individual. Possibilities include complimenting the reader for a job well done, describing a benefit, or looking forward to something positive that relates to the subject of the message.

When you write to one person, a good last paragraph fits that person so specifically that it would not work if you sent the same basic message to someone else or to a person with the same title in another organization. When you write to someone who represents an organization, the last paragraph can refer to your company's relationship to the reader's organization. When you write to a group (for example, to "All Employees"), your ending should apply to the whole group.

In the following example, a letter answered the question "When a patient leaves the hospital and returns, should we count it as a new stay?" For one company the answer was that if a patient was gone from the hospital overnight or longer, the hospital should start a new claim when the patient was readmitted.

Weak closing paragraph: *Should you have any questions regarding this matter, please feel free to call me.*

Goodwill paragraph: *Many patients appreciate the freedom to leave the hospital for a few hours. It's nice working with a hospital which is flexible enough to offer that option.*

Also acceptable: Omit the paragraph; stop after the explanation.

Some writers end every message with a standard invitation:

If you have questions, please do not hesitate to ask.

That sentence implies both that your message did not answer all questions, and that readers will hesitate to contact you. Both implications are negative. But revising the line to say "feel free to call" is rarely a good idea. People in business aren't shrinking violets; they will call if they need help. Don't make more work for yourself by inviting calls to clarify simple messages.

Humor in Informative Messages

Some writers use humor to ensure their messages are read. Humor is a risky tool because of its tendency to rile some people. However, if you know your audience well, humor may help ensure that they read and remember your messages.



Welcome News

Many companies like to maintain ties with customers by sending out a regular newsletter via e-mail. Customers welcome this type of communication only if it is truly interesting and easy to read.

Here are a few pointers for publishing a successful electronic newsletter:

- **Be relevant.** Everyone gets plenty of cute humor online. The newsletter should be limited to information recipients can use.
- **Be brief.**
- **Be consistent.** Set up a regular schedule for the newsletter, and get it out on time. This conveys an image of dependability.
- **Be simple.** Skip the audio or video clips unless they are essential to your message. They tend to be distracting, and they slow down the process of opening e-mail.
- **Be considerate.** Set yourself apart from spammers by making it easy to unsubscribe as well as to subscribe. Lead off each mailing with an explanation like “*ABC Digest* is a monthly newsletter with hints for alphabet soup lovers, sent to subscribers who have requested it. If you would like to be [removed from our mailing list, click on this link.](#)”

Adapted from Ellen Neuborne, “Making E-Mail Work: How to Enhance—Not Sabotage—Client Relationships with Electronic Newsletters,” *Sales & Marketing Management*, February 2004, 18; and Rebecca Rohan, “The Messenger,” *Black Enterprise*, July 2000, 55–56.

If you decide to use humor, these precautions will help keep it useful.

- Do not direct it against other people, even if you believe they will never see your message. The Internet abounds with proof that such certainties are false. In particular, never aim humor against a specific group of people.
- Political, religious, and sexual humor should always be avoided; it is against discrimination policies in many businesses.
- Use restraint with your humor; a little levity goes a long way.

Used with care, however, humor in carefully chosen situations can help your communications. An information technology person sent the following e-mail in his small, nonprofit organization:¹¹

My set of screw driver tips is missing. I may well have loaned them to someone, perhaps weeks ago. If you have them, please return them to me. I use them when someone reports that they have a screw loose.

He got his tips back promptly. Because he has a reputation for clever e-mails, people regularly read his messages.

Varieties of Informative and Positive Messages

Many messages can be informative, negative, or persuasive depending on what you have to say. A transmittal, for example, can be positive when you’re sending glowing sales figures or persuasive when you want the reader to act on the information. A performance appraisal is positive when you evaluate someone who’s doing superbly, negative when you want to compile a record to justify firing someone, and persuasive when you want to motivate a satisfactory worker to continue to improve. Each of these messages is discussed in the chapter of the pattern it uses most frequently. However, in some cases you will need to use a pattern from a different chapter.

Transmittals

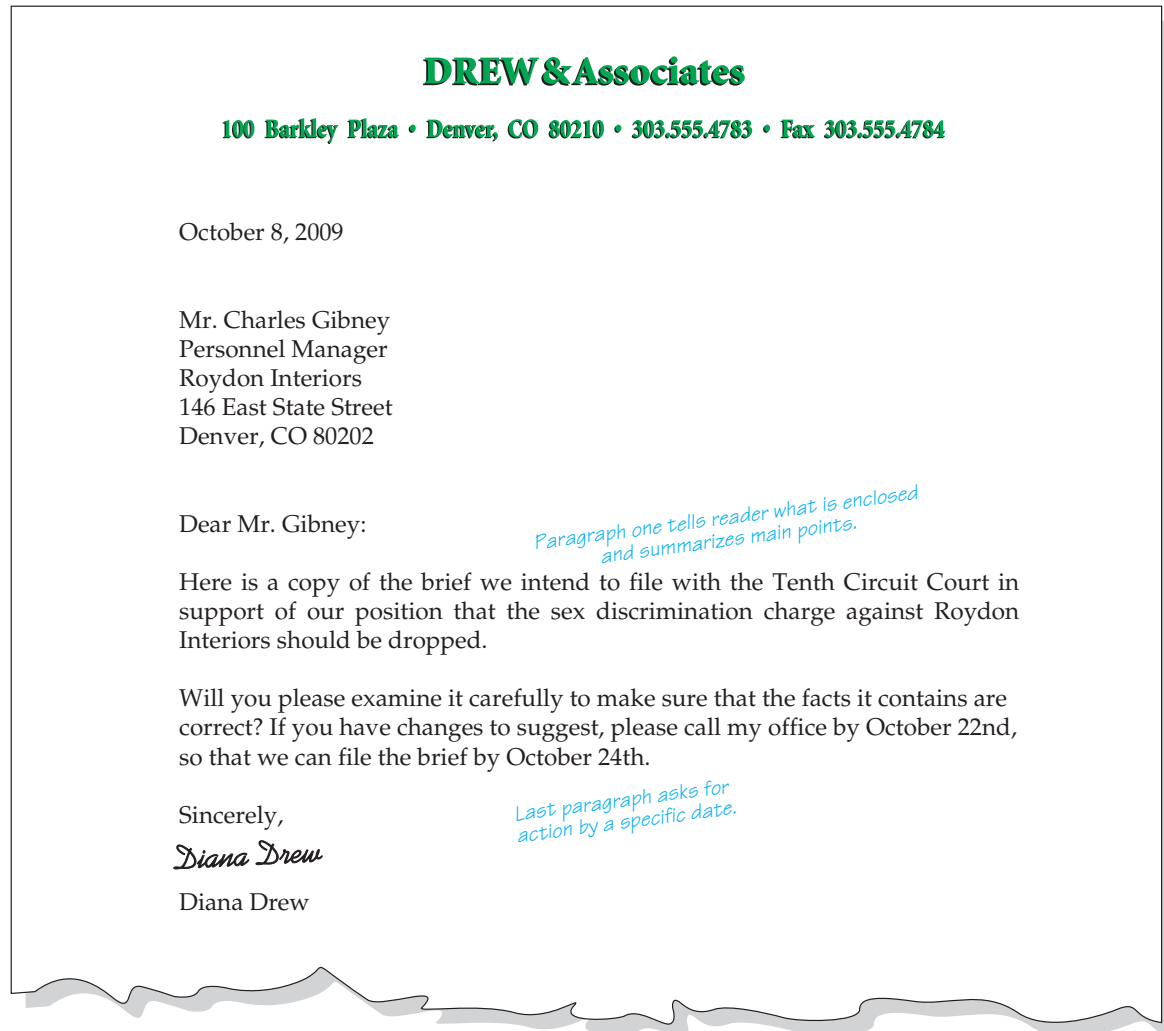
When you send someone something, you frequently need to attach a memo or letter of transmittal explaining what you’re sending. A transmittal can be as simple as a small yellow Post-it™ note with “FYI” (“for your information”) written on it, or it can be a separate typed document.

Organize a memo or letter of transmittal in this order:

1. Tell the reader what you’re sending.
2. Summarize the main point(s) of the document.
3. Indicate any special circumstances or information that would help the reader understand the document. Is it a draft? Is it a partial document that will be completed later?
4. Tell the reader what will happen next. Will you do something? Do you want a response? If you do want the reader to act, specify exactly what you want the reader to do and give a deadline.

Frequently transmittals have important secondary purposes. Consider the writer’s purpose in Figure 10.4, a transmittal from a lawyer to her client. The primary purpose of this transmittal is to give the client a chance to affirm that his story and the lawyer’s understanding of it are correct. If there’s anything wrong, the lawyer wants to know *before* she files the brief. But an important secondary purpose is to build goodwill: “I’m working on your case; I’m earning my fee.” The greatest number of complaints officially lodged against lawyers are for the lawyer’s neglect—or what the client perceives as neglect—of the client’s case.

Figure 10.4 A Transmittal



Summaries

You may be asked to summarize a conversation, a document, or an outside meeting for colleagues or superiors. (Minutes of an internal meeting are usually more detailed. See Chapter 14 for advice on writing minutes of meetings.)

In a summary of a conversation for internal use, identify the people who were present, the topic of discussion, decisions made, and who does what next.

To summarize a document, start with the main point. Then go on to give supporting evidence or details. In some cases, your audience may also want you to evaluate the document. Should others in the company read this book? Should someone in the company write a letter to the editor responding to this newspaper article?

When you visit a client or go to a conference, you may be asked to share your findings and impressions with other people in your organization. Chronological accounts are the easiest to write but the least useful for the reader. Your company doesn't need a blow-by-blow account of what you did; it needs to know what *it* should do as a result of the meeting.

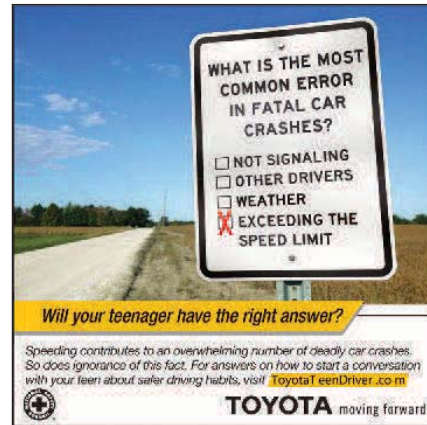
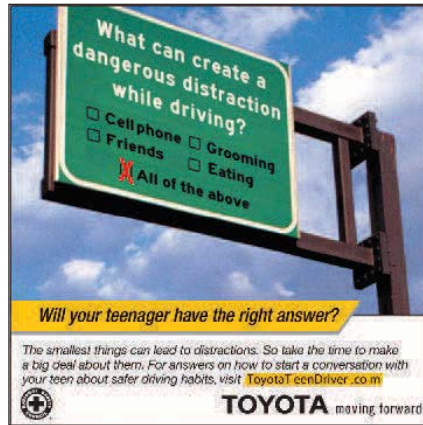


Electronic Feedback

In an attempt to boost business and promote discussion of products and services, small businesses are increasingly adding customer reviews to their Web sites. These reviews offer consumers a chance to weigh in on their experiences with a product or service. Over time, this review process has been shown to promote repeat and loyal business because consumers are more likely to trust word of mouth reviews than more traditional avenues of marketing.

A 2006 survey conducted by Forrester Research found that 71% of adults online (22 and over) and 81% of youth online (ages 13–21) use customer product ratings. The reviews not only help a small business know what's good about its organization, they also provide direct feedback on what could be improved or changed with a product or service.

Adapted from Kelly K. Spors, "How Are We Doing? Small Companies Find It Pays to Ask Customers That Question," *Wall Street Journal*, November 13, 2006, R9.



In 2006, Toyota launched an ad campaign to encourage safe driving among teenagers, who hold the highest rate for being in an accident. In the ads, Toyota attempts to inform the public about safety issues of driving recklessly, while appealing to the viewers' emotions. Source: Toyota Advertisements, *Wall Street Journal*, October 4, 2006, A1, and September 27, 2006, A1.

Summarize a visit with a client or customer in this way:

1. Put the main point from your organization's point of view—the action to be taken, the perceptions to be changed—in the first paragraph.
2. Provide an **umbrella paragraph** to cover and foreshadow the points you will make in the report.
3. Provide necessary detail to support your conclusions and cover each point. Use lists and headings to make the structure of the document clear.

In the following example, the revised first paragraph summarizes the sales representative's conclusions after a call on a prospective client:

Original:

On October 10th, Rick Patel and I made a joint call on Consolidated Tool Works. The discussion was held in a conference room, with the following people present:

1. Kyle McCloskey (Vice President and General Manager)
2. Bill Petrakis (Manufacturing Engineer)
3. Garrett Lee (Process Engineering Supervisor)
4. Courtney Mansor-Green (Project Engineer)

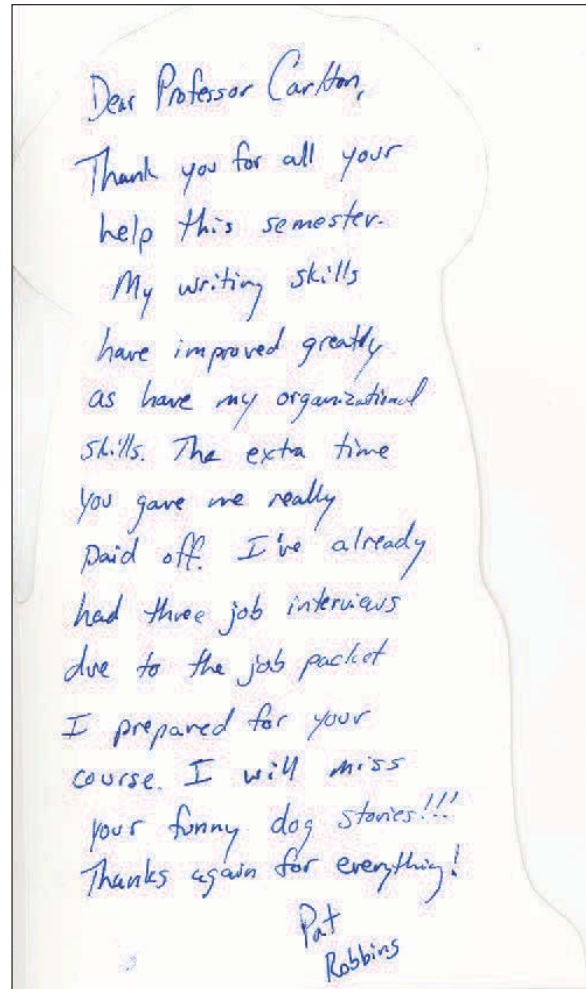
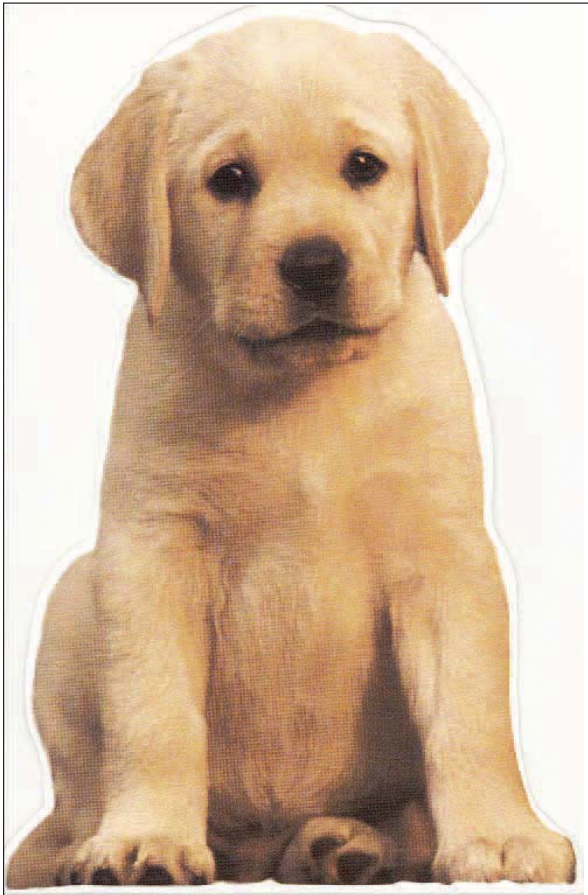
Revised:

Consolidated Tool Works is an excellent prospect for purchasing a Matrix-Churchill grinding machine. To get the order, we should

1. Set up a visit for CTW personnel to see the Matrix-Churchill machine in Kansas City;
2. Guarantee 60-day delivery if the order is placed by the end of the quarter; and
3. Extend credit terms to CTW.

Thank-You and Positive Feedback Notes

We all like to feel appreciated. Stress reduction expert Richard Carlson always recommended liberal applications of positive feedback in his popular books and lectures. As he reminded his audiences, employees who feel



Thank-you notes can be written on standard business stationery, using standard formats. But one student noticed that his professor really liked dogs and told funny dog stories in class. So the student found a dog card for a thank-you note.

appreciated are happier and work harder and better than those who feel taken for granted.¹²

Praising or congratulating people can cement good feelings between you and them and enhance your own visibility. Make your praise sound sincere by offering specifics and avoiding language that might seem condescending or patronizing. For example, think how silly it would sound to praise an employee for completing basic job requirements or to gush that one's professor or mentor has superior knowledge. In contrast, thanks for a kind deed and congratulations or praise on completing a difficult task are rewarding in almost any situation.

Sending a **thank-you note** will make people more willing to help you again in the future. Thank-you letters can be short but must be prompt. They need to be specific to sound sincere.

If you make it a habit to watch for opportunities to offer thanks and congratulations, you may be pleasantly surprised at the number of people who are extending themselves. Lawrence Fish, chief executive of Citizens Bank, tries to write a note of thanks or congratulations to one member of



Bad Words

Ruth King, who coaches building contractors, has advice for employees who handle customer complaints. When a customer complains, King says, avoid using the following words in your reply:

- **We're busy.** These words focus on your organization; you should focus on the customer. State the earliest possible time you can give your attention to the problem.
- **No.** When a customer is angry, the word *no* is like "gasoline on a fire." Instead, offer reasonable alternatives to choose from.
- **We can't.** These words are as infuriating as *no*. Again, specify what you *can* offer.
- **It's our policy.** Writing about the organization's policy takes the focus off the customer and is yet another way to say what you will not do. Customers aren't interested in policies, and they are likely to ask that the policy be changed or waived. Focus on alternatives that are available.

Adapted from Ruth King, "Five Things You Should Never Say to Customers," *Journal of Light Construction* 22, no. 1 (2003): 10.

his team every day. During his six-year term, Douglas Conant, Chief Executive of Campbell, sent over 16,000 handwritten thank-you notes to employees ranging from top executives to hourly workers. Linden Labs, a San Francisco virtual reality firm, has a "Love Machine" that allows employees to send other LL employees a note of thanks. These notes are tracked in a database, which is accessed during performance reviews.¹³ As Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, authors of the business best seller *The One Minute Manager*, note, "People who feel good about themselves produce good results."¹⁴

Adjustments and Responses to Complaints

A lot of consumers are angry these days, and organizations should be responsive to their complaints. In a recent study on customer rage by Customer Care Measurement and Consulting Firm, 70% of consumers report having bad customer-service experiences that left them "upset" or "extremely upset." Furthermore, 46% of consumers said they were dissatisfied with how a company handled their complaint. Most said they told their friends and family about their bad experience. This kind of bad publicity is risky in an Internet economy. The study suggests that the angriest customers have the power to influence about 18 other customers. That can be big money when it comes to business.¹⁵

Angry customers expect organizations to show that they are listening and want to resolve the problem. When you grant a customer's request for an adjusted price, discount, replacement, or other benefit to resolve a complaint, do so in the very first sentence.

Your Visa bill for a night's lodging has been adjusted to \$63. Next month a credit of \$37 will appear on your bill to reimburse you for the extra amount you were originally asked to pay.

Don't talk about your own process in making the decision. Don't say anything that sounds grudging. Give the reason for the original mistake only if it reflects credit on the company. (In most cases, it doesn't, so the reason should be omitted.)

Solving a Sample Problem

Real-life problems are richer and less well defined than textbook problems and cases. But even textbook problems require analysis before you begin to write. Before you tackle the assignments for this chapter, examine the following problem. See how the analysis questions probe the basic points required for a solution. Study the two sample solutions to see what makes one unacceptable and the other one good. Note the recommendations for revision that could make the good solution excellent.¹⁶ The checklist at the end of the chapter (p. 318) can help you evaluate a draft.

Problem

Interstate Fidelity Insurance (IFI) uses computers to handle its payments and billings. There is often a time lag between receiving a payment from a customer and recording it on the computer. Sometimes, while the payment

is in line to be processed, the computer sends out additional notices: past-due notices, collection letters, even threats to sue. Customers are frightened or angry and write asking for an explanation. In most cases, if they just waited a little while, the situation would be straightened out. But policyholders are afraid that they'll be without insurance because the company thinks the bill has not been paid.

IFI doesn't have the time to check each individual situation to see if the check did arrive and has been processed. It wants you to write a letter that will persuade customers to wait. If something is wrong and the payment never reached IFI, IFI would send a legal notice to that effect saying the policy would be canceled by a certain date (which the notice would specify) at least 30 days after the date on the original premium bill. Continuing customers always get this legal notice as a third chance (after the original bill and the past-due notice).

Prepare a form letter that can go out to every policyholder who claims to have paid a premium for automobile insurance and resents getting a past-due notice. The letter should reassure readers and build goodwill for IFI.

Analysis of the Problem

- Who is (are) your audience(s)? What characteristics are relevant to this particular message? If you are writing to more than one reader, how do the readers differ?

Automobile insurance customers who say they've paid but have still received a past-due notice. They're afraid they're no longer insured. Since it's a form letter, different readers will have different situations: in some cases payments did arrive late, in some cases the company made a mistake, in some the reader never paid (check was lost in mail, unsigned, bounced, etc.).
- What are your purposes in writing?

To reassure readers that they're covered for 30 days. To inform them that they can assume everything is OK *unless* they receive a second notice. To avoid further correspondence on this subject. To build goodwill for IFI: (a) we don't want to suggest IFI is error-prone or too cheap to hire enough people to do the necessary work; (b) we don't want readers to switch companies; (c) we do want readers to buy from IFI when they're ready for more insurance.
- What information must your message include?

Readers are still insured. We cannot say whether their checks have now been processed (company doesn't want to check individual accounts). Their insurance will be canceled if they do not pay after receiving the second past-due notice (the legal notice).
- How can you build support for your position? What reasons or benefits will your reader find convincing?

Computers help us provide personal service to policyholders. We offer policies to meet all their needs. Both of these points would need specifics to be interesting and convincing.
- What objection(s) can you expect your reader(s) to have? What negative elements of your message must you deemphasize or overcome?

Computers appear to cause errors. We don't know if the checks have been processed. We will cancel policies if their checks don't arrive.
- What aspects of the total situation may affect reader response? The economy? The time of year? Morale in the organization? The relationship between the reader and writer? Any special circumstances?

The insurance business is highly competitive—other companies offer similar rates and policies. The customer could get a similar policy for about the same



One Tablespoon or Two?

The Internet has provided a means for information on just about any subject to be at your fingertips. For example, chefs are now communicating over the Internet to provide cooking tips to families just like yours. These chefs communicate through IM, e-mail, or chat boards—some services for free and some for a cost. This instant access to consumers provides just one more way chefs and restaurateurs can promote their businesses. Check out some of these sites from the following list and determine how effective they are at delivering informative messages:

- <http://www.chefsline.com>
- <http://www.chefs.com>
- <http://www.cheftalk.com>
- <http://www.chefjoanna.com>
- <http://www.askachef.com>

Adapted from Yuliya Cherrnova, "Soggy Stuffing, Dry Turkey? Now You Can IM a Chef," *Wall Street Journal*, November 22, 2006, D1.



<http://www.thecoca-colacompany.com/heritage/stories/index.html>

Stories are powerful ways to inform, teach, and persuade. Coca-Cola is one of several companies posting customer stories on its Web site. Log on to read some of the stories or submit your own memory involving Coca-Cola.

While reading the stories, consider how these positive messages help the organization build goodwill with its consumers. Why are these stories powerful? Out of all the mail Coca-Cola receives, why do you think these particular stories were chosen to appear on their Web site? Furthermore, why do you think interactive sites like these build brand loyalty with customers?



Personal Touch

E-mails are fine, but if you really want to thank a customer for his [or her] business, write a short note instead. Businesspeople get so few hand-written notes these days that your thank you is sure to stand out.

Quoted from "Networking Tip," *Sales & Marketing Management*, May 2004, 64.

money from someone else. Most people find that money is tight, so they'll want to keep insurance costs low. Yet the fact that prices are steady or rising means that the value of what they own is higher—they need insurance more than ever.

Many insurance companies are refusing to renew policies (car, liability, malpractice insurance). These refusals to renew have gotten lots of publicity, and many people have heard horror stories about companies and individuals whose insurance has been canceled or not renewed after a small number of claims. Readers don't feel very kindly toward insurance companies.

People need car insurance. If they have an accident and aren't covered, they not only have to bear the costs of that accident alone but also (depending on state law) may need to place as much as \$50,000 in a state escrow account to cover future accidents. They have a legitimate worry.

Discussion of the Sample Solutions

The solution in Figure 10.5 is unacceptable. The red marginal comments show problem spots. Since this is a form letter, we cannot tell customers we have their checks; in some cases, we may not. The letter is far too negative. The explanation in paragraph 2 makes IFI look irresponsible and uncaring. Paragraph 3 is far too negative. Paragraph 4 is too vague; there are no reader benefits; the ending sounds selfish. A major weakness with the solution is that it lifts phrases straight out of the problem; the writer does not seem to have thought about the problem or about the words he or she is using. Measuring the draft against the answers to the questions for analysis suggests that this writer should start over.

The solution in Figure 10.6 is much better. The blue marginal comments show the letter's strong points. The message opens with the good news that is true for all readers. (Whenever possible, one should use the good

Figure 10.5 An Unacceptable Solution to the Sample Problem

Need date

Dear Customer:

Relax. We got your check. Not necessarily true. Reread problem.

This explanation makes company look bad.

There is always a time lag between the time payments come in and the time they are processed. While payments are waiting to be processed, the computer with super-human quickness is sending out past-due notices and threats of cancellation.

Too negative

Need to present this positively

Cancellation is not something you should worry about. No policy would be canceled without a legal notice to that effect giving a specific date for cancellation which would be at least 30 days after the date on the original premium notice.

If you want to buy more insurance, just contact your local Interstate Fidelity agent. We will be happy to help you. This paragraph isn't specific enough to work as a reader benefit. It lacks you-attitude and positive emphasis.

Sincerely,

Figure 10.6 A Good Solution to the Sample Problem

Need date

Dear Customer: *Better: use computer to personalize. Put in name and address of a specific reader*

Your auto insurance is still in effect. *Good ¶ 1. True for all readers*

Past-due notices are mailed out if the payment has not been processed within three days after the due date. This may happen if a check is delayed in the mail or arrives without a signature or account number. When your check arrives with all the necessary information, it is promptly credited to your account. *Good to treat notice as information, tell reader what to do if it arrives* *Good you-attitude*

Even if a check is lost in the mail and never reaches us, you still have a 30-day grace period. If you do get a second notice, you'll know that we still have not received your check. To keep your insurance in force, just stop payment on the first check and send a second one.

IFI is always checking to ensure that you get any discounts you're eligible for: multicar, accident-free record, good student. If you have a claim, your agent uses computer tracking to find quality repair shops quickly, whatever car you drive. You get a check quickly—usually within 3 working days—without having to visit dealer after dealer for time-consuming estimates. *Benefits of using computers* *Too negative* *Better to put in agent's name, phone number*

Today, your home and possessions are worth more than ever. You can protect them with Interstate Fidelity's homeowners' and renters' policies. Let your local agent show you how easy it is to give yourself full protection. If you need a special rider to insure a personal computer, jewelry, a coin or gun collection, or a fine antique, you can get that from IFI, too. *Need to add benefits of insuring with IFI* *Good specifics*

Whatever your insurance needs—auto, home, life, or health—one call to IFI can do it all. *Acceptable ending*

Sincerely,

news pattern of organization.) Paragraph 2 explains IFI's policy. It avoids assigning blame and ends on a positive note. The negative information is buried in paragraph 3 and is presented positively: the notice is information, not a threat; the 30-day extension is a "grace period." Telling the reader now what to do if a second notice arrives eliminates the need for a second exchange of letters. Paragraph 4 offers benefits for being insured by IFI. Paragraph 5 promotes other policies the company sells and prepares for the last paragraph.

As the red comments indicate, this good solution could be improved by personalizing the salutation and by including the name and number of the local agent. Computers could make both of those insertions easily. This good letter could be made excellent by revising paragraph 4 so that it doesn't end on a negative note and by using more reader benefits. For instance, do computers help agents advise clients of the best policies for them? Does IFI offer good service—quick, friendly, nonpressured—that could be stressed? Are agents well trained? All of these might yield ideas for additional reader benefits.

Checklist Checklist for Informative and Positive Messages

- In positive messages, does the subject line give the good news? In either message, is the subject line specific enough to differentiate this message from others on the same subject?
 - Does the first paragraph summarize the information or good news? If the information is too complex to fit into a single paragraph, does the paragraph list the basic parts of the policy or information in the order in which the memo discusses them?
 - Is all the information given in the message? What information is needed will vary depending on the message, but information about dates, places, times, and anything related to money usually needs to be included. When in doubt, ask!
 - In messages announcing policies, is there at least one benefit for each segment of the audience? Are all benefits ones that seem likely to occur in this organization?
 - Is each benefit developed, showing that the benefit will come from the policy and why the benefit matters to this organization? Do the benefits build on the job duties of people at this organization and the specific circumstances of the organization?
 - Does the message end with a positive paragraph—preferably one that is specific to the readers, not a general one that could fit any organization or policy?
- And, for all messages, not just informative and positive ones,
- Does the message use you-attitude and positive emphasis?
 - Is the tone friendly?
 - Is the style easy to read?
 - Is the visual design of the message inviting?
 - Is the format correct?
 - Does the message use standard grammar? Is it free from typos?
- Originality in a positive or informative message may come from
- Creating good headings, lists, and visual impact.
 - Developing reader benefits.
 - Thinking about readers and giving details that answer their questions and make it easier for them to understand and follow the policy.

Summary of Key Points

- Good communicators need to thoughtfully select one of the five most common modes of office communications: face-to-face contact, phone calls, instant messages, letters, and memos/e-mails.
- Informative and positive messages normally use the following pattern of organization:
 1. Give any good news and summarize the main points.
 2. Give details, clarification, background.
 3. Present any negative elements—as positively as possible.
 4. Explain any benefits.
 5. Use a goodwill ending: positive, personal, and forward-looking.
- A **subject line** is the title of a document. A good subject line meets three criteria: it's specific; it's reasonably short; and it's adapted to the kind of message (positive, negative, persuasive). If you can't make the subject both specific and short, be specific.

- The subject line for an informative or positive message should highlight any good news and summarize the information concisely.
- Good messages provide the necessary information without overwhelming their audience.
- Use benefits in informative and positive messages when
 - You are presenting policies.
 - You want to shape your audience's attitudes toward the information or toward your organization.
 - Stressing benefits presents the audience's motives positively.
 - Some of the benefits may not be obvious.
- **Goodwill endings** should focus on the business relationship you share with your audience or the audience's organization. The last paragraph of a message to a group should apply to the whole group.
- Humor is a risky tool. Use it carefully in written messages, and only when you and your audience know each other well.
- Use the analysis questions listed in Chapter 1 to probe the basic points needed for successful informative and positive messages.

CHAPTER 10

Exercises and Problems

10.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. What are the multiple purposes of informative and good news messages? (LO 1)
2. How does information overload impact your communications? (LO 1)
3. When do you use face-to-face contacts? Phone calls? Instant messages? Letters? Memos and e-mails? (LO 1)
4. What are some tips for effectively using face-to-face contacts? Phone calls? Instant messages? Letters? Memos and e-mails? (LO 2)
5. How do you organize informative and positive letters and memos/e-mails? (LO 3)
6. What are some concerns to consider when choosing and ordering the information in your message? (LO 3)
7. What are tips for composing some of the common varieties of informative and positive messages? (LO 4)

10.2 Reviewing Grammar

Do the exercises from Appendix B on correcting sentence errors (B.8) and editing for grammar and usage (B.9).

10.3 Offering Restaurant Nutrition Information

The Food and Drug Administration wants restaurants to provide more nutritional information, including calorie counts of offerings, so that customers can make more nutritious choices. You own a restaurant and are considering whether or not you should change your menu to comply. On the one hand, you know obesity is a national problem, and you might be able to attract health-conscious customers if you change your menu. On the other hand, the large majority of your customers do not seem to be counting calories. Their favorites on your menu are the comfort food

selections such as fried chicken, mashed potatoes, pies, and cakes. Furthermore, it would cost you between \$11,500 and \$46,000 for a lab to test your menu items and provide nutritional content and calorie counts. In small groups, discuss whether or not your restaurant will comply. What are some compromises you can think of? Write a memo to your instructor summarizing your group's conclusions.

Adapted from Janet Adamy, "Restaurants Urged to Stress Nutrition: FDA-Funded Report Seeks Focus on Healthful Foods and More Data on Calories," *Wall Street Journal*, May 31, 2006, D4.

10.4 Letter for Discussion—Internal Revenue Service

Below is an actual complete letter that went to millions of taxpayers; only the address and identifying numbers are missing. Read the letter and then critique it in small groups. Here are some questions to get you started.

1. Can you tell what the purpose of the letter is? If not, what in the letter confuses the purpose?

2. What kinds of impressions are given readers by document design choices?

3. What kinds of impressions are given readers by the telephone help paragraph?

Department of the Treasury
Internal Revenue Service

STOP 33
KANSAS CITY MO 64999

AMES IA 50010

In reply refer to:

LTR 12C R
2 30 000
00840

Social Security Number:
Document Locator Number:

Dear Taxpayer:

In processing your Federal income tax return for the year ended 19XX, we find we need more information or do not have the fully completed forms that are required. Please send us the information indicated or fill out the necessary lines of forms mentioned below and return the information and forms to us.

If this return is being filed by a parent for a minor child, A Power of Attorney is not necessary. Please indicate if you are the child's parent signing the return.

Please send us the information within 20 days from the date of this letter so we can complete the processing of your return. Please enclose only the information requested; DO NOT send a copy of your return. It will take about 6 to 8 weeks from the time we receive your response to issue any refund due you. If we do not hear from you, we will have to use the information we have to process your return. This may increase the tax you owe or reduce your refund because we would not be able to give you proper credit.

If the item in question appeared in error on your return, please note that on this letter when you reply. DO NOT file a corrected or amended return because that will delay the processing of your original return.

If you have any questions about this letter, please call Between 7:00a-7:00p at 816-926-5938. If the number is outside your local calling area, there will be a long-distance charge to you. If you prefer, you may call the IRS telephone number listed in your local directory. An employee there may be able to help you, but the

office at the address shown on this letter is most familiar with your case.

When you send the information or write to us, please provide your telephone number and the most convenient time for us to call if we need more information. Attach this letter to any correspondence to help us identify your case. Keep the copy for your records.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Page 2

Sincerely yours,

Juanita Benezette

Juanita Benezette
Chief, Document Perfection Branch

Enclosures:
Copy of this letter
Envelope

10.5 Memos for Discussion—Introducing a Suggestion System

Your organization has decided to institute a suggestion system. Employees on hourly pay scales will be asked to submit suggestions. (Managers and other employees on salary are not eligible for this program; they are supposed to be continually suggesting ways to improve things as part of their regular jobs.) If the evaluating committee thinks that the suggestion would save

money, the employee will receive 10% of the first year's estimated annual savings. If the suggestion won't save money but will improve work conditions, service, or morale, the employee will get a check for \$50.

The following memos are possible approaches. How well does each message meet the criteria in the checklist for informative and positive messages?

1.

Subject: Suggestion System (SS)

I want to introduce you to the Suggestion System (SS). This program enables the production worker to offer ideas about improving his job description, working conditions, and general company procedures. The plan can operate as a finely tuned machine, with great ideas as its product.

Operation will begin November 1. Once a week, a designate of SS will collect the ideas and turn them over to the SS Committee. This committee will evaluate and judge the proposed changes.

Only employees listed as factory workers are eligible. This excludes foremen and the rest of supervisory personnel. Awards are as follows:

1. \$50 awards will be given to those ideas judged operational. These are awarded monthly.
2. There will be grand prizes given for the best suggestions over the six-month span.

Ideas are judged on feasibility, originality, operational simplicity, and degree of benefit to the worker and company. Evaluation made by the SS Committee is final. Your questions should be channeled to my office.

2.

Subject: Establishment of Suggestion System

We announce the establishment of a Suggestion System. This new program is designed to provide a means for hourly employees to submit suggestions to company management concerning operations and safety. The program will also provide an award system to compensate nonmanagement employees for implemented suggestions.

Here is how the program will work: beginning October 1, suggestions can be submitted by hourly workers to the company on Form 292, which will be furnished to all plants and their departments by October 1st. On the form, the submitting employee should include the suggestion, his or her name, and the department number. The form can be deposited in a suggestion drop box, which will be located near the personnel office in each plant.

Any suggestion dealing with the improvement of operations, safety, working conditions, or morale is eligible for consideration. The award structure for the program will be as follows:

1. For an implemented suggestion which improves safety or efficiency with no associated monetary benefits or cost reduction: \$50.00.
2. For an implemented suggestion which makes or saves the company money: 10% of the first year's estimated annual savings or additional revenue.

It is hoped that we will have a good initial and continuous response from all hourly employees. This year, we are out to try to cut production costs, and this program may be the vehicle through which we will realize new savings and increased revenues. New ideas which can truly increase operational efficiency or cut safety problems will make the company a nicer place for all employees. A safer work environment is a better work environment. If department operations can be made more efficient, this will eventually make everyone's job just a little easier, and give that department and its employees a sense of pride.

3.

Subject: New Employee Suggestion System

Beginning October 1, all of you who are hourly employees of Video Adventures will be able to get cash awards when your suggestions for improving the company are implemented.

Ideas about any aspect of Video Adventures are eligible: streamlining behind-the-counter operations, handling schedule problems, increasing the life of videotapes.

- If your idea cuts costs or increases income (e.g., increasing membership sales, increasing the number of movie rentals per customer), you'll receive 10% of the first year's estimated annual savings.
- If the idea doesn't save money but does improve service, work conditions, or morale, you'll receive a check for \$50.

To submit a suggestion, just pick up a form from your manager. On the form, explain your suggestion, describe briefly how it could be implemented, and show how it will affect Video Adventures. Return the completed form in the new suggestion box behind the back counter. Suggestions will be evaluated at the end of each month. Turn in as many ideas as you like!

Think about ways to solve the problems you face every day. Can we speed up the check-in process? Cut paperwork? Give customers faster service? Increase the percentage of customers who bring back their tapes on time? As you serve people at the counter, ask them what they'd like to see at Video Adventures.

Your ideas will keep Video Adventures competitive. Ten years ago, Video Adventures was the only video store on the west side of town. Now there are six other video stores within a two-mile radius. Efficiency, creativity, and service can keep Video Adventures ahead.

Employees whose ideas are implemented will be recognized in the regional Video Adventures newsletter. The award will also be a nice accomplishment to add to any college application or résumé. By suggesting ways to improve Video Adventures, you'll demonstrate your creativity and problem-solving abilities. And you'll be able to share the credit for keeping Video Adventures' reputation as the best video store in town.

10.6 E-Mails for Discussion—Saying Yes to a Subordinate

Today, you get this request from a subordinate.

Subject: Request for Leave

You know that I've been feeling burned out. I've decided that I want to take a three-month leave of absence this summer to travel abroad. I've got five weeks of vacation time saved up; I would take the rest as unpaid leave. Just guarantee that my job will be waiting when I come back!

You decide to grant the request. The following messages are possible responses. How well does each message meet the criteria in the checklist for informative and positive messages?

1.

Subject: Re: Request for Leave

I highly recommend Italy. Spend a full week in Florence, if you can. Be sure to visit the Brancacci Chapel—it's been restored, and the frescoes are breathtaking. And I can give you the names of some great restaurants. You may never want to come back!

2.

Subject: Your Request for Leave

As you know, we are in a very competitive position right now. Your job is important, and there is no one who can easily replace you. However, because you are a valued employee, I will permit you to take the leave you request, as long as you train a replacement before you leave.

3.

Subject: Your Request for Leave Granted

Yes, you may take a three-month leave of absence next summer using your five weeks of accumulated vacation time and taking the rest as unpaid leave. And yes, your job will be waiting for you when you return!

I'm appointing Garrick to take over your duties while you're gone. Talk with him to determine how much training time he'll need, and let me know when the training is scheduled.

Have a great summer! Let us know every now and then how you're doing!

10.7 Revising a Letter

You work for a credit card company and asked your assistant to draft a letter to new customers who have recently opened an account. The purpose of the letter is to

inform clients of the services available to them, persuade them to use the services, and build goodwill.

Subject: Credit Card

Dear Sir or Madame,

This letter will let you know about our organization and what we can do for you. We believe that you will like using our services, as we offer many convenient ones.

Before we tell you about the great services we have to offer, we want to let you know how glad we are to have you as a new customer. We went out of our way to make sure you get the best benefits. 2% back on grocery purchases, no annual fee, and reward dollars—who could ask for anything more?! Shop, Shop, Shop and the rewards will pile up. Go online to sign up for rewards so you don't lose out. While you're there, don't forget to enroll in e-mail alerts to remind you of upcoming due dates.

We have been helping clients for almost a quarter of a century and are happy you're part of the family. Like a family member who just drops in, you get to choose your payment due date. Now how's that for convenience!

Thank you for joining our service. We look forward to continuing our business relationship with you.

Sincerely,

This draft definitely needs some work. It lacks you-attitude and needs attention to the organization. Moreover, the new services are not clearly explained, and there are many mechanical errors.

As your instructor directs,

- a. Write a memo to your subordinate, explaining what revisions are necessary.
- b. Revise the letter.

10.8 Responding to a Supervisor's Request

1. You've received this e-mail message from your supervisor:

Subject: Need "Best Practices"

Please describe something our unit does well—ideally something that could be copied by or at least applied to other units. Our organization is putting together something on "Best Practices" so that good ideas can be shared as widely as possible.

Be specific. For example, don't just say "serve customers"—explain exactly what you do and how you do it to be effective. Anecdotes and examples would be helpful.

Also indicate whether a document, a videotape, or some other format would be the best way to share your practice. We may use more than one format, depending on the response.

I need your answer ASAP so that I can send it on to my boss.

Answer the message, describing something that you or others in your unit do well.

2. You've received this e-mail message from your supervisor:

Subject: Mistake of the Month

Please describe a mistake you've made within the past month and explain what you learned from the mistake.

I believe that sharing our mistakes will be as valuable as sharing our best practices. We can all learn from mistakes and improve the overall efficiency of the organization.

Be specific. Explain exactly what you did and what you learned. An anecdote or clear example would be helpful. At the end of the week, we will all vote on the largest mistake. The staffer who made the biggest blunder will receive \$50.

Send your e-mail this week to all employees in the office.

Answer the message describing a mistake that you made while at work and what you learned from it.

Adapted from Jennifer Gill, "Strategies: The Mistake of the Month Award," *Inc.*, February 2005, 34.

10.9 Accommodating a Hearing-Impaired Employee

You're manager of Human Resources at your company. Two weeks ago, you got this e-mail message:

Subject: Accommodations for Employee

Our work team includes a hearing-impaired employee. She is our most productive team member on the floor, but at team meetings, she can't effectively contribute. I e-mailed her about my concerns, and she says the conversations are too hard to follow. What can we do so she can contribute her ideas?

One of your staffers has researched the issue for you and brought you several recommendations. Based on the staffer's research, you have determined that you will contract with a sign language interpreter to be present at the regular staff meetings. You will also have your staffer meet with the work team to share some basic guidelines for communicating, such as looking directly at the deaf team member when speaking, speaking

slowly, using facial expressions when possible, and avoiding any statements not intended for the interpreter to translate (the interpreter will translate anything spoken during the meeting). These plans are part of your existing policy of complying with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Write an e-mail message to the affected employees, telling them about the new practices for your employee.

10.10 Asking about a Product

Most Web sites offer a link called "Contact Us," but the quality of that contact varies substantially. Try contacting a company online, and evaluate the response you get.

Visit an e-commerce Web site. You might try a clothing retailer, a bank, an airline, or a site that sells tickets to concerts or movies. Identify a product that is out of stock or a type of product that does not seem to be offered at that site (but that might logically be found there).

Compose and send an e-mail message asking about the product. If the product is out of stock, ask when it is likely to become available. If you cannot find the product on the Web site, ask if it is somehow available.

Assuming you get a response, note how long the company took to reply. Evaluate the response. Does it seem to be an automated response, or does it sound personal? Is the response prompt and well written? Does it answer your question? If you do not get a reply, send a follow-up message. If you still do not get a reply, evaluate your own message: Could you have made it more effective?

Turn in a copy of your e-mail message and your evaluation of the company's response (or of your own message if you did not get a response).

10.11 Creating a Human Resources Web Page

As firms attempt to help employees balance work and family life (and as employers become aware that personal and family stresses affect performance at work), Human Resource departments sponsor an array of programs and provide information on myriad subjects. However, some people might be uncomfortable asking for help, either because the problem is embarrassing (who wants to admit needing help to deal with drug abuse, domestic violence, or addiction to gambling?) or because focusing on nonwork issues (e.g., child care) might lead others to think they aren't serious about their jobs. The Web allows organizations to post information that employees can access privately—even from home.

Create a Web page that could be posted by Human Resources to help employees with one of the challenges they face. Possible topics include

- Appreciating an ethnic heritage.
- Buying a house.
- Caring for dependents: child care, helping a child learn to read, living with teenagers, elder care, and so forth.
- Staying healthy: exercise, yoga, massage, healthy diet, and so forth.
- Dealing with a health problem: alcoholism, cancer, diabetes, heart disease, obesity, and so forth.
- Dressing for success or dressing for casual days.
- Financial management: basic budgeting, deciding how much to save, choosing investments, and so forth.
- Nourishing the spirit: meditation, religion.
- Getting out of debt.
- Planning for retirement.

- Planning vacations.
- Reducing stress.
- Resolving conflicts on the job or in families.

Assume that this page can be accessed from another of the organization's pages. Offer at least seven links. (More is better.) You may offer information as well as links to other pages with information. At the top of the page, offer an overview of what the page covers. At the bottom of the page, put the creation/update date and your name and e-mail address.

As your instructor directs,

- a. Turn in one printed copy of your Web page(s). On another page, give the URLs for each link.
- b. Electronically submit your Web page files, or submit them on a CD.
- c. Write a memo to your instructor identifying the audience for which the page is designed and explaining (1) the search strategies you used to find material on this topic, (2) why you chose the pages and information you've included, and (3) why you chose the layout and graphics you've used.
- d. Present your page orally to the class.

Hints:

- Pick a topic you know something about.
- Realize that audience members will have different needs. You could explain the basics of choosing day care or stocks, but don't recommend a specific day care center or a specific stock.
- If you have more than nine links, chunk them in small groups under headings.
- Create a good image of the organization.

10.12 Praising Work Done Well

Write an e-mail to a co-worker (with a copy to the person's supervisor) thanking him or her for helping you or

complimenting him or her on a job well done. Use details to give your note sincerity.

10.13 Giving Good News

Write to a customer or client, to a vendor or supplier, or to your boss announcing good news. Possibilities include a

product improvement, a price cut or special, an addition to your management team, a new contract, and so forth.

10.14 Correcting a Misconception

You're an assistant in the Governor's office. Today, the Press Secretary gives you this letter and asks you to answer it.

I see state employees driving BMWs and sports cars. These cars are a waste of taxpayer money!

Sincerely,

Rick Shipley

Rick Shipley

After checking with the Department of Public Safety, you find that some state employees do drive luxury cars. The vehicles were confiscated in criminal investigations, and the state uses them instead of buying other vehicles.

In the 10 years the policy has been in effect, the state has confiscated 43 vehicles—and thus bought 43 fewer vehicles than it would have otherwise needed.

Write to Mr. Shipley, responding to his criticism.

10.15 Reminding Guests about the Time Change

Twice a year in the United States, cities switch to daylight saving time and back again. The time change can be disruptive for hotel guests, who may lose track of the date, forget to change the clocks in their rooms, and miss appointments as a result.

Prepare a form letter to leave in each hotel room reminding guests of the impending time change. What should guests do?

Write the letter.

Hints:

- Use an attention-getting page layout so readers don't ignore the message.
- Pick a specific hotel or motel chain you know something about.
- Use the letter to build goodwill for your hotel or motel chain. Use specific references to services or features the hotel offers, focusing not on what the hotel does for the reader, but on what the reader can do at the hotel.

10.16 Announcing a New Employee Benefit

Your company has decided to pay employees for doing charity work. Employees can spend 1 hour working with a charitable or nonprofit group for every 40 they work. Employees will be paid for this hour, so their salaries will not fall. People who choose not to participate will work and be paid for the same number of hours as before. Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that essential business services are covered during business hours. Any employee who will be away during regular business hours (either to volunteer or to take off an hour in compensation for volunteering off-shift or on a weekend) will need to clear the planned absence with his or her supervisor. Your office is collecting a list of organizations that would welcome volunteers. People can work with an organized group or do something informal (such as tutoring at a local school or coaching kids at a local playground). People can volunteer 1 hour every week, 2 hours every other week, or a half-day each month. Volunteer hours cannot be banked from one month to the

next; they must be used each month. The program starts January 1 (or June 1). The various groups that people work with will be featured in company publications.

As Vice President of Human Resources, write a memo to all employees announcing this new program.

Hints:

- Pick a business, government, or nonprofit organization that you know something about.
- What proportion of your employees are already involved in volunteer work?
- Is community service or "giving back" consistent with your corporate mission?
- Some employees won't be able or won't want to participate. What is the benefit for them in working for a company that has such a program?
- Will promoting community participation help your organization attract and retain workers?

10.17 Announcing an Additional Employee Benefit

Your organization has just created a benefit to help employees who are caring for elderly relatives. Now the Human Resources office will provide information and referral services for elder day care and long-term

assisted-living or nursing care, and names and addresses of people willing to work part- or full-time as caregivers. However, your organization will not pay for any of the actual cost of hiring a caregiver or paying for a

nursing home. In addition, you will sponsor seminars on a number of topics about dealing with elderly parents, such as choosing a nursing facility, deciding when to stop driving, and filling out medical forms.

As part of the new policy, the organization will allow employees to use personal time off and sick time to care for any family member. You will also allow employees to take time off during the workday to stay until a nurse arrives or to drive a parent to a doctor's appointment. Employees must notify their supervisors in advance that they will be away and must make up the time sometime during the next 30 days. Employees who need more time can take unpaid leaves of up to 15 months and can return to their present jobs and current salaries.

The policy takes effect the first of next month.

Nationally, one in four workers over 40 provides care for an aging parent or other relative; in some organizations, the figure is higher. People who care for aging parents without assistance often make more mistakes on the job and have higher absenteeism and higher medical claims due to increased stress. Even greater than the loss of time (9.3 hours a month, according to one study) may be the inability of caregivers to accept promotions and

more responsibility in their jobs. Some of them even quit their jobs to care for their parents; thus, their skills are no longer available to the organization at all.

Assume that you're Director of Human Resources, and write a memo to all employees announcing the benefit.

Hints:

- Pick a business, government, or nonprofit organization you know well.
- What age groups do employees represent? How many of them are caring for elderly parents now?
- Specify the topic, date, and place of the first seminar you'll sponsor. If possible, give the schedule for the first three months.
- Be sure to provide benefits for employees who do not care for elderly parents as well as those who do.
- How easy is it for your organization to attract and retain skilled workers? Why is it important to your organization that people be alert and be willing to take more responsibility?

10.18 Announcing an Employee Fitness Center

Your company is ready to open an employee fitness center with on-site aerobics and yoga classes, exercycles tread mills, and weight machines. The center will be open 6 AM to 10 PM daily; at least one qualified instructor will be on duty at all times. Employees get first preference; if there is extra room, clients, spouses, and children may also use the facilities. Locker rooms and showers will also be available.

Your company hopes that the fitness center will help out-of-shape employees get the exercise they need to be more productive. Other companies have saved between \$2.30 and \$10.10 for every \$1.00 spent on wellness programs. The savings come from lower claims on medical insurance, less absenteeism, and greater productivity.

Write the memo announcing the center.

Hints:

- Who pays the medical insurance for employees? If the employer pays, then savings from healthier employees will pay for the center. If another payment plan is in effect, you'll need a different explanation for the company's decision to open the fitness center.

- Stress benefits apart from the company's saving money. How can easier access to exercise help employees? What do they do? How can exercise reduce stress, improve strength, help employees manage chronic illnesses such as diabetes and high blood pressure, and increase productivity at work?
- What kind of record does the company have of helping employees be healthy? Is the fitness center a departure for the company, or does the company have a history of company sports teams, stop-smoking clinics, and the like?
- What is the company's competitive position? If the company is struggling, you'll need to convince readers that the fitness center is a good use of scarce funds. If the company is doing well, show how having fit employees can make people even more productive.
- Stress fun as a benefit. How can access to the center make employees' lives more enjoyable?

10.19 Announcing New Smoking Policy

During a recent board meeting, your organization's officers decided to respond to complaints from workers and clients about smokers who gather outside the main entrance to your office building. Complaints ranged from the effects of secondhand smoke to the message the smokers shed on the organization's image to outside

clients who need to enter the building. The board decided that smoking will be allowed only in a designated area at the far end of the parking lot. Smokers can no longer congregate near the building's main entrance.

As vice president, write a memo to all employees announcing the immediate change in the smoking policy.

In addition, write a memo to your instructor that analyzes your rhetorical situation (context, audiences, and purposes) and the ethical decisions you had to make to construct this memo.

Hints:

- Pick a business, government, or nonprofit organization that you know something about.

- What benefits can you stress to employees about the new policy?
- Some employees, particularly those who smoke, may be disgruntled with the new policy. What benefits can you stress for them and how will you overcome their negative feelings?

10.20 Lining Up a Consultant to Improve Teamwork

As Director of Education and Training you oversee all in-house training programs. Five weeks ago, Pat Dyrud, Vice President for Human Resources, asked you to set up a training course on teams. After making some phone calls, you tracked down Sarah Reed, a business communication professor at a nearby college.

“Yes, I do workshops on teamwork,” she told you on the phone. “I would want at least a day and a half with participants—two full days would be better. They need time to practice the skills they’ll be learning. I’m free Mondays and Tuesdays. I’m willing to work with up to

five teams at a time, as long as the total number of people is 30 or less. Tell me what kinds of teams they work in, what they already know, and what kinds of things you want me to emphasize. My fee is \$2,500 a day. Of course, you’d reimburse me for expenses.”

You told her you thought a two-day session would be feasible, but you’d have to get back to her after you got budget approval. You wrote a quick memo to Pat Dyrud explaining the situation and asking about what the session should cover.

Two weeks ago, you received this memo:

I’ve asked the Veep for budget approval for \$5,000 for a two-day session plus no more than \$750 for all expenses. I don’t think there will be a problem.

We need some of the basics: strategies for working in groups, making decisions, budgeting time, and so forth. We especially need work on dealing with problem group members and on handling conflict—I think some of our people are so afraid that they won’t seem to be “team players” that they agree too readily.

I don’t want someone to lecture. We’ve already had a lecture and frankly, it didn’t do much good. Our people have even read some articles on teamwork, but somehow even with teams people are using old work habits. I don’t want some ivory tower theorist. We need practical exercises that can help us acquire skills that we can put into effect immediately.

Attached is a list of 24 people who are free Monday and Tuesday of the second week of next month. Note that we’ve got a good mix of people. If the session goes well, I may want you to schedule additional sessions.

Today, you got approval from the Vice President to schedule the session, pay Professor Reed the fee, and reimburse her for expenses to a maximum of \$750. She will have to keep all receipts and turn in an itemized list of expenses to be reimbursed; you cannot reimburse her if she does not have receipts.

You also need to explain the mechanics of the session. You’ll meet in the Conference Room, which has a screen and flip charts. You have an overhead projector, a slide projector, a laptop computer for showing PowerPoint slides, a video camera, a DVD player, and a TV, but you need to reserve these if she wants to use them.

Write to Professor Reed. You don’t have to persuade her to come since she’s already informally agreed, but

you do want her to look forward to the job and to do her best work.

Hints:

- Choose an organization you know something about.
- What do teams do in this organization? What challenges do they face?
- Will most participants have experience working in teams? Will they have bad habits to overcome? What attitudes toward teams are they likely to have?
- Check the calendar to get the dates. If there’s any ambiguity about what “the second week of next month” is, call Pat Dyrud to check.

10.21 Answering an International Inquiry

Your business, government, or nonprofit organization has received the following inquiries from international correspondents. (You choose the country the inquiry is from.)

1. Please tell us about a new product, service, or trend so that we can decide whether we want to buy, license, or imitate it in our country.
2. We have heard about a problem [technical, social, political, or ethical] that occurred in your organization. Could you please tell us what really happened and estimate how it is likely to affect the long-term success of the organization?
3. Please tell us about college programs in this field. We are interested in sending some of our managers to your country to complete a college degree.
4. We are considering setting up a plant in your city. We have already received adequate business information. However, we would also like to know how comfortable our nationals will feel. Do people in your city speak our language? How many? What opportunities exist for our nationals to improve their English? Does your town already have people

from a wide mix of nations? Which are the largest groups?

5. Our organization would like to subscribe to an English-language trade journal. Which one would you recommend? Why? How much does it cost? How can we order it?

As your instructor directs,

- a. Answer one or more of the inquiries. Assume that your reader either reads English or can have your message translated.
- b. Write a memo to your instructor explaining how you've adapted the message for your audience.

Hints:

- Even though you can write in English, English may not be your reader's native language. Write a letter that can be translated easily.
- In some cases, you may need to spell out background information that might not be clear to someone from another country.

10.22 Providing Information to Job Applicants

Your company is in a prime vacation spot, and as personnel manager you get many letters from students asking about summer jobs. Company policy is to send everyone an application for employment, a list of the jobs you expect to have open that summer with the rate of pay for each, a description of benefits for seasonal employees, and an interview schedule. Candidates must come for an interview at their own expense and should

call to schedule a time in advance. Competition is keen: Only a small percentage of those interviewed will be hired.

Write a form letter to students who've written to you asking about summer jobs. Give them the basic information about the hiring procedure and tell them what to do next. Be realistic about their chances, but maintain their interest in working for you.

10.23 Announcing a Premium Holiday

Rather than paying fees to an insurer, your company is self-insured. That is, you set aside corporate funds to pay for medical bills. If claims are light, the company saves money.

Employees pay a monthly fee for part of the amount of their health insurance. However, with one month to go in the fiscal year, you have more than enough set aside to cover possible costs. You're going to pass along some of the savings to employees (who, by staying

healthy, have kept medical costs down). Next month will be a "premium holiday." You will not deduct the monthly premium from employees' checks. As a result, they will have a slightly higher take-home pay next month. The holiday is just for one month; after it, the premium for health insurance will again be deducted each month.

Write a memo to all employees.

10.24 Announcing a Tuition Reimbursement Program

Your organization has decided to encourage employees to take courses by reimbursing each eligible employee a maximum of \$3,500 in tuition and fees during any one calendar year. Anyone who wants to participate in the program must apply before the first class meeting; the application must be signed by the employee's immediate supervisor. The Office of Human Resources will evaluate

applications. That office has application forms; it also has catalogs from nearby schools and colleges.

The only courses employees may choose are those either related to the employee's current position (or to a position in the company that the employee might hold someday) or part of a job-related degree program. Again, the degree may be one that would help

the employee's current position or that would qualify him or her for a promotion or transfer in the organization.

Only tuition and fees are covered, not books or supplies. People whose applications are approved will be reimbursed when they have completed the course with a grade of C or better. An employee cannot be reimbursed until he or she submits a copy of the approved application, an official grade report, and a statement of the tuition paid. If someone is eligible for other financial aid (scholarship, veterans benefits), the company will pay tuition costs not covered by that aid as long as the employee does not receive more than \$3,500 and as long as the total tuition reimbursement does not exceed the actual cost of tuition and fees.

Part-time employees are not eligible; full-time employees must work at the company a year before they can apply to participate in the program. Courses may be at any appropriate level (high school, college, or graduate). However, the Internal Revenue Service currently requires workers to pay tax on any reimbursement for

graduate programs. Undergraduate and basic education reimbursements of \$5,250 a year are not taxed.

As Director of Human Resources, write a memo to all employees explaining this new benefit.

Hints:

- Pick an organization you know something about. What do its employees do? What courses or degrees might help them do their jobs better?
- How much education do employees already have? How do they feel about formal schooling?
- The information in the problem is presented in a confusing order. Put related items together.
- The problem stresses the limits of the policy. Without changing the provision, present them positively.
- How will having a better educated workforce help the organization? Think about the challenges the organization faces, its competitive environment, and so forth.

10.25 Summarizing Negative Feedback

Today, your in-basket contains this message from your boss:

As you know, I'm leaving tomorrow for a vacation in New Zealand. While I'm gone, will you please scan the Internet each day for negative customer feedback and summarize any chat room threads that are relevant to our business? I'd like your summary in hard copy on my desk when I return.

As your instructor directs,

- Choose one to three "anticorporate activism" Web sites or customer feedback Web sites where people discuss your company. (In a search engine, key in the company name and "customer opinion," or visit sites that specialize in this type of feedback—for example, PlanetFeedback, NetComplaints, eComplaints, or ePinions.) Scan the sites until you find three to five relevant chat room postings or threads for the company you have chosen.
- Summarize the articles in a memo.
- Compare summaries with a small group of students. Do summaries for different organizations focus on similar issues?
- Present one of your summaries to the class.

Hints:

- Pick an organization you know something about. If the organization is large, focus on one division or department.
- Provide an overview to let your boss know whether the articles you've summarized are on a single topic or on several topics.
- Show how each posting or thread relates to the organization.
- Give the full citation (see Chapter 15) so that it's easy to track down postings if the boss wants to see the original.

10.26 Summarizing Information

Summarize one or more of the following:

- An article from a recent edition of *BusinessWeek* or *Harvard Business Review*.
- A tip from Jakob Nielsen's Alertboxes, <http://www.alertbox.com>.
- An article about college, career development, or job searching from Quintessential Careers, <http://www.quintcareers.com/articles.html>.
- Online information about options for recycling or donating used, outdated computers.
- Options for consolidating student loans and other finances (visit <http://www.consolidation-news.info>).
- An article or Web page assigned by your instructor.

As your instructor directs,

- a. Write a summary of no more than 100 words.
- b. Write a 250- to 300-word summary.
- c. Write a one-page summary.

- d. Compare your summary to those of a small group of students. How did the content of the summaries vary? How do you account for any differences?

10.27 Evaluating Web Pages

Today you get this e-mail from your boss:

Subject: Evaluating Our Web Page

Our CEO wants to know how our Web page compares to those of our competitors. I'd like you to do this in two steps. First, send me a list of your criteria. Then give me an evaluation of two of our competitors' and of our own pages. I'll combine your memo with others on other Web pages to put together a comprehensive evaluation for the next Executive Meeting.

As your instructor directs,

- a. List the generic criteria for evaluating a Web page. Think about the various audiences for the page and the content that will keep them coming back, the way the page is organized, how easy it is to find something, the visual design, and the details, such as a creation/update date.
- b. List criteria for pages of specific kinds of organizations. For example, a nonprofit organization might

want information for potential and current donors, volunteers, and clients. A financial institution might want to project an image both of trustworthiness and as a good place to work.

- c. Evaluate three Web pages of similar organizations. Which is best? Why?

10.28 Writing a Thank-You Letter

Write a thank-you letter to someone who has helped you achieve your goals.

As your instructor directs,

- a. Turn in a copy of the letter.

- b. Mail the letter to the person who helped you.
- c. Write a memo to your instructor explaining the choices you made in writing the thank-you letter.

10.29 Ethics of Confidentiality Statements

The information contained in this electronic message is confidential information intended for the use of the individual entity named above. If the reader of this message is not the intended recipient, or an employee responsible for delivering this electronic message to the intended recipient, you are hereby notified that any dissemination or copying of this communication is strictly prohibited. If this message contains nonpublic personal information about any customer of the sender or intended recipient, you are further prohibited under penalty of law from using or disclosing the information to any third party by provisions of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act.

The above text is routinely attached to organizational e-mail correspondences. Using the Internet, research laws surrounding confidentiality statements in e-mail messages. Have there been many legal cases involving confidentiality statements that were attached to e-mails? What exactly does the law say

about e-mail confidentiality statements? Consider your personal stance on these confidentiality statements. Have you ever received an e-mail with such a statement? Did you treat it differently than other e-mail correspondences? How effective do you think the confidentiality statements are when the

medium in which these appear can be forwarded to multiple recipients with the click of the mouse?

As your instructor directs,

- a. Write a memo to your instructor that discusses your answers to these questions.

- b. Prepare a brief presentation of your findings for the class.

10.30 Mosaic Case

After being on the job as an intern for a little over two weeks, Martina really seems to like the job. Mostly she has been in charge of doing routine correspondences. Today, however, Sarah comes to her with a task that will require a considerable amount of time.

"In two weeks," Sarah tells Martina, who seems to always be eating a banana, "there is the annual convention of shareholders. During that time, all departments of Mosaic's headquarters showcase their best practices during a poster presentation. This year will not be an exception. Yvonne will stand by the poster and answer potential questions about the Communications Department during the official poster session. However, she doesn't have the time with everything else she needs to prepare for the convention to actually prepare the poster this year. Do you think you can handle it?"

Although a bit leery, Martina, after swallowing the last bite of her banana, answered, "Of course, I can!" She, of course, wants to make a good impression so that Yvonne and Sarah might hire her on at the end of the internship.

Take on the role of Martina and complete Sarah's communication request by designing a poster for the annual convention of shareholders. While there will be one session solely dedicated to the posters for which Yvonne will be present to answer questions, the poster will also be displayed throughout the entire convention. Since a person will not always be there to answer questions, the poster will have to be self explanatory.

The poster should showcase some best practices of the Communications Department. Use what you have learned from this chapter to decide what some of those practices will be.

As you create the poster, remember to use traditional poster conventions such as arrows, call-outs, and captions. Make sure the poster has a clearly identifiable point and recognizable flow of information. In other words, what is the main point you want the audience to take away from the poster after they look at it and how will they know in what order to look at the information? Consider the techniques outlined in Chapter 6 to assist in font, color, and overall layout and visual choices.