

CHAPTER LEARNING OUTCOMES

After completing this chapter, you will be able to do the following:

- Recognize common types of letters:
 - adjustment letters
 - claim letters
 - collection letters
 - confirmation letters
 - inquiry letters
 - rejection and refusal letters
 - sales letters
 - thank-you and congratulatory letters
- Understand why the **Problem-Solving Approach** is important in writing letters
- Consider how letters are used in a **real-world situation**
- Recognize the basic elements of letters: **heading or letterhead, date, recipient's address, salutation or greeting, introductory/body/concluding paragraphs, closing phrase, signature, and page headers**
- Consider **additional features** often found in letters
- Identify and select **block style** or **modified block style**
- Understand the basic patterns for **organizing** letters

On the Companion Website www.prenhall.com/dobrin:

- ✓ Case 1: Bad Loans and Bad Vibes: An Assistant Manager Is Placed in a Sticky Situation
- ✓ Case 2: Cutbacks and Quality Care at St. Martin's Hospital: A New Medical Professional Faces Ethical Dilemmas in the Workplace
- ✓ Case 3: Fletcher Global Medical Manufacturers: An Engineer Confronts Quality Control Issues and Helps Combat Negative Publicity
- ✓ Video Case: Testing the GlobeTalk Handheld Devices
- ✓ PowerPoint Chapter Review, Test-Prep Quiz, Exercises and Activities

REAL PEOPLE, REAL WRITING

DAVE FERRON
Vice President of SunTrust Bank



What kinds of writing do you do as a commercial banker?

I do a lot of internal writing, such as memoranda, e-mail, and credit underwriting reports, which take the form of a memo and have a specific flow with consistent components. I also correspond by e-mail with clients or prospective clients. In the last several years, more and more customers have felt comfortable using e-mail. It seems that we connect a lot quicker by e-mail than we might otherwise. As a result, I do less of the formal letter writing than I used to, but I still write many letters. The bulk of these are thank-you letters to customers.

Does SunTrust have a structured form for writing letters?

We have a template for commitment letters, but we often deviate from that template. There are specific clauses we have to include, but we can add as much detail as we need. On occasion the reader may happen to be, say, a licensed attorney or the owner of a company and may want the language to change a bit. What I have to do then is understand what the issues are with our specific language, and I have to convey those issues to our in-house legal council to get an agreement to the proposed changes in the language before I can change a standard document.

How would you say you learned to write within your company?

It was trial by fire. When I first started in banking about nine years ago, I attended a training program that included a writing course, which involved some basic instruction. I also used letters that others had written for the company as a guide. I don't follow any standard form now, but when I began, I got examples of different types of letters and used them as models.

When you write letters now, do you involve others in your writing? Do other people see your letters before you send them?

If I involve anyone in my writing, it is typically my assistant. But because we are all so pressed for time, there seem to be only two scenarios for how I get letters written. One is that I do the letter, and it just goes out without anyone else revising or editing it. The better scenario is to send it to my assistant for review. I'd say maybe 80 percent of the time no one reviews my letters, so I need to write, revise, and edit them very carefully.

What advice about workplace writing do you have for the readers of this textbook?

I don't think you can get enough writing classes, honestly. Whether it's creative writing or technical writing, learning about writing is critical. I think that the people who do the best, whether in this industry or in other fields, are those who communicate best both verbally and in writing. Those who communicate well tend to succeed and go to the top. I guess the advice, then, is to work on your writing as much as you can, and that's not a marshmallow answer.



INTRODUCTION

Every day millions of letters are sent and received worldwide. Although e-mail is quickly becoming the vehicle for much of the correspondence in the business and technical world, the letter is still a primary means of solving external problems in business and industry. Although you may not write in all of the genres described in this book in your professional career, you will surely write letters, regardless of your job description. Letters are usually addressed to someone outside your organization, and like e-mails and memos, they generally transmit smaller chunks of information. This chapter discusses common types of letters, addresses the basic elements found in most letters, and provides organizational strategies for communicating positive, negative, and persuasive messages through letters.

Letters cover a wide range of topics, and each example shown in this chapter depicts a different type of letter. Although it is useful to know the types of letters commonly used in the workplace, when writing letters of your own, it may be more productive to think about the rhetorical situation that necessitates a letter, rather than trying to create a letter to match a predefined type. Because rhetorical situations can call for positive, negative, or persuasive letters, each of these situations is addressed in depth later in this chapter. Common types of letters include these:

- *Adjustment letters*—Describing how an organization will deal with a problem in a product or a service. Some adjustment letters are written in response to a specific claim made by an individual or an organization; others deal with adjustments made by a manufacturer or a service provider (see Figure 12.1).
- *Claim letters*—Requesting adjustments or reimbursements for defective goods or services. These letters are usually written by a customer or a consumer (see Figure 12.5).
- *Collection letters*—Asking readers to pay for goods and services they have already received. These letters typically describe the amount owed and provide a payment history (see Figure 12.4).
- *Confirmation letters*—Serving as a written record of previous conversations or agreements. These letters are often sent as a follow-up to a face-to-face or phone conversation (see Figure 12.7).
- *Inquiry letters*—Asking for something or making a request. These letters often ask for information about a particular service or product that is offered by a company or in which a company might be interested (see Figure 12.8).
- *Rejections and refusals*—Informing readers that they will not receive what they want, although the letter may present alternatives. These letters are often written in response to a request or an application (see Figure 12.11).
- *Sales letters*—Describing the benefits of a product or a service, often written to potential or existing customers to stimulate interest (see Figure 12.12).
- *Thank-you and congratulatory letters*—Building goodwill by drawing attention to a positive experience or achievement. These letters often provide information concerning future actions or correspondence (see Figure 12.10).

Because letters are particularly important in employment and service applications, we devote more attention to those types of letters in chapter 13.



Explore

Find an example of a letter you've been sent or one you found elsewhere. Does it seem to represent one of the common types of letters described here? What makes it that type of letter? If it does not seem to represent one of the common types, how would you classify it? In other words, what type of letter is it? Does it seem to fit more than one category? With your class compare the letters you've found. Consider their similarities and differences. You may also wish to tally the numbers of each type of letter. Is one type more common? Why?

FIGURE 12.1

Adjustment Letter from Vioxx. (Source: Retrieved from http://www.vioxx.com/vioxx/documents/english/information_for_patients.pdf.)

September 30, 2004

Merck Voluntarily Withdraws VIOXX

Dear VIOXX Patient:

Merck & Co., Inc. announced today a voluntary withdrawal of VIOXX®.

This decision is based on new data from a three-year clinical study. In this study, there was an increased risk for cardiovascular (CV) events, such as heart attack and stroke, in patients taking VIOXX 25 mg compared to those taking placebo (sugar pills). While the incidence of CV events was low, there was an increased risk beginning after 18 months of treatment. The cause of the clinical study result is uncertain, but our commitment to our patients is clear.

Patients who are currently taking VIOXX should contact their health care providers to discuss discontinuing use of VIOXX and possible alternative treatments. In addition, patients and health care professionals may obtain information from merck.com and vioxx.com or may call 1-888-368-4699.

Merck will reimburse all patients for their unused VIOXX. All dosage strengths and formulations of VIOXX are affected by this voluntary withdrawal. Information can be found at vioxx.com or at 1-888-368-4699.

Merck is notifying physicians and pharmacists and has informed the Food and Drug Administration of this decision.

We are taking this action because we believe it best serves the interests of patients. That is why we undertook this clinical trial to better understand the safety profile of VIOXX. And it's why we instituted this voluntary withdrawal upon learning about these data.

Be assured that Merck will continue to do everything we can to maintain the safety of our medicines.



Raymond V. Gilmartin,
Chairman, President & CEO

Please read the Patient Prescribing Information for VIOXX.



In Your Experience

Think about the last letter you wrote or received. What was the subject, purpose, and audience of that letter? Was the letter of a personal or a professional nature? How did the subject, purpose, and audience of the letter influence the style, tone, and level of formality used in the letter? What were the external problems for which the letter was written? What rhetorical problems did the letter deal with? In a small group or in class, discuss the subjects, purposes, and audiences of the letters you've written or received, looking for similarities and differences among them.



As noted in chapter 11, there are distinct differences between internal and external messages. Letters are often more formal than memos because they usually address audiences that are not part of the writer's organization and that may not share the author's goals, perspectives, or language. Letters may also contain more background information and less specialized language than memos because the recipient of a letter may not have the same knowledge and level of familiarity with a product, service, or idea as someone within the writer's organization. In addition, most letters include a more formal greeting (e.g., "Dear Sir") and closing statement (e.g., "I look forward to working with you"), which help to establish a bond between the author and the reader.

Letters solve problems ranging from formal to informal, specific to general, and individual to public. Regardless of the problem, letters should never be written hastily or without careful attention to detail. The problem-solving approach can be a useful guide in creating letters. Workplace writers must carefully plan how they will respond to situations requiring letters, they must conduct research when necessary to adequately address or solve the given problems, and they must carefully draft and revise their letters before they distribute them.

As just one example of workplace problem solving through letters, Figure 12.1 deals with a highly public problem faced by Merck, a global pharmaceutical company. In 2004 several clinical studies of Vioxx, an arthritis and pain medication produced by Merck, concluded that the medication increased the risk of heart attack and stroke in some patients. News of this study became the focus of close media scrutiny, and Merck responded by withdrawing Vioxx from its \$2.5 billion market in over eighty countries. Needless to say, Merck wanted to spread the news of this withdrawal quickly in order to minimize the risk of liability, distrust of other Merck products, and loss of sales and profit. Consequently, Merck chose several genres and media to spread the word about the withdrawal of Vioxx, including a series of letters to distributors, health-care professionals, and patients who were then taking the medication. Merck's letter to Vioxx patients is an adjustment letter that describes a change—that is, a recall and a reimbursement—in a product or a service. It also relates a negative message because the information was apt to disappoint, concern, or frustrate patients who were using Vioxx.

Merck employees must have reflected carefully on the rhetorical situation facing them to determine which document formats would be most useful in addressing this problem. When a series of letters was decided on as a primary means of communication, it is safe to assume that every aspect of those letters, from layout and design to word choice and phrasing, was carefully analyzed and discussed. In fact, we can guess that a host of Merck employees—scientists, advertisers, technical writers, lawyers, and administrators—helped to research, write, and revise each letter before it was released. Thus, Merck used letters as a primary method of addressing a serious external problem, just as you might do when attempting to solve a problem in the workplace. Examine Merck's letter in Figure 12.1, and then address the questions posed in the Analyze This box which correspond to it.



Analyze This

Discuss or write about how effectively the letter in Figure 12.1 deals with a major workplace problem. What were the external (i.e., real-world) problems that faced Merck? Does this letter adequately address those problems? Why or why not? What were the various rhetorical problems facing Merck as it attempted to communicate with patients using Vioxx? Why do you think the company chose to communicate this information in a letter? Did the letter have an appropriate level of formality and detail for the audience? What information does this letter highlight or downplay? Does Merck present the information in an ethical manner?

BASIC ELEMENTS OF LETTERS

As suggested earlier, letters can take various forms and can include different stylistic and organizational features. These variations are often shaped by the external problems a letter might address, as well as by the rhetorical problems surrounding the writer, the audience, and the purpose for writing. As Dave Ferron suggests in the opening interview, a company or organization sometimes requires its employees to use a template as a guideline for outgoing letters, but experienced writers often adapt a template to suit the occasion. As you compose workplace letters of your own, consider using the primary elements described here.

HEADING OR LETTERHEAD

If it is available, you should use stationery with company letterhead for all outgoing letters. Such stationery appears more professional than blank paper and allows readers to easily identify the source of the letter before they read it. As Figure 12.1 shows, Merck used a simple graphic along with the name of the company so that customers could quickly determine the source of the letter.

If you are using blank paper, you should create a heading that contains your address (but not your name) at the top of the first page. If you choose to center the header information, it should come before the date; if you choose to align it on the left side of the document, it should go below the date. Figure 12.2 provides three different variations of this information.



Explore

Letterhead is not only useful in providing contact information about a company, but can also help to define and emphasize the company's image, goals, and beliefs for new readers. Do a web search using a term like "company letterhead" or "letterhead samples," and analyze the letterheads you find. Do these letterheads tell you anything about the company's goals or beliefs? What colors, images, and font choices do they reflect? Do the letterheads contain address, phone, e-mail, or web page information about the company?

DATE

The date a letter was sent may be important in tracing the history of an idea, an action, or a problem, particularly if potential legal issues are involved, as is the case with the Vioxx letter. Always include the date your message was sent to your audience, even if you began composing the message earlier. And you should simply list the date—never use a "Date" line in a letter. The date generally appears two lines below the heading, aligned left (see Figure 12.2).

RECIPIENT'S ADDRESS

Address letters to a specific individual whenever possible; this helps ensure that your message is received and read. On the same line as the name, you should also include the recipient's job title if possible. Using a title like Mr. or Ms. is optional, although it is generally advisable to include more formal titles like Dr. or Rev. when appropriate. You should use the postal service's two-letter state abbreviations in any addresses you include in your correspondence. The recipient's address is generally placed two to four lines below the date, aligned left.

FIGURE 12.2

Three heading variations

Energy Systems Limited
647 Union Street
Eugene, Oregon 97440

July 14, 2007

Deborah Smith
Portland Framing and Lighting
120 Froelich Avenue
Portland, OR 97201

Dear Ms. Smith:

(a) Letterhead

Energy Systems Limited
647 Union Street
Eugene, Oregon 97440
(541) 475-7782

July 14, 2007

Deborah Smith, Purchasing Manager
Portland Framing and Lighting
120 Froelich Avenue
Portland, OR 97201

Dear Deborah Smith:

(b) Heading centered

July 14, 2007

Energy Systems Limited
647 Union Street
Eugene, OR 97440

Portland Framing and Lighting
120 Froelich Avenue
Portland, OR 97201

Dear Purchasing Manager:

(c) Heading aligned left



In Your Experience

Although they are short and simple, it is important to use the correct two-letter abbreviations, especially when sending letters out of state. You certainly know your own state's abbreviation, but how many of the other two-letter state abbreviations do you know? Make a list of the ones you know. Then visit the U.S. Postal Service website containing all of the abbreviations, http://www.usps.com/ncsc/lookups/abbr_state.txt. How many did you not know? Did you get any of the others wrong? Why did you know some abbreviations and not others?

“I have made this letter longer, because I have not had the time to make it shorter.”

BLAISE PASCAL
1657

SALUTATION OR GREETING

The salutation should begin with the word *Dear*, continue with the recipient’s last name, and end with a colon—not a comma. If you don’t know the recipient’s gender or professional title, use both the first and the last names in the salutation. If you don’t know the name of the recipient, refer to the department or use a generic name that identifies your recipient (see Figures 12.1 and 12.2). Avoid salutations such as “Dear Sir” or “To Whom It May Concern” because they are vague and impersonal and show a lack of audience awareness. The salutation is generally placed two lines below the recipient’s address, aligned left.

INTRODUCTORY PARAGRAPH

Because letters are generally short and are often read by busy audiences, it is important that they are effective in introducing the subject. The introductory paragraph should provide any background information the readers will need to understand the letter—such as who you are and why you are writing. The introductory paragraph generally contains short, descriptive sentences and may also include a thesis sentence identifying the problem or main point of the letter. The introductory paragraph is generally placed two lines below the salutation. When addressing a highly important issue or problem, you might consider a single, thesis-based sentence as your first paragraph. Notice how the letter from Merck identifies the primary purpose for the letter in the first sentence.



Analyze This

Analyze several of the introductory paragraphs in the letter examples in this chapter. Do they follow the advice about introductions? Do they provide any necessary background details? Do they provide a thesis? Are they effective? Why or why not?

BODY PARAGRAPHS

Each body paragraph contains further details concerning your message, although you should resist the urge to include details that are unnecessary or irrelevant. Body paragraphs in letters often contain bulleted or numbered lists to improve readability. The body paragraphs in the letter from Merck provide background information (e.g., why Vioxx has been withdrawn from the market) and details about how readers should respond (e.g., contact a health-care provider for treatment and Merck for reimbursement).

CONCLUDING PARAGRAPHS

Letters often conclude with one or two paragraphs that sum up or reiterate the main point of the message. If there are specific steps you’d like your reader to take, you should mention them in the concluding paragraphs. If you do not wish to encourage specific action or if you have done so earlier, you can use a final paragraph to state something positive about the relationship between you and the recipient. This is particularly important if you have delivered negative information to your readers; the conclusion can help build goodwill and a positive image of you and your company. For example, because Merck had delivered particularly bad news in its letter, the concluding paragraphs stress their ethical commitment to customer safety. In some letters you might conclude by providing information about where, when, and how the recipient could contact you for further information or feedback.

CLOSING PHRASE

Many workplace letters contain a closing phrase followed by a comma. Although there are a number of appropriate closing phrases, some are more formal than others. The phrase you choose should reflect the relationship you have with the recipient.

- Closing phrases for highly formal letters:
Respectfully yours, Yours sincerely, Respectfully,
- Closing phrases for moderately formal letters:
Sincerely, Cordially, Thank you, Regards,
- Closings for informal letters:
Best wishes, Kindest regards, Best,

The closing phrase is generally placed two lines below the last paragraph, aligned left.

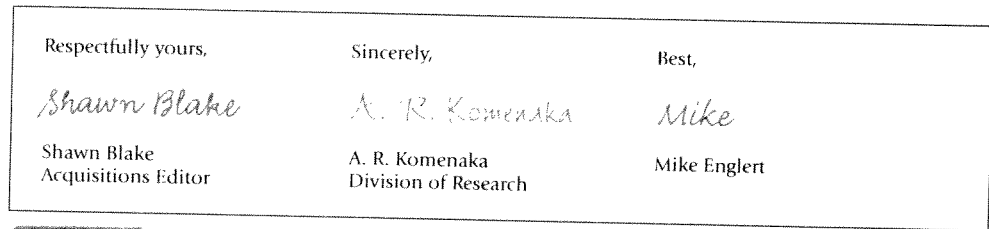


FIGURE 12.3
Closing variations

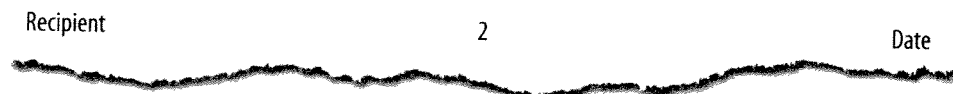
SIGNATURE

Your full name should be typewritten four lines below the closing phrase, aligned left. If you are writing in an official capacity and your job title is not included in the stationery's letterhead, you should include your title on the line directly below your typewritten full name. You should then sign the letter in the space between the closing phrase and your typewritten name. Use blue or black ink for your signature; these colors convey a professional image and will remain legible even when scanned or photocopied (see Figure 12.3).

Figures 12.4 and 12.5 show two sample letters that include all of the basic elements of letters. The first is a collection letter written on letterhead stationery; the second is a claim letter using a heading.

PAGE HEADERS

As with memos, you may sometimes need to write letters that are significantly longer than one page. Each page beyond the first should be printed on plain paper (i.e., no letterhead) of the same quality, weight, and color as the first page. These additional pages should include, at the top, a header containing some identifying information. A common approach is to include the name of the person to whom the letter is sent (flush with the left margin), the page number (in the center), and the date (at the right margin). Additional pages would look like this:



When possible, you should use the header function of your word processing program to automatically insert this information and avoid formatting and spacing problems if you revise or edit your letter at a later time.

Again, as with memos, you should be sure that the final page of your letter has at least five lines of text on it. If it does not, you may wish to manipulate the spacing, font, font size, or margins. And remember to avoid widows and orphans, too. As mentioned previously, many word processing programs have commands to address these problems.

FIGURE 12.4

A collection letter

ΔΩΓ
Delta Omega Gamma Fraternity
1000 American Lane • Columbus, GA 31907

February 1, 2007

Mr. Anthony Buffone
815 Oak Drive
Collegetown, OK 12055

Dear Mr. Buffone:

This letter is to inform you that you owe the sum of \$500.000 to the College Town University (CTU) chapter of the Delta Omega Gamma Fraternity. This amount consists of the following:

- \$200.00 Spring 2005 semester membership dues
- \$200.00 Fall 2005 semester membership dues
- \$100.00 Spring 2006 semester membership dues
- (\$0.00) Credits for prior payments

\$500.00 Total Due


If this debt is not paid within ninety (90) days, the College Town University chapter of Delta Omega Gamma Fraternity reserves the right to pursue the debts through all appropriate means, including, but not limited to

- Collection agencies
- Small claims court

Delta Omega Gamma is willing to consider payment arrangements. However, you must pay the debt listed above in full or sign a mutually agreeable payment plan by May 1, 2007, or Delta Omega Gamma will begin to pursue its legal rights at that time.

Sincerely,

Hector Esquivel
Hector Esquivel
Chapter Treasurer



ADDITIONAL FEATURES

Some letters contain additional features for specialized purposes, such as highlighting information, making note of others who helped create the letter, drawing attention to attached documents, or designating recipients who are not listed in the address line.

INTRODUCING LINE

When you are sending information that is highly important, requires an immediate response, or is directed toward a particular individual or division within a large company, it is useful to include an introducing line. As the name suggests, these lines introduce vital information about the subject or the audience of the document; there are three types.

Subject Line

This line is used to announce and highlight the topic of your letter. Subject lines are always used in memos and e-mail messages but are sometimes used in letters as well. You should

FIGURE 12.5

A claim letter

41

July 21, 2007

Dahl Agriculture
10 Plains Vista
Lincoln, Nebraska 44822

Herick Lab Equipment
101 Dartmouth Plaza
Ames, Iowa 50098

Dear Sales Manager:

On July 17, 2007, we received a UPS shipment of four (4) Herick Homogenizer Silent Crushers. We noticed that the box showed signs of water damage, so we immediately opened it and tested each homogenizer. Upon testing, we found that two of the homogenizers were inoperable.

Consequently, we are returning the two defective homogenizers to Herick Lab Equipment. We have been able to locate two additional homogenizers from our regional warehouse, so we will not need replacements. We paid \$1150 each for the two homogenizers, which should bring our total reimbursement to \$2300. I have enclosed a copy of our bill with this letter—the two items being returned are circled. Please send the reimbursement to the office address listed at the top of this letter.

We have been pleased with Herick equipment in the past and anticipate purchasing products from you in the future. If you have any questions about this claim, please call me at 802-445-1195 or e-mail me at billings@dahlag.com.

Sincerely,

Lisa Billings
Lisa Billings
Director, Agriculture Research

Enclosure: receipt for homogenizers

use all caps for the title (SUBJECT) and then capitalize the first letter of each major word in the line. Use underlining or boldface type to highlight the information contained in the line. A subject line is generally placed two lines below the recipient's address, aligned left.

SUBJECT: Short, Descriptive Phrase Here

Attention Line

This introducing line is used when you wish to address a specific department or position within a company but do not know the recipient's name. You should use the same formatting and positioning features in an attention line that you'd use in a subject line.

ATTENTION: Department or Position of Recipient

Promotional or Attention Heading

When sending a letter to many different readers (i.e., a mass mailing), you might choose to delete the salutation and use either a promotional heading or an attention heading before the body of your message. Promotional headings are often used in sales letters to announce discounts or sales; attention headings are often used to highlight problems, significant changes, or other important information.

It is common to leave two spaces above and below the heading to set it apart from the rest of the text. You should consider using all capital letters or bold or italicized text to draw attention to the heading, as these two examples demonstrate:

ANNUAL CLEARANCE SALE AT TUBERIDER'S SURF SHOP
Merck Voluntarily Withdraws VIOXX

TYPYST'S INITIALS

Although most workplace writers type their own letters, someone else may occasionally type a letter for you. In that case you should place directly below your typed signature (with or without a line space) your capitalized initials followed by the typist's lowercase initials.

YI/ti

ENCLOSURE LINE

Letters often introduce or are accompanied by other documents. If you plan to send something else with your letter, you should include an enclosure line directly below the typist's initials, noting the number of enclosures, or naming them if they are highly important or valuable. Here are three examples:

Enclosure: warehouse contract

Encl: 3

Enclosures: monthly rent check, warehouse contract

DISTRIBUTION LINE

You may send copies of your letters to other internal or external recipients and may wish to note those individuals. If you do plan to distribute copies of your letter, you should include a carbon copy notation—CC, Cc, cc, or Copy—followed by the additional names directly below the typist's initials or your typed signature if no typist's initials are necessary.

Cc: Randy Westgate

Copy: Amy Behr

cc: S. Wile

D. Plastino

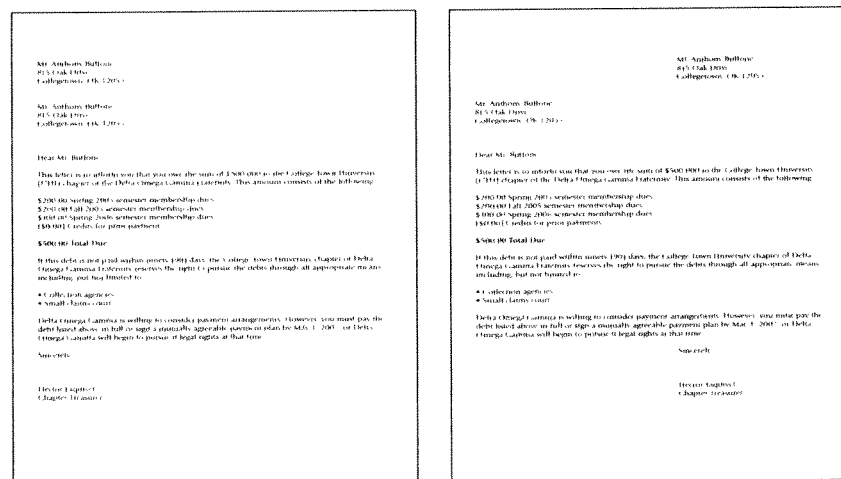
If you are simply making a copy of an original document for your own files, you can note this with the word *Copy* placed directly below the typist's initials.

FORMATS FOR LETTERS AND ENVELOPES

Your company or organization may have its own method of formatting letters. If so, follow Dave Ferron's advice, and ask a supervisor or trusted colleague for an example that you can refer to as a model. However, if your company has no particular method for formatting letters, consider using one of the two common formats diagrammed in Figure 12.6: block style and modified block style.

FIGURE 12.6

Two common letter formats



(a) block style

(b) modified block style

BLOCK STYLE

Block style is the most commonly used format for professional letters; in fact, most of the examples in this chapter use a block format. In essence, a block style aligns everything except the company logo or letterhead along the left margin. It uses single spacing for all text, with a space between paragraphs. This style looks sleek and businesslike and conveys a sense of order and symmetry. Most readers find it helpful because their eyes can skim a document vertically rather than jumping back and forth along the left margin. But a block format is equally useful for the author; the left alignment of all text is easy to remember and duplicate, even without a letter template or model. Figure 12.7 shows a sample confirmation letter written in block format.

FIGURE 12.7

A Confirmation Letter in Block Style

Pinewoods Preservation Society
<http://www.pinewoods.com>

[Two or more blank spaces, adjusted to center letter vertically on the page]

March 1, 2007

[Two to four blank spaces, adjusted to center letter vertically on the page]

Kevin Finnerty
 2991 Stockton Drive
 Asbury Park, NJ 07712
 [One blank space]

Dear Mr. Finnerty:
 [One blank space]

Thank you again for agreeing to serve on the Pinewoods Preservation Society (PPS) steering committee. Your participation and service will help to protect New Jersey's pinewoods for generations to come.
 [One blank space]

As a member of the steering committee, you will be called on to provide leadership, technical assistance, and recommendations for program development. Below are some examples of ways you can contribute to the goals of our PPS:

- Participating in monthly conference calls
- Building PPS membership
- Serving as a resource for the steering committee and other PPS members
- Seeking funding to support PPS activities
- Conducting statewide and regional education events for PPS members
- Supporting outreach efforts to raise awareness about pinewoods preservation

Our first meeting will be held at Crystal Monastery on March 30, 2007, at 7 p.m. After this initial meeting, the steering committee will convene primarily by conference call.
 [One blank space]

We are sending this preliminary notice to remind you to save the date. Directions to the meeting location, an agenda, and a list of committee members will be provided closer to the meeting date. Please confirm your attendance by contacting Jennifer Melfi at 201-273-9093.
 [One blank space]

We look forward to meeting with you!

[Three blank spaces, with signature in blue or black ink]

Anthony Sirico
 President, Pinewoods Preservation Society

MODIFIED BLOCK STYLE

Modified block style is slightly less formal than block style. Modified block style aligns the return address and the closing phrase and signature along the right margin, with all other

text aligned left. Because a modified block style uses a different alignment for the writer's return address, closing phrase, and signature, it can be useful to highlight information about the author. Figure 12.8 gives a sample inquiry letter written in a modified block format.

Although paragraph indentations are occasionally used in letters, most letters are written with single spacing and no indentations but a space between paragraphs. Using indentations along with a space between paragraphs results in too much wasted space, and using indentations without a space between paragraphs is more difficult to read.

FIGURE 12.8

An Inquiry Letter in Modified Block Style

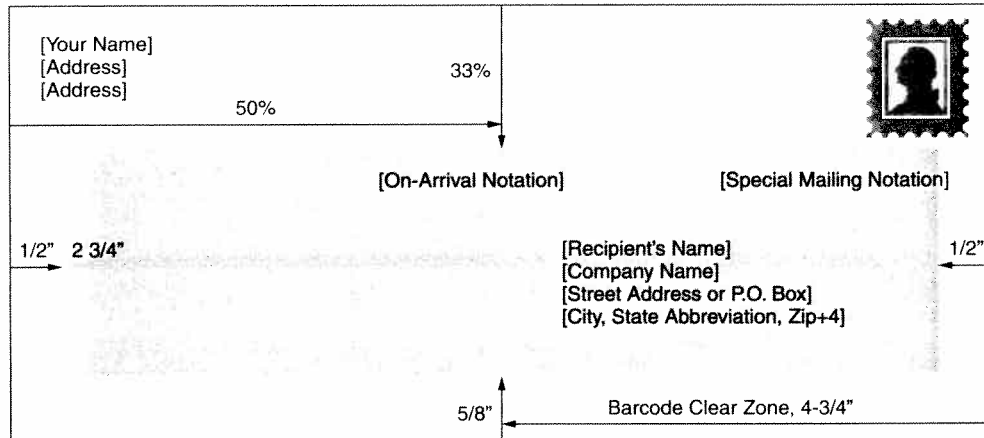
	Deb Webber Rhombus Accounting 565 N. Broad Street Tacoma, WA 93499
[Two or more blank spaces, adjusted to center letter vertically on the page.]	
April 3, 2007	
[Two to four blank spaces, adjusted to center letter vertically on the page.]	
Fred Olson Space Management Solutions, Inc. 10 Division Street Yakima, WA 98502	
[One blank space.]	
Dear Fred:	
[One blank space.]	
As you know from our previous conversations, Rhombus Accounting plans to develop a new accounting office in Yakima this summer. We envision a networked environment consisting of approximately 50 workstations, each of which will need high-speed Internet, phone, and fax capabilities. Because of your excellent work in creating our current office in Tacoma, we are contacting you to discuss developing this new office.	
[One blank space.]	
Several of our us team managers will be in Yakima on May 15 to survey the planned office, and we would like to invite you to present a proposal on that date outlining state-of-the-art solutions for our workspace needs. Please let me know if you are interested in delivering such a presentation. If you are, I will e-mail you the office specifications and our budget for the project.	
[One blank space.]	
If possible, please contact me by April 15 to confirm this engagement. We have been impressed with your work in the past and hope to continue our productive partnership. Feel free to call me at 854-775-2211 or e-mail me at dwebber1@rhombus.com if you'd like to discuss any of this.	
[One blank space.]	
Sincerely,	
[Three blank spaces with signature in blue or black ink.]	
Deb Webber Network Administrator	

ENVELOPE STYLE

The envelope will often be the first thing your readers see, and you want to make a good first impression. We recommend using the same quality and type of envelope as the stationery it contains. Typically, business letters are sent in a #10 envelope, although we encourage you to use a letter-size manila envelope for very important letters, those requiring signatures, or documents with several pages. Documents should not be folded in a letter-size envelope and should be inserted in such a way that recipients can pull them out of the envelope and begin reading, without having to reposition the documents.

You should *always* type your mailing and return addresses single space and in the same font style you used for the letter. The reader's name and address belong in the center of the envelope, with your return address in the upper left corner. Figure 12.9 illustrates the proper styling of envelopes.

FIGURE 12.9
Proper Styling of Envelopes



In Your Experience

The choices between block and modified block styles are somewhat arbitrary. There is no single right or wrong style to use, other than the style endorsed by your company. If you were asked to select the formatting style for a large corporation for which you worked, which style would you choose? Why? Do these formats lend themselves to particular types of workplace problems? Explain.

PATTERNS FOR ORGANIZING A LETTER

Workplace writers use letters to solve all sorts of problems and to address many unique situations. Some writers find it useful to think about those problems and situations as fitting into particular types and then try to write a letter that fits the specific type. For example, some organizations have forms for composing adjustment, claim, and inquiry letters, allowing employees to insert the details into the appropriate spaces. This approach takes some of the guesswork out of letter writing—it becomes a matter of just plugging information into predetermined places. Unfortunately, real-world writing situations rarely fit perfectly into those types, and rhetorical situations don't come with labels identifying the pattern to use. Moreover, using particular types as models shapes both the way a writer communicates the message and the way readers interpret it. Instead, the purpose for writing should shape the letter, and the form or pattern of the letter should depend on what is included.

Therefore, rather than focusing on how to make your situation fit a particular letter type, it is more constructive to focus on how your readers might react to the message and how a letter can help to solve a problem. This chapter looks at positive, negative, and persuasive messages in letters; and even though we mention some of the letter types most often associated with these three rhetorical situations, you should always think first about how your readers will perceive your message and then consider the organizational strategies that give your letter the greatest chance of being read, understood, and accepted.

POSITIVE MESSAGES

When you give your readers news that benefits them or their organization, the message is a positive one. Many situations require positive messages: agreeing to a request, accepting a proposal, offering a job, giving a discount, presenting a reimbursement or favorable adjustment, acknowledging that an order has been received, extending a deadline. These are all situations in which your reader's response will likely be positive. In many of these cases, you won't be asking your readers to do anything else; you'll simply be telling them the good news. We hope that most of the letters you write will be to communicate good news! You should use the following pattern of organization for positive messages:

1. **Give the good news first.** When you have good news to communicate, state it immediately and directly. Any delay can temporarily confuse readers, causing them to wonder whether the letter carries good news or bad. The first sentence of your letter should state the specific benefits, advantages, or other positive information you have to offer your reader, including the most important details of the good news, such as the job title you're offering, the percentage of the discount you can give, the date to which the deadline is extended, or the specific request to which you're agreeing.
2. **Provide the necessary follow-up details.** Nothing can spoil good news more quickly than a message that doesn't contain all of the information a reader might need. After stating the good news, be sure to give readers any background details or specific dates, times, places, and prices that will help them fully understand the message. Try to anticipate and answer any questions they might have about your message, and give these further details in order of importance. If no response or reaction is required, say so.
3. **Be clear about potential negative elements or limits.** Sometimes a positive message comes with limits or potential drawbacks. For example, a discount may have a time limit, a reimbursement may require returning the previously purchased item, or a job offer may not have all of the benefits the reader requested. If your message contains potentially negative elements or limits, be sure your readers understand them, but don't overstate the negative—present negative elements as positively as possible.
4. **Explain the advantages and benefits for the reader.** If there are benefits for both your company and the reader, be sure to focus on the reader. Clearly state the advantages and rewards the *reader* can expect from the good news. And remember that all benefits are not monetary; individuals can benefit from improved service, better products, or more time. However, avoid emphasizing benefits that make the reader sound selfish (e.g., "you'll make more money here than in your current job"), that are obvious (e.g., having a job will keep you from being poor"), or that are not likely or significant (e.g., "The \$1 discount will help you save money for larger investments").
5. **Use a goodwill ending to cement the relationship.** The conclusion of your letter should highlight and solidify the working relationship you have with your reader, emphasizing that the reader is your primary concern. Some writers finish with the three



Explore

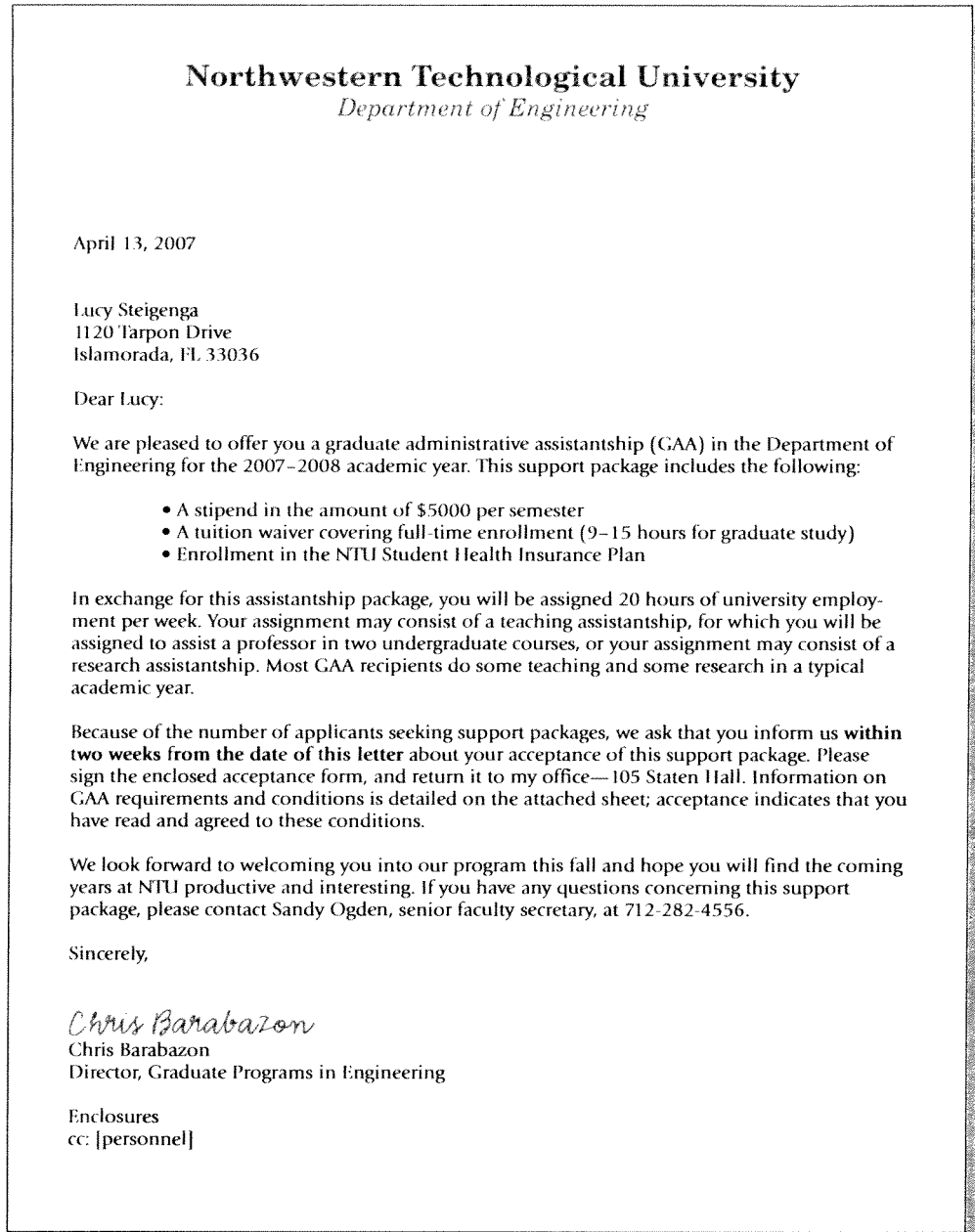
Goodwill endings are used in many types of letters that cover a variety of positive, negative, and persuasive situations. Find an example of a letter—one you have recently received, one sent to a friend or family member, or one posted on the Internet—and investigate its conclusion. Does it contain a goodwill ending? Does it state something personal, positive, and prophetic about the relationship between the sender and the recipient? Is it an effective ending, or could it be rewritten? Compare your letter with those of your classmates, looking for similarities and differences in the letters' conclusions.

p's: something *personal* about the relationship, something *positive* about working with the reader, and something *prophetic* about the relationship in the future. But keep in mind that the personal details in the conclusion should focus on the business relationship, not the reader's family, hobbies, or private life.

Figure 12.10 provides an example of a positive message.

FIGURE 12.10

A Letter with a Positive Message



NEGATIVE MESSAGES

Along with the many positive letters you'll send as a working professional, you'll also find yourself having to give bad news to your readers—that is, news that will disappoint them, make them unhappy, or cause them difficulty. In those cases the message is negative. Unfortunately, there are many situations that readers construe as negative, such as mistakes

that you or your company has made, proposals or offers you are rejecting, increases in the cost of a product or service, decreases in coverage or services, or the termination of a contract, agreement, subscription, or order.

Negative letters are perhaps the most difficult to write, but a clearly written and well-organized letter can help minimize a reader's negative feelings toward you. In many situations you will continue to have a working relationship with the reader, and in all cases you want the reader to have a positive, or at least neutral, image of you and your company. In addition, an effective and clear negative message helps reduce or eliminate future correspondence on the subject, which means less work for you. When communicating bad news, you want your readers to clearly understand the news you're giving them; understand what led up to it; feel that you've treated them fairly, reasonably, and respectfully; and believe that they'd have made the same decision if they had been in your position. You can use the following pattern of organization for communicating negative messages:

1. **Prepare the reader for the negative message.** It is often useful to begin with a sentence or two, sometimes more, that serve as a transition to the news you must communicate. Introductory statements that delay negative news or prepare the reader for it are called *buffers*. Like other introductions a buffer often provides context or background for the information that follows it. You should choose a buffer that is appropriate for your situation, although they often take one of the following forms:

- A chronology of events that led to the negative message
- General principles or ideas about the subject of your message
- An expression of thanks for something the reader has done
- Good news that helps to balance the bad news
- A reference to attachments or enclosures

Buffers can often help ease the reader into the message, but they must not imply a positive message. If you do choose to begin with a buffer, keep it short, because long, rambling introductions frustrate readers—especially when they do come to the negative message.

buffer an introductory statement that delays negative news or prepares a reader for it.



Analyze This

Analyze the following sentences, and determine which of the five common types of buffers each most closely resembles.

1. "Thank you for visiting our office last Wednesday to introduce Webcom's new highspeed DSL service." (A letter discontinuing service with an Internet service provider)
2. "Enclosed you will find the annual sales report for Deerborne Construction." (A letter announcing a drop in yearly home sales)
3. "Three years ago we began using employees from WorkStaff Temp Agency. For the first two years this worked well for us, but recently WorkStaff temps have been arriving to work unprepared, late, and sometimes not at all." (A letter canceling service with a temp agency)
4. "Many people purchase computers because of a company's reputation for good customer service. At Computer Systems Limited we take customer service very seriously." (A letter announcing a decrease in customer service hours)
5. "AquaLad Pools has a policy of offering a 10 percent discount to customers whose swimming pool installation date is more than thirty days past our original estimate." (A letter informing a customer that an installation date has been delayed)

2. **Clearly state the negative—once.** Make the negative message clear, specific, and direct. Don't be evasive or vague—there's nothing worse than having to explain a negative letter to a confused reader. When possible, get the message across in one short, direct sentence—avoid long, rambling sentences in which the negative message might be overlooked. If you are able, phrase the message in positive terms, referring to any benefits or possibilities the situation creates. Avoid placing blame on the reader, unless it is essential for an understanding of the message. And after you've clearly stated the negative message, avoid rehashing it again—once is usually enough.
3. **Present alternatives, compromises, solutions, or possible actions if they exist.** Effective communicators think about how their readers will feel or react. When you can, you should suggest alternatives, compromises, or other solutions that readers might consider. This not only helps readers accomplish what they want, but also lets them know that you really care about their needs. However, you should avoid going into too much detail or giving a chronology of what will happen if they pursue another option—just present the choices, and allow readers to decide whether they want to try an alternative.
4. **End with a positive, forward-looking statement.** Even the most negative messages can have a positive aspect. If something good can come to the reader as a result of the message, mention it. Often, your conclusion will look ahead to a happier future when your reader's needs can be satisfied, even though you are unable to satisfy them at the present time. If you plan to work with the reader in the future, say that you are looking forward to that. If not, thank the reader for any positive experiences you've had in the past. And if you anticipate further questions that you are unable to address at the moment, give specific contact information in the conclusion.

Figure 12.11 provides an example of a negative message.

PERSUASIVE MESSAGES

Much workplace writing involves persuading others. When you are encouraging others to think or act in a way that benefits you or your company, you are writing a persuasive message. Many of the letters you will send will involve some form of persuasion—selling a product or service, requesting help or materials, recommending strategies or solutions, proposing plans or guidelines, providing positive or negative feedback that you want readers to accept. In fact, many of the positive and negative messages you send will also contain a persuasive element.

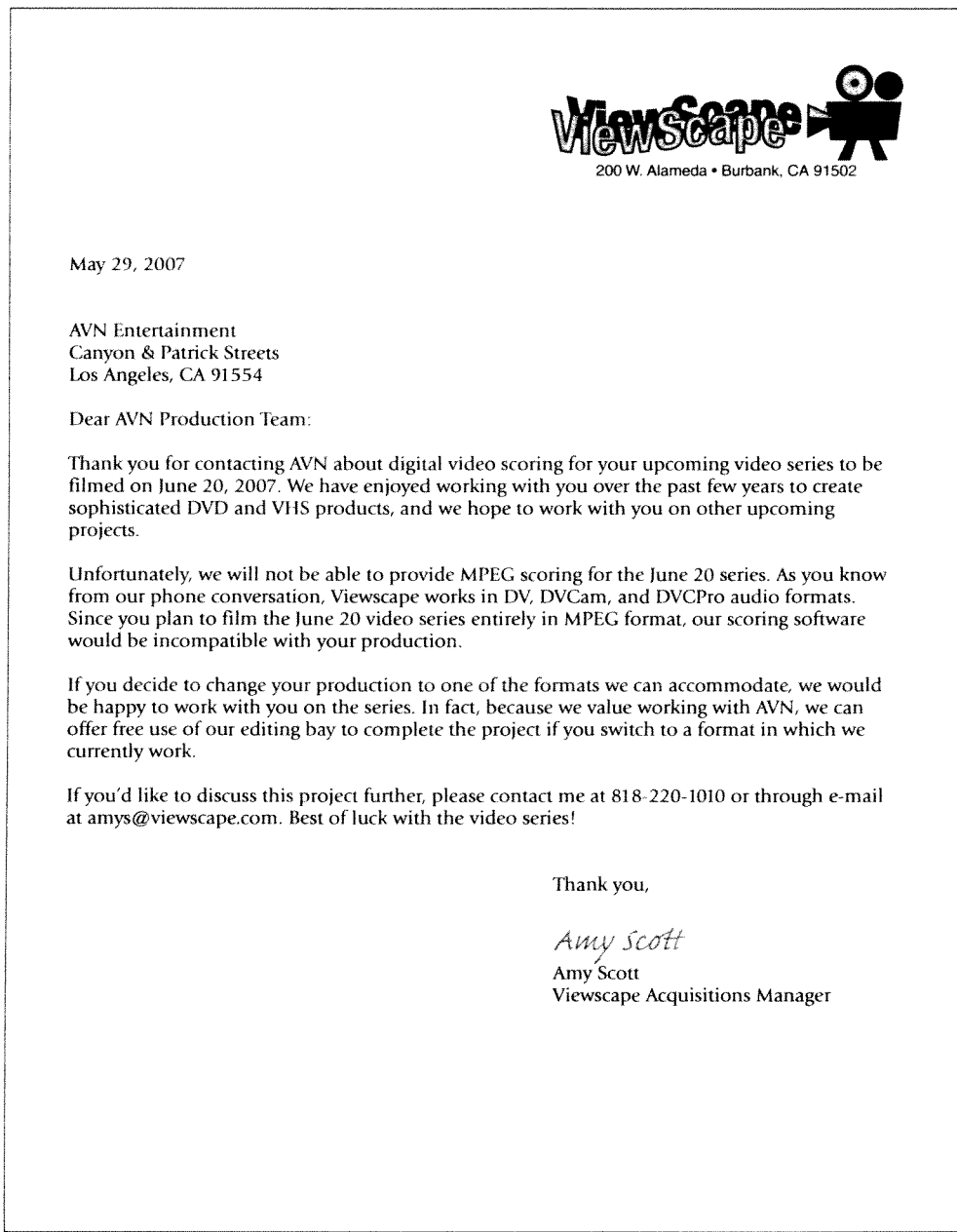
To persuade your readers to act in a certain way, you must consider whether they have previous experiences or preconceived notions about the subject of your message. Thus, your first goal should be to overcome any objections that might prevent or delay them from acting. In all cases, you will need to provide enough information so that your readers will be able to act. And persuasive messages, like all other pieces of writing, should create or cement a bond between you and your readers and should help to build a good image of you and your organization. You can use the following guidelines to shape your persuasive message:

1. **Capture your reader's attention.** Most readers today are very busy, so it is important to capture their attention and interest from the outset—particularly if you want them to act in a certain way. An attention getter provides common ground between you and your readers and can take many forms:
 - Asking a question the reader might be considering
 - Citing a surprising fact or statistic
 - Describing a new product or service
 - Summarizing a previous event or transaction
 - Challenging a commonly held belief
 - Providing a specific example
 - Offering proof that you can solve the reader's problems
2. **Connect the reader's interest with your goals.** After you've got your readers' attention and interest, make the transition from the introduction to what you want them to do. In most cases you should show how the desired action is in their best interest. But avoid overstating the benefits; readers respond best when given factual, reliable information.

89a

FIGURE 12.11

A Letter with a Negative Message



3. **Provide convincing details.** After you've made your readers aware of the purpose of your message, provide all of the details necessary to convince them. Be specific about costs, quantities, deadlines, or other important details, but also show that the advantages clearly outweigh any negatives. If possible, give your readers a reason to act promptly; show that acting now will save time or money or that delaying the action will only make things more difficult later. Anticipate any questions that might keep someone from acting immediately, and attempt to answer these questions in your message. Conclude this section with one main point or idea that you want your readers to remember.
4. **Tell the reader how to act.** You'll want to spell out the specific steps readers should take. Be clear about the order of the steps if there are several steps involved. If readers need to call, write, or e-mail, give them the specific contact information. Avoid threatening or demanding language; readers respond better when they want to act, not when they feel forced to act. If appropriate, offer to call them, or invite them to call you.

Figure 12.12 provides an example of a persuasive message.

FIGURE 12.12

A Letter with a Persuasive Message

496 51

LinkageLongDistance

September 7, 2007

Mike Strube
President
Strube Flight Instruments
2020 Pagan Way
Anthem, AZ 85086

YOU CAN CUT YOUR COMPANY'S LONG DISTANCE
PHONE EXPENSES BY 30%!

Dear Mr. Strube:

Thank you for inquiring about Linkage Long Distance services. We offer the same fiber optic telephone lines that your current service offers, except we charge a lot less for our high-quality service. And with Linkage Long Distance, you never have to worry about lost sales due to a power or system failure. In the event of an emergency, our computer will automatically reroute the calls from your 800 system to another location of your choosing.

We deal exclusively with small businesses like yours. Unlike AT&T and MCI, we don't spend millions of dollars on expensive advertising campaigns. We choose to pass the savings on to you. In fact, most of our new business is generated the old-fashioned way: our customers recommend us to their colleagues.

Our Small Business Plan has been designed to suit your needs:

- Delayed payment options during your off-peak months
- Guaranteed rates for two years
- A FREE month of long distance to new customers

Here's what some of our customers think about us:

"Linkage Long Distance has cut our long distance phone bills by 30%!"

Mark Walker, President, Trainco Transmissions

"I'll never forget the hurricane that downed our phone lines for one week. And I'll never forget how quickly Linkage Long Distance rerouted our calls to our New York branch. They saved us during our busiest sales season!"

Tobe Fisher, Sales Director, Steelmark Fasteners

I've enclosed a brochure that further details our state-of-the-art rerouting system and delayed payment options. Please be advised the free month of long distance is available only to new customers who sign with us by December 1. You must act quickly to take advantage of this exceptional savings opportunity.

I'd like to meet with you to discuss how Linkage Long Distance can immediately begin saving you up to 30% on your monthly long distance expense. I'll contact you next week at your Anthem warehouse to schedule an appointment; if you'd like to meet earlier, call me at 623-285-2290. I look forward to meeting with you soon.

Sincerely,

Raymond E. Kitch

Raymond E. Kitch
Regional Sales Manager, Linkage Long Distance



In Your Experience

Sales letters are among the most common letters sent through the mail today. Chances are good that you have received a sales letter at some time, and chances are also good that you skimmed it quickly and threw it away. Based on your experience with sales letters, why do they often go unread? Does their success have to do with their subject or with the way that subject is presented in letter form? With your class discuss your general experience with sales letters, and reflect on the ways that you could make your own sales letters more effective. Is there anything you could do to make the sales letter in Figure 12.12 more useful or effective?

SUMMARY

- Letters are used to transmit small chunks of information, communicate with individuals outside your organization, and discuss a variety of topics, from simple requests to detailed responses and descriptions.
- Specific letter types include adjustment letters, claim letters, collection letters, confirmations, inquiry letters, rejections and refusals, sales letters, and thank-you and congratulatory letters.
- Letters (i.e., external documents) are different from memos (i.e., internal documents) in the following ways:
 - Letters tend to be more formal than internal correspondence
 - Letters often contain more contextual, background information than memos
 - Letters generally include formal greetings and closing statements, whereas memos usually do not
- Letters generally contain the following basic elements: a heading or company letterhead, a date, the recipient's name and address, a salutation, an introductory paragraph, body paragraphs, a concluding paragraph, a closing phrase, a signed and typed signature, and page headers if longer than one page.
- Letters can also contain additional features: a subject line, an attention line, a promotional heading, typist's initials, an enclosure line, and a distribution line.
- Most letters use one of two common formats: block style or modified block style.
- The structure of a letter can be determined by the nature of the message—positive, negative, or persuasive.
- The pattern of organization for a positive message is to give the good news first, provide the follow-up details, be clear about negative elements, explain advantages and benefits, and use a goodwill ending.
- The pattern of organization for a negative message is to prepare the reader, clearly state the negative once, present alternatives if they exist, and end with a positive, statement.
- The pattern of organization for a persuasive message is to capture the reader's attention, connect the reader's interest with the writer's goals, provide convincing details, and tell the reader how to act.

CONCEPT REVIEW

1. Who is the general audience for most letters?
2. What is an adjustment letter?
3. What is a claim letter?
4. What is a collection letter?
5. What is a confirmation letter?
6. What is an inquiry letter?
7. What is a rejection or refusal letter?
8. What is a sales letter?
9. What is a thank-you or congratulatory letter?
10. What are the differences between letters and memos?
11. What does the Vioxx letter teach about letters?
12. What is usually placed in a heading or letterhead?
13. What date should you list on a letter?
14. Where should you place the recipient's address in most letters?
15. What are common salutations?
16. What should the introductory paragraph contain?

17. What should the body paragraphs contain?
18. What should a concluding paragraph contain?
19. How should you structure additional page headers?
20. What are the additional features you might find in a letter?
21. What is block style?
22. What is modified block style?
23. How should you organize a positive message?
24. How should you organize a negative message?
25. How should you organize a persuasive message?

CASE STUDY

Responding to Critics of a Park Services Message

The case study in chapter 11 describes a series of memos written by the director of the Lake Clarke National Park Service (LCNPS). The memos were written to employees about budget cuts that would affect staffing and hours of operation for the park, which is visited by nearly 200,000 hikers, campers, swimmers, fishermen and women, and boaters each year. Although the memos were intended for employees only several were published on the Internet, including the September 20, 2006, e-mail memo sent to park supervisors (see Figure 11.14).

Two local newspapers and one regional magazine have reprinted the e-mail memo and have written negative articles about it. One correspondent called the e-mail “dangerously unethical,” another stated that the memo “betrays public trust in our park service,” and an editorial called for the resignation of Doris Jones, the director of LCNPS and author of the message.

Director Jones has now asked you, as an employee of LCNPS, to create a response letter to the public that will be sent to these newspapers and the magazine. Your goal is to explain the information found in the memo and attempt to dispel any negative feelings toward LCNPS. You’ll want to draw from the information found in the memo but rewrite it in the form of a letter to the public. Before you begin, you should reread the memo in Figure 11.14 and consider the following questions:

- Based on the information you have, how do you envision your audiences? Will they be generally receptive or hostile to the information in your letter?
- What tone, style, and level of formality will work best in this response letter?
- Will your letter be apologetic, or will you take the perspective of someone who is correcting a misconception?
- Will you structure your letter as a positive, negative, or persuasive message? Will you use one of the patterns of organization described in this chapters