

Deborah Whittlesey Sharp

WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS

*With a
Personal Touch*

MORE THAN 340 SAMPLE LETTERS

Writing Business Letters with a Personal Touch

Deborah Whittlesey Sharp

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*To Julian and Eunice, who got me started.
To Dennis, who kept me going.
And, most especially, to my parents.*

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Preface

In today's high-tech, megacorp, megabucks atmosphere it is easy to forget that business is still essentially what it has always been—*transactions between people*. You may sometimes forget this, but your customers, clients, and colleagues don't. When your letters and memos are impersonal because they are written in the *stiff formalities of the past* or the dehumanizing technical jargon of the present, they won't get the results you want. People resent being treated like cogs in a corporate wheel, and they show their resentment by ignoring what you want them to hear or do.

What's the solution? The best one, of course, is conversation. But the limitations of time and distance make frequent business conversations impossible. The next best thing is *letters and memos written in the direct, down-to-earth style of conversation*, a style that captures and holds your readers' attention as you would if you could talk to them face to face.

This book gives you:

1. Over 300 sample letters
 - Written in the direct, purposeful style of productive conversation
 - Suitable for the simple business transactions you handle every day and the more difficult, sensitive situations you encounter occasionally
 - Annotated to highlight strong points
 - Numbered for easy reference
2. Simple, three-step guidelines for writing your own letters that
 - Begin purposefully
 - Develop details clearly and completely

- Emphasize readers' concerns sympathetically and explain your own convincingly
 - Convey and encourage action
3. Examples of poor business writing and suggested revisions that will help you
- Recognize common business writing faults
 - Avoid them in your own writing

The samples and guidelines are based on one simple principle: If you consider your readers, acknowledge their situation, opinions, and concerns, and address them as directly and sincerely as you can, they will respond to you in the same way. All your business communications, whether spoken or written, will benefit from this principle and from the practical applications of this principle as they are presented in this book.

How to Use this Book

Each chapter contains five sections: an introduction and listing of chapter contents, a selection of sample letters, a section on building your own letters, a section on things you shouldn't do, and a final checklist. The key to using these sections is found in your answer to one simple question: each time you refer to this book for help in writing a letter or memo, ask yourself, "What am I doing in this letter?" You may be requesting information, refusing an invitation, protesting an action, reprimanding an employee, or collecting an overdue bill. Whatever you are doing, you will find a chapter in the table of contents that deals with the general action you want to accomplish. Decide what that action is each time you prepare to write a letter, and then turn to the beginning of the chapter that deals with that action.

Each section of this book fills a specific writing need. Find sample letters to fill typical, immediate needs. Follow the "Building Your Own Letter" instructions to compose special letters for unique situations. Make your correspondence stand above the rest by studying the good and bad examples in the "Don'ts" section. Use the whole chapter to compose letters and memos that get results with efficiency, style, and excellence.

Sample Letters

At the beginning of each chapter you will find a list of sample letters and a reference number for each one. When you find a letter title that matches, or nearly matches, the specific purpose of the letter you want to compose, note its reference number in the left-hand margin and thumb

through the chapter until you find that number in the margin opposite the sample letter. The sample letter will deal with a specific subject, but by substituting your own facts and figures for those in the sample, you can easily rewrite it to suit your particular needs.

Building Your Own Letter

If you do not find a letter title that suits your specific need, don't give up. Turn to the section of the chapter that tells you how to build your own letters. There you will find several headings, beginning with "Planning Your Letter." Included under each heading are the instructions for building each paragraph or section of your letter. The instructions correspond to the marginal instructions opposite the sample letters and create a framework into which you can build your own specific content. In each section, in parentheses, are the numbers of the sample letters in that chapter that serve as examples of the principles discussed.

The Don'ts Section

Whether you adapt the sample letters to suit your needs or follow the instructions to build your own letters, you will greatly improve your writing style. You will further improve and refine your new skill by studying the examples of common business writing errors presented in the "Don'ts" section of each chapter. Opposite each poor example you will find an improved revision that eliminates the error. Study these bad examples and their improved revisions. You will learn to recognize poor writing when you see it, and you will develop ways to avoid the same mistakes in your own writing.

A Note on Contractions

I have used contractions frequently in the sample letters to achieve the kind of conversational writing style appropriate for modern business. "Conversational" does not mean "informal." It means "direct" and "approachable," the qualities in writing that make a reader comfortable and responsive. If you are uncomfortable with contractions, don't use them. Your writing style should reflect you and your way of doing business.

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Contents

Preface ix

Chapter 1 Requesting Information and Action 1

- Routine Form Letters of Request 3
- Requests for Special Information or Action from Individuals 9
- Requests for Advice 14
- Requests for Adjustments 15
- Requests to Stop Annoying Behavior 17
- Building Your Own Letters of Request 18
- The Don'ts of Requesting Information and Action 22
- Final Checklist 25

Chapter 2 Giving Information 27

- Cover Letters 29
- Letters of Acknowledgment 30
- Letters of Instruction 32
- Letters of Confirmation 34
- Letters Answering Questions 37
- Giving Unsolicited Information 39
- Giving Updated Information 42
- Giving Advice 43
- Giving Disappointing News 46
- Building Your Own Informative Letters 48

The Don'ts of Giving Information 53

Final Checklist 57

Chapter 3 Granting, Refusing, and Apologizing 59

Granting Adjustments 61

Granting Requests 62

Accepting Invitations and Awards 63

Granting Demands 64

Granting Partial Adjustments or Compliance 65

Refusing Adjustments 66

Refusing Requests 69

Refusing Invitations and Awards 70

Refusing Demands 71

Apologizing 72

Building Your Own Letters Granting Adjustments or Requests 76

Building Your Own Letters of Refusal 77

Building Your Own Letters of Apology 80

The Don'ts of Granting, Refusing, and Apologizing 82

Final Checklist 86

Chapter 4 Complaining and Protesting 89

Complaints That Request Satisfaction 91

Complaints That State Dissatisfaction or Disapproval 92

Complaints That Demand Satisfaction 95

Third-Party Complaints 96

Responding to Complaints 98

Protesting 102

Responding to Protests 106

Building Your Own Letters of Complaint 107

Building Your Own Responses to Complaints 112

Building Your Own Letters of Protest 113

Building Your Own Responses to Protests 115

The Don'ts of Complaining and Protesting 117

Final Checklist 120

Chapter 5 Persuading 123

Letters of Suggestion 125

Letters of Persuasion to Customers and Clients 127

| | |
|--|-----|
| Letters to Initiate Business | 128 |
| Letters to Reestablish Business | 130 |
| Letters to Encourage Acceptance of Unpopular Policies or Circumstances | 131 |
| Letters of Persuasion to Colleagues and Associates | 132 |
| Letters of Persuasion to Superiors | 135 |
| Letters of Persuasion to the General Public | 138 |
| Letters Persuading Individuals to Volunteer Time or Talent | 140 |
| Letters of Persuasion to Government Officials | 141 |
| Letters Persuading Reconsideration | 143 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Persuasion | 144 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Suggestion | 147 |
| Building Your Own Letters Persuading Reconsideration | 148 |
| The Don'ts of Persuading | 149 |
| Final Checklist | 152 |

Chapter 6 Rejecting 155

| | |
|---|-----|
| Rejecting Unsolicited Bids, Business, Contributions, or Suggestions | 157 |
| Rejecting Solicited Bids, Service, Business, or Work | 160 |
| Rejecting Competitors or Job Applicants | 162 |
| Rejecting Credit Applicants | 164 |
| Building Your Own Rejection Letters | 165 |
| The Don'ts of Rejecting | 167 |
| Final Checklist | 170 |

Chapter 7 Evaluating, Reprimanding, and Dismissing 171

| | |
|--|-----|
| Evaluations | 173 |
| Reprimands | 176 |
| Dismissals | 179 |
| Building Your Own Evaluations | 182 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Reprimand | 184 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Dismissal | 185 |
| The Don'ts of Evaluating, Reprimanding, and Dismissing | 186 |
| Final Checklist | 189 |

Chapter 8 Applying, Resigning, and Recommending 191

| | |
|------------------------|-----|
| Letters of Application | 193 |
| Resumes | 197 |
| Letters of Resignation | 199 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letters of Recommendation | 201 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Application | 204 |
| Building Your Own Resume | 206 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Resignation | 209 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Recommendation | 210 |
| The Don'ts of Applying, Resigning, and Recommending | 212 |
| Final Checklist | 217 |

Chapter 9 Collecting, Soliciting, and Responding Appropriately 219

| | |
|--|-----|
| General Collection Letters | 221 |
| Collection Letters to Valued Customers | 225 |
| Collecting Medical Accounts | 226 |
| Collecting Fees, Dues, and Rent | 228 |
| Letters of Solicitation | 231 |
| Responding to Collection Letters | 234 |
| Responding to Solicitations | 236 |
| Building Your Own Collection Letters | 237 |
| Building Your Own Solicitations | 240 |
| Building Your Own Responses to Letters of Collection or Solicitation | 242 |
| The Don'ts of Collecting and Soliciting | 243 |
| Final Checklist | 247 |

Chapter 10 Extending Thanks, Goodwill, and Condolence 251

| | |
|---|-----|
| Letters of Thanks | 253 |
| Letters Recognizing Special Events | 260 |
| Letters of Welcome | 263 |
| Holiday Letters | 264 |
| Letters Recognizing Accomplishments | 265 |
| Letters of Condolence | 267 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Thanks and Goodwill | 270 |
| Building Your Own Letters of Condolence | 273 |
| The Don'ts of Extending Thanks, Goodwill, or Condolence | 275 |
| Final Checklist | 279 |

Suggested Readings 280

Index 282

Requesting Information and Action

One of the most common business letters is the *letter of request*. With a well-written letter of request you can find out how to serve your customers better by getting the special information, advice, or action you need.

Letters of request are often more effective than requests made in person or by telephone because letters give your reader time to react and respond without pressure. They get results because they are written with courtesy, clarity, interest, and a positive approach to business.

Routine Form Letters of Request

- 1.1 Requesting an Item of Information a Customer Forgot to Give in an Order
- 1.2 Requesting Several Items of Information a Customer Forgot to Give in an Order
- 1.3 Requesting Information to Serve Your Clients Further
- 1.4 Requesting Information to Serve Your Customers Further
- 1.5 Introducing a New Service through a Letter of Request
- 1.6 Surveying Customers
- 1.7 Surveying Associates
- 1.8 Surveying Employees
- 1.9 Requesting Information to Correct Mistakes
- 1.10 Requesting Information to Correct Oversights
- 1.11 Requesting Information Against Your Own Interests
- 1.12 Requesting Further Information from Job/Credit Applicants
- 1.13 Requesting Information to Ensure Satisfaction
- 1.14 Requesting Reasons for a Customer's Dissatisfaction
- 1.15 Requesting Reasons for a Client's Dissatisfaction

Requests for Special Information or Action from Individuals

- 1.16 Requesting Special Information
- 1.17 Requesting Descriptions

-
- 1.18 Requesting Appraisals
 - 1.19 Requesting a Client's Intentions
 - 1.20 Requesting a Customer's Intentions
 - 1.21 Requesting Acknowledgment from a Customer
 - 1.22 Requesting Acknowledgment from a Charity
 - 1.23 Requesting Acknowledgment from a Client
 - 1.24 Requesting Explanation of a Commercial Transaction
 - 1.25 Requesting Explanation of a Professional Transaction
 - 1.26 Requesting Additional Routine Help
 - 1.27 Requesting Out of the Ordinary Help
 - 1.28 Requesting Additional Time
 - 1.29 Requesting Permission

Requests for Advice

- 1.30 Requesting Advice on a Simple Question
- 1.31 Requesting Advice on a Complex Matter
- 1.32 Requesting Technical Advice

Requests for Adjustments

- 1.33 Requesting Merchandise Adjustments
- 1.34 Requesting Service Adjustments
- 1.35 Requesting Price Adjustments

Requests to Stop Annoying Behavior

- 1.36 Request to a Colleague
- 1.37 Polite Threat to Someone Outside Your Business
- 1.38 Humorous Request to Someone Outside Your Business

Building Your Own Letters of Request

The Don'ts of Requesting Information and Action

Final Checklist

Routine Form Letters of Request

Draft form letters of request for routine situations in which you frequently require information from customers, clients, or employees. You can alter these letters slightly to fit particular situations.

Requesting an Item of Information a Customer Forgot to Give in an Order

1.1

The trick here is to ask for the necessary information without making your reader feel stupid for not including it earlier.

Thank you for your order. We want to process it as soon as possible, but we can't until we receive your payment or credit card number. State your desire.

If you are still interested in this offer, payable with cash or a major credit card, please return the enclosed order form with your payment or credit card number. Make answering easy.

Thank you for your help. We want to get your order to you as soon as possible. Stress action.

Requesting Several Items of Information a Customer Forgot to Give in an Order

1.2

Use the checklist approach when the information you need is more involved than a single item.

We thank you for your interest in our crystal glassware, but we need some additional information to clarify your order. State your need.

Please refer to the items checked below and reply on the back of this letter. We will mail your glassware to you as soon as we receive the following information: Make response easy.

1. What initial do you wish engraved on the glasses? Itemize the details.
2. How many sets would you like, and what initial would you like for each set?
3. Do you wish gold or silver embossing on the glasses?

Thank you for your assistance. Enjoy your glasses! Stress satisfaction.

Requesting Information to Serve Your Clients Further

1.3

Clients often forget that you need periodic information to serve them better.

How are you? It has been more than a month since we last heard from you, and we hope you are much better.

Ask an appropriate question and emphasize your concern.

Please let us know how you are getting along, and tell us if there have been any changes in your condition.

If you and your doctor will send us a current report, we will certainly consider another loss of time payment for you.

Stress further service.

Requesting Information to Serve Your Customers Further

1.4

Remind your customers of how you can serve them further.

Are you still rolling along? Don't speed past your next maintenance milepost without letting us know. According to our records you are approaching the 50,000 milepost. That's the time to check brakes, wheels, and exhaust systems.

Ask an appropriate question.

These systems are essential to your safety; so give your mileage in the box below and mail this letter back to us in the enclosed postpaid envelope. We will call to schedule your next appointment.

Emphasize well-being and action.

Introducing a New Service Through a Letter of Request

1.5

This is an easy, inexpensive way to advertise.

Would you like to end your monthly bill-paying chores forever?

Ask an appropriate question.

Our PHONE-A-BILL service allows you to make one monthly call to our bill payment supervisor, Ms. Clancy. She will issue money orders, drawn from your checking account, to pay for each of your regular monthly bills.

Specify the details.

Say goodbye to your monthly check-writing chores by filling out the enclosed forms and mailing them to us today.

Stress convenience.

Surveying Customers

1.6

Effective surveys can help you serve your customers better. Get fast results by appealing to your readers' egos.

You're an advertising expert, and we need your advice.

Make your reader an expert.

No one is a better judge of advertising than you, the discriminating American consumer. You can help us make our advertising more effective by taking a moment to answer the questions below. Just jot your answers on the back of this letter.

Make response easy.

1. Who/what convinced you to buy BUTON software?
2. If you were convinced by an ad, what caught your attention in the ad?
3. If you were convinced by another user, what business/profession is the user in?

Ask questions that can be answered briefly.

Thank you for your advice.

Surveying Associates

1.7

When you survey associates, stress their ability to help you.

We have developed an apprentice program for underprivileged students. To ensure its success, we need your help.

Stress your need for help.

By filling in the enclosed questionnaire, you can make our program more effective by telling us if and how your kind of business could utilize apprentice help.

Explain the value of your reader's information.

Thank you for helping us give needy students a head start in business.

Surveying Employees

1.8

When you need your employees' input, tell them how they will eventually benefit from the information they give now.

We are reorganizing the filing system of Customer Service Correspondence in preparation for storing all form letters in the Word Processing Center. This storage will mean that you will no

Give background information and explain how your reader can benefit.

longer have to type many routine letters. Instead, Word Processing can reproduce them.

In order for Word Processing to handle form letters well, we need the following information from you. You are the experts in the system.

Make your readers the experts.

1. What kind of letters do you type most often?
2. In an average day how often do you modify form letters to fit particular situations?
3. Which kinds of letters do you most often have to revise?

Ask questions requiring brief answers.

Please respond by September 9 so we can have the system operating for you by the new year.

State deadlines in terms of your readers.

Thank you.

Requesting Information to Correct Mistakes

1.9

When a customer or client makes a common error, send a letter that won't embarrass him or her. In the following letter notice how the bank avoids saying, "You recently presented a check for payment. . . ."

A check was recently presented for payment against your checking account, which has a zero balance.

Don't accuse your reader.

If additional checks have been written on the account, a deposit should be made to cover them.

Highlight important requests.

Please let us know if you intend to continue using this account. We will be happy to assist you in balancing the account if there is a problem.

Offer help.

Requesting Information to Correct Oversights

1.10

Life is so full of little details that sometimes we all forget the important things.

Minimize the oversight.

It seems you have momentarily overlooked your life insurance policy. We have not received last quarter's premium. Was this an oversight, or do you intend to discontinue your policy? Please let us know as soon as you can. We would hate to see you lose something so vital to your family's security.

Stress your reader's well-being.