

ENGLISH CORRESPONDENCE AND INTERNATIONAL TRADING PROCEDURES

◎ 外贸函电双语教材

外贸函电 及流程

聂春阁 王 阳 主编



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出版说明

上海工程技术大学聂春阁老师和王阳老师主编的这套教材，可作为外贸函电双语教学的使用教材。

本教材的编写以实用性作为出发点和最终目标，以英语为主要编写语言，用英语介绍和讲解国际贸易实务和流程，既强调学生英语语言能力的提高，又兼顾学生对商务知识和商务流程的掌握，在两者之间成功地找到了一个平衡点。

商务英语教学的基本思路就应该是将商务英语听说读写译技能与商务知识有机结合，使学生在提高英语语言技能的同时，了解有关商务知识，造就学生“两条腿走路的本领”，培养以商务知识为底蕴、语言技能为依托的复合型、实用型人才。

中国商务出版社

2013年1月

前 言

本书适用于国际贸易、国际商务和商务英语专业本、专科学生外贸函电课程的双语教学。

为了提高学生的商务英语能力和水平，本书的编写以英文作为主要语言，专业知识复杂、难懂之处适当辅以汉语。

为使上述各专业学生在学好商务英语的同时，又能深刻理解和灵活操作国际贸易实务，本书在内容安排上从介绍相关专业知识入手，必要时结合知识插图，做到英语函电与商务流程紧密结合，从而使学生达到融会贯通的效果。

本书精编外贸函电绝对必要的十章内容，以利于各高校合理安排学时。

本书在编写过程中，得到很多专家、学者的帮助，并参考和借鉴了国内外大量的阅读材料，在此一并致谢！

由于编者水平所限，书中恐有疏漏，敬请各位同仁提出宝贵意见。

编 者

2012年8月

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***Chapter 1* Basic Knowledge of Business Letter Writing**

Learning Objectives

1. Grasp the principles of the business letter writing.
2. Master the formats of business letters.
3. Learn to arrange various parts of a letter and to address an envelope.

Introduction

As an important part of international trade, the business letter is the most frequently used form of communication in the business world. It reflects the competence and professionalism of the person sending it. The quality of its contents and presentation is an advertisement for the company. To earn the goodwill of the reader, the business letter should always be well written and presented. It should be neat and easy to read. Its format should be attractive and uncluttered. And it should always maintain a positive, courteous tone.

All business letters have two main functions: A) to ask for or give a reply to an inquiry, offer, order or complaint; B) to keep a record of all the important facts for ready reference. An effective business letter will say what the writer wants and say it clearly and simply. It should be precise, straightforward and relevant. It should also be written in a friendly, formal style using plain language.

A business letter tells readers quite a lot about the writer and his company. If the letter is neat, easy to read and presents a professional image, then it will leave a good impression on the reader, and vice versa. A decent business letter helps the writer as much as the reader, and is very likely to invite an earlier reply. In today's global market place, the reader's first impression often comes from the appearance of the documents and the quality of the paper. So you should pay enough attention to the paper quality, the paper color, the paper size and margins. Firstly, never use paper that is too flimsy. Secondly, white is the standard color for business purposes, although light colors such as gray and ivory are sometimes used. Thirdly, the size of papers varies slightly from country to country. In the United States, the standard paper size for business documents is 8.5 by 11 inches. Last but not least, the document is to be centered in the page,

leaving at least one-inch margins all around. We can achieve the balance by defining the format with a word-processing software.

1.1 Principles of Business Letter Writing

Since its main purpose is to convey a message, the business letter should be written in language that is easy to understand. The writer must make sure that it should be free from grammatical blemishes, and also free from the slightest possibility of being misunderstood. There are certain essential qualities of business letters, which can be summed up in the following 7 “Cs” principles, namely, 1) Courtesy; 2) Consideration; 3) Completeness; 4) Clarity; 5) Conciseness; 6) Concreteness; 7) Correctness.

1. Courtesy

Courtesy refers to a courteous or respectful or considerate act, remark or manner. Courtesy is not mere politeness. Always keep in mind the person we are writing to, look upon things from his point of view, visualize him in his surroundings, see his problems and difficulties and express our ideas in terms of his experience. **Compare:**

Uncourteous: You are requested to ship our order without any delay.

Courteous: Your prompt shipment of our order will be highly appreciated.

To be courteous, the communicator should follow these suggestions regarding tone and promptness of message.

- 1) Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful, and appreciative.
- 2) Omit expressions that irritate, hurt, or belittle.
- 3) Answer letters promptly

2. Consideration

Consideration emphasizes You-attitude rather than We-attitude. When writing a letter, keep in mind the reader's request, needs, desires, as well as his feelings. Plan the best way to present the message for the reader to receive.

A) Emphasize You-attitude

Compare:

1. **We-attitude:** We allow 2 percent discount for cash payment

You-attitude: You earn 2 percent discount when you pay cash.

2. **We-attitude:** We dispatched your camera yesterday.

You-attitude: Your camera was dispatched yesterday.

B) Focus on the positive approach

Compare:

1. **Positive:** We feel sure that you will be entirely satisfied

Negative: We don't believe you will have cause for dissatisfaction.

2. **Positive:** Perhaps next time we can send you what you require.

Negative: We regret our inability to serve you this time.

3. Completeness

A good business letter should be complete, providing all the information and data necessary for a specific issue. If any necessary piece of information is lacking, the reader will have to ask for clarification, which means that you will have to write another letter. It will not only waste time, energy and money, but also damage the image of your company.

A business letter should include all necessary information. It is essential to check the message carefully before it is sent out.

- 1) Check word spelling.
- 2) Check punctuation.
- 3) Check numbers.
- 4) Check names (spelling).

4. Clarity

You must get your message across, so that the readers will not misunderstand what you are trying to convey. To achieve this, you should keep in mind the purpose of the letter and use appropriate words in correct sentence structures to convey your meaning. You should also avoid ambiguous sentences. Otherwise, the business letter will cause trouble to both sides. **Compare:**

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

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

We have semimonthly direct sailing from Hong Kong to San Francisco.

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

All in all, good, straightforward and simple language is preferred.

- 1) Avoid using the words which have different understandings or unclear meanings.
- 2) Pay attention to the position of modifiers.

- 3) Pay attention to the sentence structure.
- 4) Paragraph carefully and properly.
- 5) One paragraph for each point is a good general rule

5. Conciseness

Conciseness means saying things in the fewest possible words. The elimination of wordy business jargon helps to make a letter clearer and at the same time more concise. If conciseness conflicts with courtesy, then make a concession to courtesy. **Compare:**

Wordy: Enclosed herewith please find two copies of. . .

Concise: We enclose two copies of. . .

Generally speaking, to achieve conciseness, one should try to avoid wordiness or redundancy.

- 1) Avoid using wordy expressions
- 2) Avoid unnecessary repetition.
- 3) Using short sentences, simple words and clear explanations: a) use a word to replace a phrase; b) use a phrase to replace a sentence; c) use words to replace clauses.

6. Concreteness

To make the message specific, definite and vivid is the key point of concreteness. The writer must ensure that the letter contains all the information the recipient needs to act upon. Put yourself in reader's place. **Compare:**

General: These disc brakes can stop a car within a short distance.

Concrete: These Audi disc brakes can stop a 5-ton car within 8 feet.

The following guidelines should help you write concretely:

- 1) Use specific facts and figures.
- 2) Put action in your verb.
- 3) Choose vivid, image-building words.

7. Correctness

Correctness here refers to appropriate and grammatically correct language, factual information and accurate reliable figures, as well as the right forms and conventions. All facts should be checked and double checked. Special attention should also be paid to names of goods, specification, quantity, figures, units, etc.

In its broadest sense, the term correctness, when applied to a business letter or report,

means that the writer should:

- 1) avoid grammatical and spelling mistakes in business letters.
- 2) avoid using overstatements.
- 3) try to use accurate numbers.

1.2 Structure of Business Letters

Business letters vary in format and content with their purposes. The tone can be formal or informal depending on the occasion. A business letter may be an invitation for a golfing date to a friend or an application for employment to a large corporation. Be sure to take an appropriate tone.

A business letter generally contains three parts: the introductory paragraph, the body and the conclusion. A brief introductory paragraph, setting a courteous stone, states the reason for writing the letter. The body of the letter, consisting of one or more paragraphs, develops the major point with ample supporting details. The conclusion should be short, thanking the reader for his or her attention and suggesting possibilities for further action. If the message is very brief—a congratulatory note or confirmation of a meeting—these points may be condensed into one paragraph or two.

Before sending the letter, be sure to proofread it carefully. If using a word processor, we may wish to check spelling with the computerized dictionary. Proofreading should be done slowly, letter by letter. Several readings are often necessary to catch all potential problems.

In the formal business letters, we usually use 12 factors (Occasionally, another two factors, namely multiple-page letter heading and mailing/in-house notations have to be used). They are letterhead, reference, date, inside address, attention line, salutation, subject line, body, complimentary close, signature, IEC block and postscript. Among them, the return address (letter head), date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary close and signature belong to the standard factors and must be contained in the formal business letters. Whether to use other factors depends on the specific situation. The approximate locations of these factors in a business letter are as follows:

Letterhead

Street address

City, State ZIP

Reference number**Date****Inside address**

Attention line**Salutation****Subject line****Body**

The text of a business letter is single-spaced with double spacing between paragraphs.

The left and right margins should be set as follows: two inches for short letters; one and a half inches. for medium-length letters; one inch for long letters.

The bottom margin should be at least one and a half inches or six lines.

Complimentary close**Signature****Initials****Enclosures****Carbon copy****Postscript**

While the horizontal placement of letter parts may vary, the vertical order of these parts is standard. The followings are the most common components and formats.

1.3 The Components of Business Letters

1. The Basic Components of Business Letters

- (1) Letterhead
- (2) Date
- (3) Inside Name and Address
- (4) Salutation
- (5) Body
- (6) Complimentary Close
- (7) Signature

2. Additional Components of Business Letters

- (1) Reference
- (2) Attention Line
- (3) Subject Line/Caption
- (4) Reference Initials
- (5) Enclosure Notation
- (6) Carbon Copy Notation
- (7) Postscript/P. S.
- (8) Multiple-Page Letter Heading
- (9) Mailing or In-house Notation

Letterhead For letters to outsiders, many companies use letterhead stationery which is professionally printed at the top of the page, though some are printed at the bottom or even at the upper-left corner of the page. The letterhead indicates the name, address, telephone, fax number and E-mail address of the company sending the letter. It helps the recipient identify just at a glance the company from which the sender comes. If letterhead stationery is not available, you can type the heading, which includes a return address, and leaves about a two-inch top margin.

Street

City, State ZIP

Reference The reference may include a file number, department code or the initials of the signer followed by that of the typist of the letter. Type the reference number below the letterhead in short form as “Our ref.,” for the sender’s reference number, and “Your ref.,” for the recipient’s. The purpose of this is to facilitate filing the letter, link it with previous correspondence.

Date Writing date in English goes in two styles: one is American style, and the other is British style. The standard order of typing the date in the U.S. is month, day, year. For example: September 11, 2012. While in Britain, the standard order is day, month, year. For example: 11 September, 2012. The day can be written or typed in either cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) or in ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.). The month and the year had better not be written in their abbreviation forms; otherwise, it may easily cause confusion. For example, 11/09/2012 in the U.S. would mean November 9, 2012, while in Britain it means 11 September, 2012.

There is no rule for the date placement. If you use letterhead stationery, place the date one to three blank lines beneath the letterhead. If the stationery lacks a letterhead, type the date under the city and state of the writer’s address.

英文信的日期位置位于信头和封内地址之间。日期的写法有三种：

A. 英式：日、月、年，如 24 (th) June, 2012

B. 美式：月、日、年，如 June 24, 2012

C. 英美通用：无逗号间隔，如 24 June 2012

注意：在书写日期时，日子和年份用数字，而月份则不能用数字。为什么日子和年份用数字，而月份则不能用数字呢？答案很简单，即使用数字表示日期往往发生误解，必须避免。如按照英式 11/9/2012 是指 2012 年 9 月 11 日，但改为美式则为 2012 年 11 月 9 日。如果没人告诉你是英式还是美式，你知道这是几月几日吗？无法猜测。除此之外，应避免用 Instant (本月)。在美式写法中，1st, 2nd, 3rd, 中的 st, nd, rd, th, 是不使用的，而在英国使用。如：

英：2 (nd) March, 2009

美：March 2 2009

Inside Name and Address Generally, the inside name and address should include some or all parts of the following: the name of the recipient, the department name, company name, suite or room number, street address, city, postcode, state/province and country. Of all these parts, postcode is very important, for it helps to facilitate mechanical mail-sorting. The inside name and

address appears on the left margin and usually starts two to four lines below the date. It appears exactly the same way as on the envelope.

If the receiver of the letter is in the U. S., the address also includes the name of the state which must be typed in capitalized two letter abbreviation followed by ZIP code. The same way is also used for the provinces and territories in Canadian address.

Precede the addressee's name with a courtesy title (such as Mr., Ms. or Dr.). If you do not know whether a person is a man or a woman, and you have no way to find out, omit the courtesy title and give the full name.

The person's job title can be placed on the same line of the person's name, or on the line below. Try to square the address as much as possible. If the title appears on the same line, place a comma between the name and the title. If it appears on the next line, dispense with the comma. e. g.:

① Mr. Dick Eaton, President

② Ms. Patricia T. Higgins

Assistant Vice President

If the name of a specific person is unavailable, you may address the letter to the department, followed by the name of the company. e. g.:

① Customer Service Department

Acme Construction Company

② Director of Personnel

International Trading Co., Ltd.

In order to avoid ambiguity, when you write letters to other countries, always include the name of country, even if the city mentioned is the country's capital.

The following examples show all the information that may be included in the inside address.

Dr. H. C. Armstrong
Research and Development
Commonwealth Mining Consortium
The Shelton Building, Suite 391
353 Second St. SW
Calgary, AB T2P
Canada

Mr. Thom Collins, President
164 Bay Road
Liquorland
Oklahoma City, OK 73125
U. S. A.

Attention Line The attention line is used to name the specific individual the letter is addressed to. It is usually placed between the inside address and the salutation or within the inside address and centered over the body of a letter in the indented style. Its abbreviation is Attn. . It suggests that the sender hopes the letter receives the immediate attention of a certain person or a specific department.

ABC Co., Ltd.
8F, 87, Sichuan N. Rd.,
Shanghai
Attention: Sales Division
Dear Sir or Madam:

Salutation The salutation is the polite greeting with which a letter begins. Place it two lines below the inside address. The salutation should correspond to the first line of the inside address, that is, if the first line of your inside address is a name of a person, the salutation is “Dear + the name”. Its form depends upon your relationship with the receiver.

The customary formal greeting in a business letter is “Dear Sir” or “Dear Madam” used for addressing one person; and “Dear Sirs”, “Dear Mesdames” or “Gentlemen” for addressing two or more people. If the addressee is known to you personally, a warmer greeting such as “Dear Mr. Smith” is preferred. Quite often now companies are owned and/or managed by women, and it is more and more customary to use the greeting: Dear Madam or Sir, if you are not sure whether the letter will be read by a man or a woman. If the addressee is a group, use “Ladies and Gentlemen”. Or you may use a polite description, such as “Dear Friends”, “Dear SPA supporters”. End the salutation with a colon, or a comma.

British style: Dear Sirs/Madame,

American style: Gentlemen/Ladies

Here is how respectful addressing is used in salutation:

Recipient		Respectful Addressing	Salutation
Male	Singular	Mr. (Mister) Dr. (Doctor)	Dear Sir Dear Mr. . . .
	Plural	Messrs. (Messieurs)	Dear Sirs Gentlemen
Female	Unmarried Singular	Miss	Dear Miss. . . Dear Madam
	Unmarried Plural	Misses	Dear Ladies Dear Madams/Mesdames
	Married Unmarried	Mrs. (Mistress)	Dear Mrs. . . . Dear Madame
	Married Plural	Mmes. (Mesdames)	Dear Ladies Dear Mesdames
	Married or Unmarried	Ms.	Dear Ms. Dear Madam

Subject Line/Caption The subject line is the general idea of a letter. It calls recipients' attention to the topic of the letter. It is often inserted between the salutation and the body of a letter, usually two lines below the salutation. It is also useful as a guide for filing. Some companies omit the word "Subject:", some replace it with "Re:" or "re:" (meaning "regarding"), and some underline the subject line. The following forms are commonly used:

SUBJECT: SALES CONFIRMATION NO. 5678 FOR 300MT OF SOYBEAN OIL

Subject: Sales Confirmation NO. 5678 for 300Metric Tons of Soybean Oil

Body This is the most important part of a letter. It expresses your idea, opinion, purpose and wishes, etc. It usually begins one or two lines below the salutation. Lines within a paragraph should be single-spaced and double-spaced between paragraphs. There is no strict rule regarding the content of the letter, but it usually includes three parts: the opening paragraph, the middle paragraph and the closing paragraph. The opening paragraph refers to any previous correspondence or introduces the purpose of the letter. The middle paragraph(s) supports the opening and/or provides additional information. The closing paragraph is short and serves as a request, suggestion, or look to the future. When writing, pay attention to courtesy, clarity, conciseness, consideration, completeness, concreteness and correctness.

Complimentary Close As does the salutation, the complimentary close reflects the relationship between writer and reader. Thus, the close should maintain the same tone as the salutation. If the