

BUSINESS ENGLISH

商 用 英 文

By Kaye O'young

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BUSINESS ENGLISH  
ADAPTED FOR  
CHINESE STUDENTS

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## **Note To The Second Edition**

In response to many requests, the Second Edition of this book has been published. There is some additional material to some chapters that were felt to be insufficiently illustrated. Exercises also added to each chapter. It is hoped that this will prove especially useful to the students.

The Author

Taipei, May, 1975

## Foreword

There have been a great many books on "English Business Correspondence"; there has not been one that discusses and illustrates by examples the different kinds of business English. This is what this book tries to do. The value of this combination is especially great to Chinese students of commerce in college who have few opportunities to see the various types of writing, but may be called upon to write them. The study also impressed upon the students of the correlation of different kinds of business English writing, thereby enabling him to write and judge any kind of writing with intelligence.

It is hoped that this book will not only be recognized as the best textbook in the classroom but will be also an excellent reference book by both foreign and Chinese business men. For a large number of forms, letters and documents actually used by leading firms, are shown here.

No book is written by only one author. Usually it is an embodiment of the ideas, suggestions, recommendations and criticisms of many colleagues. This book represents the combined efforts of many good friends in both business and education. To those who have been furnished materials and offered suggestions, I offer my sincere thanks.

In particular, I want to express my profound thanks to Mrs. Mathew J. Thomas for her painstaking and critical review of the manuscript.

The Author

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May 1, 1971



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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1. What is Business English ?

Business English is a type of standard English adapted to specific business purpose. It is a valuable instrument in countless daily business transactions. It consists of the composition of letters, notes, memoranda, reports, telegrams, advertisements, contracts and other forms of documents that are commonly used in transacting business.

It does not matter whether you are preparing to become a business man, an accountant or a banker, the success of your efforts in your future work depends greatly upon your accurate and skillful employment of it. For example, if you can write a good business letter, you will find a ready market for your talents.

#### 2. The Know-how of Business English

Merely having a good command of English will not enable you to write a straightforward, intelligent business writing. Knowledge of some specific Know-how<sup>1</sup> is essential.

#### Four Requirements

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1. know-how 技術

**Accuracy<sup>1</sup>.** Be accurate in what you say in a business writing. Nothing annoys a customer more than to be written to about a bill already paid, an amount owed but incorrectly referred, or an item placed in his account in error. An incorrect amount quoted in a statement can be very costly. If the sum in question is very low, the customer may hold you to it with the subsequent loss to you. If it is too high, it will undoubtedly lose you a customer. If it is amount owed but uncorrectly stated, the letter gives the offender a basis or new delaying tactic. It is wisest, therefore, to check all facts before writing, during the dictation, or -- not quite as satisfactory --- before it is mailed.

**Brevity<sup>2</sup>.** Can you recall a long lecture or speech that left you yawning? Well, don't do the same to your correspondent when writing him a letter. On the other hand, you must guard against becoming telegraphic in your style. The trick is just the right amount of dressing on the salad.

Remember, the reader is just as busy as you. Keep your message as brief as possible without leaving out any important details. To do a good job and keep the message brief, you must plan the writing carefully.

**Clarity<sup>3</sup>.** You can recall many talks delivered by an authority in a certain field, who, when he had finished, had succeeded in making nothing clear. If he went into much detail, he may have lost you. If he skipped logical steps along the way,

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1. Accuracy 正確  
3. Clarity 扼要

2. Brevity 簡潔

he may have lost you in that manner. In comparing notes with others during intermission or after it is all over, did you discover others were in the same boat with you? We can recall several professors at college whose remarks were, to a great extent, beyond their audiences, to avoid embarrassment many people remarked after their lectures on the depth of their wisdom. There is also danger to know the subject too well and not being able to make explicit to the neophyte<sup>1</sup> the essentials of what is said.

Before a letter is signed, the writer must read it to be certain that it is clear and correct. Ordinarily, the letter was dictated several hours before. If at the time of signing it no longer sounds clear, it should be reworded or reconsidered before it is sent. If the letter is quite clear to the writer after the lapse of several hours, it will properly be clear to the reader.

Even though the letter is clear to you, if its importance is great, enlist the patience and understanding of a sympathetic colleague. Ask him to read it. He does not know the subject or purpose of the letter, and if it is clear to him, you can trust that the letter will properly be clear to the addressee, who does know the subject. Also, in the case of a writing complicated with the technical detail, the same procedure is advisable. Avoid, if you can, placing a stenographer or a typist in the position in which she is to decide the clarity of a writing.

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1. Neophyte 初學者

**Dignity<sup>1</sup>.** The dignity of a business writing has to do with its tone, its courtesy, and its sincerity. A dignified letter commands respect and reflects authenticity<sup>2</sup>. The correspondent believes a dignified letter.

A message in language as simple as a friendly conversation will not only be clearer to the reader but will seem earnest as well. As long as the conversation is not permitted to become too colloquial, it will bring across to the reader some of the personality of the writer.

Nothing will lower the dignity of a writing more rapidly than a tone of forced sincerity<sup>3</sup>. If the language used is unnatural to the writer, the reader will either sense it and be disappointed.

Occasionally, for purposes of a sale pitch<sup>4</sup>, frivolity<sup>5</sup> may be in order. Used properly, this can be refreshing. Avoid negative in writing whenever possible. Negative inform one about what not to do. However in business writing, it is good psychology to suggest the positive --- what to do. Effectively used, this positive attitude should lead to action, the primary goal of every business writing.

In conclusion, keep your business writing as short as possible, as simple as possible and as directly sincere as possible. Don't "fill" a writing because it does not seem that it will occupy sufficient space on the typewritten page.

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1. Dignity 莊重
  3. forced sincerity 虛偽
  5. frivolity 誇大的言詞

2. authenticity 真實性
4. sale pitch 貨物傾銷

## Sentence Structure

In business English, you should give close attention to your sentences. Each sentence should express a clear, independent thought. In general, short sentences are preferable to long ones. This does not mean, of course, that you should never use long sentences, but it is, a good idea to avoid writing a series of complicated, involved sentences.

Many good business English writers believe that simple and compound sentences are more effective in appealing to the average reader of business circle. The untrained mind is not capable of following complex phraseology<sup>2</sup>. Furthermore, although your reader may be highly intelligent, he may devote a minimum of time to his correspondence or other forms of documents; consequently, you should explain your subject so simple that he will understand your meaning immediately. Avoid repeating the same structure in sentence after sentence, for a series of any one kind of sentence become monotonous. Having sentences of different length and structure is wise.

**Unity in the sentence<sup>1</sup>.** A sentence is often defined as the expression of a single thought. If it lacks unity, it obviously fails to satisfy this definition. The group of words by which the thought is expressed should be complete, having at least one independent subject and predicate, except when some special effect is desired. Do not write a part of a sentence as if it were a complete sentence.

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2. phraseology 措辭

1. Unity in the sentence 句子統一性

**Wrong:** We cannot deliver your merchandise before May 5.  
Under present business conditions.

The last four words do not constitute a complete sentence. The idea of this phrase should be expressed as a subordinate part of the preceeding sentence.

**Correct:** We cannot deliver your merchandise before May 5  
under present business conditions.

**Incomplete:** Yours of the 1st received. And in answer would  
say .....

**Complete:** Thank you for your encouraging note of June 1.  
I am gratified to .....

Do not connect two or more unrelated idea in a sentence  
with "and" or "but".

**Wrong:** We did not have in stock item No. 456 in your last  
order, but you are entitled to the customary cash  
discount if this bill is paid within ten days from the  
date of invoice.

This sentence contains two distinct ideas. Consequently, two  
sentences should be used to express them, or, even better, two  
paragraphs.

**Preferable:** We did not have in stock item No. 456 requested  
in your latest order.

You are entitled to the customary cash discount

if this bill is paid within ten days from the date  
of invoice.

Avoid writing short, choppy sentences that all relate to one idea. It is far more effective to combine them into a single well-organized sentence.

Elementary: We have received your order. We very much appreciate it. We assure you it will be filled promptly.

Better: We very much appreciate your order, which will be filled promptly.

**Coherence in the sentence<sup>1</sup>.** Coherence is one of the secrets of sentence unity. To cohere means to "stick together". A sentence is coherent when all its parts are clearly and naturally connected with one another. In order to avoid ambiguity and vagueness, make certain that modifiers are placed near the words they are intended to modify.

Not clear: He had a rug in his house of which he was very proud. (Was he proud of the rug of the house?)

Clear: In his house he had a rug of which he was very proud.

Clear: He was very proud of the rug in his house.

Place words like "only", "alone", and "at least" as near as possible to the words whose meaning they are intended to restrict.



Only the president signed the order. (He alone, and no one else, signed it.)

The president only signed the order. (He simply affixed his signature)

The president signed only the order. (He signed no other paper.)

The president signed the order only. (Same meaning as the preceding sentence, but expressed a little more forcefully)

For sentence coherence it is also important that paralled ideas be expressed in paralled form.

Wrong: We need men for the sales department, the accounting department, and engineering.

Correct: We need men for the sales department, the accounting department, and the engineering department.

Wrong: The sales clerk had a neat appearance, a gracious manner, and his personality was attractive.

Correct: The sales clerk had a neat appearance, a gracious manner, and an attractive personality.

Wrong: Writing is sometimes more effective than to talk.

Correct: Writing is sometimes more effective than talking.

Conjunctions used in pairs (correlatives), like "both..... and", "either..... or", "neither..... nor", and "not only ..... but also", should connect co-ordinate ideas.