



Direct and Indirect Communication

Typically, there are two types of communication styles that you may use when giving good or bad news: direct and indirect styles.

1. Consider:

- A. What are the stakes for the reader and the writer?
- B. What are the expectations in your community and in your culture?
- C. What ethics do you want to project?
- D. What do you expect or anticipate as a response from your audience?

2. Direct Style: Typically, the direct style is used for good news and is broken into three or four paragraphs.

- A. Paragraph One: Contains the main point or reason for the communication. Start with the good news. You may begin with an introduction.
- B. Paragraph Two: Offers the explanation for the good news and offers instructions or information that the audience may need. Write this section clearly and briefly. Avoid long sentence constructions, and if there are lists of directions, you may consider prioritizing them in a numerical list.
- C. Final Paragraph: Includes the contact information and ends in goodwill. You might review some of the information.

3. Indirect Style: This style is used for bad news. Remember to consider both the situation and the context before writing. It is imperative that you avoid passive constructions in this type of letter.

- A. Paragraph One: Acts as a buffer. Buffer paragraphs are meant to soften the delivery of bad news. In this paragraph, you may start with an introduction and provide a context for the subject; however, you should never mislead your audience into thinking that you are going to give them good news.
 - I. Not all scholars are in agreement with including a buffer paragraph, and some suggest that the situation should be considered first. Below is a list of possible reasons to use the buffer.
 - a) When the audience is a part of a culture that values harmony.
 - b) When a negative reaction could be harmful.
 - c) When the buffer can serve another purpose besides delaying the negative information.
 - II. In most instances, after you provide the context, you should give the purpose of the letter and follow with the reason. Your tone should always remain professional.
- B. Paragraph Two: Explains the bad news. You should follow the bad news and reason with any further explanation and an alternative or compromise. Not all people read on the same level, so you should write positively, clearly, and concisely.
- C. Final Paragraph: Includes the contact information and ends in good will. Ending in good will is difficult; especially in this type of letter where you may have rejected someone's application for credit or employment. Try to avoid common platitudes like "if we can be of further service to you." Personalize your endings.