

# BBC Learning English

## How to...

### *Give bad news*



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**Neil:** Hello, welcome to 'How to...' with me, Neil Edgeller. This programme is all about how to give people bad news. How do you tell someone some bad news without making them too upset? Well, luckily for you, I've had a terrible week full of bad news. You'll hear four people telling me what's happened. First of all, have a listen to my bad news. What's happened?

#### **Insert**

Well Neil, I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you: you didn't quite make the grades, which sadly means that you won't be able to go to the university you chose this year.

Well, thank you very much for coming to the interview first of all. You did very well on it, but unfortunately I'm afraid we're not going to be able to offer you the position this time.

I'm afraid that the... the holiday's actually... we've got to cancel it. There's a technical problem with the hotel. I'm really sorry but it's all off.

I've got some bad news Neil, I'm afraid Rex didn't make it through the operation and he died at about midnight last night. I'm really sorry.

**Neil:** Did you hear what happened in my terrible week? Firstly I didn't get the right grades to do a university course, secondly I didn't get a job I applied for, next my holiday was cancelled and lastly my pet dog, Rex, died. Let's start at the beginning. Listen to how they told me the news.

#### **Insert**

Well Neil, I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you: you didn't quite make the grades, which sadly means that you won't be able to go to the university you chose this year. It's not all bad news though because you can apply to another one.

**Neil:** He says "I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you..." and then tells me I haven't made the grade, which means I didn't get a high enough score in my exams. 'I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you...' is a common way to give bad news. Using just 'I'm afraid' is a very simple way of introducing bad news. Two of the other speakers used it as well. Listen to them:

### **Insert**

I'm afraid that the... the holiday's actually... we've got to cancel it.  
I've got some bad news Neil, I'm afraid.

**Neil:** When you give someone bad news, it's common to say something positive as well. This helps to make things seem a little better than they are. Listen to how it's done:

### **Insert**

Well Neil, I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you: you didn't quite make the grades, which sadly means that you won't be able to go to the university you chose this year. It's not all bad news though because you can apply to another one.

**Neil:** He said: "It's not all bad news though" and then said something positive. Fortunately, I can apply for another university.

**Neil:** My next piece of bad news is that I didn't get a job I applied for. Listen to how she tells me:

### **Insert**

Well, thank you very much for coming to the interview first of all. You did very well on it, but unfortunately I'm afraid we're not going to be able to offer you the position this time because there were other candidates who were stronger than you.

**Neil:** Again, she says something positive: this time “You did very well” before giving me the bad news. And did you hear how she gave the news? She says “Unfortunately we’re not going to be able to offer you the position this time...” ‘Unfortunately’ is another way of giving bad news. It’s used in the same way as ‘I’m afraid’. Did you notice also that she gave a reason for the bad news? In this case the other candidates, meaning the other people who applied for the job, were stronger than me. Here she is again:

**Insert**

...unfortunately I’m afraid we’re not going to be able to offer you the position this time because there were other candidates who were stronger than you.

**Neil:** In the third example, a woman is cancelling my holiday.

**Insert**

I’m afraid that the... the holiday’s actually... we’ve got to cancel it. There’s a technical problem with the hotel and so I’m really sorry but it’s all off.

**Neil:** She says: “I’m really sorry but... it’s all off”, meaning it’s cancelled. ‘I’m really sorry but...’ is similar to ‘I’m afraid...’, but less formal.

In the last example, the man tells me my dog has died.

**Insert**

I’ve got some bad news Neil, I’m afraid Rex didn’t make it through the operation and he died at about midnight last night. I’m really sorry.

**Neil:** He also uses ‘sorry’, but at the end this time to offer sympathy to me. Also notice his voice. He speaks in a quiet and calm way. This is another way to show sympathy when you give someone bad news.

**Neil:** So, to recap.... here are some common ways to introduce bad news: use 'I'm afraid...' or 'unfortunately...' or 'I'm sorry but...' to introduce the news.

**Insert**

I'm afraid I've got some bad news for you... Unfortunately I'm afraid we're not going to be able to offer you the position... I'm really sorry but it's all off.

**Neil:** Say something positive either before or after the bad news so things don't seem so bad.

**Insert**

It's not all bad news though because you can apply to another one.

**Neil:** Use a soft tone of voice. It makes you sound kind.

**Insert**

He died at about midnight last night. I'm really sorry.