

BUSINESS ENGLISH

“十五”国家级规划教材

商务英语系列教材



Business

商务英语写作

An English Course in  
Business Writing

总主编 陈苏东 陈建平

主 编 姜锡彪



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总主编 陈苏东 陈建平  
主编 姜锡彪  
编著 张佐成 方春祥 姜锡彪



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总主编 陈苏东 陈建平

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## 总 序

改革开放的20年是中国经济高速发展并逐渐融入世界经济的20年。中国加入世界贸易组织是此进程的一个重要里程碑,必将进一步推动中国经济与世界经济的接轨与融合。经济日益全球化的趋势迫切需要我们培养一大批熟练掌握外语、通晓商务知识、熟悉国际商务环境、善于跨文化交际的国际型商务人才。

此类商务人才的成功培养涉及到诸多环节与因素,其中至关重要的是要有一套有助于实现此培养目标的、编写意图明确、针对性强、质量高的教材,因为教材是一切教学活动得以开展的基础与前提。目前涉及商务英语的教材不少,但在系统性、完整性以及语言技能与商务知识的有机结合上都多少存在着不足。

“十五”国家级规划教材——商务英语系列教材是高等教育出版社与在商务英语教学与研究领域起步早、阵容强的对外经济贸易大学、广东外语外贸大学、上海对外贸易学院、上海外国语大学、厦门大学、北京外国语大学、北京工业大学和湖南大学等单位联合推出的一套全新的商务英语系列教材。这套教材在编写设计时特别注意把握好商务活动主题的涵盖面、商务知识的系统性与完整性以及语言技能与商务知识的平衡,在体系上分为商务英语基础课程教材《商务英语听说》、《商务英语阅读》、《商务英语写作》、《商务英语翻译》等,和商务英语专业核心课程教材《工商导论》、《国际经济导论》、《国际贸易实务》等。每本教材自成体系,但整套教材又形成了有机的整体。另外,此套教材不是封闭系列,还将不断有新教材推出。

本套教材体现了编撰者努力将语言技能的训练与商务英语知识的介绍融为一体的编写理念,最终服务于复合型人才培养的目标。编撰者们不仅具有丰富的语言教学经验,而且具备商务活动的实践经验。有些作者本身就是经贸领域的专家学者,他们集教学经验、学术背景与专业经验于一身,有力地保证了这套系列教材的编撰质量。

本套教材在编撰过程中得到了高等教育出版社的大力支持,在此特致感谢。

陈苏东  
2002年6月

## 前 言

商务英语写作是英语专业商务方向学生的必修课，也是从事国际商务工作必需的业务技能之一。商务英语写作涉及商务业务知识、惯例和做法、语言修辞等诸多方面的因素。随着商务活动范围的扩展（如当今的商务活动范围既包括货物贸易又包括服务贸易），商务写作涉及的商务业务知识和惯例、传递信息的手段和方式以至使用的语言也在发生变化。跨文化交际和交际中的伦理问题也日益为人们所重视。

考虑到如上变化，我们编写了这套新的商务英语写作教材。该教材的内容包括传统的商务书信写作和商务备忘录、电子邮件、商务报告、新闻稿、操作说明、商品宣传、商务合同等应用越来越多的其它类型的写作。

另外，我们在编写方法上继承商务写作中的有效做法，把写作知识和写作技能训练与实际的业务活动相结合，不是孤立地讲写作，也不是孤立地讲商务知识，力求使一切努力都落到提高商务写作能力这点上。为此我们在书中提供了大量写作范例供读者学习模仿，全部写作范例均选自真实的案例。

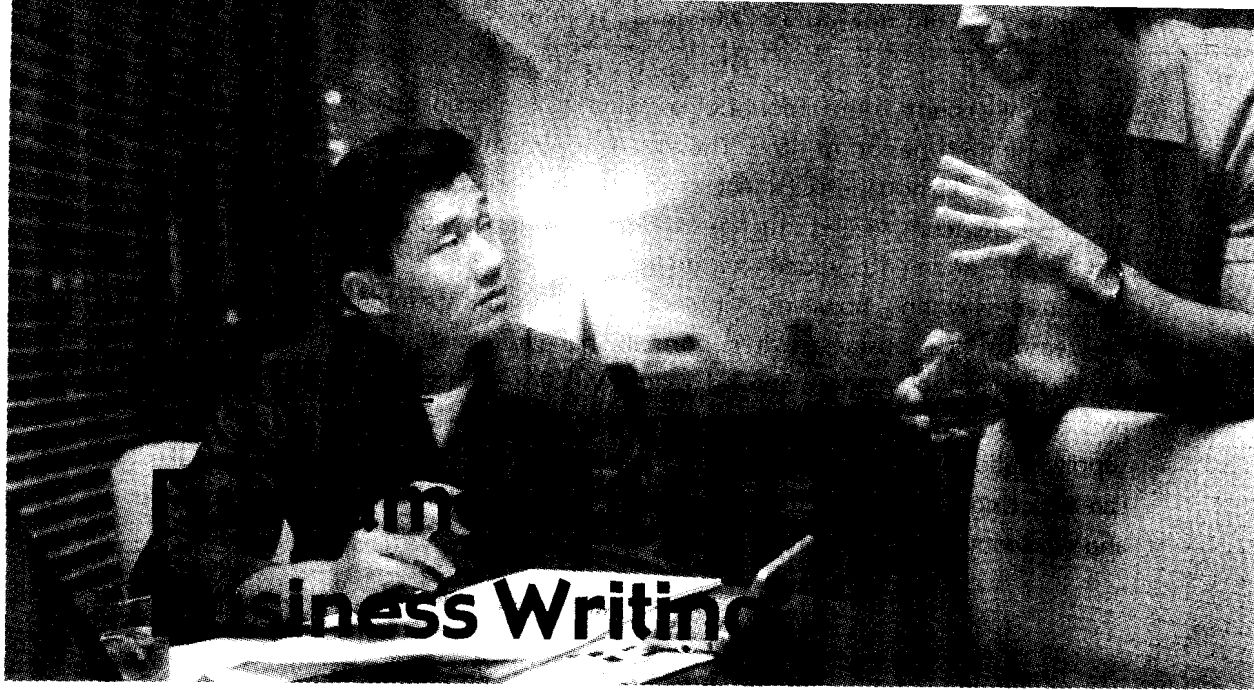
由于编者水平有限，加之时间仓促，书中纰漏甚至不当之处在所难免。敬请读者和有关专家批评指正。

编 者

2002年6月18日

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## Objectives

**By the end of this chapter you should be able to:**

- understand the differences between business writing and school writing;
- know the process of effective writing;
- understand the principles of business writing;
- deal with the cultural and ethical issues in business writing.

## School Writing vs Business Writing

We often consider writing as an encoding-decoding process. That is to say, the writer encodes information in words, which is then decoded by the reader. This conception may not be altogether new to university students. At secondary school, or at least during the first two years at university, students should have had experience with a variety of writing. Even so, it is important to note some major differences between school writing and business writing.

School writing is in the form of essays and the topic or theme is usually assigned by teachers to see how well students have learned course materials. Obviously, the information given by student writers is rarely new to their readers, i.e. examiners.

What usually counts is the amount of knowledge and language they can reproduce within a limited period of time. The extent to which they can demonstrate the knowledge and language skill affects the scores they are awarded. So it is normal for students to use complicated structures and to crowd information into a limited space, and they are often encouraged to write in this manner.

Business writing, however, is intended to communicate information. There are two reasons: first, business writers normally have information that is unknown or largely new to their readers. Second, readers need such information but are usually pressed with a tight schedule. They cannot afford much time for reading. This demand-supply relationship has considerable bearing on business writing. Writers must make careful decisions about what to write and how to get their information across effectively and efficiently.

### The Process of Writing

Writing can mean the marks we see on paper, that is the writing-as-product view. It can also mean a process by which the product is made, that is the writing-as-process view. When we take writing as product, we look for things like unity, coherence, and cohesion in the writing. Such information abounds in writing handbooks.

Writing as process has been a popular field for scholarly research. We have come to learn what happens when one goes about writing. We will illustrate the process by introducing 7 steps for writing, as listed below:

- clarifying your aim
- identifying your readers
- making a general plan
- sketching a synopsis
- drafting your text
- putting the draft aside
- revising and editing

**1. Clarifying your aim.** Start by asking yourself questions like: What am I trying to achieve: to describe, persuade, or complain? What does my reader need my information for? What would my reader do after reading my writing? By answering these questions, *you can get a clear idea of where your writing is leading to.* It is good practice to jot down a few sentences outlining your objectives, constraints, procedures, etc.



**2. Identifying your readers.** Ask yourself whether your readers are alike or a mixed group. Find out what they already know about the topic and what they need to know. This will help you decide what details to give and the best way to give them.

**3. Making a general plan.** In writing handbooks, the above-mentioned two steps are usually considered as parts of planning. We have highlighted these two steps because of their importance to the writing process. The general plan needn't be very detailed. Writing is a recursive and creative process. The plan is rarely strictly adhered to. In fact, it is usually modified in actual writing. A useful technique is to use headings or other signposts to indicate the points you want to cover, the relationship between the points, and the order of the points.

**4. Sketching a synopsis.** Wherever possible, you should sketch a synopsis, or a brief summary of what you have done so far about your assignment. Discuss it with your colleagues, boss or the person who has commissioned the writing. The benefit is obvious: you can check whether you have done the right thing, or whether you have done it properly.

**5. Drafting your text.** When you are clear about your aim, readers, and direction, you can begin drafting your text. But remember: this will only bring you a draft, not the end product yet. As research on writing shows, writing is never a linear process. It is characterized by recursiveness and creativity. Even with a detailed plan, writers frequently come up with new ideas and better ways of presenting ideas. There are some effective tactics which can help produce more writing. For example, rehearsing, or reading what has been written so far, helps to produce more words. It is also helpful not to shy away from Chinese in English writing, or leave blanks in the text which can be filled later on. Do not always write the beginning first. If writing the end first helps, write the end first. Focus on global issues instead of local concerns at this stage. Avoid doing editing, which is actually ineffective.

**6. Putting the draft aside.** The next step is to do nothing about the draft for a while, if possible. This may sound a bit strange, but it does work. What you have intended to say may not be there on the page and you may fail to notice that. Because the ideas are still fresh in your mind so that you may not actually see the problems in your wording. This will improve when you have put the piece aside for a while, because then your impressions of ideas will have faded and you are likely to focus on the words and examine whether they have indeed conveyed your ideas.

**7. Revising and editing.** It is rewarding to read through your text. Check the overall flow of ideas and information. Do not be concerned with local issues, like word choice, spelling, grammar, etc. Correct instances of inconsistency, or even restructure the whole piece to ensure unity and coherence. Leave editing to the last and make a clean copy for submission.

### **Principles of Business Writing**

Business writing differs from other types of writing in that it is not really successful unless it arouses readers' attention and receives their responses. Therefore, business writers strive to make their writing effective. In order to achieve this goal, business writers, besides observing the writing process mentioned earlier in this chapter, apply certain communication principles to their writing. We shall discuss three major principles in business writing, which are clarity, consideration, and correctness. The principles, providing guidelines for style of communication, choice of content, and organization of presentation, reveal the characteristics of business writing.

#### **Clarity**

Clarity means getting your message across clearly. The following are some specific ways to help make messages clear:

- word choice
- sentence and paragraph construction
- use of facts, examples, and visual aids

**1. Word choice.** Business writers choose short, familiar, and conversational words instead of long, unfamiliar ones. As you can see in the following table, the words under the heading "Say" are easier to understand than the words under "Don't Say", although they convey the same meaning:

<b>Say</b>	<b>Don't Say</b>	<b>Say</b>	<b>Don't Say</b>
Big	Substantial	To issue	To promulgate
Home, house	Domicile	Pay	Remuneration
Use	Utilize	About	Circa
For	For the purpose of	During	During the year of
Need	Have need for	Often	In many cases
Because	Due to the fact that	Since	For the reason that

**2. Sentence and paragraph construction.** Short sentences and paragraphs are easy to understand. Therefore, business writers try to avoid wordy sentences and lengthy paragraphs. Compare the following sentences:

**Economical**

Will you please return the enclosed card and arrange a convenient time for an interview?

I am writing about the Russell account to list potential issues before the client's visit.

**Wordy**

At this time I am writing to you to enclose the postpaid appointment card for the purpose of arranging a convenient time when we might get together for a personal interview.

I am writing in order to list the potential issues in regard to the Russell account in advance of the client's visit.

**3. Use of facts, examples, and visual aids.** Business writers use statistical data instead of general words to make their message more concrete and convincing. In effect, they help make points clear. Compare the version in general words with that using statistics.

**Concrete**

These breaks stop a 2-ton car, traveling 60 miles an hour, within 240 feet.

This computer types 1,000 personalized 150-word campaign letters in one hour.

**General**

These breaks stop a car within a short distance.

This computer reproduces campaign letters fast.

Besides, business writers improve the clarity by giving examples, analogies, or illustrations. They often use headings, tabulations, pictures, or charts to help clarify their points.

**Consideration**

Skillful business writers always visualize their readers' needs, problems, and probable reactions to the writing and put themselves in the readers' position. Such thoughtfulness is conducive to building up good interpersonal relations between writers and readers. The following techniques may help you show your consideration when composing a message:

- You-attitude
- Tactful way to blame your readers

**1. You-attitude.** "You-attitude" in writing does not simply mean being polite with a large number of "Thank-you." It actually means that the writers show appreciation and care for your readers. "You-attitude" leads to courteous messages. Compare the following pairs of sentences:

**"You-attitude"**

Please enclose the sales receipt with the merchandise, so that we can process your refund promptly.

University Books will open a new store here to serve you.

Congratulations to you on your...

**"We-attitude"**

We must receive your receipt with the merchandise before we can process your refund.

University Books is proud to open a new store here.

I want to send my congratulations...

**2. Tactful way to blame your readers.** Occasions like declining an order or making complaints are a part of business life. When this happens, writers may have to write negative-news messages. As negative news often involves blaming the readers and is thus likely to offend them, business writers need to be considerate and adopt tactful means of writing such messages. Compare the probable reactions from the readers after they have read the sentences under "Tactful" and "Blunt":

**Tactful**

Sometimes policy wording is a little hard to understand. I'm glad to clear up these questions for you.

If I understand your letter correctly...

As mentioned in my May 15 letter to you...

**Blunt**

Obviously, if you'd read your policy carefully, you'd be able to answer these questions yourself.

Your letter is not clear at all. I can't understand it.

Apparently you have forgotten what I wrote you two weeks ago.

**Correctness**

This principle comprises more than correct grammar and punctuation. Correctness means that business writers should use language and approaches that are appropriate to the purpose of writing.

**1. The formality of language.** Formal language is mainly used for academic papers, legal and government documents, etc. However, most business writing tends

to be informal. Business writers choose short, personal, and common words and write in relatively shorter sentences. It would be awkward to write an internal memo with formal words like *conflagration* or *interrogate*. Note the difference in effect between formal words and their informal counterparts:

Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
Anticipate	Expect	Endeavor	Try
Ascertain	Find out	Interrogate	Ask
Conflagration	Fire	Procure	get

**2. Right approaches.** Business writers use different approaches based on the nature of their messages and the readers. For instance, they may use the direct approach or indirect approach. The former states the main ideas at the beginning of a message, while the latter saves the important ideas until the end of a message. Business writers use the direct approach when composing a memo or a letter of inquiry, but the indirect approach is necessary when they want to soften readers' likely resistance to a negative message.

### **Intercultural Awareness in Business Writing**

International business has bound all the countries together much closer than ever before. The term "global village" coined many years ago is increasingly becoming a reality with multinational corporations moving their operations to other countries and national companies extending their markets across borders. This is certainly offering more opportunities to all business organizations. However, global business activities do not always go smoothly because of misunderstandings resulting from cultural differences among people from different countries.

Culture is often defined as a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, and norms, which affect the behaviors of a relatively large group of people. We tend to interpret what we see according to the guidance of our "mental software." It is thus important for us to overcome cultural obstacles by improving our intercultural awareness and competence when conducting international business.

English is dominant in international communication, especially in the business world. When people speaking different languages write business correspondence in English, they are probably aware of the importance of conforming to the conventions of business English writing. But their cultural traits surely influence the way they

deliver their messages. This may result in blocking the process of communication and ruining business deals. In order to minimize the cultural impact on communication, we should train ourselves as effective international communicators. The following may help us achieve that goal:

- Improve English writing skills. You should follow closely the principles guiding business English writing and observe basic English writing conventions. For example, be careful with the usage of punctuation marks. The comma used in English is quite different from that in Chinese.
- Study your own culture and be aware of how it differs from other cultures.
- Acquire knowledge about other cultures, especially the culture from which your readers may come.
- Avoid using English slang and idioms, which are often culture specific.
- Limit the use of metaphors and other culture-related expressions. For instance, the expression “to touch all the bases” will make little sense to someone who knows nothing about baseball.
- Don’t translate colorful idioms from your own language into English. If you do so, you either use more words to do it or make it difficult for your readers to catch the meaning. You lose the color of the original expression in either case.
- Make effort to communicate with sensitivity across cultures. This brings benefits to individual business organizations and to the world economy as a whole.

### **Ethical Issues in Business Writing**

Ethics play a crucial role in business communication. Because they may influence how others perceive the messages and shape their expectations and behaviors. Business ethics are the principles of conduct that guide business people’s behaviors. Ethical behaviors involve four principles: honesty, integrity, fairness, and concern for others. Ethical people consider what is the right thing to do, while unethical ones do whatever it takes to achieve their objectives.

However, every business organization is responsible for various groups: employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers, the community, and the nation. Very often what is right for one group may be wrong for another. When people are hiding some truths, they may do the right thing for themselves or for their company (at least for a short run), but not the right thing for other groups.

Therefore, we all need to develop a strong sense of ethics to identify all unethical conduct.

- When sending business messages, we should not intentionally use language that exaggerates, manipulates, discriminates, and deceives.
- We should write clearly so that readers can understand us easily and quickly. Intentionally wordy and imprecise messages are unethical. Some states in the United States have "Plain English" laws requiring businesses to write policies, warranties, and contracts in language comprehensible to average readers.
- We should strive to present all relevant facts in business writing. Never let personal opinions distort a message.
- We should acknowledge the writers whose ideas we use or quote.

### Exercises:

I. What are the major differences between school writing and business writing?

II. What do you think about "writing as a creative and recursive process"?

III. In what ways are intercultural and ethical issues relevant to business writing?

IV. Rewrite the following sentences based on the instructions in the text. You may not do it well now, but you will after you finish the course.

1. He went to the fair for the purpose of finding a partner.
2. We plan to give consideration to the idea at the meeting..
3. It is necessary that the project be finished by next month.
4. We are in receipt of the letter you sent to us on May 24.
5. It is known that we must reduce the labor force by 20 percent in order to cut the cost.
6. We wish to let you know that we fully appreciate the confidence you reposed in us.
7. The course will be of benefit to him in his accounting work.

8. It is not the desire of this firm not to allow its young engineers to assume some responsibility.
  9. Mail your payment at once.
  10. Perhaps you could afford to run a store that way, but we cannot.
- V. Write a sales letter in the format you know. Keep the letter until you finish this course. Rewrite the letter to see the difference between the two versions.





# Order The Layout of Business Letters

## Objectives

By the end of this chapter you should be able to:

- know the essential parts of a business letter;
- know the optional parts of a business letter;
- know the layout of the envelope;
- know the design and physical presentation of business letters.

## The Essential Parts of a Business Letter

A typical business letter consists of seven parts: the letterhead, the date line, the inside address, the salutation, the body of the letter, the complimentary close, and the signature.

### The Letterhead

The letterhead is the heading at the top of a letter. It usually consists of the name, address, telephone number and fax number of a company. The letterhead can be typed out but is usually printed on the company's stationery (such stationery