

Lesson 532f

Using Communication Skills in Appropriate Situations

Core Area. FFA Leadership Development

Unit 530. Communications

Topic 532. Effective Communication Skills

California Academic Standard. English-Language Arts—Grades 9 and 10—Writing—Standard 2.0—Writing Applications (Genres and Their Characteristics): Students combine the rhetorical strategies of narration, exposition, persuasion, and description to produce texts of at least 1,500 words each. Student writing demonstrates a command of standard American English and the research, organizational, and drafting strategies outlined in Writing Standard 1.0.

California Ag Standard. 2.12—Animal Science—Interpersonal Leadership Development: Students will recognize the traits of effective leaders. 3.17—Plant and Soil Science—Interpersonal Leadership Development: Students will recognize the traits of effective leaders.

Student Learning Objectives. Instruction in this lesson should result in students achieving the following objectives:

1. Understand the role of communication skills in the workplace.
2. Understand how to present a problem to a supervisor.
3. Identify the techniques used in requesting information from a supervisor.
4. Explain the role of written communication and the proper techniques to use.

List of Resources. The following resources may be useful in teaching this lesson:

Recommended Resources. One of the following resources should be selected to accompany this lesson:

Hunter, Sharon, et al. *Developing Leadership and Personal Skills*. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Publishers, Inc., 1997. (Textbook, Chapter 11)

Ricketts, Cliff. *Leadership: Personal Development and Career Success*. Albany, New York: Delmar Publishers, 1997. (Textbook, Chapter 9)

Other Resources. The following resources will be useful to students and teachers:

Agriculture Sale Communication (U6030); Steps in Preparing for the Agricultural Sales Call. (U6033). University of Illinois, Vocational Agriculture Service, 1401 S. Maryland, Urbana, IL 61801.

Applied Communication. 1988. Agency for Instructional Technology, P.O. Box A, Bloomington, IN 47402.

Cheek, Jimmy G., et al. *Effective Oral Communication*, Second Edition. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Publishers, Inc., 2000.

Understanding the Importance of Effective Communications Through the Spoken Word (#8369); Understanding the Importance of Effective Communication Through the Written Word (#8370); Improving Communications Skills Through Organized Activities (#8371); Utilizing the Media for Effective Communication—Public Relations (#8372). Instructional Material Service, Texas A&M University, F.E. Box 2588, College Station, TX 77843.

List of Equipment, Tools, Supplies, and Facilities

Writing surface
Overhead projector
Transparencies from attached masters
Copies of Student Lab Sheets

Terms. The following terms are presented in the lesson (shown in bold italics):

Address
Body
Business letter
Complimentary closing
Compromiser
Contributor
Distracter
Dominator

Elaborator
Enclosure notation
Encourager
Follower
Heading
Information-giver
Information-seeker
Integrator
No-show
Opinion-giver
Opinion-seeker
People skills
Personal letter
Personality
Postscript
Protester
Recognition-seeker
Reference initials
Salutation
Signature lines

Interest Approach. Use an interest approach that will prepare the students for the lesson. Teachers often develop approaches for their unique class and student situations. A sample approach is provided below.

Present the class with a scenario involving a problem at a fictional company. An example might be one where the wrong item has been shipped to a customer. Have students suggest methods for bringing the problem to their supervisor. Use the discussion as a means for introducing the lesson content.

Summary of Content and Teaching Strategies

Objective 1: Understand the role of communication skills in the workplace.

Anticipated Problem: What roles do communication skills serve in the workplace?

- I. Employees are always emphasizing the importance of strong communication skills in the workplace.
 - A. **People skills** are the important abilities that help people work together and get along.
 1. Effective people skills are one of the many skills sought by employers.
 2. People skills are helpful in organizations because they help members unite as a group.
 3. Traits that demonstrate good people skills include:
 - a. respecting others

- b. being courteous
 - c. using common greetings such as “thank you,” “excuse me,” and “hello.”
 - d. commending other people for a good job
 - e. seeking advice of others
 - f. recognizing different personality types
 - g. communicating effectively
 - h. criticizing carefully
 - i. helping others feel good about themselves
 - j. allowing others to make decisions
 - k. having empathy—considering others needs
 - l. using good nonverbal communication
- B. **Personality** can be defined as a collection of a person’s distinctive, individual qualities. Personality is the way a person thinks, functions, and relates to others. There are many different types of personalities.
1. **Dominator**—one who likes to control a group.
 2. **Compromiser**—one who tries to see all sides of an issue.
 3. **Follower**—one who watches, listens, and usually goes along with the group.
 4. **Protester**—one who speaks out strongly against a situation.
 5. **Encourager**—one who gives courage, hope, confidence, and support to the group.
 6. **Integrator**—one who removes barriers.
 7. **Contributor**—one who likes to share information and initiate projects.
 8. **Opinion-seeker**—one who likes to get other people’s opinions.
 9. **Opinion-giver**—one who is constantly providing his or her own opinion.
 10. **Information-seeker**—one who seeks out facts and information.
 11. **Information-giver**—one who always has answers to questions.
 12. **Elaborator**—one who will usually elaborate on issues to the smallest detail.
 13. **Recognition-seeker**—one who needs constant recognition.
 14. **Distracter**—one who constantly wants attention and sometimes does silly or foolish things to get it.
 15. **No-show**—one who usually does not show up for events or activities.
- C. Working with people successfully involves the following positive characteristics:
1. being cooperative
 2. respecting authority
 3. handling criticism positively
 4. doing quality work
 5. being enthusiastic
 6. being flexible
 7. offering compliments
 8. regularly assessing yourself

Several teaching techniques can be used to help students master this objective. Text materials will enhance their learning. Chapter 11 in *Developing Leadership and Personal Skills* is recommended. Use TM–A to help explain the various personality styles. TM–B should be used to show the positive characteristics a person should display in the workplace.

Objective 2: Understand how to present a problem to a supervisor.

Anticipated Problems: How should one present a problem to a supervisor?

- II. Three steps should be followed in handling a problem in the workplace.
 - A. Before talking to your supervisor regarding a problem, certain issues should be addressed.
 1. Make sure you understand the problem.
 2. Decide if and when you should present the problem.
 - a. Could it be handled by yourself and the co-worker?
 - b. Major problems need immediate attention; minor problems can wait until your supervisor’s workload is light.
 3. Think about what your supervisor needs to know.
 - a. What is the goal of presenting the problem to your supervisor?
 - b. What are the basic facts that he or she needs to know to handle the problem?
 4. Think of possible solutions
 - B. When you talk or write to your supervisor you should do the following:
 1. Explain the problem clearly.
 2. Get directly to the point, concentrating on the facts.
 3. Give opinions only if requested by your supervisor.
 4. Concentrate on the problem and not on what caused the problem.
 5. Focus on the solution to the problem.
 - C. After expressing your concerns to your supervisor, you should:
 1. Be modest; avoid taking credit for bringing up the solution.
 2. Respect confidentiality by not gossiping about another coworker’s mistakes.
 3. Do not be angry or resentful if your suggestions are not used.

Many techniques can be used to help students understand how to present a problem to a supervisor. Text material can enhance this learning. Chapter 11 in *Developing Leadership and Personal Skills* is recommended. Use TM–C to help explain the steps in handling a problem. Use LS–A for students to gain experience in presenting problems to a supervisor.

Objective 3: Identify the techniques used in requesting information from a supervisor.

Anticipated Problem: How should you request information from a supervisor?

III. Four steps should be followed in requesting information from a supervisor.

- A. Plan your request.
 - a. Think about your audience, the purpose, and most of all, what you want to say.
 - b. Do not “engage your mouth before engaging your brain.”
- B. State your request clearly.
 - a. Start with an introductory statement of the problem or situation.
 - b. Then describe, as best as possible, the information you are requesting.
- C. Explain your reasons.
 - a. Be specific as to the details of why.
 - b. Provide appropriate information.
- D. Keep the request simple, short, and courteous.
 - a. Remember, you are *requesting* not *demanding* information.
 - b. The tone of voice is important. It should be formal and not directive.
- E. When the request is in written form:
 - 1. Use visual illustrations when appropriate.
 - 2. Choose your words carefully.
 - 3. Express yourself clearly.
 - 4. Review the draft for punctuation, spelling, and grammar before sending.
- F. When the request is done orally:
 - 1. Listen actively.
 - 2. Maintain eye contact.
 - 3. Try not to interrupt any response to your request.
 - 4. Use pauses to consider what is being said or to allow for questions.
 - 5. Use facial expressions and gestures.
- G. There are three types of requests—information, action, and permission.

*Several methods can be used to help students master this objective. Students would benefit from text materials. Chapter 11 in *Developing Leadership and Personal Skills* is recommended. Use TM–D to help explain the steps in requesting information. TM–E can be used to show techniques in written and oral requests. LS–B can be used to introduce students to a short memo request. Use LS–C to help students learn skills for making oral requests. Use LS–D to evaluate students’ skills in responding to a formal written request.*

Objective 4: Explain the role of written communication and the proper techniques to use.

Anticipated Problem: When and how does one use written communications?

IV. The primary purpose of written communication is to inform.

- A. There are several types of written documents—reports, letters, articles, and forms are the most common.
- B. There are two types of letters—business and personal.
 - 1. A **business letter** may ask about a job, send or request information, or have another purpose.
 - 2. A **personal letter** is one that we write to a friend or family member.
- C. Steps in writing a document include:
 - 1. Planning—have a purpose and prepare an outline
 - 2. Deciding the style of writing
 - 3. Deciding on length and correspondence needed
- D. Poor writing usually occurs when:
 - 1. The intent or purpose is unclear
 - 2. The thinking of the writer appears confused
 - 3. The ideas are not organized
 - 4. Sentence structure or grammar is poor
 - 5. Style is inappropriate for the audience
- E. Skills for effective writing include:
 - 1. Keep it simple—simplicity is the key to success.
 - 2. Write from an outline—it helps in organization.
 - 3. Keep the reader or audience in mind when writing.
 - 4. Be precise—state exactly what you mean.
 - 5. Be concise—use as few words as possible.
 - 6. Be informal—use writing that is to the point.
 - 7. Be brief—get to the point quickly.
 - 8. Omit slang.
 - 9. Avoid clichés.
 - 10. Reduce redundancies—avoid using words in a sentence that have the same meaning.
 - 11. Use simple, short, familiar words.
 - 12. Avoid exaggeration.
 - 13. Have a strong closing.
 - 14. Make your writing interesting.
 - 15. Have your material edited.

- F. Pointers in writing a business letter or document include:
1. Keep it brief.
 2. Strive for neatness, it portrays your image.
 3. Always include text of respect.
 4. Be sure to include return address and zip code.
- G. Parts of a business letter include:
1. **Heading**—the mailing address of the sender and the date.
 2. **Address**—the name and address of the receiver.
 3. **Salutation**—the opening into the body of the letter, usually “Dear _____:”.
 4. **Body**—the body of the letter.
 5. **Complimentary closing**—the closing of a letter.
 6. **Signature lines**—the name and title of the person signing the letter.
 7. **Reference initials**—the initials of the person who typed and sent the letter.
 8. **Enclosure notation**—an explanation of any enclosed information.
 9. **Postscript**—a reference to whom other copies were sent.

Many techniques can be used to help students learn the role of written communication. Chapter 3 in Leadership: Personal Development and Career Success and Chapter 9 in Developing Leadership and Personal Skills are recommended text materials. Use TM–F to illustrate effective writing skills. TM–G can be used to show the various parts of a letter. Use LS–E to provide an opportunity for students to write a formal business letter.

Review/Summary. Focus the review and summary of the lesson around the student learning objectives. Call on students to explain the content associated with each objective. Use their responses as the basis for determining any areas that need to be covered again. Questions at the end of each chapter in the recommended textbooks may also be used in the review process. Use the lab activities in reviewing and reinforcing student learning.

Application. Application can involve one or more of the following activities using the attached lab sheets:

Presenting a Problem to a Supervisor—LS–A

Requesting Information from a Supervisor—LS–B

Making Oral Requests—LS–C

Written Responses—LS–D

Sample Business Letter—LS–E

Evaluation. Evaluation should focus on student achievement of the objectives for the lesson. Various techniques can be used, such as student performance on the application activities. A sample written test is attached.

Answers to Sample Test:

Part One: Matching

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

Part Two: Completion

1=integrator

2=Personality

3=review

4=information, action, permission

Part Three: Short Answer

1. Plan your request.
2. State your request clearly.
3. Explain your reasons.
4. Keep it simple, short, and courteous.

Test

Using Communication Skills in Appropriate Situations

Part One: Matching

Instructions. Match the term with the correct response. Write the letter of the term by the definition.

- | | | |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------|
| a. business letter | d. compromiser | g. distracter |
| b. dominator | e. heading | h. salutation |
| c. follower | f. people skills | |

- _____ 1. One who likes to control a group.
- _____ 2. Important abilities that help people get along and work together.
- _____ 3. Letter that asks for a job, requests information, or sends official information.
- _____ 4. One who watches and listens and usually goes along with the group.
- _____ 5. Mailing address of the sender and the date.
- _____ 6. A person who tries to see all sides of an issue.
- _____ 7. "Dear Mr. Jones:"
- _____ 8. Someone who acts foolish or silly to get attention.

Part Two: Completion

Instructions. Provide the word or words to complete the following statements.

- One who tries to remove barriers from a situation in a group is called an _____.
- _____ can be defined as a collection of a person's distinctive and individual qualities.
- When requesting information from a supervisor in written form, always _____ the draft copy before sending a final version.
- Three types of requests include _____, _____, and _____.

Part Three: Short Answer

List the four steps to follow when requesting information from a supervisor.

PERSONALITY STYLES

1. Dominator
2. Compromiser
3. Follower
4. Protester
5. Encourager
6. Integrator
7. Contributor
8. Opinion-seeker
9. Opinion-giver
10. Information-seeker
11. Information-giver
12. Elaborator
13. Recognition-seeker
14. Distracter
15. No-show

POSITIVE CHARACTERISTICS

- 1. Being cooperative**
- 2. Respecting authority**
- 3. Handling criticism**
- 4. Doing quality work**
- 5. Being enthusiastic**
- 6. Being flexible**
- 7. Offering compliments**
- 8. Assessing yourself**

STEPS IN HANDLING A PROBLEM

Before communicating with your supervisor:

- 1. Fully understand the problem.**
- 2. Decide if and when to present the problem.**
- 3. Think about what needs to be solved.**
- 4. Think of possible solutions.**

When talking or writing to your supervisor:

- 1. Explain the problem clearly.**
- 2. Concentrate on the facts of the issue.**
- 3. Give opinions only if requested.**
- 4. Concentrate on the problem, not the cause of the problem.**
- 5. Focus on the solution.**

After expressing concerns

- 1. Be modest.**
- 2. Respect confidentiality.**
- 3. Do not be angry if your suggestions are not used.**

FOUR STEPS IN REQUESTING INFORMATION FROM A SUPERVISOR

- 1. Plan your request.**
- 2. State your request clearly.**
- 3. Explain your reasons.**
- 4. Keep the request simple, short, and courteous.**

WRITTEN REQUESTS

- 1. Use visual illustrations.**
- 2. Choose words carefully.**
- 3. Express yourself clearly.**
- 4. Review draft.**

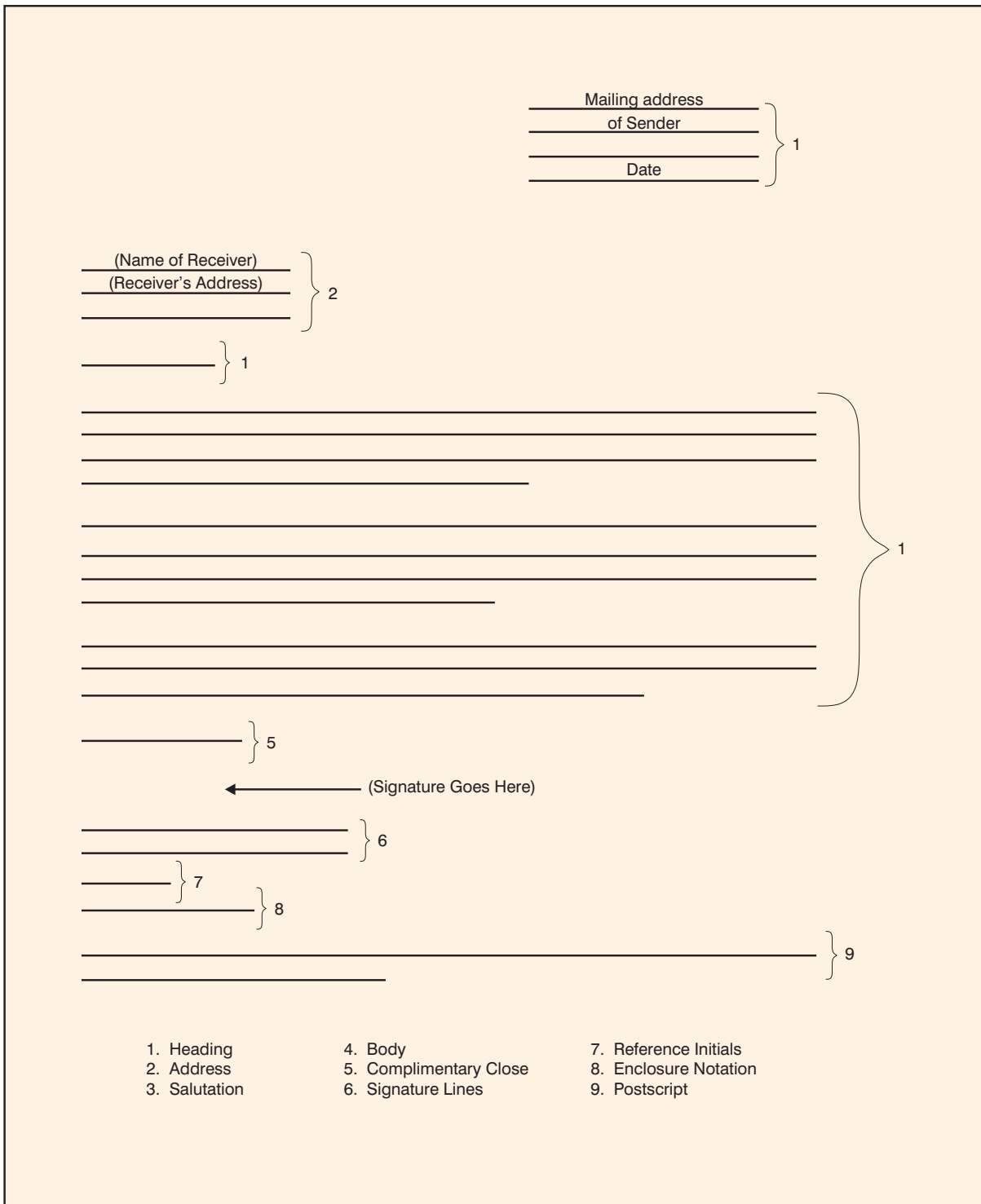
ORAL REQUESTS

- 1. Listen actively.**
- 2. Maintain eye contact.**
- 3. Do not interrupt responses.**
- 4. Use pauses.**
- 5. Use facial expressions and gestures.**

SKILLS FOR EFFECTIVE WRITING

- 1. Keep it simple.**
- 2. Write from an outline.**
- 3. Keep the reader or audience in mind when writing.**
- 4. Be precise.**
- 5. Be concise.**
- 6. Be informal.**
- 7. Be brief.**
- 8. Omit slang.**
- 9. Avoid clichés.**
- 10. Reduce redundancies.**
- 11. Use simple, short, familiar words.**
- 12. Avoid exaggeration.**
- 13. Have a strong closing.**
- 14. Make your writing interesting.**
- 15. Have your material edited.**

PARTS OF A LETTER



Lab Sheet

Presenting a Problem to a Supervisor

Purpose:

To learn how to present a problem to a supervisor.

Materials:

Lab sheet
Writing utensil

Procedure:

1. Read the scenario below.
2. Be prepared to report this problem either verbally or in memo form.
3. Your teacher will direct you as to how to report.

Scenario

Assume that you are a driver for a local florist shop. Your delivery truck was purchased about three months ago and is considered “state-of-the-art.” While making your afternoon deliveries, you realize you are slightly behind schedule. There are more deliveries today than usual, and you have to have the truck back by 5:00 PM.

Because the day is very warm and traffic is heavy, the truck starts to overheat. Steam is coming out from under the hood. You see a service station ahead and pull in. The attendants are busy, so you pick up a water hose and put cold water into the radiator. The truck will not restart.

When the mechanic at the station comes out and inspects the engine, she tells you the engine block is cracked because of the cold water you put in the radiator. The estimated cost to repair the damage is \$1,600.00.

Report the problem to your supervisor.

Lab Sheet

Requesting Information from a Supervisor

Purpose:

To learn how to prepare a written request for information from a supervisor.

Materials:

Lab sheet
Writing utensil

Procedure:

1. Read the scenario below.
2. Prepare a written request (using memo format) to attend the workshop.
3. Ask for your company to pay for cost of travel, meals, and the registration fee.
4. Estimate your total expenses, specify the number of days you will be gone, and explain who will cover for you during your absence.

Scenario

You are employed as a chemical applicator for a local fertilizer/chemical company. The state university is conducting a Chemical Applicator Workshop on campus. The registration fee for the workshop, which runs for five days, is \$125.00. This includes a manual and all handouts. The State Applicator Test which is now required for all chemical applicators (and which you have not taken), will be given at the workshop.

Lab Sheet

Making Oral Requests

Purpose:

To learn how to make requests using effective telephone skills.

Materials:

Lab sheet

Writing utensil

Procedure:

1. Read the two telephone requests below.
2. Working in pairs, discuss an appropriate telephone request for each of the situations.
3. On a separate piece of paper, outline what to say.
4. Be prepared to present your request orally to the class.

Telephone Request

- A. You are the office manager of the Bloomington Farm Co-op. Call and place an order for 25 gallons of new corn pesticide (Weed-Rid) and 10 Sure-Cut chain saws. You must receive the order within 10 days. Your company may make orders over telephone by supplying their account number. Bloomington Farm Co-op's account number is #7102-410.
- B. As office manager of the Bloomington Farm Co-op, you want to register a complaint about the service your company received from a tractor company's regional representative. The representative has not returned your calls, has misplaced two orders for replacement parts, and incorrectly billed you for equipment you did not order.

Lab Sheet Key

Making Oral Requests

A. Students' request should include the following:

- Student's name
- Company name
- Merchandise ordered
- Account number
- Delivery date

B. Students' requests should include the following:

- Student's name
- Company name
- Buffer statement
- Statement of problem
- Supporting details
- Action requested
- Courteous ending

Lab Sheet

Written Responses

Purpose:

To practice writing a response to a written request.

Materials:

Lab sheet
Writing utensil

Procedure:

1. Read the written request below.
2. Identify what is being requested and plan your response.
3. On a separate piece of paper, draft your response to the request.

Written Request

You are employed at the Universal Chemical Company, a manufacturer of herbicides, as one of their customer relations specialists. You have been assigned to handle customer letters concerning product problems. The general policy on handling customer problems with products is to provide a refund for the purchase price.

You have received the letter on the following page from a customer. Prepare a written response.

853 West Crescent Street
Cimarron, CO 81220
June 21, 1998

Universal Chemical Company
Customer Service Department
3455 South Street
Jackson, MS 39956-1112

Dear Sir or Madam:

On May 23, 1998, I paid for a 25-pound bag of Feed and Weed Kill, a product made by your company. I bought it at Mighty Green Lawn Company, which is located in Cimarron, Colorado. A copy of the sales slip is enclosed.

Although I followed the application instructions on the label, I still have a problem with weeds that the product is advertised to control. There was almost no effect on these weeds.

Roger Thomas, manager of Mighty Green Lawn Company, refused to return my money. He said it was company policy not to give refunds on herbicides. Your advertisement says that customer satisfaction is completely guaranteed. Since the product did not work, I feel you should refund my money.

Thank you and I hope to hear from you in the near future.

Sincerely,

Marcus Kildare

Lab Sheet Key

Written Responses

Students' written responses should include the following information:

- The student's name and position
- The name of the company
- A reference to the request
- A response
- Supporting detail or an explanation
- A suggested action
- A friendly ending

Lab Sheet

Sample Business Letter

Purpose:

To learn how to write a formal business letter.

Materials:

Lab sheet

Writing utensil

Procedure:

1. Come up with a name for a fictional employer.
2. Write a sample business letter about a job that interests you at the fictional company.
3. Select a job title before you begin.
4. Stress your qualifications and abilities.
5. Have your teacher critique your letter and rewrite it to include improvements.