Business Communication

A PROBLEM-SOLVING APPROACH

THIRD
EDITION

Poe / Fruehling

BUSINESS COMMUNICATION

A Problem-Solving Approach

THIRD EDITION

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Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach
Third Edition

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PREFACE

Once they use it, teachers—and their students—become loyalists about *Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach.* This phenomenon, consistent through two editions, has strengthened the authors' conviction that the time had indeed come for a unique approach to the subject. Thus the approach taken in the first and second editions is retained and enhanced in this edition. This unique approach to business writing embraces seven major concepts:

1. *Business communications are highly individualistic and cannot be written to formula.* There is no magic formula for writing a good letter or report; individual writers approach a communication situation differently (and each produces a unique letter or report), depending on how they feel about their job and the matter to be communicated, their relationship to each reader, and the attitudes and policies of the organization they represent.
2. *Electronic technology helps the business writer—but it is not a substitute for writing skill.* Electronic technology can, in many ways, make life easier for the business writer. Information and word processing, telecommunications, personal computing, electronic mail and scheduling, and facsimile transmission are among the many communications technologies discussed in the course. But these technologies are discussed in the context of how they can aid—not make—good business writers.
3. *To produce effective communications, students should be involved as deeply as possible in each writing situation.* It is extremely important that students really care about the results of their communications. This is difficult to bring about when assignments are presented as abstract situations in which students feel only a bystander role. Instead, the authors ask students to imagine themselves in various positions—assistant office services manager, word processing operator, assistant manager, assistant personnel manager, document reprographics operator, and so on—thus approaching each communication problem as a participant

rather than as an onlooker. Each case is constructed around a role-playing situation—even the writing projects at the end of each case are similarly designed.

4. *Examples of letters and reports are most effective when related to situations with which students are familiar.* In the typical textbook, students are shown primarily "good" examples of communications—and always in situations unrelated to the students' experience. In *Business Communication: A Problem-Solving Approach*, students have a direct involvement in every case problem, and the examples are possible solutions to these problems; the examples offer one or more "wrong" solutions, with analyses, and one or more recommended solutions, again with analyses. This device, the authors believe, is superior to narrative presentation of "rules" followed by an abstract illustration of the rules.
5. *Most of the challenging communication situations faced by the writer on the job require choosing between alternatives—which may be only unpleasant alternatives.* Many students have been taught that every communication must be friendly, tactful, positive, and goodwill-engendering. Although true for many letters and reports, as a generalization this is idealistic. Writers face many problems that arise out of human error, misunderstandings, and carelessness, and students should be prepared to deal with them. Thus numerous situations are given in which the student, as a writer-entrepreneur, must say no, apologize for the mistakes of fellow employees, reprimand recalcitrant customers and suppliers, and take the hard line when there is no other course.
6. *Since the typical employee writes many interoffice memorandums, they should be introduced early in the course, and students should be given frequent opportunity to use this form of communication.* Memos are in reality letters, and the general principles of writing effective letters that are to go outside the organization also apply to effective letters sent to fellow employees. Therefore, students are exposed early to this very important communication medium and deal with it throughout the course.
7. *There should be a culminating project, which embraces all the principles covered throughout the course, to provide students with an experience that simulates a real-life job situation.* In the Communications Project at the end of the book, the student acts as advertising director for a magazine company using electronic technology. Students face 25 communication situations, typical of both the traditional and electronic office, that demand not only writing skill but the exercise of judgment and the selection of alternatives.

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SOME FEATURES OF THE THIRD EDITION

Following are some of the major features of the new edition:

- *Reading Before Writing.* Because few students have been exposed to typical communications that flow in and out of a business office, an introductory section describes the role of communications in business and how electronic technology facilitates that role. Before they actually start to write, students read to get a perspective on how well-written communications contribute to a business's success. In addition, many examples of effective letters and memorandums illustrate some of the most important uses of communications. By reading and analyzing successful letters and memorandums at the outset, students will be better prepared to understand the principles of business writing that follow.
- *Human Relations in Communication.* Good writing is largely the application of effective human relations and sound management principles to communication situations. In the new edition, the qualities that are common to good writers and good managers are stressed—qualities that become increasingly important with the arrival of the electronic office.
- *Electronic Technology in Communication.* The business writer of today faces the exciting challenge of using electronic technology in such a way as to broaden the scope of communicating. This theme is reflected throughout the course in appropriate chapters, beginning with the Part 1 introduction and specially concentrated in the new Chapter 6 and in the electronic office glossary.
- *Word Usage.* Proper and concise word usage in communications has always been critical to effective communicating. It has become increasingly important in this rapidly emerging electronic age, where one improper word can cause endless errors and ill will. To emphasize word usage, the course includes specific coverage on avoiding "computerese," "businessese" and "federalese," clichés, euphemisms, slang, exaggeration, jargon, and other faults that can destroy effectiveness. In addition, starting with the cases in Chapter 7, new Style Checkup exercises have students apply the principles of style learned previously in their education to their newly developed skills as business writers.
- *Craftsmanship.* The course focuses continuously on the treatment of sentences and paragraphs in business communications. Emphasis is on sentence length, the flow of ideas between sentences, the transitions between paragraphs, and such faults as sentence fragments, run-ons, imbalance, omission of words, dangling modifiers, and biased language.

- *Planning for Writing.* Planning techniques for writing are consistently developed throughout the first five chapters of the course. Emphasis is on the importance of visualizing the reader and taking into account his or her preparedness, interests, and prejudices.

THE WORKBOOK

A workbook is available which is carefully integrated, chapter by chapter and case by case, with the textbook and provides supplementary practice in writing letters, memorandums, and reports. The workbook emphasizes analyzing communications, editing and revising weak communications, and restructuring and simplifying garbled and incoherent messages. In many instances, letterheads and interoffice memorandum forms are provided. A special feature of the workbook is the new English Usage Revisited exercise for each of the cases in the textbook. These drills provide practice in dealing with over 90 common problems in punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, possessives, word usage, spelling, and grammar—all important skills to maintain permanently.

INSTRUCTOR'S MANUAL AND KEY

The *Instructor's Manual and Key* contains teaching suggestions and the key to both the textbook and the workbook. It also includes for review purposes new English Usage tests on punctuation, capitalization, sentence structure, possessives, word usage, spelling, and grammar. The key to the tests is also included in the manual.

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PART ONE

WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS

Letters are sometimes referred to as substitutes for personal visits. Most people find it impossible to meet and talk with everyone with whom they want to communicate—whether friends or relatives who live in a distant town, fellow employees just three doors or floors away, or customers, clients, and suppliers who are scattered everywhere. And the telephone is not always a satisfactory means of communication. Thus all of us must depend on letters to represent us.

This fact alone makes letters a powerful medium of communication in all walks of life. But even if we could handle all our business and social communications on a face-to-face basis, we would still need to prepare written messages. One reason is that we often need a permanent record of what was said, to whom, by whom, and on what date. Equally if not more important is that written communications can often do a far better job than spoken communications. We'll demonstrate that last statement many, many times throughout this book.

THE ROLE OF LETTERS IN BUSINESS

What do we mean when we use the term *letter*? Of course, you know that it is a written message from one individual or organization to another individual or organization. However, there are really two types of letters used in business:

1. Those addressed to people outside one's own organization. (In this book, when we speak of *business letters* or simply *letters*, we are referring to this type.)
2. Those addressed to people within one's own organization. (These may be thought of as interoffice letters, although they are usually called *memorandums* or simply *memos*.)

The distinction between letters that are sent to outsiders and those sent to fellow employees is arbitrary, since the content, language, and tone are quite similar. In many instances, the only real difference is in format (setup), as you will see later.

Businesses use written communications in dozens of different ways. Six of the most important uses of both *business letters* and *memorandums* are to:

- **Ask for and supply information and services.**
- **Confirm agreements made and decisions reached.**
- **Transmit important documents and other materials.**
- **Obtain and grant special favors.**
- **Establish and maintain a favorable image (picture) of the organization.**
- **Promote effective personnel relations.**

***Business letters,* however, have four additional uses, unique to themselves, which are to:**

- **Promote the sale of merchandise or services.**
- **Arrange for the purchase or sale of goods and services on both a cash and credit basis.**
- **Collect money due from customers and clients who purchase on credit.**
- **Develop and maintain good relations with customers, clients, suppliers, and the public at large.**

ELECTRONIC TECHNOLOGY IN BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

In the preceding paragraphs, we suggested that letters and memos are "paper" communications. This is because most of these messages are written on paper and placed in the mail for delivery to those to whom they are addressed.

However, in an increasing number of offices, the computer has made it possible for people to send and receive written messages without using paper. Much has been said to all of us about the accomplishments of the computer. But for many of us, just understanding what the computer is—let alone what it does—is mind-boggling. Let's first understand what a computer is. A *computer* is simply a piece of equipment that manipulates information automatically by interpreting electrical impulses.

One of the most important computers to communicators is the word processor. The *word processor,* which is also called a *text editor,* includes a typewriterlike keyboard connected to a *video display terminal* (VDT), which is actually a television screen. Sometimes the keyboard and VDT are connected to a printer, which makes paper copies (called *hard copy* or *printout*) on command.

Using a word processor is similar to using a typewriter. When you type, or *keyboard,* your message, the words, or *text,* first appear on the VDT rather than on paper, and you can edit and rewrite the text electronically—before you make a hard copy. For example, suppose that you want to send the following message to the members of the Personnel Planning Committee, each of whom has a word processor that is linked to your system:

> The meeting of the Planning Committee scheduled for January 13 at 10 o'clock has been postponed. It will take place on January 21, same time and place as usual.

Immediately after you keyboard this messsage, which appears on your VDT, you get word that the place of the meeting must also be changed because of a conflict. Thus, you electronically delete the phrase *same time and place as usual* and replace it by keyboarding the following: *in Conference Room 3 rather than in the Board Room. The time is still 10 o'clock.*

Once you keyboard this message on your word processor, you can, with a computer command, send it to the members of your committee. This is done through the use of what are called the *electronic message files,* which are document records retained by the computer's storage unit (called its *memory*). Once your message is sent, the committee members simply read it on their own VDTs and make a note of the new meeting date and place. Also, if hard copies are desired, the word processor, on command, will produce them.

This small example of what electronic equipment can do makes it easy to see why more and more organizations are purchasing equipment that puts them in direct "written" contact with customers, clients, suppliers, and others in all parts of the country—and abroad—without the use of paper. The messages may look exactly like those that are typed on paper, except that they appear on a screen. The system of transmitting documents electronically

rather than on paper is often referred to as *electronic mail.* We'll talk about this in more detail later (see page 96).

We'll illustrate applications of computer technology in communications throughout the book. (Detailed coverage is in Chapter 6.) As you get acquainted with some of the marvels of the computer, however, keep in mind that the computer can do only what it is instructed (*programmed*) to do. Thus when you have to write to important clients and customers and other VIPs, you can't rely on the computer to do your thinking. *Creating* the communications such as those you will see throughout this book still requires the human brain and human skill. Until the computer is given a "soul," with all the qualities that word embraces, you as the writer will still have to compose the original message. And deciding how to word your message so that it will achieve your objective—no matter what method you use to transmit that message—is your responsibility. Indeed, that is what this book is all about.

BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS IN YOUR FUTURE

There are many reasons why you should know how to write effective business communications, regardless of the type of equipment to which you have access. In the first place, your value to the organization you work for will be greatly enhanced, which often means more rapid progress up the promotion ladder. Competent writers are not as plentiful as you might imagine, and those who write well stand out like a beacon.

Second, those who can compose effective business letters make new friends and keep old ones for the organization, thereby increasing sales and profits, which all businesses need for survival.

Third, good writers can save a great deal of time, effort, and money for an organization. Millions of dollars are wasted each year by people who write windy and garbled messages that exhaust and befuddle their readers.

Finally, your rating as an employee—which hinges greatly on your skill in working harmoniously with the people around you—shoots up dramatically when you master the art of writing sensible, tactful, and finely honed memorandums.

How Much Writing?

How heavy will your writing responsibilities be? The answer to that question depends, of course, on what your job is. If you are a

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