



国际经济与贸易系列规划教材

外贸函电

International Business Letters

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大连理工大学出版社

内容提要:本书介绍了外贸商务活动各个环节函电往来的书写,包括:建立贸易关系、询盘、报盘、还盘、订货、支付、结算、包装、运输、保险、索赔和理赔、代理等,涉及到进出口过程中的多种情况和不同问题的处理。每个单元包含实务介绍和写作技巧,以及大量的句型、替换练习和范文。

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《外贸函电》主要介绍了与国际贸易进出口各个环节相关的英文信函的写作,是一门应用性和实践性很强的综合专业课程。其任务是培养学生掌握外贸商务活动过程中书信写作的基本技能,并能在实际业务中熟练地加以运用。

本书介绍了外贸商务活动各个环节函电往来的书写,包括:建立贸易关系、询盘、报盘、还盘、订货、支付、结算、包装、运输、保险、索赔和理赔、代理等,涉及到进出口过程中的多种情况和不同问题的处理。每个单元包含实务介绍和写作技巧,以及大量的句型、替换练习和范文。

编者长期处于教学的前沿并有一定的实践基础,注意到国际商务写作在全球化大环境中日益重要和不断变化的现状,这次教材的编撰过程中,在调整课程结构、充实课程内容方面,主要进行了以下几方面的新探索:1. 扩大涵盖范围,编者注意到国际商务写作在网络化的今天出现的新变化,在既往教材侧重于传统书信和电文的基础上,加入了网络营销信函等内容,突出了现代写作元素的特点;2. 深化教材内容,通过总结国际贸易实际运作环节的基础知识,循序渐进地铺垫出专业知识的英语语言环境,在此基础上展开针对性的函电写作介绍,能够区别于普通英语写作,实现专业英语类课程的深化;3. 拓展分析角度,在每

个章节的描述中,编者力求深入浅出,既是介绍和讲解,又是在和读者做一种交流和探讨。

本书的主要目的在于技能的培养,而不是记忆的训练,因此要求学生在使用本教材时,在熟读句型和范文的基础上,坚持大量的写作和翻译练习,逐渐加强语言基本功,全面提高商务英语的写作能力。

本教材可供国际贸易、工商管理、市场营销、财税、经济、法律等专业的本科生使用,也可供具有一定英语基础的商务工作者学习参考,还可以作为进出口从业人员的商务英语写作手册。

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第 1 章
Chapter 1

An Overview of Business Writing

Objectives

In today's highly developed and toughly competitive society, communication between individuals and groups is becoming increasingly frequent and important. It serves to pass on information, to express ideas or to exchange feelings. Every transaction needs communication. Business letter is a common communication medium. Every letter that leaves the office should be looked upon as a representative of the firm and as a messenger of goodwill. When we have written a letter, read it through carefully, see that we have put in everything we intended, and have expressed it well, read it again, trying to put ourselves in the place of the reader to find out what impression our letter will make.

We communicate for a purpose, and our basic objectives in communication are generally these:

- (1) To be understood exactly as we intended;
- (2) To secure the desired response to our message;
- (3) To maintain favorable relations with those with whom we communicate.

The main reason we should learn letter-writing is that by studying the principles and practicing the skills and arts of letter-writing, we can learn to write letters that will more frequently bring the desired results. Through the study of business letters, we will get a further insight into the ways of business world, and learn about practices in making inquiries, getting people to buy, handling orders, adjusting claims, and so on.

1.1 Writing Principles

In order to write out perfect business letters, attention must be paid to the following principles:

1.1.1 Clarity

To make sure that your letter is so clear that it cannot be misunderstood. Much confusion can be caused by unclear business communication. For example, if a letter says: "new baskets have been adopted for flowers and we are going to send them at once" then how should the reader interpret this statement? What will be shipped? The baskets? The flowers? Or both?

When you are sure about what you want to say, avoid using the words which have different understanding or unclear meaning so that the receiver will understand it well.

Compare the following three sentences. Sentence B and C are clearer and more effective than sentence A:

A: As to the steamers sailing from Hong Kong to San Francisco, we have bimonthly direct services.

The word "bimonthly" has two meanings: twice a month, or once two months. The reader will be confused about the meaning.

B: We have two direct sailings every month from Hong Kong to San Francisco.

C: We have a direct sailing from Hong Kong to San Francisco every two months.

1.1.2 Conciseness

Conciseness is often considered to be the most important writing principle, it enables to save both the writer's and the recipients' time. Conciseness means to express in as few words as possible without sacrificing completeness, concreteness and courtesy. To do so, the following guidelines are to be observed:

- (1) Omit trite expressions;
- (2) Avoid unnecessary expressions;
- (3) Include only relevant facts with courtesy;
- (4) Organize effectively.

Compare the following sentences. Sentence B is concise and more effective

than sentence A:

A: We have received your letter under the date of June 6 and have given same our most careful consideration, but regret to have to inform you that your proposal is unacceptable to us at this present juncture.

B: We are sorry we cannot at present agree to the proposal made in your letter of June 6.

A: We are going to give consideration to the delivery schedule at today's meeting.

B: We will consider the delivery schedule at today's meeting.

A: They attend the Guangzhou Trade Fair for the purpose of finding a business partner.

B: They attend the Guangzhou Trade Fair to find a partner.

A: Please be advised we have received your L/C.

B: We have received your L/C.

A: The writer wishes to acknowledge your letter of ...

B: Thank you for your letter of ...

1.1.3 Courtesy

Try to avoid irritating and offensive statements. To answer a letter promptly is also a kind of courtesy. It is discourteous to keep your correspondent waiting for an answer. If you cannot deal promptly with a letter seeking information, write and explain to your customer why and tell him when you will write or deal with the matter. Courtesy consists of not only using polite phrases and sentences, but also of showing consideration for your correspondent. This quality enables you to refuse to perform a favor without killing the friendly relations between you two, and to refuse a customer's request for discount without creating detriment to the future business. It is necessary to plan the best way for presenting your message, your request, your desire, and etc.

Courtesy plays a considerate role in business letter writing, as in all business activities. It is a favorable introduction card, helping to strengthen your present business relations and to establish new ones. Someone has said, "Courtesy is oil to business—it reduces friction." To show courtesy, one should follow closely the suggestions given:

- (1) Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful and appreciative;

(2) Take a personable, friendly and modest tone;

(3) Omit expressions that irritate, hurt or belittle. It is always offensive to show any sign of arrogance or prejudice;

(4) Be prompt in reply. If your answer is delayed, give strong and understandable reasons.

Compare the following sentences. Sentence B is courteous and more effective than sentence A:

A: Unfortunately we cannot fill your order because you failed to send your check.

B: We shall be glad to fill your order as soon as we receive your check.

A: We are sorry you have misunderstood us.

B: We are sorry we didn't make ourselves clearly.

A: Your letter of May 5 regarding the shipment of this batch has been received.

B: Your letter of May 5 regarding the shipment of this batch has received our careful attention.

1.1.4 Consideration

Consideration is an important role of good business writing. The letters you send out must create a good impression. Try to put yourself in his or her place to give the consideration to this or her varied wishes, demand, interest and difficulties. Emphasize the "You" attitude rather than the "I" or "We" attitude. Find the best way to express your better understanding and present the message. That enables a request to be refused without killing all hope of business or allows a refusal to do a favor to be made without harming friendship.

Compare the following sentences. Sentence B is more considerable than sentence A:

A: We'd like to send our congratulations to you.

B: Congratulations to you on your success.

A: We won't be able to send you the sample this month.

B: We will send you the sample next month.

A: We allow you 2% discount for cash payment.

B: You earn 2% discount when you pay cash.

1.1.5 Correctness

Correctness means not only proper expression with correct grammar, punctuation and spelling, but also appropriate tone which is a help to achieve the purpose. It is likely to convey the real message in a way that will not cause offence even if it is a complaint or an answer to such a letter. Business letters must be factual information, accurate figures and exact terms in particular, for they involve the right, the duties and the interest of both sides often as the base of all kinds of documents. Therefore, we should not understate nor overstate as understatement might lead to less confidence and hold up the trade development while overstatement would throw you in an awkward position.

1.1.6 Completeness

A business letter is successful and functions well only when it contains all the necessary information. An outline helps for the letter to be full and complete. See to it that all the matters are discussed, and all questions are answered. Incompleteness is not only impolite; it also leads to the recipient's unfavorable impression towards your firm. He may give up the deal if other firms can provide him with all the information needed, or if he would not take the trouble inquiring once again.

As you work hard for completeness, keep the following guidelines in mind: why do you write the letter, what are the facts supporting the reasons, whether have you answered the questions asked or not and what the reader has expected to do.

1.1.7 Concreteness

What the letter comes to should be specific, definite rather than vague, abstract and general. Especially for letters calling for specific reply, such as offer, inquiring trade terms, etc., concreteness is always stressed. For example, some qualities or characters of goods should be shown with exact figures and avoid words like short, long or good. Give specific time with date, month, year and even offer hour, minute if necessary, but avoid expressions such as yesterday, next month, immediately and etc.

The following guidelines can help us write concretely; use specific facts and

figures; put action in your verbs, prefer active verbs to passive verbs or words in which action is hidden; choose vivid, image-building words; pay attention to word orders, put modifiers in right place.

1.2 Rules of Good Writing

1.2.1 Plan your letter

Many business letters are short and routine and can be written or dictated without special preparation. Others must first be thought about and planned. First jot down all the points you wish to cover and then arrange them in logical order to provide the plan for a letter that will read naturally and fluently. If your letter is in reply to one received, underline those parts which seek information or on which comment is necessary. This will ensure that your reply is complete.

If your letter is one sent in reply to another, refer in the opening paragraph to the letter you are answering, but avoid the sort of old-fashioned phrases, such as "We are in receipt of your letter ...". Although they are grammatically correct, they tend to be dull and monotonous from over-use.

If you want to have a letter well-planned and followed by a logical sequence, both the first and the last impression are very important. A word of caution! Avoid the kind of ending introduced by a participle. "Thanking you in anticipation" and similar endings are no longer used in modern letter writing. They mean nothing and serve no useful purpose.

In a business letter the vivid words and loose sentences will make the message vivid, which will attract the reader attention and interest and desire. Short sentences are preferable to long ones, because short sentences are easily understood. A succession of short sentences, however, has a disagreeable jerky effect and the best letters are those that can provide a mixture of sentences of different length. Sometime you wish to emphasize some words, and then you may place them at the beginning of the sentence.

Emphasis is also achieved by using "It is ...", "It was ..." to introduce statements.

Example:

A. I met your director yesterday.

B. Yesterday, I met your director.

Example:

A. Unfortunately, the goods did not arrive in time.

B. It was unfortunately that the goods did not arrive in time.

1.2.2 Write sincerely and naturally

The letters you send you must create a good first impression. To achieve this, “put yourself in the reader’s site” and try to imagine how he will feel about what you write. Ask yourself constantly, “What are his needs, his wishes, his interests, his problems, and how can I meet them?” “What would be my own feelings, if I were to receive a letter of the kind I propose to write?” Try to imagine that you are receiving rather than sending the letter and emphasize the “You” attitude rather than me or us.

When you write or dictate a business letter, try to feel a genuine interest in person you are writing to and in his problems. Say what you have to say with sincerity and make sure that it sounds sincere. Express your thoughts in your own words and in your own way. Be yourself. Write so that what you say would sound natural if reading over the telephone.

If a letter is to achieve its purpose, its tone must be right. Before beginning to write think carefully about the way in which you want to influence your reader. Ask yourself, “What do I want this letter to do?” and then express yourself accordingly, being persuasive apologetic, obliging, firm and so on, depending on the effect you want to produce.

1.2.3 Write effectively

In business letter writing we should use simple language, which calls for a plain style — a style that is simple, clear and easily understood. Make it a rule to use no more words than are needed to make your meaning clear. Businessmen today have many letters to read and welcome the art of letter that is direct and to the point.

We have to remember that using simple language doesn’t mean the contents and expressions should be too simple to be meaningless. Simple languages can also bear and express underlined thoughts. Smooth and grace writing is what we want to obtain. Sometimes long and complicated words and expressions may

cause understanding difficulties.

Be consistent in writing a business letter. Avoid repeating in the same sentence an important word with different meaning.

But in your efforts to avoid repetition doesn't make the opposite mistake of confusing your reader by using different words to express exactly the same thing. Don't say in the same letter that goods have been sent, forwarded, and dispatched, and if you are giving your letter to a firm, don't change it as you go a long a "concern" or a "business", or an "organization". If you do, you will leave your reader wondering whether something different is intended. Avoid using vague expressions but concrete words. Avoid using state and round phrases that add little or nothing to the sense of what you write. Such phrases were at one time common, but they have no place in modern business letter.

1.2.4 Check your letters

Be careful to create a good first impression with each of your letters. Before signing, check it for the accuracy of contents and test its general suitability against such questions as these.

- (1) Is its appearance attractive; is it well laid out?
- (2) Is it correctly spelt and properly punctuated?
- (3) Does it cover all essential points and is the information given correct?
- (4) Is what I have said clear, concise and courteous?
- (5) Does it sound natural and sincere?
- (6) Does it adopt the reader's point of view and will it be readily understood?
- (7) Is its general tone right and is it likely to create the impression intended?
- (8) Is it the kind of letter I should like to receive if I were in the reader's place?

If the answer to all questions is "yes" then the letter will take the first step in creating good will and you may safely sign and send it.

1.3 Writing Procedures

How shall we deal with business letter writing? Generally, the writing process consists of the following five steps. While writing, ask yourself the relevant question(s) following each step:

- (1) Determine your purpose of writing
 - Why shall I write?
- (2) Analyze your reader
 - What do I know about the receiver?
 - What kind of relationship do we have?
- (3) Organize your thoughts
 - What shall I say?
 - How shall I say?
- (4) Write your drafts
 - Is this the best way to say what I want to say?
- (5) Polish your writing
 - Is this a really effective business letter?

1.4 Exercises

1. Answer the following questions briefly.

(1) How do you understand the importance of a business letter in international business?

(2) What are the seven writing principles that we should observe when we write business letters?

2. Rewrite the following sentences, to make them effective.

(1) He will fly to Germany next week for the purpose of meeting Mr. Swartz in person.

(2) We require cameras that are of a new type.

(3) It should be noted that this is the best price we can offer in this season.

(4) Your letter is not clear. I can't understand it.

(5) For two years, you haven't given us any order.

(6) We allow you 3 percent discount for cash payment.

(7) We wish to acknowledge receipt of your letter of July 5.

(8) This product not only is welcome for its reasonable price, but also is welcome for its fine quality.

(9) We are informed that similar goods of American origin have been sold here at a level about 30% lower than you.

(10) Our normal practice is that we usually insure shipments for the invoice value plus 10%.

The Form of A Business Letter

Objectives

- Name the seven essential parts of a business letter;
- Name the seven optional parts of a business letter;
- Know the layout of the envelope;
- Know the design and placement of a business letter;
- Understand different styles of a business letter.

The first impression a business letter makes on its reader often determines whether that letter will actually be read, and it also may determine the reader's reaction to the contents of the letter. Therefore, business letter writers must, in addition to composing well-written sentences and paragraphs, be able to communicate their thoughts in efficient, appropriate letter form.

2.1 The Layout of A Business Letter

2.1.1 The layout of the letter body

So far in 1990s, the most common letter layouts remain the block style, modified block style, and simplified style. Companies and government