

Contemporary
Business
Writing

现代
商务英语
写作

胡英坤
车丽娟
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苏丽文
编著

 东北财经大学出版社
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前 言

中国经济的国际化使英语在商务上的应用远远超越贸易领域,它渗透到我国经济生活的各个方面。商务写作能力是每个从事国际商务工作的人员走向成功的关键之一。而从我们对毕业生的调查中发现,他们大多缺乏这一能力。这其中有教师水平和教学方法上的原因,但最根本的问题是教学思想不对头,教材不适用。近 50 年来英美国家的商务工作者越来越讲究商务交际技巧,在我国,经贸部门实际使用的英语也发生了很大的变化。但是,我国目前这方面的教材从内容到语言大多滞后于时代的发展。多数教材是以语言本身为主,提供范文、例句让学生模仿,缺乏对写作方法的指导,尤其是尚未把写作作为一种交际手段,缺乏对学生如何通过写作达到理想的交际作用的指导,而且就语言本身而言,在教材中存在大量陈腐过时的词句,有的书还在大量沿用英美国家早已摒弃的所谓商业用语。我们有些教师将这些过时的内容奉为经典,让学生死记硬背。诚然,英美国家商务写作方面的新内容在国内近年出版的教材中亦有所反映,但至今较为成熟的商务英语写作教材还为数甚少。教师上课只能从各种书中寻找材料,内容很不系统。这就是我们下决心写这本书的初衷。

现代商务英语写作是经贸英语专业的骨干专业课之一,是经贸英语专业区别于其他英语专业方向的特色课之一。商务英语写作过去在许多院校被细分为外贸函电、外贸应用文等课程。本书把商务工作中可能遇到的各种写作任务融为一体,并尽量反映英美国家商务写作方面的最新内容。本书从商务交际原则出发,强调写作过程中注重读者的商业心理和心理接受过程,突出商务写作的特点,强调通俗易懂、简明完整、清楚正确的写作风格和原则。

本书分三部分,20 章。第一部分为现代商务英语写作的基本原则,包括 4 章,主要阐述在商务英语写作中如何针对读者心理,进行合理选词,如何组织清楚的句子和段落,以及如何达到有效写作的组织技巧等。

第二部分为商务信函写作,包括 14 章。各章首先从理论上对各种信函(贸易书信、社交信函、申请信、简历、推荐信、通知、便条等)的写作原则和方法加以阐述,然后结合实例给予说明。第三部分为报告写作,包括 2 章,介绍了较短的非正式报告(备忘录、意向书及其他非正式报告)和正式报告。各章课文后均配有注释、讨论题和应用题。讨论题的目的是帮助学生进一步掌握每章的写作原则和写作方法。应用题的目的是让学生针对给予的具体情况练习写作,提高他们的创造力和想像力。本书第 1~4, 19~20 章由胡英坤教授编写;第 5~14 章由车丽娟教授编写;第 15 章由李明媚副教授编写;第 16~18 章由苏丽文副教授编写。全书由胡英坤教授策划总纂。本书在写作过程中得到了何宝善教授的大力帮助与有益的指导。

本书的特点是既有理论又有实例,吸收了英美近年商务交际的新思想。它不仅可以提高学生语言基本功,而且有利于他们了解和学习语言应用的社会环境,掌握有效交际技巧,全面提高商务英语写作能力。我们真诚希望本书会是一本充满时代气息、适用性强的国际商务英语写作教材。同时,我们恳请广大师生以及其他读者对书中的缺点和不足之处提出批评和指正。

编者

2004 年 3 月

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Part One

Fundamentals of Modern Business Writing

现代商务英语写作的基本原则

Chapter 1

An Overview of Business Writing

商务英语写作概论

Objectives

By learning this chapter you will be able to :

- Understand the importance for business people to have a good command of modern business writing skills;
- Identify functions of business writing;
- Know the characteristics of good business writings;
- Appreciate why courtesy is listed as an important factor in business writing;
- Tell the differences between a good writing and a poor writing.

The ability to write effectively is a valuable business asset. One reason is that a great deal of business is transacted in writing. With the wide use of fax and recent development of EDP, even more writing is involved in every part of business. More than at any previous time business people feel the need to put ideas and information into written form. Another reason is that the effective business writers can use their skill to help increase their company's sales and profits by promoting good relations with customers, employees, and the general public. Still another reason is that proficiency in writing gives the man or woman in business a personal advantage over less capable writers and contributes substantially to his or her self-confidence—a necessary quality for business success.

Functions of Business Writing

Every business message is designed to achieve a specific business objective. Its success depends on what it says and to what extent it induces a favorable response from the reader. Thus, business writing has three functions: (1) to inform, (2) to influence, and (3) to entertain.

Messages to inform are used to convey the vast amount of information needed to complete the day-to-day operations of the business—explain instructions to employees, announce meetings and procedures, acknowledge orders, accept contracts for services, etc. The major purpose of most of these messages is to have the receiver understand a body of information and concentrate on the logical presentation of the content.

In addition to providing information, a business message must also influence the reader's attitudes and actions. These messages might include letters promoting a product or service and seeking support for ideas and worthy causes presented to supervisors, stockholders, customers/clients, and others.

To secure the desired response, it is necessary to have an adequate knowledge of the English language and an understanding of human nature. The writer should have an acquaintance with the particular interest and, if possible, the emotions of the reader. It seems easy enough, for example, to ask payment of a bill, but it is quite difficult to secure payment without offending the reader and losing his or her future patronage. No communication is wholly successful unless it retains the reader's goodwill.

Criteria for Effective Business Writing

A business message is considered successful when (1) the receiver interprets the message as the sender intended it and (2) it achieves the sender's purposes. In order to meet these objectives, American experts in business communication developed six C's principles: Courtesy, Correctness, Conciseness, Clarity, Concreteness and Completeness.

A. COURTESY Review of actual business correspondence reveals that special attention should be devoted to assuring the courtesy of business communication. Effective

writers visualize the reader before starting to write. They will consider the reader's desires, problems-circumstances, emotions and probable reaction to their request.

B. CORRECTNESS Correct grammar, punctuation and spelling are basic requirements for business writing. In addition, correctness means choosing the correct level of language, and using accurate information and data.

C. CONCISENESS Effective writing is concise—each word, sentence, and paragraph counts. Conciseness means to write in the fewest possible words without sacrificing completeness and courtesy. Because a wordy message requires more time to write and read, business people put a high premium on conciseness in business messages. Conciseness will give emphasis to your message.

D. CLARITY Clarity tells the reader exactly what he or she wants and needs to know, using words and a format that make your writings totally understood with just one reading. Short, familiar words and simple, short sentences rather than long, difficult words, complex and long sentences are better for this purpose.

E. CONCRETENESS Your writing should be vivid, specific and definite rather than vague, general and abstract, especially when you are requiring a response, solving problems, making an offer or acceptance, etc.

F. COMPLETENESS Your writing should include all the necessary information and data in the message because information and data can help senders get receivers' responses and achieve desired objectives. An incomplete message may result in increased communication costs, loss of goodwill, sales, and valued customers, cost of returning goods, and wasted time trying to make sense out of the incomplete message.

Adapting to Modern Changes in Business Writing

Languages are products of the times and always bear the marks of a particular time. The rapid development of technology has brought changes to business writing. Fax and e-mail send messages quickly, and narrow the distance between people in different locations. Business writing, in general, has more and more assumed a friendly, easy, and conversational style.

There were times when the prevailing rule for business writing was that it should

be written in the driest possible manner and in language so stilted and formal that the true personality of the writer was completely hidden. Unfortunately, that rule was never abolished, and even now there are some that foolishly cling to it.

The awareness of change—the appreciation of up-to-date ways of doing business—is most important to anyone who aspires to become a successful writer. He gains nothing by imitating the past. Like life-styles and working conditions, the standards for business writings have changed. In the following chapters we will discuss in detail the basic principles of modern business writing and appropriate approaches to specific writing tasks.

Examples of Poor and Better Business Letters

In the following examples of business letters, both poor and better writing is presented. Problems illustrated in the poor examples are common in business letters. The contrasts will hopefully clarify the different impacts of poor and better writing on the readers, which will guide conscious efforts to improve our business writing skills.

Example 1

POOR

Dear Mr. Hua

We are in receipt of and would like to thank YOU for your letter and catalogue of June 14, 2003. After close examination we have come to the conclusion that your products are of no interest to us but we wish you every success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely

BETTER

Dear Mr. Hua

Thank you for your letter and catalogue sent on July 14, 2003. We appreciate your interest in our company though your products fall out of our line for the time being. We wish you every success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely yours

Example 2

POOR

Dear Mr. Fritz

We are sorry to have your complaint about the poor performance of our Monay batteries. You claim your flashlight was damaged. Under separate cover, we are sending you a new flashlight which we hope is not inferior to the one you submitted to us under our guarantee. Monay batteries are included. They were tested beforehand for any obvious defects.

Less than 1/2 per cent of our total production is unsatisfactory, and we are usually inclined to feel that the user of the flashlight is at fault, not the batteries. Since it is possible for some defective batteries to slip by our rigid inspection process, we follow the practice of replacing any damaged flashlights that are called to our attention.

It is unfortunate that you have had this inconvenience. We trust you will experience no further difficulties with our product.

Very truly yours

BETTER

Dear Mr. Fritz

We are sending you a new flashlight of comparable value with the one you submitted to us under our guarantee. Fresh Monay batteries are included. Your recent experience with a set of Monay flashlight batteries will not happen.

Far more than 99.5 per cent of our entire Monay battery production is satisfactory. It would be nice if this record was 100 per cent, but in the absence of a perfect record, we do appreciate it when a customer brings an unsatisfactory experience to our attention.

We are sure that the fresh Monay batteries we are sending you will give you the same dependable service that has made Monay batteries so famous all over the world.

Very truly yours

Example 3

POOR

Dear Mr. Bell

If you were like the majority of our other customers, you would never have allowed your Grayson's charge account to become past due.

You have now owed us \$ 342.87 since June 12, the day on which payment was to have been received for the merchandise we sold you on account on May 4. In case you have forgotten, the past-due status of your account is costing you money because 1.5 percent interest per month is being charged on the unpaid balance. As of July 13, the interest charge is \$ 5.14, making the current balance of the account \$ 348.01.

Gets check to us as soon as possible so that you can avoid further interest charges.

Sincerely

BETTER

Dear Mr. Bell

Because you are familiar with the benefits of a good credit record, the past-due status of your Grayson's charge account must be an oversight on your part.

Please take just a minute to write us a check for \$ 348.01, the current balance of your account. Since June 12, the day by which payment of \$ 342.87 was to have been received, your account has accumulated \$ 5.14 in interest charges. To avoid additional charges, please send us a check for the current balance of the account. As you mentioned the Collingwood metal art frames you purchased from us are popular with your customers. The corner clamp patented by Collingwood makes these metal frames easy to assemble.

Please send us a check today using the stamped, preaddressed envelope that is enclosed.

Sincerely

Notes

1. asset n. 财富
2. courtesy n. 礼貌, 客气
3. conciseness n. 简洁性
4. clarity n. 清楚性
5. charge account 赊账账户
6. past-due 过期
7. current balance 经常项目余额
8. accumulate v. 积累
9. patent v. 得到专利
10. preaddressed a. 事先写好地址的

Questions for Discussion

1. Why is it important for business people to have a good command of modern business writing skills?
2. What are the functions of business writing?
3. What are the six C's developed by American business communication experts?
4. Why is courtesy listed first among the six C's?
5. What are the characteristics of modern business writing?

Application Exercises

1. Answer the following questions about the letters shown in Example 3.
 - a. What is the common purpose of the letters?
 - b. If you were the reader, how would you feel after reading the first letter?
 - c. In what ways does the second writer show his/her consideration for the reader?
 - d. How does the second writer maintain goodwill in his/her letter?
2. What are the problems of the first letters in Example 1 and 2?

3. Which of the characteristics of effective business letters are lacking in the following letter:

Dear Mr. Miller We are in receipt of yours of the 15th-advising that you wish to purchase two pairs of cafe curtains. If you will read our advt. carefully, you will see that these curtains do not come in orchid as you specified.

Awaiting further word from you, we are

Very truly yours

4. Rewrite the above letter following the rules for effective letters stated in this chapter. After you finish Chapter 4, when you have a better idea of modern business writing principles, do this exercise again.