

Activity Type

Reading and Writing Exercises: gap-fill, error correction, generating options, email writing, peer feedback

Focus

Refusing requests diplomatically in business emails

Aim

To practice writing polite business emails that refuse a request clearly, give a brief constraint, and offer alternatives and next steps.

Preparation

Make one copy of the two-page worksheet for each student.

Level

Upper-intermediate (B2)

Time

45 minutes

Introduction

In this responding to requests email worksheet, students learn and practice how to politely refuse a customer request and offer alternatives.

Procedure

Give each student a copy of the two-page worksheet.

First, read the Refusal Blueprint together as a class and discuss what each move achieves. Emphasise that the moves can be expressed in different ways.

Students then complete a refusal email with phrases from a box.

Exercise A - Answer key

1. d 2. h 3. a 4. e 5. c 6. g 7. f 8. b

Next, students identify grammar and wording errors and rewrite each sentence so that it is correct and professional.

Exercise B - Answer key

1. I appreciate the detailed request.
2. Unfortunately, we are not able to deliver the full report by Friday.
3. We are at capacity this week.
4. What we can do is send the executive summary by Friday.

After that, in pairs, students read each scenario and write two alternative solutions using the examples from the Refusal Blueprint to help them. Pairs then share their strongest options with the class.

Exercise C - Possible answers

Pricing policy:

- a: We can keep the price the same, but reduce the scope by removing two optional modules.
- b: We can keep the price the same and include a free onboarding session and two weeks of extended support.

Fixed deadline:

- a: We can include the must-have changes for launch, and schedule the remaining changes for the first update after launch.
- B: We can deliver the changes by the deadline if you prioritise the top three items today and sign off by 3 p.m.

(continued on the next page)

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Procedure continued

Students then write a refusal email using the Refusal Blueprint and the situation provided.

Exercise D - Sample answer

Re: Question about training session reschedule

Hi (Customer name),

Move 1: Thanks for your message. I understand you would like to move next week's training session to tomorrow.

Move 2: Unfortunately, we are not able to run the session on-site tomorrow.

Move 3: The trainer is already booked for an on-site session tomorrow.

Move 4: What we can do is deliver the session online tomorrow at the same time. As an alternative, we can keep the original date next week as planned.

Move 5: Would either option work for you? If you confirm today, I'll send the updated calendar invite.

Best regards,

(Your name)

Finally, students read their email to their partner and discuss whether it followed the Refusal Blueprint moves clearly and sounded polite and professional.

Refusal Blueprint
Move 1: Acknowledge (show you understand their request)
Move 2: State the refusal (say clearly and politely what isn't possible)
Move 3: Give a brief reason (capacity / deadline / policy / compliance)
Move 4: Offer alternatives (give 2–3 realistic options)
Move 5: Confirm next steps (ask a question + say what you'll do)

A. Complete the refusal email with phrases below.

- | | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| a. We are at capacity | e. What we can do is |
| b. If you confirm by the end of the day today, | f. Would either option work for you |
| c. As an alternative, | g. Another option is that |
| d. I appreciate the detailed request | h. Unfortunately, we are not able to |

Hi Maya,

(1), thanks for outlining what you need. (2) deliver the full report by Friday and include benchmarking plus competitor analysis. (3) this week, and the new sections require compliance sign-off. (4) send the executive summary and key findings by Friday, with the full report by Wednesday. (5) we can deliver the full report by Tuesday if we remove competitor analysis for now. (6) we can schedule competitor analysis as a Phase-2 add-on and share a quote. (7)

(8) I'll finalise the plan and share the milestones.

Best regards,
Jordan

B. Identify the grammar and wording errors and rewrite each sentence so that it is correct and professional.

1. I appreciate for the detailed request.

.....

2. Unfortunately, we are not able to delivering the full report by Friday.

.....

3. We are at the capacity this week.

.....

4. What we can do is sending the executive summary by Friday.

.....

C. In pairs, read each scenario and write two alternative solutions. Use the examples from the Refusal Blueprint to help you.

1. Pricing policy: The client asks for a 20% discount, but you can't reduce the price.

Option a:

Option b:

2. Fixed deadline: The launch is next week. The client requests extra changes today.

Option a:

Option b:

D. Read the situation and write a refusal email using the Refusal Blueprint.

Situation: The client wants to reschedule next week's training session to tomorrow. You can't do this because the trainer isn't available for an on-site session tomorrow, but you can offer an online session tomorrow or keep the original date.

Re: Question about
Hi
Move 1:
.....
Move 2:
.....
Move 3:
.....
Move 4:
.....
.....
Move 5:
.....
Best regards
.....

E. Now, read your email to your partner and discuss whether it followed the Refusal Blueprint moves clearly and sounded polite and professional.