

English Writing

— Letters, Applications and Certificates

英语写作

信函·申请·证件

主编 余宝珠



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【内容简介】 本书精选了英语应用文写作中几种主要的类型,对业务书信、社交信函、证件函件等加以介绍,从写作方法、语言特点、标准格式等方面进行论述,并提供了各类文章的样本及写作练习,重点放在实践。本书不仅是高校英语应用文写作的教材,还可为从事外事、外贸、外企的工作人员及其他涉外人员和英语学习者提供切实帮助,可谓一册在手,方便实用。

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前 言



《英语写作——信函·申请·证件》(English Writing—Letters, Applications and Certificates)与《英语写作——遣词·造句·组段》(English Writing—Words, Sentences and Paragraphs)和《英语写作——段落·短文》(English Writing—From Paragraph to Essay)为系列英语写作教程。本书不仅可作高校英语应用文写作教材,还可为从事外事、外贸、外企的工作人员及其他涉外人员和英语学习者提供切实的帮助。可谓一册在手,方便实用。

编写本书,旨在适应中国社会主义市场经济下广大英语学习者学习与工作、谋职与深造等不同场合对英语应用文写作的新需求。在中国加入WTO后,这种需求将越来越大。因此,本书特精选了目前英语应用文中使用最为广泛和频繁的几种主要类型,如业务书信、社交信函、电子函件、电话传真通讯、留学申请及请柬、证件等,对其分别进行介绍。从写作方法、语言特点、标准格式等方面逐一详细说明,并提供了各类文章的样本及写作练习。理论技巧阐述简明扼要、易于把握;范例典型、新颖,能够代表不同层次不同领域的现行应用文模式;练习形式多样,数量和难度适中,可操作性强。

本书由余宝珠教授任主编。编写工作按参编人员的姓氏笔画排列分工如下:

王 锋 第三、四、八、九、十章;

田德新 第一、二、七章;

余宝珠 第五、六章。

在编写过程中,西北工业大学出版社和西安外国语学院英语系的众多同仁给予了极大的鼓励和支持,在此谨表感谢。同时对所参阅的大量国内外书籍的作者致以深切的谢意。

限于水平及其他客观原因,本书难免有疏漏之处,敬请各位英语界前辈、同行和读者不吝赐教,予以指正。

编著者

1999年10月

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Chapter One



Introduction to Letter Writing

What Is Letter Writing

As an important means of communication, letter writing is the expression of ideas and thoughts in written form. Everyone has the need to communicate either orally or on paper. A letter is a visit on paper, which is usually the first and foremost step for successful communication. Just as an executive states, "If the ideas are not presented well on paper, the chances are that the writer will never get a chance to present them orally." This is especially true in the present world where interviews might take place only after effective letters of introduction or application are received. Therefore, letter writing still remains a surviving skill whose roles cannot be easily replaced by telephone or telegram, fax or telex.

In fact, letter writing is still playing an important part in personal affairs, the social life and business transactions. In personal affairs, you write home and expect family letters to bridge any distance. You receive and answer letters from and of friends, relatives and teachers to ensure closer intimacy and further understanding. What's more, you write love letters to win

affection and inspire love. In the social life, there are more occasions on which letters are written. For example, letters of application and recommendation are written to hunt for jobs or university seats. For another example, letters of thanks, congratulations and condolences are written to show gratitude, pleasure and sympathy respectively. For still another example, both formal and informal invitations and announcements are made for various reasons on different social occasions. In business transactions, letter writing is perhaps of the most importance. On the one hand, a very large amount of the business of the present world is still conducted by means of correspondence. On the other hand, letters are regarded as the most authoritative and trustworthy written documents of reference. In a sense, a business letter initiates or transacts business. It is written to establish business relations, to make inquiries or orders, and to ask for credit standing or raise claims, etc.

Therefore, it can be safely said that in the present world of high-tech and global communication, letter writing is still an essential skill to master for not only English major students at school but also English learners in the society as well. To obtain this essential skill and bring the functions of letter writing into full play, you may start by familiarizing yourselves with the types, forms and parts of English letters.

Types of English Letters

English letters may be classified into different types according to different criteria. Generally speaking, English letters are divided into personal correspondence and business correspon-

dence. The former is made up of letters you write to your families and relatives, friends and lovers, and teachers and seniors. The latter refers to letters in-between companies, and between companies and individuals, usually concerning big or small business affairs or significant social matters. From the point of view of uses or functions, English letters can be further categorized into personal correspondence, social correspondence and business correspondence, which will be dealt with in detail in the present text-book. As far as the style is concerned, most personal correspondence and some social correspondence are often informal while some other social correspondence and most business correspondence are usually formal. Thus, English letters may be grouped into either two types: personal and business or formal and informal or three types: personal, social and business, according to the three different criteria.

Forms of English Letters

In general, English letters take three forms: the blocked form, the indented form and the modified form.

The blocked form includes the full-blocked form and the modified blocked form. The former has all the letter's elements flush against the left-hand margin, and the first line of each paragraph is not indented. The latter is the same as the former with three exceptions: the heading, the complimentary close and the signature are placed on the right side of the page.

Example One

The full-blocked form:

Department of English
Xi'an Foreign Language University
Xi'an, Shaanxi 710061
China

10 February 1998

Mr. Ronald Purvis
Department of Education
Michigan State University
East Lansing, MI 48824
USA

Yours sincerely,

...

(Signature)

The indented form has each line in the heading and the inside address indented 2 to 3 letters. Besides, the beginning of each paragraph is indented 5 letters.

The indented form:

The modified form is a combination of the modified blocked form and the indented form. It takes the same form as the former in the heading and the inside address, the complimentary close and the signature. And it is the same as the latter in the body of the letter.

Example Three

The modified form:

| |
|--|
| Department of English Xi'an Foreign Language University Xi'an, Shaanxi 710061 China |
| 10 February 1998 |
| Mr. Ronald Purvis Department of Education Michigan State University East Lansing, MI 48824 USA |
| _____ |
| _____ |
| Yours sincerely, ... (Signature) |

Parts of English Letters

The parts that usually appear in an English letter are 1) the heading, 2) the inside address, 3) the salutation, 4) the body, 5) the complimentary close, 6) the signature, 7) the enclosure, and 8) the postscript.

The heading is the section that tells the address of the writer and the date. The inside address is the section telling to whom the letter is addressed. The salutation is your complimentary greeting, such as "Dear sir," or its equivalent. The body of the letter is the message you are sending, which has as many

paragraphs as there are topics concerning the message. The complimentary close says “good-bye” with phrases like “Sincerely yours,” and “Yours truly”. The signature includes the handwritten signature and the typed signature. The enclosure indicates that the envelope contains additional material, and the postscript refers to your afterthoughts.

Example

| | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| HEADING→ | 1201 Linwood Avenue Peoria, Illinois 61650 |
| | February 16, 1997 |
| | ← <i>Four Spaces</i> |
| Wakey Products, Inc. | |
| 1401A Grand Avenue | ← INSIDE ADDRESS |
| Detroit, Michigan 48239 | |
| | ← <i>Two Spaces</i> |
| Gentlemen: | ← SALUTATION |
| | ← <i>Two Spaces</i> |
| BODY→ | _____ |
| | _____ |
| | ← <i>Two Spaces</i> |
| | _____ |
| | ← <i>Two Spaces</i> |
| COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE→ | Sincerely yours, |
| | ← <i>Four Spaces</i> |
| HANDWRITTEN SIGNATURE→ | |
| TYPED SIGNATURE→ | Mun C. Tsang |
| | ← <i>Two Spaces</i> |
| Enc. | ← ENCLOSURE |

How to Write Good English Letters

Having learned the types, forms and parts of English letters, you may then want to try your hand at English letters of your own. But before anything else, you should again get familiar with the general rules of English letter writing and the specific steps to be taken to write each part. The general rules to be observed here concern the physical appearance, the content planning and the language style of English letters. The specific steps are the actual writing of each particular part in an English letter and the ways to fold the letter. Last, but not the least, you should also know how to address the envelope.

General Rules of English Letter Writing

(1) The Physical Appearance

Although the content of a letter is of first importance, attractive appearance is also necessary if the letter is to be effective. Good appearance requires that margins and overall layout of the letter on the page should be pleasing to the eye. The spacing and the arrangement of the parts should agree with the accepted conventions of good taste. And the whole letter must be neat.

Attractive appearance calls for a margin of about 1-inch (2.5 cm) on all sides of a letter. Margins will have to be increased all around for letters that do not occupy a full page. A letter must appear in the middle of the page and not on one side. However, a very short letter will have about $\frac{1}{3}$ of the empty space at the top and $\frac{2}{3}$ at the bottom of the page.

Attractive appearance also calls for proper spacing in the

letter. Usually, each of the parts of the letter is single-spaced. Double space or quadral-space is used between the parts and between the paragraphs. This means that the lines of the heading, inside address and each paragraph of the body are single-spaced. There is double spacing between the inside address and the salutation, between the salutation and the opening paragraph, between paragraphs, between the last paragraph and the complimentary close, and between the typed signature and the enclosure or postscript if either is included. Quadral spacing is used in two places between the heading and the inside address, and between the complimentary close and the typed signature (See Example on page 7).

Nevertheless, very short letters may be double-spaced throughout. Long letters that are more than one page long should bear the name of the person or organization addressed, the page number, and the date at the top of the second and later pages.

Example One

| | |
|-----------------------|-----------------|
| ~2~ | |
| Dr. Irvin B. Steadman | October 3, 1997 |

(2) The Content Planning

Planning the content of a letter helps you to remember what to write about. You can make a simple plan by just jotting down a few topics. The following questions will always help you to choose the right topics. 1) Why are you writing? 2) What facts

support your reasons for writing? 3) What would you like the reader to do?

By telling why you are writing the letter, you immediately let the reader know what is on your mind and provide him with a signpost showing him where to focus his attention. Giving important facts to support your reasons will impress the reader that you are being thoughtful and reasonable. Describing what you'd like the reader to do gives him something to act upon. You don't need to be too modest or beat about the bush. Otherwise, you may either confuse the reader or fail to achieve the purpose of writing the letter.

If you are answering a letter, be sure to read it over again before you start writing. The person you are writing to might have asked you to do something in his letter. It is always annoying if you forget to answer his questions or fail to act upon something he intended you to.

(3) The Language Style

Since a letter is a visit on paper or a personal communication, you should keep the language in your letter as interesting as that in a lively conversation. The letter you are writing is actually part of you. If you want to give the correct impression of your personality, you should, first of all, be yourself. To do so, you may write in an easy and natural way by choosing plain, familiar words of everyday speech, writing simple, clear sentences and organizing short, meaningful paragraphs.

Plain homespun words of everyday speech are usually more vivid and expressive than long, flowery expressions. Compare the following pairs of words and expressions:

| | |
|------------------|---------------------------------|
| do—accomplish | always—at all times |
| write—correspond | now—at the present time |
| give—furnish | soon—the earliest possible time |
| begin—commence | because—due to the fact that |
| as—inasmuch as | enclosed—enclosed herewith |

It is clear that the first word in each pair is more acceptable in letter writing because it is more often used and carries a clearer meaning. However, this does not mean you may choose any simple words at random. The simple words you choose should have meaning, substance and life. Usually action verbs are expressively forceful, which may bring movement and action to your writing.

The same rules apply to sentence writing in English letters. Short sentences of simple structure with rugged verbs or specific nouns are more forceful and effective than long, involved ones with abstract or general modifiers. Moreover, letters nowadays are often dictated or written rapidly and mailed in a haste. Long sentences are likely to become jumbled and misleading. Therefore, simple and clear sentences with variety are more desirable. This can be easily seen from the following three pairs of sentences.

1. My brother's wife has two children.
→ My sister-in-law has a four-year-old son and a baby daughter.
2. We express our regret at being unable to fulfil your order on this occasion with our customary promptness.