

ENGLISH FOR

BUSINESS

2nd Edition

Duncan Macintosh

Senior Staff Tutor
Department of Extra-Mural Studies
University of Hong Kong

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INTRODUCTION

English for Business was originally written for students attending Extra-Mural courses at the University of Hong Kong and was itself based on a quantity of material and notes that I had written for these courses over a number of years. Since its first publication in 1975, it has proved to be popular and useful not only in Hong Kong, but also elsewhere in the Far East. It now therefore seems appropriate to bring the book more up to date, to include additional material that many students of business will find useful and also to include examples of different kinds of writing with rather more international relevance than was necessary in the original edition. Although any teacher must rightly be primarily concerned with his own students, the basic principles of business communication in English are clearly the same no matter where in the world you may be. It is therefore hoped that teachers and students will find this book useful in many different parts of the world.

As in the first edition, I have paid particular attention to the requirements of all those who need to communicate with others and handle correspondence independently for the organisations they work for. The greater part of the book is therefore devoted to different kinds of business letters. It is clearly impossible to provide examples of every single type of letter an executive may be called upon to write, but the most common kinds have been identified and clear principles laid down. If the students can apply those principles as he should when he is handling his daily correspondence, he should have no great difficulty in writing any kind of letter. Perhaps the most important of these principles is adherence to 'The Three C's': Clarity, Courtesy and Conciseness. Guidelines are therefore laid down not only in *what* to say in a given situation, but *how* to say it, and the implications of expressing oneself in a variety of different ways.

The book also provides several examples of how *not* to write a letter and of the kinds of jargon that should be rigidly avoided. It may easily be said that no one would actually write in the way suggested in some of the examples of bad letters, but it is also unfortunately true that some correspondents express themselves in a way that makes it clear that they have given serious thought neither to what they should be saying in their letter nor the impression that they are likely to make on the person who has to read it. It is therefore necessary to consider not only the effect of a good letter, but the implications and possible consequences of expressing oneself badly.

Executives are also frequently required to write summaries of correspondence and sometimes to make recommendations for further action. Chapter 8 is therefore devoted to the writing of correspondence summaries, and the material in it has now been completely rewritten to allow for both summarization of the correspondence as a whole and for summarization of it by stages.

Though correspondence with other companies and organisations is obviously of very great importance, there are also other forms of written communication that should concern any student of business. Chapter 9 is therefore devoted to written communication *within* an organisation and deals with the writing of internal memoranda and the drafting of notes as well as the compilation of various kinds of forms that can be used both internally and in dealing with individuals and organizations outside.

Chapter 10 is concerned with the writing of reports, one of the most formidable tasks a young executive may be confronted with. There are several kinds of report that may be required, and many of these are completed on printed forms and do not present any particular difficulty. In Chapter 10, however, we are mainly concerned with the writing of a full report, possibly running to several thousand words, in which the writer is supposed to come to certain conclusions and then to go on to make specific recommendations based on them. This is undoubtedly the hardest kind of report to write, but once that skill is mastered, the writing of other kinds of report should not present any especial difficulty.

The next chapter, No. 11, is concerned with the recording of meetings. There are two kinds of meeting that need to have their discussions recorded: meetings of boards and committees, which are normally very formal, and the far more informal meetings of two or three individuals. The former type of meeting calls for full minutes that record what was agreed upon, and the latter, the far smaller meeting, for notes that set out the *Heads of Agreement* which were arrived at. Considerable attention is therefore paid both to how to prepare an agenda for a formal meeting, how to distinguish the final decisions reached from the mass of discussion that lead up to them and how to record those decisions clearly and concisely in the subsequent minutes.

The chapter on Banking that follows has been specially written for this edition of the book. Unlike the previous chapters, it is not so much concerned with how you should express yourself as with how currency transactions are completed and the procedures that are required when a sum of money has to be remitted from one part of the world to another. This for the most part calls for a knowledge of the forms to be completed and the commitments entered into in international trade. It may therefore be seen as a complement to Chapter 4 on Trade Enquiries.

The chapter on Notes and Digests has been completely rewritten for this edition, and an attempt has been made to include examples and articles in it that will have a lasting interest for all those in business.

The final chapter, which is another entirely new addition for this edition, is also totally different from the previous ones; while they are concerned with written communication, it is devoted to public speaking in a number of different situations. It is appropriate, however, that anyone studying business communication should be fully aware of how he can make an oral presentation effective. It is often said that good speakers are born, not made, but while there may be a good deal of truth in that, anyone who has to speak in public should be conversant with the basic principles of good public speaking. Study of this chapter will not by itself make the reader a good speaker, but he will find in it a number of guidelines that he should follow when he is called upon to speak.

The book concludes with a Glossary of Commercial Terms. While this does not claim to be exhaustive, it includes many of the terms and abbreviations used in commerce today that the reader may not be fully familiar with. As with all glossaries, it is intended for reference rather than intensive study.

All the chapters except those on Banking and Public Speaking include exercises. These have been provided as the book is primarily intended for teaching purposes, and it is hoped that teachers will find it useful as such. However, it also hoped that students who first used the book as a class text, and also others who did not do so, will later find it of value as a desk reference book and for self-study. It sets out to teach certain principles of business communication, and although, as has been noted above, no one book can provide all the answers required to meet every possible situation, intelligent application of the principles stated should be of value in everyday business communication.

It will be noticed that no guidance or exercises in General English skills have been included. A further book, *English for Business: Language Practice*, is in preparation and will be published later. It is hoped that this will also be of value, for the exercises will be related to the material in the present book. However, although even the most able often need to "brush up their English" and improve their ability to read material quickly for full comprehension, it must always be remembered that no student can hope to apply English effectively to business communication until he has at least a fairly good general command of the language. The present book has been written in the assumption that all those who wish to use it already have a reasonable degree of fluency in English, and the *Language Practice* book is to be produced so that their command of English can be reinforced.

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1 Commercial Correspondence: Basic Principles

THE LETTERS WE WRITE

Too often in countries all over the world, writers phrase their letters with only themselves in mind and appear to forget that a letter should be written for the receiver, *not* for the writer. You should not, therefore, write your letter in order to show how clever you are, but say what you have to clearly, concisely and courteously, and make it clear that you have taken the recipient's views into consideration, or at least are very willing to do so.

The Reaction to Your Letter

Unlike other means of communication, the reaction to a letter is only learnt when you get the reply to it. In conversation, of course, you can see what kind of impression you are making on the other person as you are speaking to him, and therefore are able to make corrections immediately in order to "get on better" with him. This is not so with a letter, and so when you write you have to consider very seriously what he has to say in reply. Let us consider the following two ways of expressing a point of view.

1. We have considered all aspects of this question very seriously and believe that you would be well advised to accept the terms that the ABC Company offer you. The consequences of your failing to do so could be very serious for you, and we do not feel that we could be of any further service to you. We therefore now look forward to receiving your early confirmation that you will accept the terms offered.
2. The terms that the ABC Company offer are attractive, and, after considering them very seriously, we would like to recommend them to you for acceptance as we do not believe we can obtain more satisfactory ones for you. You will doubtless wish to discuss the contract with us, and so I will be very pleased to meet you in order to explain the situation further. As, however, a decision on this matter should be reached as soon as possible, we look forward to hearing from you at an early date.

Notes:

1. Both passages are clear, though the second is rather longer, for the writer wishes to make it clear that he is taking his correspondent's views into consideration, and so is more persuasive and courteous in his approach.

2. The first passage takes a rather bullying attitude and the writer seeks to force his correspondent to agree by saying **and we do not feel that we could be of any further service to you**, whereas the second passage suggests a meeting at which the whole matter can be explained further.
3. The first passage takes for granted that the correspondent will agree to the terms offered, **We therefore now look forward to receiving your early confirmation that you will accept the terms offered**, whereas the second passage leaves the question much more open, **we look forward to hearing from you at an early date**.
4. The second passage lapses into the first person singular, **and so I will be very pleased** which sounds more friendly and adds a certain personal and sympathetic note to the letter.

The Length of a Letter

A letter should be long enough to say what needs to be said and no longer. Too often writers think that a short letter will not be considered adequate and therefore try to 'pad' it with a great deal of unnecessary detail or with 'flowery' language. This should be rigidly avoided, for no businessman wants to waste time in reading excessively long letters, and he certainly does not want to receive exaggerated compliments that he feels to be insincere. You should remember, too, that the longer a letter is, the less likely it is to be carefully read. A good letter is one that is clearly and concisely written and courteous in style so that the reader will believe that his point of view is being considered.

Although no letter should be any longer than necessary, yet all vital information should be included. At one time or another we have all written a letter to a friend, and found afterwards that we have forgotten to say this or that. This is annoying, but not, perhaps, serious, for we can always send another brief letter. In business correspondence, however, it is very much more serious, for any executive who forgets to include any of the relevant details in his letter will make a very bad impression on his client. In a letter to a friend, too, you can add a **post script** or P.S. at the last moment, but you should not do this in a business letter. You should therefore be careful that you do in fact know all that you want to say when you sit down to write your letter. You would be well advised to make notes before you start; this is specially the case when you need to write a particularly long or complex letter.

The Aim of a Letter

Any writer of a letter wants to attract the attention of his reader from the very beginning, and so the subject matter should be introduced without delay. Since no businessman wants to wade through a mass of "flowery" and insincere compliments, polite forms to help the introduction of the letter should not be too long. The interest of the reader can often be encouraged if the subject of the letter is clearly stated at the beginning in a subject heading, e.g.

Dear Sirs,

New Discount Terms Available

This subject heading also serves to show the reader from the outset what the letter is about, and so he can give it the appropriate priority. On some occasions, however, the 'headline' approach may appear rather too abrupt, and so the writer must decide for himself whether the subject of his letter is something that he wishes to proclaim at the beginning or whether it is something that should be introduced rather more delicately. This is often the case with bad news or something that needs tact or discretion to explain.

As a general rule, anything that has a note of urgency about it or is of transparent importance merits the 'headline', but if the subject matter is more complex, it should be introduced more gently. In both cases, however, it should be introduced as soon as possible.

The Language of the Letter

Since a letter should always be written for the reader, the language used should be related to his probable ability. There is no point, therefore, in using language that is complex if you know that your correspondent's knowledge of English is very limited. In these circumstances what you say should be expressed in simple and straightforward English so there will be little possibility of being misunderstood. Further, you should be careful not to use technical terms in your letter unless you have good reason to believe he is familiar with them.

Long paragraphs and even long sentences are often off-putting to many readers, whether they are familiar with English or not. While there is no point in composing your letter in artificially short sentences, you should avoid using very long ones that are either hard to understand or ambiguous in meaning. Your reader could get lost in them and therefore fail to grasp your meaning as clearly as he should. If you have to write a long or complex letter, you would also be well advised to number each of your paragraphs. This facilitates easy reference for you as you write and also for your reader when he comes to reply to you.

Avoid using Outmoded Language

This may appear as obvious advice, but, as we shall see in the next chapter, it is distressing to see how much nineteenth century jargon still survives in correspondence today. This makes the language of the letter seem stale, stiff and incredibly formal, with the resulting impression that the writer has composed his letter without giving it very much thought. The business letter of today is no longer the stiff and formal letter of the past, but fresh and friendly in approach, and avoids the excessive use of jargon.

Some people will tell you that unless a business letter contains certain stereotyped examples of jargon, it is not a "proper" business letter. While it is true that business letters follow a certain format that encourages easy communication, which we shall be considering later in this chapter, this is a very different thing from saying that we must repeat the jargon of our forefathers. The next chapter will deal with this in greater detail, but for the moment you should remember the following examples to be avoided:

your goodself

There is no point in saying this, for the compliment is meaningless, and so **you** is far more appropriate;

the undersigned

This is a very impersonal way of referring to yourself that should be avoided whenever possible, for it is very much clearer and simpler just to say **I** or **me**. It sometimes happens, however, that the 'house rule' of a particular company insists that a junior executive does not refer to himself directly, but writes only on behalf of his company, and so in these circumstances he is obliged to refer to himself by use of the expression **the undersigned**;

the above

Some writers might claim that this is the simplest way of referring to something that has been previously mentioned, but **this** should be just as adequate and very often less ambiguous if they are writing clear English;

With reference to

In the opening sentence of a letter, it is very much better to begin your letter with a straightforward **Thank you for**, but occasionally you may wish to use

the phrase **with reference** to later in the body of your letter when you go on to refer to a particular matter, e.g. **With reference to the views of our clients that I have mentioned in the previous paragraph, I would like to add**

Nothing adds to the formality of a letter more than excessive use of the passive voice. When a writer wishes to appear friendly in his approach, he should be on his guard against using it too often. The commonest occasions when the active voice can be used in place of the passive are as follows:

We would appreciate it if instead of it would be appreciated if ;
We think instead of It is thought;
We have despatched the goods instead of The goods have been despatched;
We will do everything instead of Everything will be done.

There are, of course, many other possibilities, but in all of them the use of the active voice has the effect of associating the writer much more closely with the action or the sentiment in question, and so his letter gains in friendliness. There are occasions, however, when the writer will not wish to give this impression. This is frequently the case when he has to write very impersonal notices or letters where a friendly approach would clearly be inappropriate. In such cases, of course, the use of the passive is entirely acceptable.

CONVENTIONS AND LAYOUT

Business letters have developed over a number of years, and, as we shall see in the next chapter, there have been a number of changes in the technique of writing them. Today the emphasis is on "freshness", informality and friendliness in approach. However, certain conventions remain, and these should be followed if the letter is not to seem very amateurish. They can be classified as follows:

1. Private person to a firm or organisation.
2. Firm or organisation to a private person.
3. Firm or organisation to another firm or organisation.

Once the conventions of the first two types are known, the third, which we shall be looking at again on a number of occasions in later chapters, is fairly easy to follow.

Private Person to a Firm or Organisation

	36 Newton Road, Anytown.
	3rd May, 197-.
J. Smith & Co., 3 High Street, Lawton.	
Dear Sirs,	
	Yours faithfully, M..Brown (Mrs)

Notes:

1. **The address:** this is the most common pattern, though the 'open style', i.e. omitting punctuation, is now also commonly used; it is not now usual to insert a comma after a house number in a street, e.g. **36 Newton Road** rather than **36, Newton Road**.

2. **The date:** this is the most usual form, though it is also possible to substitute 3 for 3rd, and to drop the comma after the month; the American form would in this case be **May 3, 197 . . .**; abbreviated forms, e.g. **3/5/7 . . .**, are now out of fashion and so should not be used in business letters, though they are often used in brief notes.
3. **The inside address:** the only reason for including the inside address of the recipient is for record purposes when a carbon copy of the letter in question is kept; when, therefore, this is not the case, the inside address should not be included. The earlier device of addressing companies whose trading name incorporates the members of the firm, e.g. **Smith, Watson & Co.**, as **Messrs e.g. Messrs Smith, Watson & Co.**, is now out of fashion; it has never been correct to do so when the company in question is a limited one, e.g. **Jardine, Matheson & Co., Ltd.** or when the trading name of the company has not incorporated the names of its members, e.g. **The Jardine Engineering Company Ltd.**
4. **Dear Sirs:** Mrs Ng has correctly used this form as she is writing to an organisation; had she written to the manager of a company, she would have said **Dear Sir**, or **Dear Mr**, if she had known the recipient of her letter personally.
5. **Yours faithfully:** this is the correct form to use when a letter begins with **Dear Sirs** or **Dear Sir**; had, however, it begun with **Dear Mr** or with the first name of the recipient, the correct subscription would have been **yours sincerely**. The variant **yours truly**, is a weak form and should be avoided; some writers often also use other variants when writing to those they know well, e.g. **yours ever** or **yrs aye**. It is also increasingly common to add a cordial message before the subscription, e.g.

With all good wishes,

Yours faithfully/sincerely,

except when the subject matter of the letter has made the use of a friendly conclusion inappropriate.

6. Mrs Ng has indicated her marital status by adding (**Mrs**) after her name; had she not been married, she would have added (**Miss**), for this would also have shown her correspondent how to address her correctly when replying; when the marital status of the writer is not indicated, we assume that he is a man, except when we happen to know that the person in question is in fact a woman, in which case she should be addressed with the prefix **Ms.**, e.g. **Ms. Jean Smith**.

Firm or Organisation to a Private Person

J. Thompson, Esq.,
5804 Town Mansions,
58 Po Sing Road,
Singapore, 8

Dear Sir,

Yours faithfully,

A. Singh

for Everbest Textile Factory
A. Singh

Notes:

1. **The inside address:** as this is a letter from a firm, a carbon copy for their file would certainly be kept. Many writers add the form **Esq.** after the name of their correspondent

instead of addressing him as **Mr.** **Esq.** is an abbreviation for **Esquire**, and was originally used only if the person in question was either a professional person or a land-owner. It is used very much more widely today, and so has lost a great deal of its meaning, but it does indicate a certain degree of respect on the part of the writer for his correspondent. **Esq.** should never be used in conjunction with **Mr.**, and should be used only if you know the initials of your correspondent, e.g. **J. Thompson, Esq.**; when this is not the case, you should use **Mr.**, e.g. **Mr. Thompson**. As **Esq.** is a peculiarly British form of address, it should be used only with British people. When, therefore, you are not sure of the nationality of your correspondent, it is more appropriate to write **Mr.**

2. **Dear Sir:** many firms address their correspondent by his name, e.g. **Dear Mr. Thompson**, even if the writer does not know him personally, with the praiseworthy intention of gaining in friendliness and informality.
3. **The subscription:** as we shall see in the next paragraph, a firm's letter may be signed in a number of different ways depending on the importance of the correspondence and the seniority of the person signing the letter.

How Letters are signed

All organisations send out vast quantities of correspondence each year, and so this varies very considerably in importance and type. Similarly, these differing types of correspondence may be signed by the chief executive of the organisation and also by junior clerks. The range of responsibility, therefore, varies very considerably, and so the way the letters are signed varies accordingly. In ascending order of responsibility, correspondence is signed in the following ways:

1. With the name of the firm only; this is most commonly found in routine circulars only, and so they are not actually **signed** by any member of staff, but their despatch is the responsibility of a junior clerk.
2. With the name of the firm plus the initials of the sender; this is often found with **form letters**, i.e. those sent as brief replies to enquiries, and so they have not really been drafted by the sender.
3. With the name of the firm plus the signature of someone who has signed for the firm, as in the example in the previous paragraph.
4. With the signature of the person who has drafted the letter plus the office he holds, e.g. **K.P. Tang, Sales Manager**.

The first two styles should not be used except for the most routine letters, and are therefore used only by very junior members of staff. The third style can be used by those who have authority to sign letters, but who do not have responsibility to act on their own. They therefore sign *for* the organisation in question. Such people are sometimes obliged to refer to themselves as **the undersigned**. The fourth style is confined to the most senior executives of the organisation in question, in other words those who hold particular offices in it and who can therefore write on their own responsibility. Even so, you will sometimes find that the name of the firm is sometimes incorporated in the signature, e.g.

Yours faithfully,
Smith, McGregor & Sons Ltd

T. Smith
Manager

This is not really necessary, however, for senior executives can write letters on their own responsibility, and the name of the firm is, of course, normally indicated clearly enough in the letterhead.

American Usage

The difference between British and American English is something that is often made far too much of, with the result that many learners of English as a second language are often at a loss to know which is preferable. There is, of course, a difference between what is normally accepted as a British accent and what is considered to be an American accent, but it is also true that within both Britain and America you will find a very wide range of regional accents which are perfectly acceptable.

It is also true that certain vocabulary items are different in Britain and America, but these are confined almost entirely to scientific and technical terms, and so need not worry us here. In the writing of business letters, however, American conventions are slightly different from those in common British usage, and so we should also consider the variations that are common in American business letters.

In general it is true to say that American business letters are very much more informal than British ones. The following are the most common areas where they differ from modern British usage:

The date: **March 3, 197** . . . instead of the British **3rd March, 197** .

The greeting: **Gentlemen**: instead of the British **Dear Sirs**, when addressing a company.

There is a greater tendency to address a friend by his first name, e.g. **Dear Dick**, but this is also now increasingly found in British letters (Note: whereas it is British practice to place a comma after the name of the person addressed, e.g. **Dear Mr Jones**, or **Dear Sir**, except when the recipient of the letter is addressed by his first name as above, an American will use a colon, e.g. **Dear Mr Jones**: , **Dear Sir**: or **Gentlemen**:).

The paragraphs: it is usual in a British letter to find the beginning of each paragraph indented five space, e.g.

This is the way most paragraphs in British letters are begun, with the first line indented in the way shown

but this is not commonly found in American letters — or indeed, in letters written by some British writers — and so each paragraph is neatly lined up with the margin of the letter, e.g.

This is the way most paragraphs in American letters are begun, without indenting in the way a British writer would begin his paragraph.

The subscription: just as paragraphs all begin on the left-hand margin of the letter, so is it usual to find the subscription in American letters lined up there instead of on the right-hand side of the page as is usual in British letters, but some British writers are now imitating this practice; where it is usual in British letters to find letters concluding with **Yours faithfully** or **Yours sincerely**, American letters tend to end very much more informally with **Sincerely yours**, or just with **Sincerely**, or **Cordially**; amongst friends the warmer, **Best regards**, is now very common.

SOME POINTS OF STYLE

Many firms have accepted a 'house-style' which makes their most routine letters look and

read as if they have come from the same family. Where such local rules apply, they should be obeyed regardless of any clash with the suggestions made in this chapter. Some firms also impose minimum standards of consistency by the use of 'form letters' which are stereotypes that can be used to meet any situation and be copied by the inexperienced. They may be necessary where routine letters and postcards have to be sent out by very junior members of staff, but they are the main cause for conservatism in a firm's correspondence, perpetuate outmoded expressions and produce lifeless and unnatural letters that seldom fit the circumstances that they are being used for. The best letter is the one that is fresh in style and written for the particular occasion in question.

The Opening Paragraph

As we have already seen, this should be as brief and to the point as possible, and when the letter is in reply to another the date and reference number of that letter should be quoted. If, on the other hand, the letter is a follow-up to an earlier one, the date and reference number of that earlier letter should be quoted instead. In such circumstances the writer is justified in beginning with **With reference to**, **I/We refer to** or **Further to my/our letter of** It is often helpful to give the letter a 'subject head', for this will show the recipient from the outset what the letter is about. Elaborate and outmoded expressions such as **I beg to inform you that** should always be avoided.

The Body of the Letter

Organize the material for your letter so that it follows a logical sequence. If you are writing a long or particularly complex letter, this will involve making a detailed plan beforehand. However time-consuming this may be, the consequent clarity of the letter will justify the trouble taken. If your letter is one in reply to one received, make sure that you have answered all the requests and the points made before going on to introduce new ideas.

It is often advisable to number your paragraphs, for this will make it very much easier to refer to them in subsequent correspondence. However, you should also remember that if the letter is short, simple and very routine in character, numbered paragraphs are not only superfluous, but may also be distracting to the reader.

The Closing Paragraph

Many letters require a closing courtesy sentence. This will balance the opening paragraph and should be set out as a separate paragraph, e.g.

If you require any further details, I shall be only too pleased to send them to you.

If such a sentence is not called for, the letter will gain in courtesy by the addition of such a phrase as **With all good wishes** immediately before the subscription, **yours faithfully/sincerely**. Always make certain that your closing sentence is complete, and not a mere participle phrase such as **Trusting that this will meet with your wishes**. You should say instead **We trust that this will meet with your wishes**.

General

Business letters are usually written in the first person singular, e.g.

I have received your application and will submit it to the Board next week.

or in the first person plural, e.g.

We thank you for your interest in our product.

or in the impersonal passive, e.g.

You will be informed accordingly when your application has been processed.

The first person singular should be used only by a senior person of authority in the firm who can report on his own personal actions or express his own opinion, which is at the same time that of the firm as a whole. A more junior person would do better to associate himself with the firm by using the plural form. Both these styles have a certain personal element, which is their main advantage, but this may not always be appropriate if the writer is very junior or if the nature of the letter is very impersonal or such that the writer does not want to appear to be particularly friendly. In such cases the third style, the impersonal passive, should be used. The passive voice should be avoided as often as possible, but this does not mean that it should **never** be used. It invariably has the effect of appearing very much less personal and therefore less friendly than either of the other two styles mentioned, and so the important thing is that the writer who uses it should be well aware of this and therefore use it very cautiously.

There is no reason why the first style, the first person singular, and the second, the first person plural, should not be used in conjunction in a letter. When the writer is expressing his own ideas or reporting his own actions, he will use the first style, and when he is speaking for the firm as a whole he will use the second. This varying from one style to the other often has the effect of emphasising the value of the first person singular, for it makes it very clear that what is said in it is a *personal* opinion which the writer has given some thought to. The occasions when any writer will want to use the third style, the impersonal passive, with the first style are very rare, though it would be possible to use it with the second style if the writer wanted to play down the personal element in his letter.

Letters written mainly in the first person singular are normally signed by the writer with his position in the firm indicated. Those written, on the other hand, in the first person plural are signed with the name of the firm, and the writer's name appearing beneath and those in the impersonal passive are signed with the name of the firm and the sender's initials only.

When a person uses the first person singular and signs with his name and the position that he holds in the firm, it is usual when writing in reply to address the letter to him personally, e.g.

James Smith, Esq.,
Manager.

or to the office he holds, e.g. **The Manager**. When, however, he uses the first person plural and signs "for" the company, it is usual to address a letter in reply to the company, though you may also indicate that the letter is intended for a particular person by adding after the inside address **For the attention of Mr. J. Smith**.

2

Commercial Jargon

The use of the term 'Commercial English' in textbooks and curricula has unhappily given rise to the false notion that a special kind of English is used in commerce in general and commercial correspondence in particular. Although anyone writing a business letter should follow the format and conventions that we considered in Chapter 1, this suggestion certainly does not mean that the actual language used needs to be markedly different from the kind of language that we use everyday. So far from this being the case, modern thought clearly suggests that commercial correspondence should be free from old fashioned jargon and should be as cordial in tone as the subject matter of the letter allows. This method of writing not only makes a letter appear very much more friendly, but it is also often easier to understand and more concise as a result.

'Jargon' can be defined as those terms and phrases that are currently used in various specialised areas and so reflect contemporary thought in the areas in question. While, therefore such examples of late twentieth century jargon as 'competitive prices', 'penetrate the market', 'command ready sales' and 'discount concession' are acceptable as commonly in use today, it is distressing to see how some older executives too often tend to use the jargon that they were taught when they were juniors. It also sometimes happens that the young executive who is not quite sure how he should express himself will look up the file copy of a letter that was written on a similar subject several years previously. As it could well have been that the writer of that letter also referred to an earlier letter, there is a very real danger that the jargon that was acceptable forty years ago is now dragged out of some old file and pressed into use again today. This is particularly unfortunate when we remember that the use of outmoded language can often give a very false impression of a company that wants to project a modern image.

Such appalling examples of commercial jargon as **It is incumbent upon me to take the matter in hand** (I must do something about this), **In re your favour of the 5th ultimo** (Thank you for your letter of the 5th – the previous month), and **We are the recipients of your favour of yesterday's date** (Thank you for your letter of – the previous day) have – or certainly should have been – ridiculed out of common use. There are, however, many other examples that may slip past the notice of the most wary. Moreover, many writers tend to say things in such a long-winded and round-about manner that we may well doubt if they stopped to think for a minute of what they were trying to say. e.g.

We beg to ;
We have the honour to ;
We respectfully