

# **Bad News Assignment: Denying Request for Promotion, Coaching for Improvement**

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## **Genre**

Unit Assignment, message packaging, giving bad news

## **The Assignment**

This negative message assignment includes not only bad news delivery skills but also skills involved in appraising performances and instructing and motivating for improvement. Much ground is covered in a short but feasible document. Another strength is the assignment is open-ended. Students write about a co-worker, not a fictional or other person they haven't worked with.

A danger of case as opposed to open-ended problems is students can just provide information in the case back to the instructor in a rearranged form that does not use their planning or other writing skills effectively. This kind of procedural facilitation stifles inquiry, a major goal of successful writing instruction. (Hillocks, 2008).

**Assignment** Your average-performing employee has asked for an increase in rank and salary. Write a one-page single-spaced (250-400-word) memo tactfully denying his or her request. But give the employee suggestions and encouragement that could help him or her attain the goal in a year.

## **Target learners**

Junior and senior students from a variety of majors and colleges in the university taking business communication.

## **Learning objectives**

- Learn to produce the content, organization, tone, syntax, punctuation, and rhetorical moves of the bad news message.
- Learn to convince the audience with observations and warrant (e.g., job description of the position sought) of performance rather than inferences.
- Motivate the reader to improve performance, in part by conveying hope of improvement.

## **Time to complete the assignment**

Two weeks for unit

## **Materials, equipment, special considerations**

Assignment, exercises, rubric.

## **Evaluating outcomes/grading**

- If the message includes a buffer other than below, this opening paragraph should relate to the reader's concerns, introduce or lead into the topic, and avoid misleading statements. There should be no abrupt shift in tone between the buffer and the body of the letter.
- The message should include at the top or immediately after another buffer a description of the job duties and demands (criteria for the job).
- The reasons why the employee does not meet the criteria of the job should then be presented-  
-before the refusal.
- Reasons for the bad news are clear and sound.
- Sufficient reason(s) for the rejection.
- Refusal follows logically from the reasons.
- Refusal is tactful but clear.

- Offers suggestions for improving performance so that one has a win-win" situation.
- Clearly organized, following the indirect approach: 1) criteria, 2) reasons he/she did not meet criteria, 3) refusal, 4) alternative 5) positive close.
- Reasonably concise.
- As free as possible of grammatical and spelling problems.
- Ends on a pleasant note and avoids suggesting further problems.
- Clearly indicates that the reader has been taken seriously and treated fairly.

### **Support materials**

- Instructions to students
- Stimulus and exercise materials
- Grading rubrics
- Sample student work product

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