

CHAPTER 3

Building Goodwill

Learning Objectives

After studying this chapter, you will know how to:

- 1 Create you-attitude.
- 2 Create positive emphasis.
- 3 Improve tone in business communications.
- 4 Reduce bias in business communications.

IN THE NEWS

Karma Capitalism



When Crate & Barrel, the upscale furniture retailer, set out to support education with donations, they didn't just give money to needy schools. Instead, they sent out coupons in their mailers inviting their customers to use the DonorsChoose.org Web site to decide how and where Crate & Barrel would donate its money.

The response? Customers loved the program. Not only did the coupons inspire a high rate of customer involvement—11% of the coupons were redeemed, compared to 2% in a normal mass mailing—but the coupons also improved customers' perceptions of the company: 75% of the customers who used the DonorsChoose coupons said they now considered Crate & Barrel a company with a positive attitude toward the community, while 82% said they'd be more likely to buy the company's products in the future.

So, is winning everything? Is greed good? In the 1980s and 1990s, when business managers liked to quote Sun Tzu's ancient Chinese classic

The Art of War, those ideas seemed to describe the most successful way to run an organization. Today, when business scandals and the increasingly complex demands of a globalized economy dominate the headlines, people are finding good business ideas in another ancient Asian book: the *Bhagavad Gita*.

This "new" ancient wisdom isn't just about business trends—it's good advice. In the global marketplace, no organization exists in a vacuum and no

one works alone: we all have business partners and customers we rely on for information, goods and services, and revenue. In "Karma Capitalism," successful businesses focus on creating relationships that build success. You-attitude and goodwill involve showing your audience that you understand and

care about their needs, concerns, and problems. If you can demonstrate to your audience that you're interested in communicating about things they care about, in ways that they appreciate, they'll respond by paying attention to you, your message, your product, and your organization.

Sources: Pete Engardio, "Karma Capitalism," *BusinessWeek*, October 30, 2006, 84–91; and Emily Steel, "Novel Program Blends Charity and Marketing," *Wall Street Journal*, December 20, 2006, B1, B5; www.donorschoose.org.

Chapter Outline

You-Attitude

- How to Create You-Attitude
- You-Attitude Beyond the Sentence Level

Positive Emphasis

- How to Create Positive Emphasis
- How to Check Positive Emphasis

Tone, Power, and Politeness

Reducing Bias in Business Communication

- Making Language Nonsexist
- Making Language Nonracist and Nonagist
- Talking about People with Disabilities and Diseases
- Choosing Bias-Free Photos and Illustrations

Summary of Key Points

Goodwill smooths the challenges of business and administration. Companies have long been aware that treating customers well pays off in more sales and higher profits. Linda Thaler and Robin Koval built The Kaplan Thaler Group into an advertising agency with nearly \$1 billion in billings using goodwill, you-attitude, and positive tone.¹ General Motors has found that customers who get good service from their dealers are five times more likely to buy another GM car than those who had poor service.² Government organizations now realize that they need citizen support—goodwill—to receive funding.

Goodwill is important internally as well as externally. More and more organizations are realizing that treating employees well is financially wise as well as ethically sound. Happy employees create less staff turnover, thus reducing hiring and training costs. A University of Pennsylvania study of 3,000 companies found that investing 10% of revenue on capital improvement boosted company productivity 3.9%, but spending the money on employees increased productivity 8.5%, or more than twice as much.³

You-attitude, positive emphasis, and bias-free language are three ways to help build goodwill. Messages that show you-attitude use the audience point of view, not the writer's or speaker's. Positive emphasis means focusing on the positive rather than the negative aspects of a situation. Bias-free language does not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, physical condition, race, age, or any other category. All three help you achieve your purposes and make your messages friendlier, more persuasive, more professional, and more humane. They suggest that you care not just about money but also about the needs and interests of your customers and employees.

You-Attitude

Putting what you want to say in you-attitude is a crucial step both in thinking about your audience's needs and in communicating your concern to your audience.

How to Create You-Attitude

You-attitude is a style of communication that looks at things from the audience's point of view, emphasizing what the audience wants to know, respecting the audience's intelligence, and protecting the audience's ego.

To apply you-attitude, use the following five techniques:

1. **Talk about the audience, not about yourself.**
2. **Refer to the audience's request or order specifically.**
3. **Don't talk about feelings, except to congratulate or offer sympathy.**
4. **In positive situations, use *you* more often than *I*. Use *we* when it includes the audience.**
5. **In negative situations, avoid the word *you*. Protect the audience's ego. Use passive verbs and impersonal expressions to avoid assigning blame.**

Revisions for you-attitude do not change the basic meaning of the sentence. However, revising for you-attitude often makes sentences longer because the revision is more specific and has more information. Long sentences need not be wordy. **Wordiness** means having more words than the meaning requires. We can add information and still keep the writing concise.

1. Talk about the audience, not about yourself.

Your audience wants to know how they benefit or are affected. When you provide this information, you make your message more complete and more interesting.

Lacks you-attitude: I have negotiated an agreement with Apex Rent-a-Car that **gives you** a discount on rental cars.

You-attitude: As a Sunstrand employee, **you can now get** a 20% discount when you rent a car from Apex.

Any sentence that focuses on the communicator's work or generosity lacks you-attitude, even if the sentence contains the word *you*. Instead of focusing on what you are giving, focus on what your audience can now do. To do that, you may need to change the grammatical subject.

Lacks you-attitude: **We** are shipping **your order** of September 21 this afternoon.

You-attitude: **The two dozen Corning Ware starter sets you ordered** will be shipped this afternoon and should reach you **by September 28**.

Emphasize what the audience wants to know. Your audience is less interested in when you shipped the order than in when it will arrive. Note that the phrase "should reach you by" leaves room for variations in delivery schedules. If you can't be exact, give your audience the information you do have: "A UPS shipment from California to Texas normally takes three days." If you have absolutely no idea, give your audience the name of the carrier, so then he or she knows whom to contact if the order doesn't arrive promptly. You might also provide the tracking number.

2. Refer to the customer's request or order specifically.

Refer to the customer's request, order, or policy specifically, not as a generic *your order* or *your policy*. If your customer is an individual or a small business, it's friendly to specify the content of the order. If you're dealing with a company with which you do a great deal of business, give the invoice or purchase order number.

Lacks you-attitude: **Your order . . .**

You-attitude
(to individual): **The desk chair you ordered . . .**

You-attitude
(to a large store): **Your invoice #783329 . . .**



IRS Uses You-Attitude

Where's My Refund?

You filed your tax return and you're expecting a refund. You have just one question and you want the answer now—*Where's My Refund?*

Whether you split your refund among several accounts, opted for direct deposit to one account or asked IRS to mail you a check, you can track your refund through this secure Web site. You can get refund information even if you filed just to request the telephone excise tax refund.

To get to your personal refund information, be ready to enter your:

- Social Security Number (or IRS Individual Taxpayer Identification Number)
- Filing status (Single, Married Filing Joint Return, Married Filing Separate Return, Head of Household, or Qualifying Widow(er))
- Exact refund amount shown on your return

If you don't receive your refund within 28 days from the original IRS mailing date shown on *Where's My Refund?*, you can start a refund trace online.

If *Where's My Refund?* shows that IRS was unable to deliver your refund, you can change your address online.

Where's My Refund? will prompt you when these features are available for your situation.

Okay now, **Where's My Refund?**

Note: If you have trouble while using this application, please check the Requirements to make sure you have the correct browser software for this application to function properly and check to make sure our system is available

Quoted from: U.S. Department of the Treasury. "Where's My Refund?" in *Internal Revenue Service: Individuals*, <http://www.irs.gov/individuals/article/0,,id=96596,00.html> (accessed May 8, 2007).



Exercising Empathy for Employees and Customers

Although the concept of happy employees leading to happy customers is not new, it is experiencing a resurgence in many different industries. For example, call centers are allowing seasoned employees to work at home while a grocery chain is giving employees a profit-sharing plan that rewards them for excellent customer service.

Companies are finding creative ways to help employees identify with customers. USAA, an insurance agency for the military, provides new employees with MREs (meals ready to eat) during orientation so they will better understand the lifestyle of the members they serve. Cabela's, an outdoor outfitter, encourages employees to use products they sell by loaning items free of charge in exchange for writing reviews on a company system. The loans are good perks for employees, and they help staff understand the issues customers may have with the products. At Four Seasons Hotels, employees receive free overnight stays and meals at the hotel for themselves and a guest. They gain a customer's perspective on the hotel, but they also grade the hotel on various services. The companies exercising empathy for employees and customers believe their customer service helps set them apart from other organizations.

Have you experienced empathy from a customer service representative recently? What did he or she do to build goodwill?

Adapted from Jena McGregor, "Customer Service Champs," *BusinessWeek*, March 5, 2007, 52.

3. Don't talk about feelings, except to congratulate or offer sympathy.

In most business situations, your feelings are irrelevant and should be omitted.

Lacks you-attitude: **We are happy** to extend you a credit line of \$5,000.

You-attitude: **You can now charge** up to \$5,000 on your American Express card.

Your audience doesn't care whether you're happy, bored stiff at granting a routine application, or worried about granting so much to someone who barely qualifies. All your audience cares about is the situation from their point of view.

It is appropriate to talk about your own emotions in a message of congratulations or condolence.

You-attitude: **Congratulations on your promotion to district manager!** I was really pleased to read about it.

In internal e-mails, it may be appropriate to comment that a project has been gratifying or frustrating. In the letter of transmittal that accompanies a report, it is permissible to talk about positive feelings about doing the work. But even other audiences in your own organization are primarily interested in their own concerns, not in your feelings.

Don't talk about your audience's feelings, either. It's distancing to have others tell us how we feel—especially if they are wrong.

Lacks you-attitude: **You'll be happy** to hear that Open Grip Walkway Channels meet OSHA requirements.

You-attitude: **Open Grip Walkway Channels meet OSHA requirements.**

Maybe the audience expects that anything you sell would meet government regulations (OSHA—the Occupational Safety and Health Administration—is a federal agency). The audience may even be disappointed if they expected higher standards. Simply explain the situation or describe a product's features; don't predict the audience's response.

When you have good news, simply give the good news.

Lacks you-attitude: **You'll be happy** to hear that your scholarship has been renewed.

You-attitude: **Congratulations! Your scholarship has been renewed.**

4. In positive situations, use *you* more often than *I*. Use *we* when it includes the audience.

Talk about the audience, not you or your company.

Lacks you-attitude: **We provide** health insurance to all employees.

You-attitude: **You receive** health insurance as a full-time Procter & Gamble employee.

Most readers are tolerant of the word *I* in e-mail messages, which seem like conversation. But edit paper documents to use *I* rarely if at all. *I* suggests that you're concerned about personal issues, not about the organization's problems, needs, and opportunities. *We* works well when it includes the reader. Avoid *we* if it excludes the reader (as it would in a letter to a customer or supplier or as it might in a memo about what *we* in management want *you* to do).

5. In negative situations, avoid the word *you*. Protect your audience's ego. Use passive verbs and impersonal expressions to avoid assigning blame.

When you report bad news or limitations, use a noun for a group of which your audience is a part instead of *you* so people don't feel that they're singled out for bad news.

Lacks you-attitude: **You** must get approval from the director **before you** publish any articles or memoirs based on **your work** in the agency.

You-attitude: **Agency personnel** must get approval from the director to publish any articles or memoirs based on **their work** at the agency.

Use passive verbs and impersonal expressions to avoid blaming people. **Passive verbs** describe the action performed on something, without necessarily saying who did it. (See Chapter 4 for a full discussion of passive verbs.) **Impersonal expressions** omit people and talk only about things. In most cases, active verbs are better. But when your audience is at fault, passive verbs may be useful to avoid assigning blame.

Normally, communication is most lively when it's about people—and most interesting to audiences when it's about them. When you have to report a mistake or bad news, however, you can protect your audience's ego by using an impersonal expression, one in which things, not people, do the acting.

Lacks you-attitude: **You made no allowance** for inflation in **your estimate**.

You-attitude (passive): No allowance for inflation **has been made** in this estimate.

You-attitude (impersonal): **This estimate makes** no allowance for inflation.

A purist might say that impersonal expressions are illogical: An estimate, for example, is inanimate and can't "make" anything. In the pragmatic world of business writing, however, impersonal expressions help you convey criticism tactfully.

You-Attitude Beyond the Sentence Level

Good messages apply you-attitude beyond the sentence level by using content and organization as well as style to build goodwill.

To create goodwill with content,

- Be complete. When you have lots of information to give, consider putting some details in an appendix, which may be read later.
- Anticipate and answer questions your audience is likely to have.
- When you include information your audience didn't ask for, show why it is important.
- Show your audience how the subject of your message affects them.

To organize information to build goodwill,

- Put information your audience is most interested in first.
- Arrange information to meet your audience's needs, not yours.
- Use headings and lists so readers can find key points quickly.

Consider the letter in Figure 3.1. As the red marginal notes indicate, many individual sentences in this letter lack you-attitude. Fixing individual sentences could improve the letter. However, it really needs to be totally rewritten.



You-Attitude with International Audiences

When you communicate with international audiences, look at the world from their point of view.

The United States is in the middle of most of the maps sold in the United States. It isn't in the middle of maps sold elsewhere in the world.

The United States clings to a measurement system that has been abandoned by most of the world. When you write for international audiences, use the metric system.

Even pronouns and direction words need attention. *We* may not feel inclusive to readers with different assumptions and backgrounds. *Here* won't mean the same thing to a reader in Bonn as it does to one in Boulder.

Figure 3.1 A Letter Lacking You-Attitude

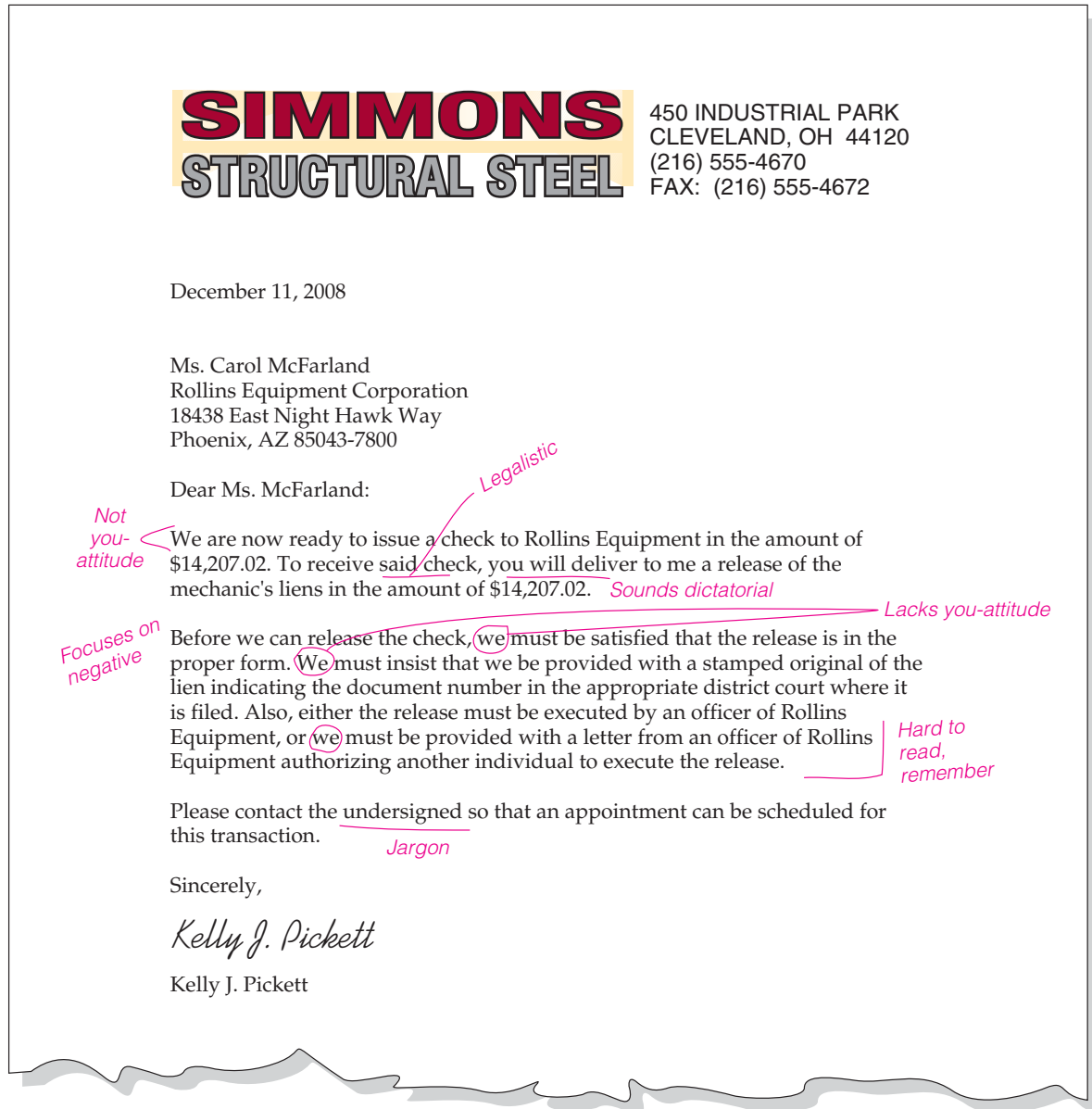
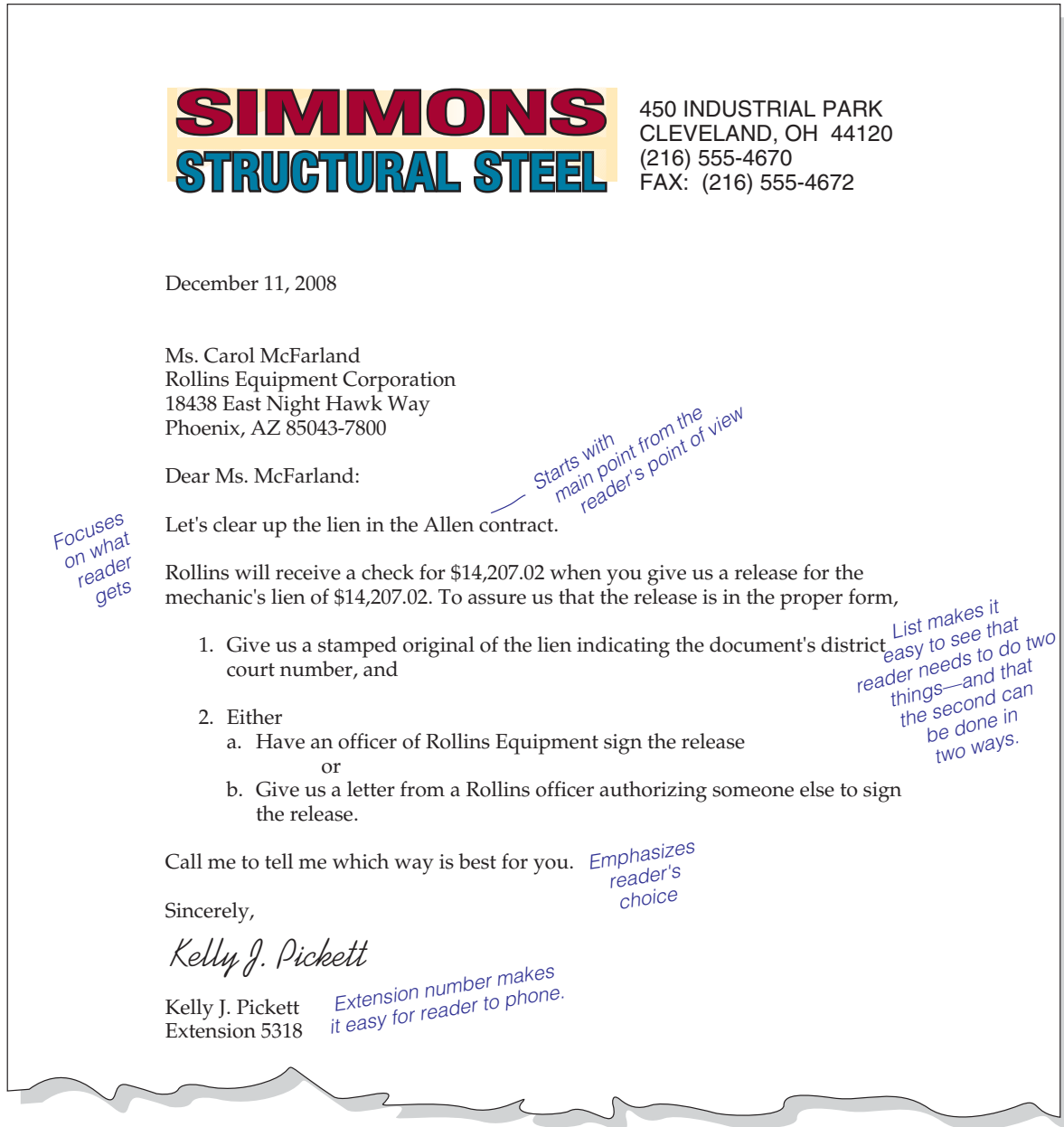


Figure 3.2 shows a possible revision of this letter. The revision is clearer, easier to read, and friendlier.

Positive Emphasis

Some negatives are necessary. When you have bad news to give—announcements of layoffs, product defects and recalls, price increases—straight-forward negatives build credibility. (See Chapter 11 on how to present bad news.) Sometimes negatives are needed to make people take a problem seriously. In some messages, such as disciplinary notices and negative

Figure 3.2 A Letter Revised to Improve You-Attitude



performance appraisals, one of your purposes is to make the problem clear. Even here, avoid insults or attacks on your audience's integrity or sanity. Being honest about the drawbacks of a job reduces turnover.

Sometimes negatives create a "reverse psychology" that makes people look favorably at your product. German power tool manufacturer Stihl advertises that its chain saws and other tools are *not* sold by chains like Lowe's or Home Depot. Instead, the company emphasizes that its products are sold through independent retailers. While the campaign risks offending potential customers



Defining Allowable Negatives

The Des Moines
Register issued the

following standards for contribu-
tors to its electronic forum:

[The Des Moines *Register's*] up-
dated standards make the distinc-
tion between offensive opinion and
offensive approach.

... We reserve the right to remove
comments including these types of
specific information or language:

- Libel. In general terms, that means a comment that includes a false statement of fact that actually harms a person's reputation (as opposed to insulting or offending them).
- Sexually explicit or crude sexual comments about someone.
- Threatening statements or statements that suggest violent acts against someone.
- Crude comments about a child.
- Swearing or obscenity.
- Derogatory phrases to define a group of people.
- Nasty name-calling (language such as "moron" and "white trash").

But we will allow opinions some
will find offensive.

We will allow conversation that is
simply strident in tone.

We will allow criticism of public of-
ficials.

We will allow criticism of people
who are subjects of stories.

We will allow opinions that some
may find offensive about tough so-
cial issues around race and sexual
orientation, as long as they don't in-
clude the kind of specific language
described above.

Quoted from Carolyn Washburn, "Invit-
ing Robust Conversation, but Spelling
Out a Few Rules," *Des Moines Sunday
Register*, April 15, 2007.

by implying that shopping at big box stores means that they don't appreciate quality, Stihl insists that its high-end products are worth the prices that are charged by specialty stores.⁴ New York marketing consultant Michael Fanuele says that purity is dull; ads that emphasize only the positive are viewed suspiciously by today's consumers. He advises companies to sell their imperfections. For instance, Ragu accepted the fact that its sauce was not as thick as Prego's. It marketed its sauce to young children, most of whom do not like chunky sauces.⁵

But in most situations, it's better to be positive. Researchers Annette N. Shelby and N. Lamar Reinsch, Jr., found that business people responded more positively to positive than to negative language and were more likely to say they would act on a positively worded request.⁶ Martin Seligman's research for Met Life found that optimistic salespeople sold 37% more insurance than pessimistic colleagues. As a result, Met Life began hiring optimists even when they failed to meet the company's other criteria. These "unqualified" optimists outsold pessimists 21% in their first year and 57% in the next.⁷

Positive emphasis is a way of looking at things. Is the bottle half empty or half full? You can create positive emphasis with the words, information, organization, and layout you choose.

How to Create Positive Emphasis

Create positive emphasis by using the following five techniques:

1. Avoid negative words and words with negative connotations.
2. Focus on what the audience can do rather than on limitations.
3. Justify negative information by giving a reason or linking it to an audience benefit.
4. If the negative is truly unimportant, omit it.
5. Put the negative information in the middle and present it compactly.

Choose the technique that produces the clearest, most accurate sentence.



Businesswoman Ellen Elleman creates signs to encourage positive emphasis. These signs are available in multiple languages at www.nocant.com.

Source: Julie R. Bailey, "Gahanna Resident Spreads Positive Attitude with Her Signs," *Columbus Dispatch*, July 14, 2003, B1.

1. Avoid negative words and words with negative connotations.

Figure 3.3 lists some common negative words. If you find one of these words in a draft, try to substitute a more positive word. When you must use a negative, use the *least negative* term that will convey your meaning.

The following examples show how to replace negative words with positive words.

- Negative: We have **failed** to finish taking inventory.
Better: We haven't finished taking inventory.
Still better: We **will be finished** taking inventory **Friday**.
Negative: If you **can't understand** this explanation, feel free to call me.
Better: If you have further **questions**, just call me.
Still better: **Omit the sentence**.

Omit double negatives.

- Negative: **Never fail** to back up your documents.
Better: **Always** back up your documents.

When you must use a negative term, use the least negative word that is accurate.

- Negative: Your balance of \$835 is **delinquent**.
Better: Your balance of \$835 is **past due**.

Getting rid of negatives has the added benefit of making what you write easier to understand. Sentences with three or more negatives are very hard to understand.⁸

Beware of **hidden negatives**: words that are not negative in themselves but become negative in context. *But* and *however* indicate a shift, so, after a positive statement, they are negative. *I hope* and *I trust that* suggest that you aren't sure. *Patience* may sound like a virtue, but it is a necessary virtue only when things are slow. Even positives about a service or product may backfire if they suggest that in the past the service or product was bad.



Honest Negatives Can Improve Morale—and Save Money

Four years ago, the part-time workers who load, unload, and sort packages in UPS's Buffalo district office were deserting at the rate of 50% a year. Since part-timers account for half of Buffalo's work force, . . . the attrition was both costly and disruptive. . . . [Why did people quit?] Many of those who hired on as part-timers wanted full-time jobs, which rarely opened up. It takes six years to work up to a coveted full-time driver's job. . . .

[The new district manager Jennifer] Shroeger started selling part-time jobs for what they were. . . . [She highlighted] their own good points: short, flexible jobs [with benefits] that are especially good for college students. . . . [Attrition plunged.] The annual savings, due in part to low hiring costs, total around \$1 million. Lost workdays that are caused by work-related injuries are down 20%, and the percentage of packages delivered on the wrong day or at the wrong time has dropped from 4% to 1%.

Quoted from Keith H. Hammonds, "Handle with Care," *Fast Company*, August 2002, 104-5.

Figure 3.3 Negative Words to Avoid

afraid	error	lacking	trivial
anxious	except	loss	trouble
avoid	fail		wait
bad	fault	Some mis- words:	weakness
careless	fear	misfortune	worry
damage	hesitate	missing	wrong
delay	ignorant	mistake	
delinquent	ignore	neglect	Many un- words:
deny	impossible	never	unclear
difficulty		no	unfair
	Many in- words:	not	unfortunate
Some dis- words:	inadequate	objection	unfortunately
disapprove	incomplete	problem	unpleasant
dishonest	inconvenient	reject	unreasonable
dissatisfied	insincere	sorry	unreliable
eliminate	injury	terrible	unsure



Truth Can Be Spoken in Different Ways

One Iranian told a fable of an ancient king who had an ominous dream. In the dream the king saw himself aged and afflicted, with decaying and falling teeth. Calling together his court astrologers for an interpretation, the shaken king heard the first say, "Your Majesty, I regret to tell you that the interpretation must be bad. The dream means that you will die within a year." In a rage the king threw the brash astrologer out of his court and turned to the second man.

The second astrologer said, "Your Majesty, it is good news, the very best. It means that all your programs and projects will live on after you, and all your sons and daughters will survive you." The king, who was old and knew he might die soon, nevertheless was pleased with this interpretation and richly rewarded the astrologer.

Quoted from John P. Fieg and John G. Blair, *There Is a Difference: 12 Intercultural Perspectives* (Washington, DC: Meridian House International, 1975), 83.

- Negative: I **hope** this is the information you wanted. [Implication: I'm not sure.]
- Better: Enclosed is a brochure **about road repairs scheduled for 2007–09**.
- Still better: The brochure contains a list of **all roads and bridges scheduled for repair during 2007–09**. Call **Gwen Wong at 555-3245 for specific dates when work will start and stop and for alternate routes**.
- Negative: Please be **patient** as we switch to the automated system. [Implication: You can expect problems.]
- Better: If you have **questions** during our **transition** to the automated system, call Melissa Morgan.
- Still better: **You'll be able to get information instantly about any house on the market when the automated system is in place. If you have questions during the transition, call Melissa Morgan.**
- Negative: Now Crispy Crunch tastes **better**. [Implication: it used to taste terrible.]
- Better: Now Crispy Crunch tastes **even** better.

Removing negatives does not mean being arrogant or pushy.

- Negative: I **hope** that you are **satisfied enough** to place future orders.
- Arrogant: I **look forward** to receiving **all of your future business**.
- Better: **Call Mercury whenever you need computer chips**.

When you eliminate negative words, be sure to maintain accuracy. Words that are exact opposites will usually not be accurate. Instead, use specifics to be both positive and accurate.

- Negative: The exercycle is **not** guaranteed for life.
- Not true: The exercycle is **guaranteed for life**.
- True: The exercycle is **guaranteed for 10 years**.
- Negative: Customers under 60 are **not eligible** for the Prime Time discount.
- Not true: You must be **over 60 to be eligible** for the Prime Time discount.
- True: **If you're 60 or older**, you can save 10% on all your purchases with Right-Way's Prime Time discount.

Legal phrases also have negative connotations for most readers and should be avoided whenever possible. The idea will sound more positive if you use normal English.

- Negative: If your account is still **delinquent**, a second, **legal** notice will be sent to you informing you that **cancellation** of your policy will occur **30 days after the date of the legal notice if we do not** receive your check.
- Better: Even if your check is **lost in the mail and never reaches us**, you still have a **30-day grace period**. If you do get a **second notice**, you will know **that your payment hasn't reached us. To keep your account in good standing, stop payment on the first check and send a second one**.

2. Focus on what the audience can do rather than on limitations.

When there are limits, or some options are closed, focus on the alternatives that remain.

- Negative: We will **not** allow you to charge **more than \$1,500** on your VISA account.
- Better: **You can charge \$1,500** on your new VISA card.
- or: **Your new VISA card gives you \$1,500 in credit that you can use at thousands of stores nationwide**.

As you focus on what will happen, check for **you-attitude**. In the last example, "We will allow you to charge \$1,500" would be positive, but it lacks you-attitude.



Some stores might say, "Put books you don't want here." But bookseller Joseph Best in Lexington, KY, uses positive emphasis.

When you have a benefit and a requirement the audience must meet to get the benefit, the sentence is usually more positive if you put the benefit first.

Negative: You will **not** qualify for the student membership rate of \$25 a year **unless** you are a full-time student.

Better: You get all the benefits of membership for only \$25 a year if you're a fulltime student.

3. Justify negative information by giving a reason or linking it to an audience benefit.

A reason can help your audience see that the information is necessary; a benefit can suggest that the negative aspect is outweighed by positive factors. Be careful, however, to make the logic behind your reason clear and to leave no loopholes.

Negative: We **cannot** sell individual report covers.

Loophole: To keep down packaging costs and to help you save on shipping and handling costs, we sell report covers in packages of 12.

Suppose the customer says, "I'll pay the extra shipping and handling. Send me seven." If you truly sell only in packages of 12, you need to say so:

Better: To keep down packaging costs and to help customers save on shipping and handling costs, we sell report covers **only** in packages of 12.

If you link the negative element to a benefit, be sure it is a benefit your audience will acknowledge. Avoid telling people that you're doing things "for their own good." They may have a different notion of what their own good is. You may think you're doing customers a favor by limiting their credit so they don't get in



Four Ways to Say "Yes" Instead of "No"

"Yes, I want to help."

Even if you have to say no personally, there is usually an alternative yes. By helping to solve someone's problem—say, by referring them to someone who might be able to help them—you keep the positive energy in motion.

"Yes, you can do better."

Rather than say, "This is terrible," it's a lot more motivating to say, "You do such terrific work. I'm not sure this is up to your caliber."

"Yes, I see you."

It only takes a minute to send a thank-you note or respond to an unsolicited résumé.

"Yes, your talents lie elsewhere."

Warren Buffet says that he's never fired anyone. He has just helped them to find the right job.

Quoted from Linda Kaplan Thaler and Robin Koval, *The Power of Nice: How to Conquer the Business World with Kindness* (New York: Currency, 2006), 84–87.



Truth in Advertising

Ford Motor Company had a difficult year in 2006. Sales slumped, plants closed, and critics were lining up to forecast the demise of the auto giant. In the midst of the company's turnaround effort, executives decided to try something a little, well, radical. They hired @Radical Media to film a series of short documentaries about Ford, its products, and its people. But unlike traditional advertising, the documentaries weren't always flattering. In fact, some of them didn't even seem like advertising: one Webisode addressed Ford's stock market woes and another featured interviews with employees of the soon-to-be-closed plant in Norfolk, Virginia. By offering viewers an unvarnished view of itself, Ford wanted to get people talking about, and buying, its vehicles.

What do you think of this approach? Would it work for you? Does it seem ethical?

Adapted from David Kiley, "Ford on the Web—Warts and All," *BusinessWeek*, October 30, 2006, 68, 71.

over their heads and go bankrupt. They may think they'd be better off with more credit so they could expand in hopes of making more sales and more profits.

4. If the negative is truly unimportant, omit it.

Omit negatives only when

- The audience does not need the information to make a decision.
- You have already given the audience the information and they have access to the previous communication.
- The information is trivial.

The following examples suggest the kind of negatives you can omit:

Negative: A one-year subscription to *PC Magazine* is \$49.97. *That rate is not as low as the rates charged for some magazines.*

Better: A one-year subscription to *PC Magazine* is \$49.97.

Still better: A one-year subscription to *PC Magazine* is \$49.97. You save 43% off the newsstand price of \$87.78.

Negative: *If you are not satisfied with Interstate Fidelity Insurance, you do not have to renew your policy.*

Better: *Omit the sentence.*

5. Put the negative information in the middle and present it compactly.

Put negatives at the beginning or end only if you want to emphasize the negative. To deemphasize a written negative, put it in the middle of a paragraph rather than in the first or last sentence and in the middle of the message rather than in the first or last paragraphs.

When a letter or memo runs several pages, remember that the bottom of the first page is also a position of emphasis, even if it is in the middle of a paragraph, because of the extra white space of the bottom margin. (The first page gets more attention because it is on top and the reader's eye may catch lines of the message even when he or she isn't consciously reading it; the tops and bottoms of subsequent pages don't get this extra attention.) If possible, avoid placing negative information at the bottom of the first page.

Giving a topic lots of space emphasizes it. Therefore, you can de-emphasize negative information by giving it as little space as possible. Give negative information only once in your message. Don't list negatives vertically on the page since lists take space and emphasize material.

How to Check Positive Emphasis

All five of the strategies listed above help create positive emphasis. However, you should always check to see that the positive emphasis is appropriate, sincere, and realistic.

As you read at the beginning of this section, positive emphasis is not always appropriate. Some bad news is so serious that presenting it with positive tone is insensitive, if not unethical. Layoffs, salary cuts, and product defects are all topics in this category.

Some positive emphasis is so overdone that it seems insincere. The used-car sales rep selling a rusting auto is one stereotype of insincerity. A more common example for most business people is the employee who gushes praise through gritted teeth over your promotion. Most of us have experienced something similar, and we know how easy it is to see through the insincerity.

Positive emphasis can also be so overdone that it clouds the reality of the situation. If your company has two finalists for a sales award, and only one award, the



loser does not have second place, which implies a second award. On the other hand, if all sales reps win the same award, top performers will feel unappreciated. Too much praise can also make mediocre employees think they are doing great.

Restraint can help make positive emphasis more effective. Conductor Otto Klemperer was known for not praising his orchestra. One day, pleased with a particularly good rehearsal, he spoke a brusque "good." His stunned musicians broke into spontaneous applause. Klemperer rapped his baton on his music stand to silence them and said, "Not *that* good."⁹

Tone, Power, and Politeness

Tone is the implied attitude of the communicator toward the audience. If the words of a document seem condescending or rude, tone is a problem. Norms for politeness are cultural and generational; they also vary from office to office.

Tone is tricky because it interacts with power. Language that is acceptable within one group may be unacceptable if used by someone outside the group. Words that might seem friendly from a superior to a subordinate may seem up-pity if used by the subordinate to the superior. Similarly, words that may be neutral among peers may be seen as negative if sent by a superior to subordinate.

Paul Goward, the former police chief of Winter Haven, Florida, discovered this lesson about the connection between power and tone. Goward sent an e-mail to about 75 employees asking "Are You a Jelly Belly?" In the e-mail, he provided 10 reasons why his employees should be in better shape; the reasons ranged from health risks to department image. The e-mail added, "If you are unfit, do yourself and everyone else a favor. . . . See a professional about a proper diet. . . . Stop making excuses. . . . We didn't hire you unfit and we don't want you working unfit." The e-mail so offended employees that Goward was forced to resign.¹⁰

Using the proper tone with employees can have huge economic impact for a business. A Litigation Trends Survey, based on reports from 310 in-house counsel, found employee lawsuits to be the top litigation concern of corporate lawyers. Disgruntled employees are suing more than ever before, and disputes over wages or hours frequently can be brought as class actions, making them even more expensive.¹¹

The desirable tone for business writing is businesslike but not stiff, friendly but not phony, confident but not arrogant, polite but not groveling. The following guidelines will help you achieve the tone you want.



Solving an Ethical Dilemma Using Goodwill

Most ethical dilemmas boil down to people, balancing the needs or desires of one constituency against those of another: Management versus staff, stockholders versus customers.

Toro, maker of lawnmowers, faced such a dilemma. One of its popular riding mowers is very hard to overturn, but when it does, it can seriously injure the driver. Toro decided to install roll bars behind the driver's seat on new machines but not raise the price because the bars were added for safety.

Then an even harder issue arose. Shouldn't the same ethical treatment be offered on machines already owned? Those owners would be protected but the cost would adversely affect shareholders.

What would you do? Toro installed the bars for all mowers, new and used, a decision they believed would best serve users and shareholders in the long term.

Adapted from Kevin Cashman. "What Exactly Is Ethics?" in *Leadership: Consulting Cashman*, Forbes.com, http://www.forbes.com/leadership/2007/03/03/leadership-cashman-ethics-leadership-citizen-cx_kc_0305ethics.html (accessed May 11, 2007).

- **Use courtesy titles for people outside your organization whom you don't know well.** Most US organizations use first names for everyone, whatever their age or rank. But many people don't like being called by their first names by people they don't know or by someone much younger. When you talk or write to people outside your organization, use first names only if you've established a personal relationship. If you don't know someone well, use a courtesy title:

Dear Mr. Reynolds:

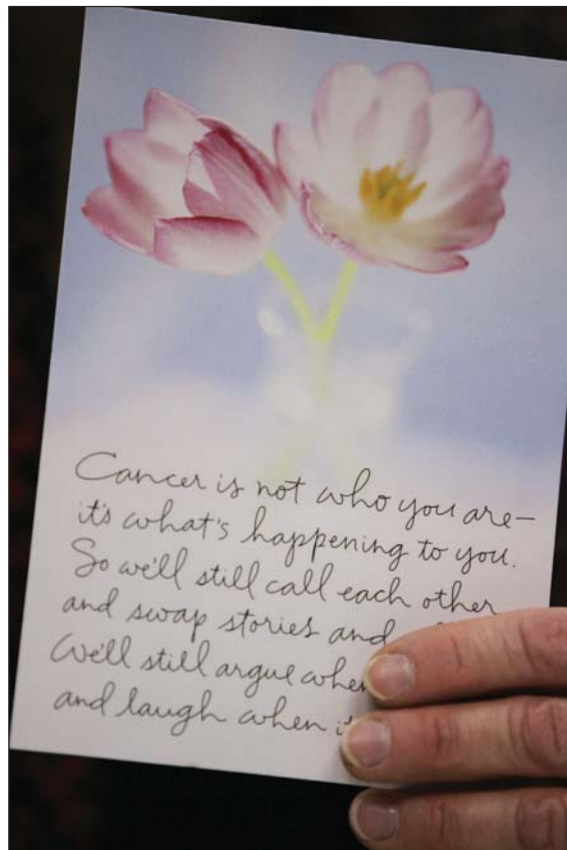
Dear Ms. Lee:

- **Be aware of the power implications of the words you use.** "Thank you for your cooperation" is generous coming from a superior to a subordinate; it's not appropriate in a message to your superior.

As researchers Margaret Graham and Carol David have found, different ways of asking for action carry different levels of politeness.¹²

Order: Turn in your time card by Monday.
(lowest politeness)

Polite order: Please turn in your time card by Monday.
(midlevel politeness)



Hallmark is producing a new line of cards for common situations such as depression or chemotherapy. For example, "Get Well Soon," is not appropriate for someone who is battling cancer. Hallmark has changed the tone of their Journey's Collection to reflect the needs of their dual audiences—buyers and receivers of cards.

Source: David Twiddy, "Hallmark Tackles Real-Life Situations," *Chicago Tribune*, February 19, 2007, sec. Business.

Indirect request: Time cards should be turned in by Monday.
(higher politeness)

Question: Would you be able to turn in your time card by Monday?
(highest politeness)

Higher levels of politeness may be unclear. In some cases, a question may seem like a request for information to which it's acceptable to answer, "No, I can't." In other cases, it will be an order, simply phrased in polite terms.

You need more politeness if you're asking for something that will inconvenience the audience and help you more than the person who does the action. Generally, you need less politeness when you're asking for something small, routine, or to the audience's benefit. Some discourse communities, however, prefer that even small requests be made politely.

Lower politeness: To start the scheduling process, please describe your availability for meetings during the second week of the month.

Higher politeness: Could you let me know what times you'd be free for a meeting the second week of the month?

Generally, requests sound friendliest when they use conversational language.

Poor tone: Return the draft with any changes by next Tuesday.

Better tone: Let me know by Tuesday whether you'd like any changes in the draft.

- **When the stakes are low, be straightforward.** Messages that beat around the bush sound pompous and defensive.

Poor tone: Distribution of the low-fat plain granola may be limited in your area. May we suggest that you discuss this matter with your store manager.

Better tone: Our low-fat granola is so popular that there isn't enough to go around. We're expanding production to meet the demand. Ask your store manager to keep putting in orders, so that your grocery is on the list of stores that will get supplies when they become available.

- **When you must give bad news, consider hedging your statement.** Researchers John Hagge and Charles Kostelnick have shown that auditors' suggestion letters rarely say directly that firms are using unacceptable accounting practices. Instead, they use three strategies to be more diplomatic: specifying the time ("currently, the records are quite informal"), limiting statements ("it appears," "it seems"), and using impersonal statements that do not specify who caused a problem or who will perform an action.¹³
- **When you give bad news to your supervisor, display self-confidence and competency while respecting and being sensitive to your supervisor.** Using politeness strategies in work situations can be tricky for subordinates reporting negative messages as researchers Rogers and Lee-Wong discovered. Their study found that subordinates need to balance the display of self-confidence and competence with showing understanding of the supervisor; the sender of negative messages must demonstrate the ability to suggest or make needed changes while also giving superiors respect and helping them save face. The subordinate should ask questions, request resources and provide feedback while not imposing on the supervisor's areas of expertise or self-worth.¹⁴

Reducing Bias in Business Communication

Bias-free language is language that does not discriminate against people on the basis of sex, physical condition, race, age, religion or any other category. It includes all readers, helps to sustain goodwill, is fair and friendly, and complies with the law.

Check to be sure that your language is bias-free. When you talk about people with disabilities or diseases, talk about the people, not the condition.



Goodwill Can't Be Bought

Asian multinational companies have encountered problems in merging and acquiring companies in the United States. Scholars speculate that one of the reasons is their inability to create goodwill with the media, activist groups, and politicians. To create goodwill with American companies, Asian businesses are discovering the importance of strategic communication. Goodwill communication practices needed include

1. Targeting audiences: media and corporations.
2. Demonstrating global nature.
3. Building key stakeholder relationships including the government, politicians, unions, employees, local communities, customers, financial analysts, and media of both countries.
4. Outlining benefits to the US economy.
5. Becoming conscious of the culture, concerns, and perceptions of the company and the acquisition.

Adapted from Arun Sudhaman, "When Money Alone Can't Buy Goodwill," *Media*, April 2006, 10A.

When you produce newsletters or other documents with photos and illustrations, choose a sampling of the whole population, not just part of it.

Making Language Nonsexist

Nonsexist language treats both sexes neutrally. Check to be sure that your messages are free from sexism in four areas: job titles, courtesy titles, pronouns, and other words and phrases.

Job titles

Use neutral titles which do not imply that a job is held only by men or only by women. Many job titles are already neutral: *accountant, banker, doctor, engineer, inspector, manager, nurse, pilot, secretary, technician*, to name a few. Other titles reflect gender stereotypes and need to be changed.

Instead of	Use
Businessman	A specific title: executive, accountant, department head, owner of a small business, men and women in business, business person
Chairman	Chair, chairperson, moderator
Fireman	Firefighter
Foreman	Supervisor
Mailman	Mail Carrier
Salesman	Salesperson, sales representative
Waitress	Server
Woman lawyer	Lawyer
Workman	Worker, employee. Or use a specific title: crane operator, bricklayer, etc.

Courtesy titles

Memos normally use first and last names without courtesy titles. Letters, however, require courtesy titles in the salutation *unless* you're on a first-name basis with your reader. (See Appendix A ➡ for examples of memo and letter formats.)

- When you know your reader's name and gender, use courtesy titles that do not indicate marital status: *Mr.* for men and *Ms.* for women. There are, however, two exceptions:
 1. If the woman has a professional title, use that title if you would use it for a man.
Dr. Kristen Sorenson is our new company physician.
The Rev. Elizabeth Townsley gave the invocation.
 2. If the woman prefers to be addressed as *Mrs.* or *Miss*, use the title she prefers rather than *Ms.* (You-attitude takes precedence over nonsexist language: address the reader as she—or he—prefers to be addressed.) To find out if a woman prefers a traditional title,
 - a. Check the signature block in previous correspondence. If a woman types her name as (*Miss*) *Elaine Anderson* or (*Mrs.*) *Kay Royster*, use the title she designates.
 - b. Notice the title a woman uses in introducing herself on the phone. If she says, "This is Robin Stine," use *Ms.* when you write to her. If she says, "I'm Mrs. Stine," use the title she specifies.

- c. Check your company directory. In some organizations, women who prefer traditional titles can list them with their names.
- d. When you're writing job letters or crucial correspondence, call the company and ask the receptionist which title your reader prefers.

Ms. is particularly useful when you do not know what a woman's marital status is. However, even when you happen to know that a woman is married or single, **you still use Ms.** unless you know that she prefers another title.

In addition to using parallel courtesy titles, use parallel forms for names.



R-E-S-P-E-C-T

Most major airlines and hotel chains provide disability training to employees. . . . I recognize when someone has been trained—to offer me a Braille menu, use my name when addressing me, or take a moment to orient me to a new environment. What I appreciate even more, though, is . . . simple, common courtesy.

I don't care how many pages in an employee manual somewhere are devoted to . . . the dos and don'ts of interacting with someone who is deaf, blind, or mentally retarded. Among hundreds of experiences in airports and hotels, the one distinction that separates the (mostly) pleasing from the (occasionally) painful in my encounters has been the honest friendliness and respect with which I have or have not been treated.

Ask me where I'd like to sit, whether I need help getting there, and what other kinds of help I need.

Please, assume that I know more about my disability than anyone else ever could.

Respect me as you do any other customer who is paying for the same service, and have the grace to apologize if something does go wrong.

Too many companies, it seems to me, are busy shaking in their boots over the imagined high cost of accommodating people with disabilities when, in many instances, a good old-fashioned refresher course in manners would cover most bases.

Quoted from Deborah Kendrick, "Disabled Resent Being Patronized," *Columbus Dispatch*, July 21, 1996, 3B.

Not Parallel	Parallel
Members of the committee will be Mr. Jones, Mr. Yacone, and Lisa.	Members of the committee will be Mr. Jones, Mr. Yacone, and Ms. Melton. or Members of the committee will be Irving, Ted, and Lisa.

- When you know your reader's name but not the gender, either
 1. Call the company and ask the receptionist, or
 2. Use the reader's full name in the salutation:
Dear Chris Crowell:
Dear J. C. Meath:
- When you know neither the reader's name nor gender, you have three options:
 1. Omit the salutation and use a subject line in its place. (See Figure A.3, AMS Simplified Format.)
SUBJECT: RECOMMENDATION FOR BEN WANDELL
 2. Use the reader's position or job title:
Dear Loan Officer:
Dear Registrar:
 3. Use a general group to which your reader belongs:
Dear Investor:
Dear Admissions Committee:

Pronouns

When you refer to a specific person, use the appropriate gender pronouns:

In **his** speech, John Jones said that . . .

In **her** speech, Judy Jones said that . . .

When you are referring not to a specific person but to anyone who may be in a given job or position, traditional gender pronouns are sexist.

Sexist: a. Each **supervisor** must certify that the time sheet for **his** department is correct.

Sexist: b. When the **nurse** fills out the accident report form, **she** should send one copy to the Central Division Office.

Business communication uses four ways to eliminate sexist generic pronouns: use plurals, use second-person *you*, revise the sentence to omit the pronoun, or use pronoun pairs. Whenever you have a choice of two or more ways to make a phrase or sentence nonsexist, choose the alternative that is the smoothest and least conspicuous.

The following examples use these methods to revise sentences *a* and *b* above.

1. Use plural nouns and pronouns.

Nonsexist: a. **Supervisors** must certify that the **time sheets** for **their departments** are correct.



Attempts To Create a Unisex Pronoun

For more than 150 years, people have attempted to coin a unisex pronoun. None of the attempts has been successful.

	<i>he</i>	<i>his</i>	<i>him</i>
Date	<i>or she</i>	<i>or her</i>	<i>or her</i>
1850	ne	nis	nim
1884	le	lis	lim
1938	se	sim	sis
1970	ve	vis	ver
1977	e	e's	em
1988	ala	alis	alum

Adapted from Dennis E. Baron, "The Epicene Pronoun: Word That Failed," *American Speech* 56 (1981): 83–97; and Ellen Graham, "Business Bulletin," *Wall Street Journal*, December 29, 1988, A1.

Note: When you use plural nouns and pronouns, other words in the sentence may need to be made plural too. In the example above, plural supervisors have plural time sheets and departments.

Avoid mixing singular nouns and plural pronouns.

Nonsexist but lacks agreement: a. Each **supervisor** must certify that the time sheet for **their department** is correct.

Since *supervisor* is singular, it is incorrect to use the plural *their* to refer to it. The resulting lack of agreement is acceptable orally but is not yet acceptable in writing. Instead, use one of the four grammatically correct ways to make the sentence nonsexist.

2. Use *you*.

Nonsexist: a. **You** must certify that the time sheet for **your** department is correct.

Nonsexist: b. When **you** fill out an accident report form, **send** one copy to the Central Division Office.

You is particularly good for instructions and statements of the responsibilities of someone in a given position. Using *you* also may shorten sentences, since you write "Send one copy" instead of "You should send one copy." It also makes your writing more direct.

3. Substitute an article (*a*, *an*, or *the*) for the pronoun, or revise the sentence so that the pronoun is unnecessary.

Nonsexist: a. The supervisor must certify that the time sheet for **the department** is correct.

Nonsexist: b. **The nurse will**
1. Fill out the accident report form.
2. Send one copy of the form to the Central Division Office.

4. When you must focus on the action of an individual, use pronoun pairs.

Nonsexist: a. The supervisor must certify that the time sheet for **his or her** department is correct.

Nonsexist: b. When the nurse fills out the accident report form, **he or she** should send one copy to the Central Division Office.

Other words and phrases

If you find any of the terms in the first column in Figure 3.4 in your messages or your company's documents, replace them with terms from the second column.

Not every word containing *man* is sexist. For example, *manager* is not sexist. The word comes from the Latin *manus* meaning *hand*; it has nothing to do with maleness.

Avoid terms that assume that everyone is married or is heterosexual.

Biased: You and **your husband or wife** are cordially invited to the dinner.

Better: You and **your guest** are cordially invited to the dinner.

Making Language Nonracist and Nonagist

Language is **nonracist** and **nonagist** when it treats all races and ages fairly, avoiding negative stereotypes of any group. Use these guidelines to check for bias in documents you write or edit:

- **Give someone's race or age only if it is relevant to your story.** When you do mention these characteristics, give them for everyone in your

Figure 3.4 Getting Rid of Sexist Terms and Phrases

Instead of	Use	Because
The girl at the front desk	The woman's name or job title: "Ms. Browning," "Rosa," "the receptionist"	Call female employees <i>women</i> just as you call male employees <i>men</i> . When you talk about a specific woman, use her name, just as you use a man's name to talk about a specific man.
The ladies on our staff	The women on our staff	Use parallel terms for males and females. Therefore, use <i>ladies</i> only if you refer to the males on your staff as <i>gentlemen</i> . Few businesses do, since social distinctions are rarely at issue.
Manpower Manhours Manning	Personnel Hours or worker hours Staffing	The power in business today comes from both women and men.
Managers and their wives	Managers and their guests	Managers may be female; not everyone is married.

story—not just the non-Caucasian, non-young-to-middle-aged adults you mention.

- **Refer to a group by the term it prefers. As preferences change, change your usage.** Fifty years ago, *Negro* was preferred as a more dignified term than *colored* for African Americans. As times changed, *Black* and *African American* replaced it. Surveys in the mid-1990s showed that almost half of blacks aged 40 and older preferred *Black*, but those 18 to 39 preferred *African American*.¹⁵ Currently, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) uses *African American* on its Web page.

Oriental has now been replaced by *Asian*.

The term *Latino* is the most acceptable group term to refer to Mexican Americans, Cuban Americans, Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Brazilians, and other people with Central and Latin American backgrounds. (*Latina* is the term for an individual woman.) Better still is to refer to the precise group. The differences among various Latino groups are at least as great as the differences among Italian Americans, Irish Americans, Armenian Americans, and others descended from various European groups.

Baby boomers, *older people*, and *mature customers* are more generally accepted terms than *Senior Citizens* or *Golden Aged*.

- **Avoid terms that suggest that competent people are unusual.** The statement "She is an intelligent black woman" suggests that the writer expects most black women to be stupid. "He is an asset to his race" suggests that excellence in the race is rare. "He is a spry 70-year-old" suggests that the writer is amazed that anyone that old can still move.

Talking about People with Disabilities and Diseases

A disability is a physical, mental, sensory, or emotional impairment that interferes with the major tasks of daily living. According to the US Census Bureau, 18% of Americans currently have a disability; of those, about 56% who were 21–64 were employed.¹⁶ The number of people with disabilities will rise as the population ages.



Positive Emphasis Is Good for Your Health

The latest trend in therapy is happiness. "Positive psychology" helps patients focus on the things that are right in their lives rather than the things that are wrong. For years traditional therapy has encouraged patients to focus on their families to discover how their problems may be based upon past experiences and relationships. By contrast, positive psychology encourages patients to focus on the patient's strengths and interests; homework from the sessions may include writing letters of forgiveness or essays about favorite rituals, taking a class, reflecting on art, or even changing jobs.

The goal of positive psychology is to help patients feel more optimistic. The practice is not recommended for people with severe mental illnesses like bipolar disorder or schizophrenia, but it has shown some promise with people who suffer from depression or post-traumatic stress disorder, such as veterans and survivors of Hurricane Katrina.

Adapted from Elizabeth Bernstein, "Therapy that Keeps on the Sunny Side of Life," *Wall Street Journal*, September 26, 2006, D1.



Technology helps blind people contribute fully as members of the workforce. This Braille keyboard allows a computer engineer to key in commands and data. Specialized computer programs such as JAWS can read computer screens out loud.

- **People-first language focuses on the person, not the condition.** **People-first language** names the person first, then adds the condition. Use it instead of the traditional noun phrases that imply the condition defines the person.

Instead of	Use	Because
The mentally retarded	People with mental retardation	The condition does not define the person or his or her potential.
Cancer patients	People being treated for cancer	

- **Avoid negative terms, unless the audience prefers them.** You-attitude takes precedence over positive emphasis: use the term a group prefers. People who lost their hearing as infants, children, or young adults often prefer to be called *deaf*, or *Deaf* in recognition of Deafness as a culture. But people who lose their hearing as older adults often prefer to be called *hard of hearing*, even when their hearing loss is just as great as that of someone who identifies him- or herself as part of the Deaf culture.

Using the right term requires keeping up with changing preferences. If your target audience is smaller than the whole group, use the term preferred by that audience, even if the group as a whole prefers another term.

Some negative terms, however, are never appropriate. Negative terms such as *afflicted*, *suffering from*, and *struck down* also suggest an outdated view of any illness as a sign of divine punishment.

Instead of	Use	Because
Confined to a wheelchair	Uses a wheelchair	Wheelchairs enable people to escape confinement.
AIDS victim	Person with AIDS	Someone can have a disease without being victimized by it.
Abnormal	Atypical	People with disabilities are atypical but not necessarily abnormal.

Choosing Bias-Free Photos and Illustrations

When you produce a document with photographs or illustrations, check the visuals for possible bias. Do they show people of both sexes and all races? Is there a sprinkling of various kinds of people (younger and older, people using wheelchairs, etc.)? It's OK to have individual pictures that have just one sex or one race; the photos as a whole do not need to show exactly 50% men and 50% women. But the general impression should suggest that diversity is welcome and normal.

Check relationships and authority figures as well as numbers. If all the men appear in business suits and the women in maids' uniforms, the pictures are sexist even if an equal number of men and women are pictured. If the only blacks and Latinos pictured are factory workers, the photos support racism even when an equal number of people from each race are shown.

In 1997, as Marilyn Dyrud has shown, only 22% of the images of humans in clip art files were women, and most of those showed women in traditional roles. An even smaller percent pictured members of minority groups.¹⁷ Don't use biased clip art or stock photos: create your own bias-free illustrations.

Summary of Key Points

- **You-attitude** is a style of communication that looks at things from the audience's point of view, emphasizing what the audience wants to know, respecting the audience's intelligence, and protecting the audience's ego.
 1. Talk about the audience, not about yourself.
 2. Refer to the audience's request or order specifically.
 3. Don't talk about feelings except to congratulate or offer sympathy.
 4. In positive situations, use *you* more often than *I*. Use *we* when it includes the audience.
 5. In negative situations, avoid the word *you*. Protect the audience's ego. Use passive verbs and impersonal expressions to avoid assigning blame.
- Apply you-attitude beyond the sentence level by using organization and content as well as style to build goodwill.
- **Positive emphasis** means focusing on the positive rather than the negative aspects of a situation. To create positive emphasis
 1. Avoid negative words and words with negative connotations.
 2. Focus on what the audience can do rather than on limitations.
 3. Justify negative information by giving a reason or linking it to an audience benefit.

4. If the negative is truly unimportant, omit it.
 5. Put the negative information in the middle and present it compactly.
- Check to see that your positive emphasis is appropriate, sincere, and clear.
 - The desirable tone for business communication is businesslike but not stiff, friendly but not phony, confident but not arrogant, polite but not groveling. The following guidelines will help you achieve the tone you want:
 - Use courtesy titles for people outside your organization whom you don't know well.
 - Be aware of the power implications of the words you use.
 - When the stakes are low, be straightforward.
 - When you must give bad news, consider hedging your statement.
 - Communication should be free from sexism in four areas: job titles, courtesy titles, pronouns, and others words and phrases.
 - *Ms.* is the nonsexist courtesy title for women. Whether or not you know a woman's marital status, use *Ms.* *unless* the woman has a professional title or unless you know that she prefers a traditional title.
 - Traditional pronouns are sexist when they refer to a class of people, not to specific individuals. Four ways to make the sentence nonsexist are to use plurals, to use *you*, to revise the sentence to omit the pronoun, and to use pronoun pairs.
 - Bias-free language is fair and friendly; it complies with the law. It includes all members of your audience; it helps to sustain goodwill.
 - Check to be sure that your language is nonsexist, nonracist, and nonagist. When you talk about people with disabilities or diseases, use the term they prefer. When you produce newsletters or other documents with photos and illustrations, picture a sampling of the whole population, not just part of it.

CHAPTER 3 Exercises and Problems

3.1 Reviewing the Chapter

1. What are five ways to create you-attitude? (LO1)
2. What are five ways to create positive emphasis? (LO2)
3. How can you improve the tone of business messages? (LO3)
4. What are different categories to keep in mind when you are trying to reduce bias in business messages? (LO4)
5. What techniques can you use when you are trying to reduce bias in business messages? (LO4)

3.2 Evaluating the Ethics of Positive Emphasis

The first term in each line is negative; the second is a positive term that is sometimes substituted for it. Which of the positive terms seem ethical? Which seem unethical? Briefly explain your choices.

cost
second mortgage
tax

investment
home equity loan
user fee

nervousness
problem
price increase
for-profit hospital
used car
credit card fees

adrenaline
challenge
price change
tax-paying hospital
pre-owned car
usage charges

3.3 Eliminating Negative Words and Words with Negative Connotations

Revise each of the following sentences to replace negative words with positive ones. Be sure to keep the meaning of the original sentence.

1. You will lose customer goodwill if you are slow in handling returns and issuing refunds.
2. Do not put any paper in this box that is not recyclable.
3. When you write a report, do not make claims that you cannot support with evidence.
4. Don't drop in without an appointment. Your counselor or case worker may be unavailable.
5. I am anxious to discuss my qualifications in an interview.

3.4 Using Passives and Impersonal Expressions to Improve You-Attitude and Positive Emphasis

Revise each of these sentences to improve you-attitude and positive emphasis, first using a passive verb, then using an impersonal expression (one in which things, not people, do the action). Are both revisions equally good? Why or why not?

1. You did not supply all of the information necessary to process your claim.
2. The credit card number you supplied has expired.
3. You did not send us your check.
4. You did not include all the necessary information in your letter.
5. By failing to build a fence around your pool, you have allowed your property to violate city regulations against health hazards.

3.5 Focusing on the Positive

Revise each of the following sentences to focus on the options that remain, not those that are closed off.

1. Housing applications that arrive December 1 or later cannot be processed.
2. You cannot use flextime unless you have the consent of your supervisor.
3. As a first-year employee, you are not eligible for dental insurance.
4. I will be out of the country October 25 to November 10 and will not be able to meet with you then.
5. You will not get your first magazine for at least four weeks.

3.6 Identifying Hidden Negatives

Identify the hidden negatives in the following sentences and revise to eliminate them. In some cases, you may need to add information to revise the sentence effectively.

1. The seminar will help you become a better manager.
2. Thank you for the confidence you have shown in us by ordering one of our products. It will be shipped to you soon.
3. This publication is designed to explain how your company can start a recycling program.
4. I hope you find the information in this brochure beneficial to you and a valuable reference as you plan your move.
5. In thinking about your role in our group, I remember two occasions where you contributed something.

3.7 Improving You-Attitude and Positive Emphasis

Revise these sentences to improve you-attitude and positive emphasis. Eliminate any awkward phrasing. In some cases, you may need to add information to revise the sentence effectively.

1. You'll be happy to learn that the cost of tuition will not rise next year.
2. Although I was only an intern and didn't actually make presentations to major clients, I was required to prepare PowerPoint slides for the meetings and to answer some of the clients' questions.
3. At DiYanni Homes we have more than 30 plans that we will personalize just for you.

4. Please notify the publisher of the magazine of your change of address as soon as possible to prevent a disruption of subscription service.
5. I'm sorry you were worried. You did not miss the deadline for signing up for a flexible medical spending account.
6. We are in the process of upgrading our Web site. Please bear with us.
7. You will be happy to hear that our cell phone plan does not charge you for incoming calls.
8. The employee discount may only be used for purchases for your own use or for gifts; you may not buy items for resale. To prevent any abuse of the discount privilege, you may be asked to justify your purchase.
9. I apologize for my delay in answering your inquiry. The problem was that I had to check with our suppliers to see whether we could provide the item in the quantity you say you want. We can.
10. If you mailed a check with your order, as you claim, we failed to receive it.

3.8 Improving You-Attitude and Positive Emphasis

Revise these sentences to improve you-attitude and positive emphasis. Eliminate any awkward phrasing. In some cases, you may need to add information to revise the sentence effectively.

1. Your signature block in an e-mail message should not exceed more than four lines.
2. We have added a 24-hour-a-day seven-days-a-week ATM for your convenience.
3. There may be a slight delay while our Web site validates your order information. Please be patient while you wait.
4. The services on our Web site will enable job seekers to identify the areas where their skills are needed.
5. Don't forget that museum memberships make great gifts.
6. Please fill out our online survey. The survey will not be available after 5 PM October 10.
7. To prevent problems, when installing a new software program, don't click "OK" if the program asks you a question you don't understand.
8. Starting January 1, we are offering you a new employee benefit.
9. As a government employee, you must fill out the Financial Disclosure form so that you prove that your decisions are not biased.
10. Although I have had only one course in business communication, I could possibly be of some help as an intern. Please give me a chance.

3.9 Improving You-Attitude and Positive Emphasis

Revise these sentences to improve you-attitude and positive emphasis. Eliminate any awkward phrasing. In some cases, you may need to add information to revise the sentence effectively.

1. Don't put your visual on the screen until you are ready to talk about it.
2. We can arrange for our services to reach you within 24 hours.
3. Starting January 1, the company will create a new program that lets full-time employees volunteer one hour a week on company time.
4. APA style doesn't capitalize the major words in the titles of journal and newspaper articles.
5. I hope this answers your question. If you still do not understand, do not fail to ask for more information.
6. If you reserve your space online by November 27, we will extend to you a special rate of \$1,295, which is \$300 off the registration fee. You must enter DE35 in the priority code field to avoid being charged the regular rate.
7. Next Tuesday will not be a problem. Our service crew is not overbooked and will not have trouble fitting you in.
8. I realize that Wednesday at 10 AM is not a convenient time for everyone, but I was unable to arrange a time that is good for everyone.
9. You cannot accept gifts from anyone with whom you, as an employee of the Environmental Protection Agency, deal, because some citizen might suspect that your enforcement decision had been subject to undue influence.
10. If you supplied receipts with your request for reimbursement, as you claim, they have been lost.

3.10 Eliminating Biased Language

Explain the source of bias in each of the following, and revise to remove the bias.

1. We recommend hiring Jim Ryan and Elizabeth Shuman. Both were very successful summer interns. Jim drafted the report on using rap music in ads, and Elizabeth really improved the looks of the office.
2. All sales associates and their wives are invited to the picnic.
3. Although he is blind, Mr. Morin is an excellent group leader.
4. Unlike many blacks, Yvonne has extensive experience designing Web pages.
5. Chris Renker
Pacific Perspectives
6. 6300 West Corondad Blvd.
Los Angeles, CA
Gentlemen:
Enrique Torres has very good people skills for a man.
7. *Parenting 2007* shows you how to persuade your husband to do his share of child care chores.
8. Mr. Paez, Mr. O'Connor, and Tonya will represent our office at the convention.
9. Sue Corcoran celebrates her 50th birthday today. Stop by her cubicle at noon to get a piece of cake and to help us sing "The Old Grey Mare Just Ain't What She Used to Be."
10. Because older customers tend to be really picky, we will need to give a lot of details in our ads.

3.11 Advising a Hasty Subordinate

Three days ago, one of your subordinates forwarded to everyone in the office a bit of e-mail humor he'd received from a friend. Titled "You know you're Southern

when . . .," the message poked fun at Southern speech, attitudes, and lifestyles. Today you get this message from your subordinate:

Subject: Should I Apologize?

I'm getting flamed left and right because of the Southern message. I thought it was funny, but some people just can't take a joke. So far I've tried not to respond to the flames, figuring that would just make things worse. But now I'm wondering if I should apologize. What do you think?

Answer the message.

3.12 Responding to a Complaint

You're Director of Corporate Communications; the employee newsletter is produced by your office. Today you get this e-mail message from Caroline Huber:

Subject: Complaint about Sexist Language

The article about the "Help Desk" says that Martina Luna and I "are the key customer service representatives 'manning' the desk." I don't MAN anything! I WORK.

Respond to Caroline. And send a message to your staff, reminding them to edit newsletter stories as well as external documents to replace biased language.

3.13 Exploring the Positive Effects of Negative Messages

In 2004, Gap Inc. (Gap, Old Navy, and Banana Republic) released a social responsibility report that acknowledged wage, health, and safety violations in many of its overseas factories. Rather than hiding this information, Gap chose to go public and address the problem. In 2006, Ford Motor Company released a series of online documentaries about the company's turnaround efforts which included a film about the company stock receiving a "sell" rating from industry analysts (see sidebar on page 86).

Find an example of a company that has shared its problems and its plans to solve those problems with the public. What went wrong? How did the company respond? How did the company report the problem?

Can you find the current status of the company and its recovery?

As your instructor directs,

- Share your findings orally with a small group of students.
- Post your findings in an e-mail to the class.
- Summarize your findings in a memo to your instructor.
- Join with a group of students to create a written report summarizing negative corporate news.

Adapted from Cheryl Dahl, "Gap's New Look: The See-Through," *Fast Company*, September 2004, 69–70.

3.14 Evaluating Bias in Visuals

Evaluate the portrayals of people in one of the following:

- Ads in one issue of a business magazine
- A company's annual report
- A company's Web page

Do the visuals show people of both sexes and all races? Is there a sprinkling of people of various ages and physical conditions? What do the visuals suggest about who has power?

As your instructor directs,

- Share your findings orally with a small group of students.
- Post your findings in an e-mail to the class.
- Summarize your findings in a memo to your instructor.
- Present your findings in an oral presentation to the class.
- Join with a small group of students to create a written report.

3.15 Revising a Memo for Positive Tone

Revise the following memo to improve positive tone.

TO: All Staff

SUBJECT: Decorating Your Work Area

With the arrival of the holiday season, employees who wish to decorate their work areas should do so only with great caution. Don't do something stupid that might burn down the entire office. If you wish to decorate, don't forget the following guidelines:

- If using decorative lights, don't place them in obstructive places.
- Do not overload your workstation with decorations that will interfere with your daily duties.
- Don't forget to turn off and/or unplug all lights at the end of your workday.

- Do not use hot lights; they can burn your countertop so it is imperative that everyone take care in selecting your lights.
- Do not use decorations which will offend people of other religions.
- Absolutely no candles are allowed.

Don't forget these guidelines, and we'll have a great holiday season. Thank you for your cooperation.

3.16 Revising a Form Letter

You've taken a part-time job at a store that sells fine jewelry. In orientation, the manager tells you that the store photographs jewelry it sells or appraises and mails the photo as a goodwill gesture after the transaction.

However, when you see the form letter, you know that it doesn't build much goodwill—and you say so. The manager says, "Well, you're in college. Suppose you rewrite it."

Rewrite the letter. Use square brackets for material (like the customer's name) that would have to be inserted

in the form letter to vary it for a specific customer. Add information that would help build goodwill.

Dear Customer:

We are most happy to enclose a photo of the jewelry that we recently sold you or appraised for you. We feel that this added service, which we are happy to extend to our fine customers, will be useful should you wish to insure your jewelry or need to identify it should you have the misfortune of suffering a loss.

We trust you will enjoy this additional service. We thank you for the confidence you have shown by coming to our store.

Sincerely,
Your Sales Associate

3.17 Evaluating You-Attitude and Positive Emphasis in Brochures

Collect three brochures from organizations on your campus or from businesses in your city. Identify sentences in each brochure that demonstrate (or should demonstrate) you-attitude and positive emphasis.

As your instructor directs,

- Turn in a memo that identifies sentences with good you-attitude and positive emphasis. Include

the original and a revision of sentences that should incorporate you-attitude and/or positive emphasis but did not.

- Share your findings with a small group of students. What patterns do you see? How would others revise the problematic sentences you found?

3.18 Evaluating You-Attitude and Positive Emphasis in University Web Sites

As they plan their college visits, many students begin by visiting university Web sites. Imagine you are a high school senior and a prospective student. Go to the "Prospective Students" part of your school's Web site and read about housing, course offerings, and student life. Evaluate the information you find for you-attitude and positive emphasis. Compare the text for prospective students with the text on several sites targeted for current students. Does the tone change? In what ways?

Now visit the Web site of another university. Review the same type of information for prospective students and compare it to that of your own school.

As your instructor directs,

- Share your findings orally with a small group of students.
- Share your findings orally with the class.
- Post your findings in an e-mail to the class.
- Summarize your findings in a memo to your instructor.

3.19 Mosaic Case

"Great job on brainstorming the needs of senior citizens, Trey," said Sarah, who was standing at the entrance to his cubicle.

"Thanks. I'm sure that targeting them specifically will increase our sales figures," replied Trey.

"Definitely. And Yvonne has another idea to let senior citizens know about the updates to the Web site," said Sarah.

"Oh, really? What do I have to do now?" asked Trey.

"Well," said Sarah with a big smile, "she wants a letter that we can send to all senior citizens who are currently

on Mosaic's mailing list. She wants to get the word out. Or, as Yvonne would say "get the word out," this time mimicking air quotes that Yvonne often uses during their staff meetings.

They both chuckled at Sarah's imitation. "But seriously, Trey, this should be a pretty easy task."

"Yeah, it sounds like a piece of cake," Trey remarked sarcastically.

"If you could get a draft to me by later today, we can both look through the letter before I pass it on to Yvonne for final revisions."

After tinkering around with the letter for most of the day, Trey took his draft to Sarah to look over. However, she was gone for the day and only had a chance to look

over it the next morning. When she did read the letter, she was shocked.

Here is the draft Trey wrote:

Dear Sir or Madam:

We at Mosaic are happy to inform you that we have now provided a section of the Web site that is just for you to make your life a little less stressful. We understand you get easily frazzled when things don't work the way you think they should. The new section of the Web site will help ease all your worries.

We have hand-selected and highlighted pieces of furniture that will fit an old lifestyle. For example, there are some stylish couches that sit higher off the ground so you won't to strain your bad back when you take a seat or stand.

In addition, we realize that you're old and have issues navigating through Web pages. Further, we want to make sure you can actually read the text on our Web pages, so we've taken the initiative to increase the size of the font to one that is appropriate for people with bad eyes.

Finally, Mosaic has decided to team up with AARP to give you a great benefit. If you're an AARP card-holding member, you now receive 5% off all online purchases on the checkout page.

We are fully committed to you as a customer of our store and are always thinking about your needs. If you have other ideas about improving the Web site, please don't hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

Mosaic

Although grammatically correct, Trey's letter stunned Sarah by its content. What happened to all the ideas he generated during the analysis of the audience's needs?

He called in sick today, so Sarah couldn't tell him directly what was wrong with the letter. Instead, she decided to write him a memo about areas where the letter needs to be improved. And since Yvonne wanted to see a draft of this letter by yesterday afternoon and Sarah doesn't know when Trey will be back to work, she decided to make the necessary changes to the letter herself.

Take on Sarah's communication tasks:

- Write a memo to Trey in which you provide some specific areas where Trey's letter could be improved and reasons for making changes. In addition, let him know the potential effects of sending out his version of the letter.
- Re-write the letter incorporating you-attitude, positive emphasis, goodwill, and unbiased language.