

EXAMPLES OF BAD NEWS MEMOS

SET 1

- 1) The following example is problematic for several reasons. First, the bad news is mentioned right away, in the subject line and in the first sentence. Upon reading this news, the reader might be shocked, will probably be angry, and may not read the rest of the memo. To prepare the reader and to try to get the reader to understand the reasoning, the writer should place a buffer and the reasons before the news. Second, this memo lacks you-attitude and is written from the writer's own viewpoint. Notice that the word "I" is used 8 times. This tone may cause the reader to conclude that the writer doesn't care about him or her. Throughout the memo, the writer needs to be more concerned about the reader's reactions and opinions.

To:
From:
Subject: Travel Request Denial
Date: 6 June 1990

I regret to inform you that your request for travel funds to travel to the Syllabus Conference in Santa Clara, California, has been denied. The university has limited funds available for travel this year and although I know you really want to go, I can't afford to give you the \$1500 you requested (which by the way is a lot to request at this late date at the current time of this request.

I hope you understand our position because we really want our faculty to be happy. Even though I can't pay for this trip, I encourage you to apply again for future travel money because I hope to receive more money budgeted for travel the next fiscal year of 2000/2001.

Thank you again for your request. I always strive to help faculty fund their travels.

- 2) The following example is much more effective. The writer does a good job of using a common ground statement and placing the reasons before the bad news. In addition, the memo is written with you-attitude. By providing alternatives and offering to help, the writer shows concern for the reader, who consequently will probably react more favorably towards the news and the writer.

To:
From:
Subject: Travel Request
Date: 6 June 1990

Thank you for your interest in new, emerging online technologies. The travel committee reviewed your request to attend the Syllabus Conference in Santa Clara, California in July.

The university increased its travel budget this year by \$5,000. However, with the increase in requests we've received and because we are close to the end of a fiscal year, we have used all our travel funds for the year. As much as we would like to fund your request, we just do not have the money to do so. Remember, though, that if you have departmental funds available, you may use those. You may also want to check to see if any divisional monies are still available.

I do hope you will be able to attend the conference. Please contact me if you need help finding another source of funding.

SET 2

1) The following example is problematic for several reasons. First, the memo lacks important information, such as how much the assistantship will be, when the deadline for accepting is, and who to contact for further information. Second, and probably most important, although the memo is informing the reader of good news, it lacks you-attitude and positive emphasis. The writer uses first person (I, we, our, etc.) more than second person (you, your), and when second person is used in this context, it is often in a negative context. After reading the first part of the introductory paragraph, for example, the reader is probably expecting rejection. Even within the memo, the writer focuses on the negative, as evident by such statements as "If you don't do well..." and "...you probably don't have enough information..." Further, the final paragraph lacks a goodwill ending.

To: Jane Doe

From:

Subject:

Date:

We have finally reviewed your application for graduate study at Colorado State University. Due to the large number of applicants this year, competition was very tough, but luckily, we have recommended you for acceptance.

Also, to keep our students happy, we were fortunate enough to be able to offer a teaching assistantship, whereby you would work 20 hours a week. This assistantship also comes with a non-resident tuition waiver for the first year. If you don't do well, though, we cannot give you another assistantship.

It occurred to us that you probably don't have enough information to make a sound decision. The enclosed flyer provides a detailed description of our Cognitive Psychology Program, including the program of study, degree requirements, mentorship program, faculty research interests, and laboratory facilities.

Since other qualified students are on a waiting list for admissions, please notify me in writing of your decision to accept or reject admission as soon as possible.

2) The following is much more effective. The writer maintains positive emphasis throughout the memo, starting with the good news and concluding with a goodwill ending. Further, the memo contains the important information the student needs. In case the reader needs further information, though, the writer also includes the phone number to call. The reader will most likely react more favorably towards the news and the writer of this memo, as compared to the previous one.

To: Jane Doe

From:

Subject:

Date:

Thank you for your interest in graduate study at Colorado State University. You have been admitted to our Cognitive Psychology Program beginning with the fall semester of 2000.

The Psychology Department will provide full financial support, including 20 hours a week as a teaching assistant. This assistantship carries a stipend of \$1045 per month, as well as a non-resident tuition waiver. As long as satisfactory academic progress is made, this assistantship will continue throughout your graduate career at CSU. The enclosed brochure provides a detailed description of the Cognitive Psychology Program, including the program of study, degree requirements, mentorship program, faculty research interests, and laboratory facilities.

We hope you will join us this Fall. Your undergraduate record, interests, and experience indicate that you will gain much new and exciting knowledge at CSU. Please notify me in writing of your decision to accept or reject this offer, prior to April 15. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me at 555.555.5555.