

Major Writing Assignment: Project #1

To: English 304 Students
From: Allison Hitt
Date: May 18, 2011
Subject: Correspondence Assignment

As members of the business community, you will be asked to write memos and letters of various kinds to many different audiences: individual customers, corporate clients, government agencies, higher-ups, subordinates, and others. The strategies for internal/external and good news/bad news messages are all related, but each requires particular rhetorical moves.

Instructions

For this assignment, choose one scenario from each category: good-news memo, bad-news memo, good-news letter, and bad-news letter. For each scenario, write the appropriate response, doing your best to attend to all of the primary and secondary purposes involved. Use appropriate formatting and document design, and make sure your point is clear and obvious to the reader.

Criteria

Your correspondences should fulfill the following criteria:

- **Format:** Memos and letters are very conventionalized. You should adhere to these conventions carefully, excluding choices made to construct specific rhetorical efforts.
- **Audience accommodation:** Each set of documents should adhere to the expectations, needs, and values of their different audiences. These differences will manifest in word choice, argument choice, and details you highlight.
- **Voice:** This is an opportunity to practice shaping your professional voice. Each document should be written in a way that is clear, direct, tactful, and professional.
- **Rhetorical analysis:** It should be clear to me that you have fully analyzed the scope of the different situations and are reacting to them in ways that are effective and professional. Each situation should not be addressed the same way. Think critically about your options.

The Correspondence Assignment is due Monday, May 23, 2011.

Memo Scenarios

Good-News Memo #1

Sheila Lee, a senior account executive in a public relations firm, sent the following memo to the firm's chief executive officer (CEO):

To: CEO
From: Sheila Lee
Date: [Insert Date]
Re: Intern

The WVU School of Journalism's public relations program has asked us to participate in its internship program. The program is designed to provide its juniors at least 150 hours of on-the-job experience over the course of a semester.

The upcoming Smith campaign would provide meaningful experience to an intern. In addition, the intern's contributions would help us meet the incredibly tight deadlines of a statewide ad campaign.

Let me have your answer by July 5 so I can initiate the interview process and have the intern on board when we begin preliminary planning for the Smith campaign.

As the CEO, write a memo to Sheila Lee approving the firm's participation in the internship program and authorizing her to coordinate the selection for the intern and work assignments. Provide instructions related to compensation (i.e., benefits) and other pertinent information.

Good-News Memo #2

As direct of human resources, you have been authorized to develop an appropriate casual dress policy for your company (you should specify the type of company). Write a memo conveying the new policy to your employees that both informs them of the policy and helps to ensure they follow it. Provide a detailed explanation of acceptable casual dress that employees can follow consistently.

Bad-News Memo #1

Economic troubles have hit the Premier Publishing Corporation. Many employees have been laid off, and rumors have started that additional employees will be laid off and the company is going bankrupt. Communication related to the initial layoffs was poor and reactive. Top management is convinced that communication between employer and employees must be improved if the company is to survive this economic downturn. As plant manager, you must announce that the plant will close for two weeks at Christmas. Workers will be paid only 50% of their salaries for the two weeks the plan is closed.

Write a memo informing employees of their reduced work schedule during Christmas. Consider ways to minimize fear and inaccurate rumors and improve communication.

Bad-News Memo #2

You are the Chief Operating Officer (COO) of a state education agency. The majority of employees commute to work, averaging 2.5 hours roundtrip every day. Because of this, the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) allowed for a flexible work schedule to adapt employees' needs. Instead of working Monday through Friday from 8 A.M. – 5 P.M., employees have the option to work Monday through Thursday from 7 A.M. – 6 P.M. However, this state agency works directly with teachers throughout the state, offering regular professional development sessions and workshops. Many of them run on a traditional work schedule. The employees who still work a traditional work schedule feel that it is unfair to be the only ones facilitating these Friday workshops, and it is difficult to get all the work done that is needed with less people in the office. The CEO has decided to revert back to a traditional work schedule and would like you to circulate a memo to all office employees.

Write a memo informing employees of the change and reasoning behind. Keep in mind that these employees will be very upset.

Letter Scenarios

Good-News Letter #1

Athletic concessions at WVU placed an order for 50,000 20-oz. plastic cups at 15 cents each from Custom Plastic Products. Each cup was to be imprinted with the Mountaineer and this year's slogan, "Leave No Doubt." The concessions manager noticed, when inspecting the order, that you had sent 16-oz. cups instead of the 20-oz. cups ordered. As the claims manager for Custom Plastic Products, you are concerned about the error. Working at peak levels to prepare for football season, the workers made a simple but rather costly mistake.

Write to the concessions manager at West Virginia University explaining the mistake and apologizing for the inconvenience. Assure the manager that the correct order will arrive in time for the first football game in two weeks and ask the manager to return the 16-oz. cups at the company's expense.

Good-News Letter #2

You are the owner of a small, local business: Bill's Books and Baked Goods. You recently opened a used bookstore that also offers a café that serves coffee, baked goods, and sandwiches in a wealthy part of town. You've been open for two months and have gotten very little business. Even though you are the only used bookstore in town, you fear that none of the community members are interesting in buying used books, and that they may prefer new books or eBooks that they can just download to their iPads and Kindles. You know that many of them frequent the local Starbucks where coffee and baked goods are also readily available.

Write a letter that will be mailed to community members. Detail the benefits of your business and try to appeal to their values. What services would interest them? How can you sell your business in a way that competes with other businesses in the area?

Bad-News Letter #1

You are the owner of an online body jewelry company. Though there are many competitive companies, you offer the best deals on shipping and returns: All items can be returned, no questions asked, as long as the heat-sealed packages are not opened. For sanitary reasons, you will not accept unopened or previously worn jewelry. Each package's packing slip contains a warning: **Opened jewelry cannot be returned.** Recently, your best customer, someone who buys wholesale and is very influential in the jewelry industry sent you an email:

Dear [Your Name]:

For the last three years, I have bought my wholesale jewelry exclusively from your company. I have poured thousands of dollars into your company. Now, I need a favor.

In my recent order, I noticed an issue. After unwrapping the pieces and placing them on display, I realized that many of them were not the right size I meant to request. I also noticed that some of the jewelry pieces had physical damages, such as scratches.

I have done my business with you for a reason: I know you are an honest man. I am requesting that you send me enough pre-paid envelopes to return the 74 pieces of jewelry that were either ordered in the wrong size or damaged.

Sincerely,

John Wilson

Though John is a close friend and, admittedly, could greatly hurt your reputation, you must write him a letter explaining the situation and standing true to your company's founding policy. Remember to maintain professionalism.

Bad-News Letter #2:

You are the newly elected President of the Mountaineer Maniacs. Since there was money rolled over from the previous academic year, you want to provide members with something nice to start off their semesters. You decide on 8 GB flash drives—yellow with the blue Maniacs logo. After speaking with the company on the phone, you decide to place an order for 9,500 flash drives for 0.11 cents each. When they arrive, you notice an issue: all the flash drives have a logo that reads "Mountaineer Maniacs." You're furious. You try calling the company, and they tell you that they will "see what they can do" if you send them back with a letter explaining the issue.

You need to write a complaint letter to Anne Price at BulkFlashDrives.com. Remember, you represent WVU's largest student organization, and you really need the company to take care of this problem. Maintain a calm, professional tone, and clearly explain the issue and what needs to happen.