

Business Correspondence Scenarios

I

United States of Subsidies: Investigative report

Part of this research has been done by Louis Story for the *New York Times* as you can see here: <http://goo.gl/dx4MC>. Your role as communicator will be to identify what is at stake and explain to your audience, clearly and effectively, what's at stake. You might find that your research yields sources and scholars that aren't *directly* in conversation with one another. In that case, you will have to show your audience how the sources relate with regard to the question you are trying to address.

Invention

Keep in mind as you brainstorm/draft:

- The report begins with an inquiry that will eventually lead to an informed and complex picture of what is at stake.
- As you choose an audience with some investment in your topic, consider what kinds of sources and support they will find credible.
- Find sources that disagree with one another, even if not directly.
- This assignment calls for interesting research findings that aid you in furthering an idea or argument that you find particularly engaging.

Write

...to a specific audience of your choosing. The criteria is that it should be an audience that can appreciate, act upon, or respond to your investigation. Be sure to have a section in your report justifying why you are addressing the issue to your target audience.

... write with a specific purpose in mind (what it is you want your audience to do or think).

This is an exercise in community engagement, you'll learn about your surroundings by exploring, listening to, absorbing, and questioning through conducting research and interviewing.

II

Communicating with shareholders

Shareholders are important internal stakeholders of an organization, since they are the owners of the company. Therefore, it is essential to retain the shareholders' confidence in the company's management through effective communication with them on a regular basis. There are two situations when shareholder communication is extremely vital:

1. If a company is doing well and wants to expand its scope of operations, or diversify into unrelated areas. In this case, good shareholder relations can help to raise the required capital and minimize borrowing from banks and financial institutions.
2. If a company is going through a crisis or difficult times, more communication with shareholders is needed. Take the example of coke and Pepsi during the pesticide controversy. In such a situation, the company should be open with its shareholders and explain the problem clearly, including the steps being taken to overcome the crisis.

In light of your assignment, determine which of these categories suits your task for any one of the following scenarios.

II (a) Housing and the Financial Crisis

Your group works in the public relations division of JP Morgan Chase. A recent investigative report airing on "[60 Minutes](#)" revealed that your bank contributed to the housing crisis through its decisions to lower qualification guidelines, devise creative methods of securitization to "spread the risk" and then conjured up fancy names for securities (junk) that would insure against failure. As guidelines for mortgage qualifications continued to be lowered, more and more people purchased homes - sometimes multiple homes - that they truly could not afford. These people were foreclosed on. Further, a number of financial institutions are implicated in fraudulently informing the investing public that there was little risk in these investments by granting the respective banking institutions "AAA" ratings. To complicate matters, 60 Minutes reports that bank executives received millions of dollars in performance bonuses for those deals.

Your PR group has tasked assuaging the shareholders and informing them what's at stake. The correspondence ought to address issues pertaining to culpability (or not), the toxic assets (think underwater mortgages) and their cost to the company, and what it means for the US economy as a whole, how to solve the problem, etc., with a view to cleaning up the company's image.

A lot of research will go into preparing this correspondence. Obviously, the rhetorical decisions concerning how to position your company are yours, however, consider ethical and reasonable (read factual) concerns in your framing. Do you wish to carry on the falsehood? Regardless, objective research needs to be the basis of your content.

II (b) Patent Wars

Apple vs Samsung vs Google

Creating effective correspondence often requires research, considerable forethought, deliberation, strategy, and collaboration. For this activity, I'm asking you get into groups to respond to the following scenario. Feel free to make up plausible details to fill out the scenario as necessary, including [names](#), addresses, and other factual details. (If you aren't sure if a particular detail counts as plausible or not, please talk to me.)

Case 1: Apple vs Samsung

Listen to this podcast on Apple's case against Samsung <http://www.marketplace.org/node/57073/player/popout>

You will, of course, need to carry out more research on this issue, but, for now, here is the gist of that story:

Samsung has overtaken Apple as the larger maker of Smartphones. Seeing a threat to its market share, Apple has decided to strike back by taking Samsung to court by bringing a motion in the United States for a preliminary injunction against the Galaxy Nexus, the official Android 4.0 ("Ice Cream Sandwich") lead device developed by Samsung in close cooperation with Google. The motion is based on four patents, which are the patent equivalent of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse:

1. the "data tapping" patent based on which the ITC ordered an import ban against HTC
2. a patent related to Siri and unified search, which must be of huge concern to Google with a view to its core business
3. a new slide-to-unlock patent that even had the head of the Taiwanese government profoundly worried
4. a word completion patent that provides major speed improvements for touchscreen text entry

Apple alleges that Samsung has cost Apple \$500 million, while making billions themselves. In return, Samsung claims that it in fact originated some of the technology in question, and has countersued Apple.

If Apple wins, not only will Samsung have to take its phones off the market until they can design them around the patent laws, but Android itself, which is used by many phone companies, will be stifled. Apple seeks to instate a permanent injunction to stop future violations.

Resources: <http://tiny.cc/u5yejw>
<http://tiny.cc/z2yejw> <http://tiny.cc/57yejw> Apple Inc.
<http://tiny.cc/s9yejw> Samsung Inc.

Case II: Google vs Apple

Android, which is distributed by [Mountain View](#), California- based Google, is the most popular platform for smartphones. [Google Inc. \(GOOG\)](#), which owns Motorola Mobility unit said it filed a

new patent-infringement case against [Apple Inc.](#) ([AAPL](#)) claiming that features on some Apple devices, including the Siri voice-recognition program, infringe its patents. The complaint claims infringement of seven Motorola Mobility patents on features including location reminders, e-mail notification and phone/video players. Apple seeks a ban on U.S. imports of devices including the iPhone, iPad and Mac computers. Apple's products are made in [Asia](#). A key issue in that case is whether the agency, which is designed to protect U.S. markets from unfair trade practices, should issue import bans on products found to infringe patents on technology used in industry standards.

Resources: <http://tiny.cc/57yejw>
Apple Inc. <http://tiny.cc/mfzejw>

Your task

Decide which of these companies you work for as a team of communications consultants.

Following your company being accused of copying patented designs for mobile devices, your shareholders are beginning to worry about the future of their stock and the health of the company in general.

Your communications group has been asked to write a letter to the shareholders informing them what's at stake. The correspondence ought to address issues pertaining to culpability (or not), the assets / products in question and what they have meant for the bottom line of the company; what it would cost the company if the judge ruled against it, how to solve the problem, etc., with a view to cleaning up or clearing the company's image.

A lot of research will go into preparing this correspondence. Obviously, the rhetorical decisions concerning how to position your company are yours; however, consider ethical and reasonable (read factual) concerns in your framing. Do you wish to carry on the falsehood? Regardless, objective research needs to be the basis of your content.

Case III Netflix

In September 2011, Netflix enacted a new pricing scheme, which, in essence, forced Netflix's 25 million customers to choose a preferred service. Customers could have access to online streams, access to DVDs by mail or both. In addition, Netflix announced that it would offer its streaming plan for \$7.00 and its DVD plan for \$7.99, with the result that customers who wanted both would pay \$16 a month. These changes constituted a 60% price increase over Netflix' previous plan options for customers who opted for both the DVDs and the streaming service. As a result, some Netflix customers decided to rethink the monthly splurge entirely.

In the aftermath, the company reported that customers were canceling their subscriptions in greater numbers than it expected, about a million in total, causing a projected quarterly loss in customers for only the second time in its history. The company did not signal a shift in direction or a change its financial guidance for the quarter; still, its stock dropped almost 19 percent in heavy trading that week, closing at \$169.25 and worsening a season-long selling streak. For perspective, in July, the stock had peaked at \$304.79.

The downward revision reflects the negative reaction to Netflix's decision, announced in July and adopted in September, to separate its DVD-by-mail service from its faster-growing Internet streaming service. Before, DVD-by-mail was a \$2 add-on for some streaming subscribers; now, each service costs \$8.

Context: You are part of the communications department of Netflix.

Your Task: Draft a Letter to Shareholders of Netflix

Instructions: The letter will be a group effort.

You may see examples in most annual report -- many of them online. Check out Gillette, Raytheon and other brand-name companies and see the links to their “investor relations,” which may include not only annual reports (which BEGIN with the Letter to Shareholders) but “earnings [news] releases” and other financial communication documents. Here is a good one: <http://goo.gl/DAfDS> see especially beginning with page 3.

The Content

In your letter to the shareholders, describe the company foundation and its growth with specific references to the years and earnings on the top and bottom lines (revenues and profits, or earnings). A key thrust of your letter should outline the reasons for growth inclusive of the company highlights, previous year achievements, financial irregularities, restatement of mission/vision, industry and company growth trends, and calls for action. Write about the social-marketing, corporate-social-responsibility focus of the company. You must also focus on the company’s operating performance (up or down), its objectives, strategies, tactics and highlights. Discuss the recent set-backs to the company... be sure to justify the company’s reasoning in crafting that particular business strategy, what it anticipated would go well, how the company was blindsided. Then pivot to the issues at hand and how the company intends to right its course so as to thrive again.

In short, employ all instructions provided in-class and in the text with respect to tone, format, and delivery. It is very important to retain the goodwill of customers and other external publics.

You may use headings and subheadings as appropriate. Note that business letters give maximum information to the reader, using minimum words. Therefore, pay attention to the following:

Clarity and precision: Business letters should be clearly worded, avoiding the use of jargon or technical terms, and slang words. Concrete words should be used, so that there is no ambiguity. Example: Instead of “I received your communication”, it is better to be more precise by saying “I received your letter.”

Appearance: Apart from the content, the format, layout and overall look of the letter should be equally appealing to the reader. The margins should be appropriate, including one inch on each side and one and a half inches on top and at the bottom. The letter should be written on company letterhead.

Please design a letterhead that seems to you a reflection of the company you choose. Resources for the assignment:

1. Locate examples of letter to shareholders:
 - a. <http://goo.gl/DAfDS>
 - b. <http://goo.gl/9LUkN>
2. Research, [research](#), [research](#). [Find every written and other material on this case.](#)
3. Make an outline (or some other type of organizational scheme) of ideas you wish to discuss in your letter. Pick out issues from the assignment description that need to be addressed!
4. Write your letter on your designed Letterhead (<http://goo.gl/znYzt> and <http://goo.gl/kiU3M>). Be sure to follow the convention of business letters. DO NOT DEVISE YOUR OWN FORMAT.

Deliverable

A formal letter, 3000 words, single spaced

This letter will not have an inside address. However, it will be on letterhead.

The structure of your letter should signal:

Introduction: Introduce and briefly discuss the topic you chose and its significance. State your thesis

Research: your sources research and what they reveal—meaning what themes or patterns were revealed in your research, both for and against the position you are taking. Explain the significance of the patterns you observed in the readings

Research and analysis: discuss the research you found on the topic including arguments, insights, and explanations using terms, concepts and theories that apply. Integrate your research in your narrative. I like the way this article is written, for example: <http://goo.gl/tK8C4O> and this one: <http://goo.gl/g2ySVL>

Develop your own argument about the emerging narrative to help readers understand the impact of the policy or the position taken on society. Explain your position.

Conclusion: what kinds of insights did you gain from conducting this analysis?

Mechanics: document sources in text using APA format.