



Business Writing and Communication Strategies and Applications

Brown/Reid

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Preface

Business Writing and Communication: Strategies and Applications is designed to meet the needs of the basic business communication course. The book is equally suitable for employee development programs in industry or as a reference for anyone interested in communicating more effectively in business. Good business writing means shaping a message that evokes the desired response from the reader. What is it that makes a letter or memo most effective in eliciting this response? What strategies, style, and characteristics will best influence the reader? *Business Writing and Communication* answers these questions and stresses the development of a close relationship between the writer and reader.

The three most important qualities of business correspondence are clarity, appeal, and conciseness. The plan of this book is based on the development of these qualities, covering individual topics such as precision of information; forcefulness in writing; writing strategies; reader's interest and point of view; effective tone, tact, and wording; and proper attitude and psychological framework.

Specialized types of communication drawn from actual business situations are illustrated and analyzed. Included are guidelines, techniques, and models for adjustment claims, inquiries, credit checks, recommendations, collections, orders, confirmations, refusals, goodwill messages, announcements, congratulations, requests, replies, conciliations, and job applications. Problems and exercises in each unit require the student to write "on-the-job" letters. Strategies for oral communication are also provided. The Appendix is replete with checklists and glossaries of helpful information such as spacing, word division, spelling, punctuation, usage, abbreviation, forms of address, business terms, and model letters.

The structure of the book is flexible; the sections are complete in themselves and are not interdependent.

An Instructor's Manual is available which contains lecture suggestions and answers to questions in Part I.

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Contents

PART 1 The Basic Principles: Clarity and Character

Chapter 1 The Double Message: The Total Message 3

The Effective Business Letter

Clarity / Character

Planning the Letter

Defining Objectives / Accomplishing the Objectives

Chapter 2 The Format: No Margin for Error 15

Basic Formats

*Blocked / Semiblocked / Full Blocked / Simplified /
Hanging Indentation*

Essential Parts

*Heading / Inside Address / Salutation / Body /
Complimentary Close / Signature / Identification Line*

Special Features

*Personal Notation / Reference Line / Attention Line /
Subject Line / Enclosure Notation / Carbon Copy
Distribution Notation / Mailing Notation / Postscript*

Other Marks of Physical Precision

*Stationery / Margins / Envelope / Continuing Sheet /
Spacing and Punctuation / Correct Typing and Use of
English*

Format of a Memorandum

Chapter 3 The Information: Exact and Exactly Enough 53

Inaccurate Data

Omissions

Irrelevancies

Ambiguities

*Careless Pronouns / Misplaced Modifiers / Words with
Multiple Meanings / Vague Words*

Contradictions

| | | |
|------------------|---|------------|
| Chapter 4 | The Words: Precise, Alive, Direct | 62 |
| | Precise <i>Denotation—the Precise Definition / Connotation—the Precise Tone / The Handbook of Duplicity</i> | |
| | Alive <i>Concrete and Specific / Strategic Generalization / Fresh</i> | |
| | Direct <i>Hackneyed Phrases / Jargon / Jargon-Making Machine: Checklist / Exaggeration / Incorrect Idiom / The Calculated Euphemism / Euphemisms: Checklist</i> | |
| Chapter 5 | The Sentence: Clear and Forceful | 79 |
| | Brevity and Directness <i>Repeat for Emphasis Only / Shorten Clauses and Phrases / Brevity: Checklist / The “to” Form of the Verb / Eliminate Unnecessary Articles / Eliminate Indirectness / Avoid Clusters of General Words / Combine Short Sentences / Avoid Multiple Hedging</i> | |
| | Consistency and Connection <i>Fuzzy Pronouns and Pointers / Dangling Modifiers / Shifts in Perspective / Wrenched Parallelism</i> | |
| | Emphasis <i>Key Positions / Order of Climax / The Suspense Sentence / Delayed Subjects / Strong Active Verb / Unusual Word Order / Repetition of Key Words / The Short Sentence / Paragraph Length</i> | |
| Chapter 6 | The You Attitude: Getting the Reader Involved | 100 |
| | Emphasize “You” Instead of “I” Point Out Reader Benefit Have Real Interest in Your Reader Check Your Reader-Interest Index | |
| Chapter 7 | Tone: The Sound that Sells | 112 |
| | Tact <i>Abruptness / Irritability / Sarcasm / Suspicion / Accusation / Irritating Expressions: Checklist / Superiority / Presumptuousness</i> | |
| | Sincerity <i>False Humility / Flattery / Exaggeration</i> | |
| | Positiveness | |

*Emphasize What Can Be Done / Avoid Negative Words /
Be Positive Instead of Neutral / Beginning and Ending*

PART 2 Kinds of Communications: The Profit and the Loss

Chapter 8 Routine Communications 133

Routine Requests and Inquiries

*Organizational Plan / Guidelines / Typical Letters /
Requests for Free Materials / Request for Information
or Action from a Customer / Organizational Plan for
Additional Information / Request for Special
Consideration / Order Letter / Credit Check*

Routine Replies

*Organizational Plan / Guidelines / Typical Letters /
Reply to Request for Information / Negative Reply to
Request for Information / Confirmation of an Order /
Follow-up After Personal Negotiations / Stopgap Reply /
Credit Check / Recommendations / Organizational
Plan for a Recommendation*

Form Letters and Prototype Letters

Chapter 9 Favorable Communications 180

Good-News Messages

*Organizational Plan / Guidelines / Typical Letters /
Approving Credit / Granting an Adjustment / Granting
a Favor / Announcing a Raise*

Goodwill Messages

*Organizational Plan / Guidelines / Typical Letters /
Congratulations for Achievement / Praise for a Job
Well Done / General Appreciation for Patronage /
Welcome to a Newcomer*

Chapter 10 Unfavorable Communications 202

Demands

*Organizational Plan / Typical Letters / Claims /
Guidelines / Reprimands / Guidelines for Reprimands /
Collection Letters*

Collection Series

Conciliation

*Organizational Plan / Guidelines / Typical Letters /
Apology—Explanation—Adjustment /
Apology—Explanation / Apology*

Bad News

*Organizational Plan / Guidelines / Typical Letters /
Refusal of Credit / Refusal of Request for Adjustment /
Refusal of Request for a Favor / Turning Down a Job
Applicant*

Chapter 11 The Sales Letter 255

The Persuasive Process

*Capture Attention / Focus on a Basic Motive / Basic
Human Desires and Motives: Checklist / Develop
Persuasive Appeals / Induce a Course of Action*

Typical Letters

*Special Items Letter / Reply to a Particular Inquiry /
Institutional Letter*

Chapter 12 Specialized Writing Projects 267

Job Application

*Application Letter / Solicited Applications / Format for
Resume: Guidelines / Covering Letter / Follow-up
Letters*

The Business Report

*Steps in Writing a Report / Define the Problem /
Gathering Information / Guidelines—Notetaking /
Organize the Findings / Draw Conclusions and Make
Recommendations / Write a First Draft / Use
Illustrative Aids / Revise the Report / Proper Format /
Footnotes—Guidelines / Bibliography—Guidelines*

Typical Reports

*Short Informal Reports / Longer Formal Reports /
Checklist: Parts and Guidelines for Reports*

PART 3 Strategies of Oral Communication:

Chapter 13 Strategies of Oral Communication 309

Listening

Nonverbal Communication

Face-to-Face Speaking

Conversation

The Interview

| | | |
|-------------------|---|------------|
| | <i>Strategies for the Interviewer / Guidelines for the Interviewer / Strategies for the Interviewee / Guidelines for the Interviewee / Questions Frequently Asked During Interviews</i> | |
| | The Formal Talk | |
| | Telephone Communication | |
| Appendix A | Forms of Address and Salutation Proper Spacing | 325 |
| Appendix B | Abbreviations Capitalization Punctuation Numbers as Figures or Words Syllabication—Dividing Words Abbreviations of States | 334 |
| Appendix C | Glossary of Usage Outdated Expressions Checklist of Clichés | 368 |
| | Glossary of Terms Frequently Used in Business | 392 |
| | Index | 399 |
| | Index of Model Letters | 403 |

Part 1

The Basic Principles: Clarity and Character

1

The Double Message: The Total Message

The Effective Business Letter Planning the Letter

THE EFFECTIVE BUSINESS LETTER

The business letter may be defined as a written message that tries to influence its reader to take some action or adopt some attitude desired by the writer. That is, the writer tries to get his or her reader to agree with the message of the letter. This attempt at agreement should always be part of the letter, whether the goal is immediate and tangible, such as the collecting of a bill, or whether it is an intangible attitude like goodwill. Any letter is judged by how successfully it gains agreement from the reader. The successful sales message gets its reader to agree that a product or service is worth buying. The effective collection letter convinces the debtor that payment of the bill is the wisest policy. The convincing application letter makes the prospective employer agree that the applicant is highly desirable for the job.

But what makes a business communication effective? How do you get the reader to agree with your message? The first thing you must remember is that a written business communication has a double message. Its reader gets meaning from *what* is said and from how it is said. The primary message is the information, the factual material presented. The secondary message is the manner in which the letter delivers the message.

The combination of the two messages is the *total message*, which is like a face-to-face conversation. A person's tone of voice, way of speaking, the urgency or calmness of his voice, the frown or smile on his face, the glint in his eye, all tell something beyond what words say. Sometimes the secondary message reinforces the words; sometimes it contradicts. A severe contradiction can cancel the verbal message, and the manner becomes the primary message. "I hear what you are (or mean), not what you say."

These two messages are called the *informative message* and the *character message*. Why is it important to keep these two messages in mind? Because with the business letter we are trying to evoke a certain response from the reader. We must make sure that both the clarity of the letter (*what* the letter says) and the character (*how* the letter says it) help to bring about that response. Since a business letter is written for a specific purpose, its message cannot be neutral. It will work either for you or against you. Give attention to clarity and character, and you can make them work for you.

Let's see how clarity and character work, or fail to work, in a letter.

Clarity

Assume that you are a customer service correspondent in the home office of Auto General, Inc. Recently you have had several complaints from customers (managers of retail auto parts stores) that checks due them for exchange parts (brake shoes and generators, for example) and returned merchandise are slow in reaching them. They say your competitors are much faster. You alert your supervisor, and he decides that each district office of Auto General should prepare its own refund checks so that customers will get them sooner. He writes the following memo to the district managers telling them about the new procedures.

To: All District Managers

Date: April 17, 1978

From: B. D. Collins

Subject: Refunds

Effective May 1 and thereafter issue all checks for any amount written out to customers for exchange parts and for returned merchandise from your office directly to the customer without having to go through the home office.

We feel that this plan and procedure will not only help to improve customer relations substantially but will also close the gap on one of the important areas where our company compares unfavorably with other companies in its contacts with customers.

However, you may or may not find in your previous or committed routine that this is feasible. This new practice may be too time-consuming. Comment on same at the bottom of this memo and return it to me. Please do this by return mail, as we hope to effectuate this new procedure immediately. Thank you for your cooperation.

You can easily see that the message is garbled. It is clumsy, wordy, and hard to read. The managers will finally be able to figure it out, after “crawling” through “underbrush” and “deadwood.”

See how you like a revised version—direct, brief, essential, and cordial.

To: All District Managers

Date: April 17, 1978

From: B. D. Collins

Subject: Refunds

Beginning May 1, please send all checks for exchange parts and returned merchandise to customers directly from your office. This procedure should speed up the process and get rid of the complaints we've had from some of our customers.

The idea should work; let's give it a try. Let me know if you run into any problems.

In another message clarity fails, and the recipient can do nothing. The writer neglected to give the address of the new warehouse. More communication is necessary.

S P R I N G A P P L I A N C E C O .

Colorado Springs, Colorado 80901

March 20, 1978

The Yale Manufacturing Co.
3120 Railway Street
New Haven, Connecticut 06510

Gentlemen:

This is to confirm the telephone order I placed this
afternoon for the following:

3 Alaskan King refrigerators, model 250K

These refrigerators are to be delivered in three weeks.
But please deliver them not to our main store as usual,
but to the new warehouse.

Sincerely,



Ralph Keating

Character

Information can be complete and clear in a business letter, and the message will still fail because it lacks *character*. The following letter is clear enough: the company is sending the latest catalog. But how dull! The recipient is likely to lay the catalog aside without making a purchase.

Dear Mr. Taylor:

With reference to yours of recent date would state that we are enclosing herewith our latest sales prospectus. Should the need arise for any of our parts, we will be very glad to fill your order for same.

Very truly yours,

With a little thought and concern for the reader, the writer could have added positive character to the informative message.

Dear Mr. Taylor:

Here is the latest catalogue of United parts and equipment, as you requested. Please note that you, as a new customer, will receive a 10% discount on your first order. Whenever you do wish to place an order, you can count on our usual promptness at filling it.

Sincerely,

It is reader directed. Besides using the other-directed pronouns “you” and “your” five times (against only one use of the self-centered pronouns “I” and “we”), the letter points out two direct benefits to the reader—discount and prompt delivery. The reader is likely to feel warm toward the company and its products.

Again, in the following letter the informative message is clear enough, but the tone is insulting. There probably will be no more business from that customer.

Dear Mrs. Walters:

Because you delayed so long in your response, Model GSF is out of stock. If you are interested, we have some similar models on hand.

Yours truly,

The accusation “you delayed” and the discourteous indifference of the last sentence will likely cause Mrs. Walters to crumple the letter and throw it into the wastebasket. Some reader interest and a positive alternative could add the tone that might produce a sale and a satisfied customer.

Dear Mrs. Walters:

If I had known your needs before May 20, I could have shipped Model GSF immediately. However, the spring sale drained our stock.

The Model GSK, a similar instrument, is in stock, and you could have it at the same price as the GSF. It normally sells for \$10.00 more. We will ship it as soon as you give us the word.

Sincerely,

This letter is successful. It works for the company because its total message is positive.