

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

**Practical written English for the
modern business world**

Cynthia Beresford



**BBC English by Radio & Television
World Publishing Corporation**

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Introductory Note

This book is intended for anyone who handles business communication in English.

It can be used for self study or classroom work, either individually or in groups. It assumes a knowledge of English to at least Intermediate level.

By using a series of clear models and exercises, the book illustrates the language needed for different communicative functions. It demonstrates the use of both formal and informal register.

The models are based on authentic situations, and are followed by systematic revision and vocabulary building exercises.

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How to use this book

These notes are intended for students working on their own. Teachers will find some suggestions for using the book in class just before the key.

Before you start work

First of all, look at the Contents, familiarising yourself with the business topics covered. Then skim quickly through the entire book. You will see that each unit includes:

- Models for letters, memos, reports and other standard written forms covering a wide range of business situations. These models have often been adopted from actual documents
- Common phrases, selected to be as useful as possible in a wide range of contexts
- Exercises practising either language points or business terms.

Working through a unit

a. Understanding the model

Before starting to write, you need to understand written business English. Look at some of the model letters. They often have questions besides them, which are intended to increase your powers of comprehension by focusing your attention on specific points. Study these questions, and try to ask similar ones when you receive letters at work. You will soon find it easier to understand both the structure and content of the letter or document. (What is its purpose? Is it a standard reply – or a letter of application?) and the implications. You will learn how to 'read between the lines'.

It is important to understand what the person writing to you *really* means. For instance, is the tone formal or informal? Recognising different degrees of formality is discussed in Unit 1. Business letters carry factual information. But they may also, like personal letters, convey information about the quality of the business

relationship between two firms. Suppose you have an old and valued customer who happened to be late with a payment. It would be wrong to write a really angry letter. Instead, you could convey your irritation more subtly by adopting a more formal tone than usual.

b. Practising the language

When you have fully understood one of the models, look at the phrases which follow it. Could you use them in letters of your own? Now turn to the exercises. They take several different forms:

- filling in blanks with appropriate phrases
- writing something similar to the model
- language practice and use of common business phrases
- précis e.g. turning a letter into a telex.

Many of the exercises have answers in the key at the back of the book.

When you have finished

Remember to revise at regular intervals, one week and one month after finishing a unit. If you do this, you will be surprised at how much you can remember. But without revision you are likely to forget and so waste the effort you have put in. Revision need not take long, it's just a question of reminding yourself what was in the unit. However, in your initial work and your revision you will need a dictionary.

Choosing a dictionary

A good monolingual dictionary is an essential aid to anyone studying a language. Bi-lingual dictionaries can be helpful but their use is limited. Small pocket dictionaries can actually be misleading.

When choosing a dictionary check:

- Does it contain a clear guide to how to use the dictionary?
- Does it give alternative meanings as well as the definition?

- Is an American/English equivalent given when necessary? What about American spellings?
- Is there a clear example of the word in context?
- Can you tell if the word in question is formal, informal or slang?

Recognising when to use a particular word is one of the skills practised in this book.

Dealing with new words

When you meet a new word, first of all try to predict what it means. Look for clues. This can be done by asking yourself the following questions.

- 1) What is the context of the word?
- 2) What part of speech is it? For example, 'we can bid' (verb) or 'we can make a bid (noun) for a contract'.
- 3) Can you recognise and understand the root of the word?
- 4) What does the prefix or the suffix indicate?

Decide whether it is important to know the *exact* meaning. If it is not preventing you from understanding the gist of the text, carry on reading. Return later to the unknown word and then consult your dictionary. Note the context, the negative forms, synonyms and any interesting uses or idioms.

How to get the most out of your dictionary

Learn to say and use the alphabet quickly. Check that you are pronouncing the letter correctly. This will help you to find words quickly. Refer to the head words in the top left and top right hand corners of each page.

It is important that you understand the meaning of the symbols, abbreviations and the different typefaces used. This is **bold**, this is *italic*.

Make a special effort to understand, recognise and practice using the phonetic and stress symbols. When you have learnt a new word, check the number of syllables and the pronunciation. Say it aloud to yourself and put it into a sentence. Note what happens to it when it is used as a noun, and when it is used as a verb. Note if the stress changes.

- 1) Get a supply of small cards, about the size of visiting cards.
- 2) When you find a new word or phrase which is important, write it in the centre of the card.
- 3) Write the definition in your own language on the reverse side.
- 4) Make personal notes on the face of the card.

Accumulate a pack of cards (hold them together with an elastic band). These can be slipped into your pocket and be referred to at odd moments of the day. As you learn each card, exchange it for a new one. This way you can build up your own personal dictionary.

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An exercise on formal and informal phrases.
- B. Opening and closing phrases for different kinds of letters.
Establishing the tone of a letter.
Exercise on beginning and ending a letter.
- C. A memo.
Exercise on phrasal verbs.
Exercise on file memos.
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- B. Composing a standard letter and report, note taking, summarising.
- C. Form filling, letters of application and refusal.

General notes to the Teacher

Key

UNIT 1

In this Unit you will find:

- A. Formal and informal letters confirming an invitation
- B. Opening and closing phrases establishing the tone of a letter
- C. Memos
- D. Telexes

A1 A formal letter confirming an invitation

Here is a formal letter from the Managing Director of an international company written to an important customer whom he has never met. Read it carefully. Use the information given in this letter to complete the informal letter which follows.

Dear Mr. Comelli,

Proposed Visit - October 19th/20th

We are delighted to know that you will be in Greece on October 19th. This is to confirm our telephone conversation. We shall meet you at Athens airport at 1530. By coincidence, our Scandinavian agent, Mrs. Larssen, is on the same flight.

We have reserved a room for you at the Grand Hotel for the 19th and 20th. The Heads of Department will join us for dinner which has been arranged for 2100 on the 20th.

In view of your other commitments, we will endeavour to cover the complete programme in one day. Here is a suggested timetable.

- 0930 Review last year's results
- 1000 Evaluate new products
- 1030 Determine price levels for new season
- 1100 Coffee
- 1115 Finalise promotional activities
- 1215 Negotiate renewal of agency contract (Lunch)
- 1430 Visit Quality Control laboratory to settle Spring Hotel's complaint (in Quality Control lab.)
- 1530 Discuss long-term Research and Development
- 1600 Inspect new high-speed factory unit

I realise it is a very full programme, but there will be an opportunity to discuss outstanding matters in a more relaxed atmosphere over dinner.

I look forward to meeting you on the 19th.

Yours sincerely,

C. Ioannou

An informal letter

Anna Larssen is an agent who has known Mr Ioannou for many years. She is on the same flight as Mr Comelli. Fill in the gaps in the letter below. Choose from the list of words in the margin.

- a. tie up (this means to finalise)
- b. into
- c. pick you up
- d. booked
- e. laid on
- f. chance

Dear Anna,

We are very pleased that you will be here with us for the session on the 20th. We can certainly⁽¹⁾..... at the Airport at 1530. Quite by⁽²⁾..... our Italian agent, Antonio Comelli, of the Albani Group, will be on the same flight. We have⁽³⁾..... you both⁽⁴⁾..... the Grand Hotel, and we have⁽⁵⁾..... dinner at 2100 for nine of us on the 20th. I know you have a tight schedule, so we will try to cover everything in the one day. There will be time to⁽⁶⁾..... any loose ends over dinner.

A2 Formal and informal language

Compare the informal language Mr Ioannou used in his letter to Anna Larssen with the more formal language in his letter to Mr Comelli.

'We shall meet you at the airport.'

'We can certainly pick you up at the airport.'

'By coincidence our Scandinavian agent, Mrs Larssen, is on the same flight.'

'Quite by chance our Italian agent, Antonio Comelli of the Albani Group, will be on the same flight.'

'The Heads of Department will join us for dinner, which has been arranged for 2100 on the 20th.'

'We have laid on dinner at 2100 for nine of us on the 20th.'

'We have reserved a room for you at the Grand.'

'We have booked you into the Grand.'

on a flight

Notice that you book someone *into* a hotel

through to New York (e.g. from Athens via Rome to New York)

Note how the formal letter in A1 contains a higher proportion of words which are Latin in origin, such as

'delighted' 'coincidence' 'commitments' 'endeavour'

Note how the second letter in A1 has a higher proportion of Anglo-Saxon words or phrasal verbs which makes the tone less formal, such as

'pick up' 'laid on' 'tie up' 'try' 'chance'

B1 Opening and closing phrases for different kinds of letters

The opening and closing phrases are important as they establish the tone of your letter. The following examples would appear in a formal, impersonal letter.

Dear Madam, Note that the writer does not know the addressee's name nor has he taken the trouble to find it.

Unless we hear from 'Unless' is sometimes followed by a threat.

Yours faithfully, 'Yours faithfully' is only written when the salutation is 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam'. It is formal and distant.

B2 Establishing the tone of a letter

Look at the beginnings and endings of the following four letters and fill in the answers below. When you have decided the main purpose of the letter place a tick (✓) in the appropriate column.

Purpose of the letter:

to	1	2	3	4
inform				
apologise				
threaten				
sympathise				

- 1 Dear Mr Craig,
I am writing to advise you that your account is now so
that the situation can be rectified
Yours sincerely,

Note the formal language which creates distance even though the recipient's name is used.

- 2 Dear Mrs Ghosh,
We were very sorry to receive your letter about
In the meantime, please accept our sincere apologies for the
inconvenience we may have caused.
Yours sincerely,

Note how this letter is formal but an effort has been made to sound friendly.
(very sorry – please accept – we may have caused)

- 3 Dear Mr Alexis,
Are you aware that your car has been parked in front of
I shall have to take the matter further
Yours truly,

Starting with a question makes this very blunt. The writer ends with a threat. By signing 'Yours truly', even though he knows Mr Alexis, makes the letter very cold and formal.

- 4 Dear Mrs Klein,
I've only just heard the sad news
Please let me know if there is anything I can do to help. I'll
phone you next week.
With our best wishes,

By the use of contraction (I've – I'll) and the ending, this letter is informal and friendly.

B3 Exercises in beginning and ending your letter

The opening and closing sentences of the following examples have been separated. Match up the extracts which belong together.

- | | |
|--|---|
| (a) Dear
On Friday we're having a few friends round
to our place for drinks | (i) I will do all I can but you must know you
have left it very late.
Yours sincerely,
Andy Park |
| (b) Dear Sue,
Thank you for your letter of the 5th. I
really do think you should have told me
..... | (ii) Our very best wishes for the future.
Very sincerely yours,
Margaret Melville |
| (c) Dear Sirs,
You will surely agree that we have been
very patient about | (iii) about 8.30. I hope you can make it.
Yours,
Olga |
| (d) Dear Ms Vango,
Congratulations – we heard today that you
..... | (iv) Thank you once again.
Yours sincerely,
Paul |
| (e) Dear Mrs Petersen,
It was kind of you to | (v) If we do not have all the details of the On
Board Bill of Lading by 28th October we
shall have to cancel the order.
Yours faithfully,
A J Agnew |

When you have matched the examples, decide what the purpose of each letter is.

C1 A memo

Inter-office memos differ from ordinary letters. They are written to people within one company. They follow the basic principles of letter-writing. They are usually more direct, concise and less formal than letters. The opening and closing phrases are omitted. The following memo was sent to the various Heads of Department by Mr Ioannou after he had written to Mr Comelli.

To: JJ Sales
AKM Accounts
IL Advertising
PJB Legal
JD R & D
NC Production

Date: Sept. 1st
From: C. Ioannou (MD)

Subject : Proposed visit of Mr. Comelli - 19th October

Mr. Comelli is the Import Manager for the entire Albani Group. He will spend all day in the plant on 20th October. His programme is as follows:

Time	Subject	Participants
0930	Look through last year's results	AKM JJ CI
1000	Weigh up new products	JJ NC IL CI
1030	Work out price levels for new products	AKM JJ CI
1100	Coffee	
1115	Tie up promotional activities	IL NC JJ
1215	Fix up renewal of agency contract	PJB JJ
	Lunch	
1430	Visit Quality Control lab to sort out Spring Hotel's complaint in Quality Control lab.	AKM JD JJ CI
1530	Talk over long-term Research & Development	JJ JD CI
1600	Look over new high-speed packaging unit	

All meetings will take place in my office unless specified to the contrary. Will participants please brief me in writing before October 14th?

I hope you will all be able to join us for dinner at the Grand. A table has been booked for 2000 hours.

Note how positive Mr Ioannou is in his memo. The language used is direct, concise and less formal than in his letter to Comelli in A1.

C2 Phrasal verbs

Compare the schedule given in the memo in C1 with the one given to Mr Comelli in A1. What are the one word equivalents of the following phrasal verbs? You will find them all in the original timetable in A1.

To look through
weigh up
work out
tie up
fix up
sort out
talk over
look over

C3 File memos

Records of telephone calls, visits, conversations, should be kept in File memos. The Director of the Research & Development Department wrote the following memo when he returned from his holiday.

Fill in the gaps, choosing from the prepositions in the margin on the left. Some prepositions may have to be used more than once.

over
with
in
at
on
for
by
of

Date: 28th August
From: LK (R & D)
File: C 27
Subject: Albani - Milan

Whilst ⁽¹⁾..... holiday ⁽²⁾..... Zurich last month, I met
Mr & Mrs Abate ⁽³⁾..... chance. They were also guests
⁽⁴⁾..... the Royal. Mr. A. is Catering Manager ⁽⁵⁾.....
Springs Hotel (some time ago merged ⁽⁶⁾..... Albani).
Not knowing who I was, the possibility ⁽⁷⁾.....
Albani now being taken ⁽⁸⁾..... was mentioned. No
names were quoted but indicated he knew who it was.

Action: Check: 1. Are Albani looking ⁽⁹⁾..... an
opening ⁽¹⁰⁾..... this market?
2. What inside information does
AKM have?

Note another way of expressing:

As he did not know who I was, he mentioned

★ Not knowing who I was, he mentioned

As I did not understand what to do I asked

★ Not understanding what to do I asked

D1 Telex

Telex is one of the most efficient forms of business communication. It provides a written record, it is immediate, economical and can be sent even when the receiving office is shut. Rates are calculated according to the time taken to transmit the message.

HINTS

- ★ When you wish to write a telex, make a draft of what you wish to say and underline the important words which carry the main points.
- ★ Group questions together.
- ★ Start a new line or new paragraph when you change the subject.
- ★ Do *not* abbreviate if you doubt the recipients' knowledge of English.

Here is Mr Comelli's telex in reply to Mr Ioannou's letter of invitation in A1.

ATTN C IOANNOU
THIS IS TO CFM DET IN YR LTR 18TH AUG.
TKS FOR YR OFFER OF HOSPITALITY.
WE ACCEPT WITH PLEASURE.
RE. SCHEDULE - O.K. I SUGGEST WE ALSO
DISCUSS IMPENDING CHANGES TO LOCAL
FOOD & DRUG LAW. I LOOK FWD TO MEETING
YOU ON 19TH.
REGARDS COMELLI

Notice these telex abbreviations.

ATTN	for the attention of
CFM	confirm
DET	details
YR	your
LTR	letter
TKS	thanks
FWD	forward
RYT or RE YR TLX	referring to your telex

D2 Making a discreet enquiry

Only Mr Comelli was expected. In his telex he refers to 'we'. Who is coming with him? His wife, his boss, a colleague?

Read the following telexes carefully. Which is the most polite and tactful – A, B or C?

A

RE YR TLX 27TH. ADVISE US DETAILS OF
YR HOTEL REQUIREMENTS.
BRING ALL AVAILABLE INFO. RE FOOD/
DRUG LAW.
REGARDS.

B

RE YR TLX 27TH. REGRET WE DO NOT
UNDERSTAND YOU.
WHO IS COMING WITH YOU?
WE MUST SEE NEW REGULATIONS RE
FOOD & DRUG LAW.

C

TKS FOR YR TLX 27TH.
PLEASE BRING ALL INFO. RE FOOD/DRUG
LAW.
MAY WE ASSUME YOUR WIFE WILL JOIN US
FOR DINNER? PLEASE CONFIRM. REGARDS

Note that in A the use of the imperatives 'Advise' and 'Bring' is demanding. In B the direct question and the use of 'must' are very forceful, but in C efforts have been made to be polite and tactful. 'May we assume' is a polite way of saying 'we assume'.

D3 A telex

Mr Ioannou telexes a business acquaintance in Milan to ask about the rumour mentioned in C3.

Note how the following sentence has been abbreviated:

The Director has recently heard rumours about one of their large customers, Albani, being taken over.

CONFIDENTIAL

HAVE HEARD RUMOUR ABOUT ALBANI
BEING TAKEN OVER

Now abbreviate the following.

Mr Ioannou would like his friend in Milan to investigate the company's background. It must be done with discretion and Mr Ioannou also assures his friend he would treat any report in confidence.

PLEASE (1) (2) (3) DISCREETLY
(4) YOU ANY REPORT (5) (6)
CONFIDENTIALLY.

D4 Here is the reply Mr Ioannou received from Milan

CONFIDENTIAL

WITH REF YR TLX 18.8 ALBANI UNLIKELY TO BE TAKEN OVER.
FAMILY WISH REMAIN CONTROL. THEY DO NOT APPEAR SHORT
OF CAPITAL. NO REASON WHY YOU CANNOT CONTINUE TRADING.
WILL CONTACT IF FURTHER NEWS.
REGARDS.

Change this telex to a letter. Include the following phrases of reassurance:

As far as I can see (taken over).

At present there is no need for concern
(family maintain control).

I can assure you (not short of capital).

If I hear anything to the contrary I will contact you.