

# On the Job **WRITING**



## BASIC EDITION

### Lesson 16

*In this lesson, you will learn:*

- The best way to deliver bad news
- How to buffer bad news

## DELIVERING BAD NEWS

Beckman has assisted the director at his community's YMCA summer camp for four years, and he camped for several years before that. His experiences as both a camper and an assistant have prepared him well for his chosen career as a recreational youth leader.

The YMCA camp has gained such an excellent reputation that the applications exceeded the number of children that can be served this year. Many hopeful campers will be unable to attend because of lack of space and resources.

Beckman knows that both the parents and children will be upset when they learn this news—the parents because they expected camp to substitute for daycare while they work, and the children because they just want to have fun.



Beckman's director has asked him to write a letter to parents advising them that their children cannot attend camp this summer. This will be a hard letter for him to write because he doesn't like to disappoint people.

He does not want the camp to come across in the letter as uncaring, but he's sure the parents will react negatively. They may be frustrated that they have to make other summer plans for their children, or they may even become angry.

This is a sensitive letter and Beckman is trying to decide whether to hide the bad news near the end of the letter or just say upfront, "*Your children will be unable to attend YMCA camp this summer.*" He doesn't consider either of these to be good options, and he's stressing over what to write.

## DEFINE IT! Buffer

A buffer in a bad news letter is a cushion that attempts to lessen or soften the negative news.

## DELIVERING BAD NEWS MESSAGES

Do you like to hear bad or negative news? Of course not. No one does. That is why bad or negative news is hard to write.

In work-related writing, a bad news message is a letter, email, memo or note that delivers negative or unpleasant information. The way the message is worded influences how the reader will react.

Messages that refuse a request, deny credit, cancel a program or tell a customer an order will be delayed convey bad news. Consider these examples of bad news messages.

*I am sorry to inform you that we have selected another candidate for the position you sought.*

*Our technology classes are full at this time, but you may apply again in six months.*

*Your automobile insurance policy with our company does not cover the cost for the \$508 repair to your car.*

*The result of the coronavirus test you took on 5-8-20xx was inconclusive, and you need to return for a second test.*

*The concert is sold out for both February 14 and 15.*

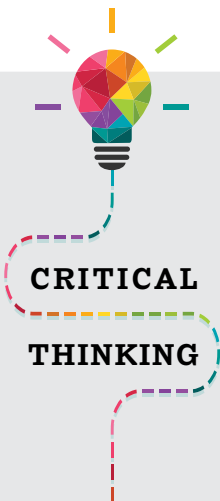
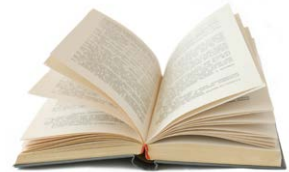
*We appreciate your interest in being on the waiting list for one of our apartments, but ten individuals are already wait listed, and we are closing the list.*



### DID YOU KNOW ?

Two purposes are important in delivering bad news:

- Being honest with the reader
- Achieving an outcome that is helpful for your employing company, such as continuing a relationship without bad feelings



***How would you react to the following message from the store where you ordered your prom clothes? How would the news affect your life and emotions?***

The dress/tuxedo you purchased is on back order and will be unavailable by the date of your prom.

## BUFFERS HELP

When the purpose of writing is to deliver bad news, it's best to start with a "buffer" or a "cushion"—something that will reduce the pain of the negative news. Begin with a positive or neutral statement that allows you to transition into the bad news.

The purpose of a buffer is to be polite, but not to mislead the reader. Be careful not to cross the line between these two. Common buffers include:

- *You asked us about the warranty on your phone.*
- *Your application for employment is appreciated.*
- *Thank you for your request.*
- *We appreciate your interest.*



Bad news can bring on writer's block because its purpose is to communicate something a recipient doesn't want to read. One way to deal with a bad news writing block is to write several opening sentences that can serve as a buffer and to change a word here and there until the opening is as neutral as possible while still being honest.

## Give Reasons for Negative News

The most important part of a negative message is the reason for the bad news. Without a good explanation for denying a request, refusing a claim or revealing other bad news, a message will fail, no matter how well it is written.

The reasons should be stated clearly without trying to hide the negative. In the email below, Jana Owings learns she cannot take the workshop on document design.

Note the reasons shown for the rejection of her request.

To: [Jowings@yorksys.com](mailto:Jowings@yorksys.com)  
 From: [NevaHusam@yorksys.com](mailto:NevaHusam@yorksys.com)  
 Subject: Registration for Document  
 Design Workshop

Thank you for registering for the March 6 workshop "Putting the Customer First." You are smart to continue to build your customer service skills.

This workshop—our most popular program—was filled within one week of its announcement, and your registration arrived after all seats were taken. To handle the many requests we received, an additional session is scheduled for April 17.

I would like to add your name to the list of attendees. Please let me know if you would like to register for the new session.

## LESSON 16 ACTIVITY



### Write a note to the member rejecting the following request.

You work in the office of a carpentry trade association that recently sponsored a conference in a distant city. A builder paid \$250 to attend, but his work schedule kept him from attending, and he wants his fee back. The organization reimburses individuals who notify its office five days before the conference that they will not be attending, but does not reimburse non-attenders after the conference ends.