

EFFECTIVE BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

A Self-Instructional Text for Managers and for
Students of Advanced Business English

怎样写英文商业文书
——高级商业英语自学教材

Jane Plas 著

商务印书馆国际有限公司

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作 者	Jane Plas
责任编辑	钱王骊
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About the Author

The business career of the author extends over four countries—The Netherlands, Switzerland, Canada and China. In Canada she developed her long term career as a manager and senior executive with Canpotex Limited, the world's largest supplier of Canadian potash to export markets. During her final eight years she was its Director of Administration and Corporate Secretary. Beginning in 1992, she spent two years as a Professor of Business English and International Management at the University of International Business and Economics (UIBE), Beijing, China, under the auspices of Canpotex and China National Chemicals Import & Export Corporation (Sinochem). For a number of years prior to this assignment, she conducted management seminars on behalf of Sinochem at its Nan Dai He Training Centre.

On her retirement from Canpotex, she joined Sinochem as Senior Advisor, Training and Development, continuing her Business English and Management training programs, followed by a further teaching assignment with the Beijing Foreign Studies University. While in China, she also conducted a wide range of in-company training programs for Chinese and joint venture corporations.

The author's academic background includes a Bachelor of Arts degree (Modern Languages) from the University of Western Ontario (Canada). She is also a graduate of the Institute of Chartered Secretaries and Administrators in Canada.

Waterloo, Ontario Canada
1998

前言

学写有效的商业文书是学习商业英语学生的最大难点。写商业文书——不论是信函、报告还是办公室间的通报——是与学习单词、语法或句子结构完全不同的训练。商业文书涉及商业关系和管理功能的基本原理。在这方面,从理论上说,每一种商业文书都包括三大部份,各部份又分为三小部分。这部份的详细论述见“商业文书的基本原理”。

当你细察这些材料时,你的第一个反应可能是这种写作过程太费力,太消耗时间。的确,在开始的时候是要花费很多时间,但随着你开始练习写作并运用这些原则,不久你就会发现它们是很自然的过程,你开始问自己有关的问题,而无需真的把它们写在纸上。再者,并非所有的商业文书都涉及复杂的商业关系和问题。简单的信并不需要你有意识地去完成每个步骤。

为了使学生们了解所写的通信的商业背景,我们虚构了一个公司**坎多有限公司**(CDC),它是一个生产健身设备的公司,生产车间和办公室都设在中国北京。

在适当的场合,你将被赋予一个职衔,它反映在有关的商业背景下你所代表的部门或科室。

本书分四大部分:首先,在第一章中着重讲述商业文书的基本原理,这部分简要论述值得你认真学习。第二章简要考察了句子结构和段落。第三章提供给你一个练习写简明段落的机会。从第四章开始练习写涉及到各种问题的对外商业通信,紧接着是一节有关电信的简要论述。

对每一类书信,你应遵循**练习**(Assignment)中所给的基本原则。在作者认为可对学生的写作提供更多帮助的地方,作者加了一些具体的评论。在开头的一些练习中,学生只须在所画出的横线上填写缺少的词或短语。填完之后,应认真学习这些信的组织结构、所使用的语言、术语及表达方式。

从第十二章起,主要讲述内部函件,包括办公室间的通报、政策和程序(正式的和非正式的),随后有一节全面讲述报告的写法(第十七、十八章)。报告写作的基本理论对内部和外部通信都适用。

第十九章列出一些在内部商业环境下经常能听到的一些比喻、惯用语和表达法。当然还有很多没有列入,随着你商业文件阅读量的增加,你会有意识地去注意他们的使用和含义。

将要毕业的学生或寻求新的就业机会的职员会对“**附录**”、“**申请信和简历**”感到兴趣。

为了获得尽可能多的练习实践,你应独立地去完成所有规定的练习,然后再去查书后的答案。

有关书信、通知和电传格式的完整介绍,读者可参见商务印书馆国际有限公司出

版的作者本人所著的自学教材《商业英语入门》(An Introduction to Business English)。本书包含的只是书信和通知的标准格式(书信见第四章,通知见第十二章)。

通信是书信者本人的个性、感情和情绪的表达,因此没有两个人会写完全相同的信、通知或报告。由于这个原因,本书答案中所提供的信和其他函件的样本,只是书信者在特定情况下可能说些什么的示范。

虽然笔者曾尝试“用他人之笔”来写,但所有函件在很大程度上反映的仍是笔者本人的个性。因此经理和学生们应当考察它们的恰当性,而不应把它们看作是“惟一方式”。你的注意力应当主要放在清楚、简洁、礼貌的原则以及本书所使用的那些有用的词汇、习惯用语和表达法上。本书的答案部分在必要的地方加了一些注释,以对某些特殊的商业关系及讲英语的商业环境中常用的惯用语和表达法作些补充说明。

PREFACE

There is no more difficult task for the student of Business English than to learn to write effective business communications. Writing business communications, whether they be letters, reports, or inter-office memoranda, is a discipline entirely separate from learning vocabulary, grammar, or sentence structure. Business communications have to do with the underlying philosophy of business relations and the function of management. In this regard, theoretically each communication involves three components, which are then broken down into three further sub-components. These components are described in detail in Chapter 1, "The Underlying Philosophy of Business Writing".

When you review this material, your first reaction may be that this writing process is too laborious, that it takes too much time. It does take a great deal of time at the beginning. However, as you start practising your writing and applying these principles, you will soon find that they become automatic, that you start asking yourself the relevant questions without actually putting them down on paper. Moreover, not every business communication of course involves complex business relations or problems. Simple letters will not require that you consciously go through each step.

For the student's understanding of the business situations on which communications are to be written, we have created a fictional corporation, **Cando Corporation Limited (CDC)**, a manufacturer of fitness equipment. The Company's manufacturing plant and offices are located in Beijing, P.R. China.

Wherever applicable, you are provided with a function title, reflecting the department or division that you represent in the particular business situation described.

The book comprises four major components: First of all, in Chapter 1 we focus on the underlying philosophy of business writing, a summary that warrants your careful study. In Chapter 2, we review briefly the structure of the sentence and the paragraph. In Chapter 3, you are given an opportunity to practise your ability to write effective paragraphs. In Chapter 4, we begin writing letters to external business contacts on a wide variety of subjects, followed (in Chapter 11) by a brief section on Telecommunications.

For each category of letters you need to follow the guidelines provided in the Assignment. Specific additional comments are made where the author believes they may further help the student in writing his or her communication. In the first few assignments, the student is only required to fill in the missing words and phrases above the underscores provided. Once completed, these letters should be studied carefully for their organization, language and terminology used, and manner of expression.

Beginning with Chapter 12, we concentrate on internal communications, compris-

ing inter-office memoranda, policies and procedures (both informal and formal), followed by a comprehensive section on report writing (Chapters 17 and 18). The underlying theory of report writing applies to both internal and external communications.

Chapter 19 provides you with a list of metaphors, idioms and expressions that you will frequently hear in the international business environment. There are of course numerous others and you may wish to look out for their use and meaning as you increase your reading of business literature.

Students who are approaching graduation or employees seeking alternative employment opportunities will find the Addendum on Application Letters and Curriculum Vitae of interest.

For a maximum learning experience, you should attempt to complete all assignments on your own before consulting the Answer Key provided at the end of this textbook.

For a complete description and illustration of the formatting of letters, memoranda, and facsimile messages, you may wish to consult the Author's self-instructional textbook, *An Introduction to Business English*, published by The Commercial Press International Co., Ltd., Beijing, China. This text contains only a standard format for letters and memoranda. (For letters, see Chapter 4; for a memorandum form, see Chapter 12.)

Communications are an expression of an author's personality, feelings, and emotions. Therefore, no two authors will ever write exactly the same letter or message, memorandum, or report. Accordingly, the sample letters and other communications provided in the ANSWER KEY accompanying this text are merely examples of what the writer might say under the circumstances described.

Even though an attempt has been made to use the pen of other writers, all communications to a large degree reflect the personality of the author. Managers and students should therefore evaluate their adequacy and not accept them as *the only way*. You should focus primarily on the principles of clarity, conciseness, and courtesy, and on the useful vocabulary, idioms and expressions employed throughout. Wherever justified, the Answer Key includes supplementary notes explaining both the particular business relations concerned and the common idioms and expressions used in an English speaking business environment.

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CHAPTER 1

THE UNDERLYING PHILOSOPHY OF BUSINESS WRITING

Oral Versus Written Communications

When we speak to someone, various gestures and symbols can help us make our point. When we wish to be kind and courteous, we can speak softly; we can smile and bow. When we wish to express frustration or anger, we can raise our voice; we can even roar or scream in anger, not a very good idea of course under any circumstances.

When we speak we also receive immediate feedback. Our listener either uses the right words to express appreciation or chooses specific words to make his or her displeasure, disappointment, or anger known to us.

When we write, these **external stimuli** are missing. Also, and just as importantly, there is a delay in the feedback we receive. We have to wait until our communication is received, *how* it is received, and then answered. A third very important factor of course is that the written word cannot be recalled. When we speak and we use the wrong words or say the wrong thing, we can immediately apologize. We do not have that choice when we write. The written word can subsequently be used as a weapon against the writer.

It is for these reasons that our writing has to be precise, so precise that it conveys exactly what we wish to say and that it is received in exactly the manner we wish.

Words in themselves have no meaning. They derive their meaning from context and context is the total situation or circumstances within which the word is used. In this regard, dictionaries are useful but the user must have sufficient knowledge of the language to know which particular definition applies in any given situation.

We often speak of the “**denotative**” and “**connotative**” meaning of words. Denotative meanings relate to the real world, without the intrusion of listeners’ or readers’ feelings, emotions, or opinions. Connotative meanings arouse feelings, sometimes very strong feelings or emotions. They can therefore lead to misinterpretation of what we intended to convey. They often exist only in the mind of the reader and his or her particular interpretation of what we have said. They prompt judgments that may add to or detract from the denotative meaning of our words.

A few examples will illustrate these points.

DENOTATIVE MEANINGS

Aggressive (forceful energy)
 Eager (enthusiastic, keen)
 To be enthusiastic (keen)
 Concerned
 Depart, go, leave
 Be silent, be quiet
 To be unable to
 To use, take advantage of an opportunity
 Not available, having other commitments

CONNOTATIVE MEANINGS

Aggressive (combative readiness)
 Eager (impatient)
 To exaggerate one's efforts; trying too hard to impress
 Worried, appalled, disgusted
 Get out
 Shut up
 Cannot
 To cheat
 Not available, indicating lack of interest or cooperation

Our readers "filter" our words, i.e. they separate out words they do not wish to hear or, for any number of reasons, they may attach meanings that were not intended. Sometimes they will vary their interpretations depending on how they feel on any one day. If a customer is already unhappy about a certain situation and then receives a letter of apology from the supplier that is defensive in tone, it may simply increase his anger rather than pacify him.

Consequently, one has to adapt one's writing to each individual recipient and this requires constant reflection on the words or phrases we use.

Being precise in business writing also requires that we avoid abstract expressions whenever concrete information is available. Note the following examples:

ABSTRACT EXPRESSIONS

A sizeable profit
 The leading student
 The majority
 The minority
 In the near future
 As soon as possible
 By return

CONCRETE EXPRESSIONS

A profit of 10%
 Top student in a class of 20
 55%
 40%
 By Thursday (with or without date)
 No later than (date)
 By (specific day or date)

It is also best to use the **active voice** rather than the **passive voice** in writing, except in certain circumstances. The active voice is more direct and it usually allows the writer to reduce the number of words needed to make oneself clear. The passive voice is used only when the writer either does not know the performer of the action, believes it unwise or discourteous to identify the person, or when the reader would have no interest in knowing his or her identity.

Note the following examples:

ACTIVE VOICE

We will ship the goods next week.

We appreciate your cooperation.

We received your letter (Better: Thank you for your letter)

We have received your complaint and are taking corrective action.

PASSIVE VOICE

The goods will be shipped by us next week.

Your cooperation is appreciated.

Your letter has been received.

Your complaint has been received and corrective action will be taken by us.

There should be no disagreement on which of the two versions is the more effective in business writing.

Now note the following examples:

PASSIVE VOICE

An error was made in your invoice.

Our office was broken into overnight.

ACTIVE VOICE

The typing clerk made an error in your invoice.

A thief broke into our office overnight.

In the first sentence, no useful purpose is served by pointing the finger at the typing clerk. Therefore, only the passive voice is appropriate. In the second sentence, the fact that it was a thief who broke into the office is obvious. Therefore, the passive voice is preferred.

In our writing, we should also avoid so-called “**rubber stamps**”. These are repetitive statements or comments that lose their meaning when they are used indiscriminately and, worse, when they are used in situations where they do not apply. A few typical examples of rubber stamps are:

*If we can be of further assistance,

*Please advise.

*Best regards.

*We are at your service.

Sincerity, saying what we mean and meaning what we say, is the hallmark of good business writing. Never exaggerate with expressions such as the following:

*You are one of the few capable of making a judgment

*We are extremely pleased to welcome you

*No one is more intelligent than

*We deeply appreciate your order etc.

Never lecture or preach to the recipients of your communications with wording such as:

*We suggest that you

*You had better

*You must know that

*You ought to realize that

Except in rare circumstances, it is unwise to show anger in one's writing by using adjectives such as: *angry*, *frustrated*, *extremely upset*, *appalled*, etc. In other words, never lose your temper.

In summary, always try to form a **mental visual image** of your reader sitting on the other side of your desk. Then bring your writing to life, with courtesy and distinction by means of the words you choose, taking into account the following principles:

- *Use active rather than passive voice
- *Use concrete rather than abstract words or phrases
- *Use adjectives sparingly
- *Always be precise
- *Do not exaggerate
- *Do not lecture or preach
- *Never lose your temper

A Writing Strategy

The graph on the page that follows this Section illustrates the three major components of any business communication: subject material, recipient (the person receiving your communication), and the author. You will note that the three circles are linked together. The three sub-components of each circle are also inter-connected as each reflects and is reflected by the other.

The following summary discusses each of these components in turn.

You begin with your **subject material** and first of all focus on your **objective**:

Why are you writing? What are you attempting to accomplish by doing so? Are you seeking or providing information? Are you explaining a situation or requesting an explanation? Are you granting or refusing a request? Are you writing to congratulate, express thanks, or extend condolences? Are you trying to collect an overdue account or are you asking for an extension of credit? Are you complaining or praising? Are you selling or buying? In each business situation, you will be asking yourself this type of question.

The second component, your **strategy**, has to do with the plan or method you will use to reach your goal. It means asking yourself the question of how to go about writing your communication and deciding which facts and factors are relevant to the subject you wish to discuss.

Once you have decided on your strategy, you then move to the third component. You **plan** in detail your approach: Your content, order of priority, what to include, and what to exclude.

The next major step is to look at your **recipient**, the person who is to receive your communication. What is your **relationship** to this person or company? Is he or she (or it) a customer, a supplier, an acquaintance or business associate, friend or foe, a new contact, a job applicant, your boss, or your subordinate?

Your relationship to the recipient of your communication will determine to a great extent the manner in which you write, the words or phrases you choose, the length of your communication, and its formality and protocol.

Once you have determined this relationship, you **organize** your communication. Your organization involves (1) an introduction, in which you capture the subject material that has prompted you to write; (2) a record or discussion of the detail, i.e. the fundamental components of your subject in a logical order; and (3) either a summary statement, a recommendation, or a conclusion.

It is the **communications** component that often presents a problem for students: Where to begin, how to organize, and how to lead into the recommendation or conclusion. Try to visualize the recipient sitting across the desk from you; then determine what you would say, in which order, if you had the advantage of oral communication.

The complexity of your subject material will determine the number of paragraphs you need to put your message across. Once you have covered the substance, you need to end with a finishing sentence or two. *How* you end your communication will again depend on your objective. You either make a re-statement, a final appeal for acceptance of your suggestions, or you make a recommendation. In simple communications, your ending is sometimes merely a *finishing touch*. You must avoid *afterthoughts*: new ideas that should have been covered in the substance of your communication.

The third major component is the **Author**. It focusses on three sub-components: **adequacy**, **sensitivity**, and **control**.

You have now completed your communication and you need to determine whether it meets your objective (your reason for writing). Will it serve your purpose?

The only way in which you can determine its **adequacy** is by re-visiting your **relationship** to the recipient: Will he or she be willing or able to respond to your communication in the way you would like?

Sensitivity has to do with feelings and emotions; it has little or nothing to do with business reason. Consequently, you now need to review your **vocabulary**—the words you have chosen—and the manner in which you have expressed yourself.

Have you been businesslike, courteous and thoughtful, kind and sincere, or have you been thoughtless, blunt, or patronizing?

Have you lectured or preached to the recipient? Even though disturbed or angry, have you held your temper and not shown your anger? Have you avoided exaggeration and restricted yourself to the facts?

The final component is **control**. Control is the essential complement to **planning**. It is the function of control that allows you to determine whether your communication is in harmony with your original plan. The essence of control is **feedback**, i.e. the reaction or response your communication is going to produce.

Your knowledge of business and human relations and your sensitivity to organizational and authority relationships will enable you to judge whether you will accomplish what you set out to do. In other words, they will determine whether your communication will prompt the response that meets your objective.

Appendix: Graph for Writing Strategy

CHAPTER 2

THE WRITTEN COMPOSITION

The Sentence

Each sentence expresses a thought and sentences, clearly written and in the right order, give an indication of clear and orderly thinking. However, individual sentences do not move on their own. Therefore, we need “bridges” to move from one to the next sentence and these bridges are formed by conjunctions, phrases, or simply words.

Effective sentences have certain characteristics. For example, each sentence must have unity, continuity in purpose and action. One must not start with one thought and then abruptly change to another. One must also have unity in verb tense, in the use of singular or plural nouns and pronouns with singular and plural verb forms.

Sentences must also show development whereby one moves from the general to the specific. One writes a topic sentence and then substantiates or illustrates that topic with supporting details. Sentences must have proper emphasis, i.e. they should vary in length, whereby a strong statement is followed by subordinate thoughts.

The Paragraph

A paragraph can be made up of one sentence, particularly at the end of one's communication. Usually, however, a paragraph is a series of sentences that make up a complete unit. Whereas one sentence should contain only one thought, paragraphs may contain several thoughts.

One paragraph, however, should deal with only one idea or notion. A paragraph should also be able **to stand on its own**. This characteristic requires that one must always complete the presentation of one idea before going on to the next. One should never force a reader to either “backtrack” or look to subsequent paragraphs to determine meaning, to fill in missing detail, or to seek clarification.

Since paragraphs are made up of sentences, it follows that they, too, must have unity, continuity, and emphasis.

The task of writing paragraphs becomes easy when the sentences that make up the paragraph are well written. All the writer needs to be concerned with when writing paragraphs is to find the right pattern, which is usually a topic sentence that introduces the subject, a logical arrangement of the content, and transitions to move from one sentence to the next.

When writing more than one paragraph, transitions are often also required between paragraphs for the same reason, i.e. to move logically from one paragraph to the next. Transitions are **bridges** that enable the writer to create a logical flow from one thought or idea to the next.

The problem students sometimes encounter is that they are not sure which transitional word or words to use. To help solve this problem, therefore, you will find immediately below a whole series of transitions (called terms) that may be used in particular situations.

Terms moving from one point to another:

And, also, besides, moreover, another, in addition, further, furthermore

Terms showing similarity:

Similarly, likewise, equally, in other words

Terms showing differences between ideas:

But, yet, however, nevertheless, nonetheless, despite, in spite of, on the other hand, even though, although, whereas, on the contrary, otherwise, conversely, while

Terms showing cause and effect:

Because, for, since, as a result, consequently, therefore, then, thus, of course, hence

Terms introducing examples:

For example, for instance, namely, to illustrate, such as, particularly, in particular, specifically

Terms expressing emphasis:

Especially, particularly, in particular, mainly, primarily, chiefly, most importantly

Terms showing relations in time, space, and importance:

At the same time, simultaneously, in the meantime, meanwhile, subsequently, until now (hitherto), foremost, formerly, at present, presently, beyond, above, around, behind, before, after, then, in the distance, to the left, to the right, right in front, ahead

Terms indicating stages:

Initially, at the outset, at the beginning, to begin with, from the beginning, from the start, up to now, so far, until now, until recently

Terms anticipating a conclusion:

In summary, to sum up, in conclusion, lastly, finally, before closing

Varying Methods of Writing

Even when writing only one paragraph, one can use a variety of methods:

- (1) The **deductive** method (stating the main point first, followed by supporting detail);
- (2) The **inductive** method (presenting supporting detail first, leading up to the