

Topic: Neutral and Positive Messages

Of the many kinds of documents and communications you will encounter are these neutral and positive message, information or action requests, requests for approval, routine claims, claim adjustments, and social business messages. The most important thing about all of these messages is to keep your messages clear, well structured, and concise; include enough information without going on too much.

Subtopics

- Information or Action Requests
- Requests for Approval
- Routine Claims
- Claim Adjustments
- Social Business Messages

Subtopic: Information or Action Requests

You will have to generate many requests for information or action – this is one of the most frequent kind of message sent. When writing an information or action request understand that most readers will focus on the opening and the closing. Understanding this, you are most likely to receive a positive response by starting your most significant sentence. Phrasing your request as a question or polite command is the most effective way to form this opening statement. You should not offer a justification or explanation unless you expect to meet with resistance. The body of this request should contain all of the important details.

This document should be as clear and well organized as absolutely possible. When you can, focus on how this request is a benefit to the reader. For instance, if sell sportswear and you are asking a customer to clarify an order you might say something like “In order to assure that you get exactly what you need, please give us a complete breakdown of our running shoes by style number and size.” Close appreciatively, but avoid overused closing sentences.

When you are responding to this type of document, give your reader the information they are seeking at the beginning of the document in the opening. Use the body to give any explanations or expand on any necessary details. You can include product promotions to customers in the body if appropriate. Close this document in a pleasant tone.

- Open by stating your main point, what you are requesting.
- Form your opening sentence as a polite command or a question.
- Do not offer a justification or rationale for your request unless you expect resistance.
- Provide important details in the body of the message.
- Clarity and organization of thoughts.
- Focus on the benefits to the reader.
- Close appreciatively.
- Responders should open with the requested information.
- Responders use the body to give explanations or details.
- Conclude cordially.

Subtopic: Requests for Approval

In setting up a flow for requesting and granting approval for any of a variety of business transactions, most organizations would be served by establishing a functional and fully realized template. Such requests might include request for leave, for system upgrades, for purchases, ... any transaction that requires approval calls for a request and approval stream. Creating such a template can help to maintain the flow of such requests and approvals. This template should include fields for all information required by your organization. In order to assure this flow of requests and approvals moves effectively, the requester needs to make sure they have included all necessary details and supported their request with justifications when needed. The writer needs to find the balance between giving enough information and keeping your writing clear and concise.

The closing section of an informal proposal is also referred to as a request for approval. In this section, the writer usually rearticulates the benefits that the proposal offers to the reader.

- Establish a routine or template.
- Include all pertinent details
- Support request with justification when necessary
- Clear and concise writing.
- Find the balance between enough information and too much information.

Subtopic: Routine Claims

A request for an adjustment of any kind is referred to as a claim. The two types of claims are routine claims and persuasive claims. Routine claims are those that you believe will be granted quickly and without much persuasion. Because this is the assumption routine claims never include forceful language or an accusatory tone. With the assumption that your claim will be granted, a more direct approach is preferred.

In writing a claim message, begin by stating clearly what you are requesting, followed by the reasons why written in a clear and concise manner. Close this document by summarizing.

In responding to a claim message, be aware that by standing by the integrity of your organizations work or product you are creating customer loyalty. As with the claim message, the response should be clear and concise, starting with the main point, that the claim is approved, followed by any necessary supporting information which is followed by a brief summary.

- Routine claims versus persuasive claims.
- Do not use forceful language or accusatory tone.
- Use a direct approach.
- Begin claim message by clearly stating what you are claiming.
- Support what with why you believe this is a reasonable claim.
- Finish a claim message with a summary.
- Approving claims engenders customer loyalty.
- Open with primary statement.
- Follow opening with any necessary information.
- Close with a summary.

Subtopic: Claim Adjustments

When an organization chooses to respond to a claim favorably, the message relaying that information is called an adjustment. Adjustments have traditionally been made promptly whether those adjustments were replaced merchandise, refunded money, discounts on future purchases, coupons, or repairs. Those adjustment timelines have grown even shorter with the advent of the Internet and of social media. Businesses offer claim adjustments in part because they are required to by law, and in part to satisfy customers and engender customer loyalty.

As with most of these messages, open with the main point, the good news. The body of the adjustment can then include a summary of the problems that were addressed in approving the claim, and go on to explain how the issues are being redressed. If procedures are going to change going forward, let the reader know how as a way of explaining to them that this mistake will never happen again. Even if it is the person requesting the adjustment who was at fault, avoid negative words in your explanation. Apologizing is appreciated by customers but highly discouraged by attorneys. Whether you apologize or not always avoid negative words. Avoid blaming anyone including customers or individuals or departments from your organization. Conclude with a pleasant, confident, and upbeat closing.

- Claim adjustments are the messages relaying that a claim has been approved.
- Claim adjustments have always been handled in a timely way and have become even faster.
- Open with the primary point, the good news that the claim has been approved.
- Body of the document can summarize the problems redressed in adjusting the claim, and state specifically how they are complying with the claim.
- Explain what will change in the future.
- Keep language positive.
- Avoid placing blame on anyone.
- Pleasant, confident, and upbeat closing.

Subtopic: Social Business Messages

Six common social business messages are: welcome note, holiday greeting cards, invitations, letters of appreciation, condolence cards, and Letters of congratulations. In times of sorrow these cards should be written by hand; for formal functions printed invitations are appropriate; to welcome an employee or customer, a commercially produced card is preferred; in strictly business situations computer-written letters are appropriate. Be aware that for this type of communication, email or e-cards are cold and lacking in a personal touch.

- Handwrite condolence cards
- Formal functions call for printed invitations
- A computer written note is appropriate to welcome an employee or customer or other strictly business situations
- Email and e-cards do not offer a personal enough tone for these kinds of social business messages.

Topic Review

Neutral and Positive messages deliver information that is favorable to the receiver, or has no positive or negative resonance. All of these kinds of messages require you to begin with the key point; open with the primary piece of positive or neutral information that is the point of this message. After your opening offer an explanation in as limited a number of words as you can. Consider including an appeal for further or additional sales. Conclude with a cordial and friendly closing. Keep the wording positive and open.

Question(s) to Consider:

1. You are selling raw metals to a metal sculptor. The shipment was initially sent to the wrong location, then it reshipped, but the package contained the wrong product. Finally the third shipment was correct, but by the time it arrived the customer had lost her commission and no longer needed it. She has sent it back with a slightly angry note asking for a full refund and an apology. How do you shape your response to her?
2. What exactly is the difference between a routine claim and a claim adjustment?
3. You have been tasked with setting up a series of templates to handle requests for approval of: purchase of supplies, new full-time hires, temp workers, and capital upgrades.
4. What commonalities can you draw along the spectrum of neutral and positive business messages?

Answers to Question(s) to Consider:

1. What your customer has written is a claim, and so a claim adjustment is the appropriate way to respond to her. Begin your claim adjustment with the main point, which is that of course you are offering her a full refund, which will be immediately credited back to her through her original means of payment. The body of the adjustment should include a point-by-point summary of each of the problems with explanations of how the issues are being redressed. Her address has been updated, the incorrect address has been purged from the system, and a marker has been placed on her account letting everyone know to double check her address on all future shipments. A new policy has been instituted across your organization to insure that orders are cross-checked with the invoices shipped with every order, assuring a wrong product is never shipped again. You can apologize for the delay in the shipment ultimately, but do not assign blame to any person or department. Close by telling her how important she is as a client and how important her happiness is, and explain that that is why you are offering her a substantial discount on her next order and the assurance of your personal oversight. Sign off with a friendly tone.
2. A claim is a request for an adjustment. Claims can be either routine or persuasive; a routine claim is one that is expected to be resolved positively and easily. A persuasive claim is one that requires more of an argument being made. A claim adjustment, on the other hand, is a letter of notification informing the filer of the routine claim that their claim is being settled favorably.
3. What you have been asked to do is create several forms covering the range of standard requests for approval in order to streamline the process and assure that all of the pertinent information is supplied at the time that the request is submitted. This will hopefully avoid the received having to go back to the sender for additional information. In order to successfully complete your task, you will need to seek out the people who approve or deny such requests for each task and ask them to tell you all of the important information that they would need to make a determination and then create a form with a place for each piece of information.
4. All of these neutral and positive messages require clear and concise communications. This usually means saying things in as few words as possible. Neutral and positive business messages call for a friendly and positive tone. All of these forms of communication should open with the most

important point, contain all of the supporting or background information in the body, conclude with a summary.