



SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WRITING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR THE STUDENT
AND PROFESSIONAL

Marion Sitzmann

SUCCESSFUL BUSINESS WRITING

A PRACTICAL GUIDE
FOR THE STUDENT
AND PROFESSIONAL

Marion Sitzmann, Ph.D.
Creighton University
Omaha, Nebraska



NATIONAL TEXTBOOK COMPANY • Skokie, Illinois 60077

A special debt of gratitude is owed to the following for their kind suggestions and help in preparing this text: Sue Kamler, Mark Thiesen; David Paolicelli of the Brown Electrical Equipment Co., Carnegie, Penn.; William Henry, President, Rich Lorimer and Fred Mueller of Skinner Macaroni, Omaha, Nebr.; George Wendt of Illinois Association of Professional Insurance Agents; Robert Steele, General Manager of Sioux Bee Corp., Sioux City, Iowa; Chesley Smith of the American Popcorn Company, Sioux City, Iowa; Cathy Campbell of Mutual of Omaha, Omaha, Nebr.; Lynn Harvey; Chris Kleisen; Carl Lo Sasso; and Fr. Robert Halter, O.S.B. This book is dedicated to Fr. Harold McAuliffe, S.J.

*Copyright © 1978 by National Textbook Co.,
8259 Niles Center Rd., Skokie, Ill. 60077
All rights reserved. No part of this book
may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,
mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise,
without the prior permission of National Textbook Company.
Manufactured in the United States of America.*

890PP 987654321

Foreword

Successful Business Writing is designed to present a thorough treatment of the major forms of business communications: memo, sales call report, business report, letter, and the press release. It is a no-nonsense book that gives the principles and practices of business writing. The exercises at the end of each chapter are intended to make the business student conscious of the world in which he or she will have to operate. The book is intended to prepare the student (within the scope of one semester) for the business world.

The book will prove useful and invaluable to business administration students, those concerned about the techniques of business writing and the business man or business woman who may seek to improve his or her written communicative skills.

Throughout the text, I have taken care to dislodge stereotyped ideas embedded in the minds of students that anyone can write for the business world or that "business writing must of necessity be always dry and dull." The concept I wish to stress throughout the text is that the business world is *alive*, and the good student will capture this vitality in his or her writing. Words like "sensitive," "personalized," "conversational" have been used on purpose in these chapters precisely with the intent of conveying a sense of the "human." The examples at the end of each chapter have a tone of modernity; they are written to express the excitement of the business world to the student in the classroom.

Why is it that there are so few business men and women who excel in business writing? Perhaps I am too simplistic in my judgment to say that they have been turned off by the complicated texts of business writing manuals that have been given to them. The very weight of most of these manuals is enough to make the struggling business student think that the subject of business writing is complicated and, therefore, impossible to learn. This is precisely why the pages of this book have been kept to under one hundred. Theory/example/practice tell it all! If a student thoroughly understands each chapter and does one or two of the assignments, he or she will learn how to write for the business world. Style and precision will come with practice.

Contents

1 Notetaking	1
Effective Notetaking	1
Organization	1
Outlining Material	3
Sample Speech	4
Model Outline of Speech by Notetaker	7
Exercises	8
2 Memos	9
Writing an Effective Memo	9
Conciseness	9
Completeness	10
Correctness	11
Strength	11
Sample Memos	14
Memo of Instruction	14
Memo of Request	14
Memo of Proposal	15
Memo of Transmittal	15
Memo of Inquiry	15
Exercises	16
3 Business Letters	17
Purpose of the Business Letter	17
Parts of a Business Letter	18
Heading	18
Dateline	18
Inside Address	18
Salutation	19
Body	19
Complimentary Close	19
Signature	19
Stenographic Reference	20
Envelope Address	20
Postscript	20
Layout of the Letter	20
Block Layout	20
Semiblock Layout	20

Style	22
Language	22
Sentences	23
Paragraphs	23
Beginnings	24
Body	24
Endings	24
Correctness	24
Neatness	24
Exactness	25
Clarity	25
Tone	25
Positive	25
Negative	25
Persuasive	26
Samples of Letters	27
Inquiry	27
Refusal	27
Persuasion	28
Complaint	29
Compliment	30
Information	30
Exercises	31
4 Business Reports	32
General Content and Purpose	32
Subject	33
Origin	33
Frequency	33
Formality	33
Prewriting Considerations	34
Analysis of Purpose	34
Writing for the Reader	34
Source Materials	35
Organizing the Report	35
Order of Notes	35
Revisions	36
Outline	36
Order	40
Headings	41
Illustrations	42
Bibliography	46
Qualities of the Well-Written Report	46
Conciseness, Word Economy, and Completeness	46
Specific and Concrete Words	46

Sample Business Reports	49
Short Report	49
Long Report	52
Exercises	63
5 Press Releases	64
Traits of a Good Press Release Writer	64
News Sense	64
Motivational Awareness	64
Public Relations	64
The Press Family	64
Poor Public Relations	65
Writing the Press Release	65
Inverted Pyramid Structure	65
Length of Paragraphs and Press Releases	65
Style	66
Form	66
Dates	66
Omissions	66
Qualities of a Good Picture	67
Clarity	67
Size	67
Sending the Pictures	67
Sample Press Releases	68
George R. Wendt's Press Release	68
Fr. Matthew E. Creighton's Press Release	69
The Sue Bee Squeeze Container Press Release	71
Exercises	71
6 Sales Call Reports	72
Preparation for Writing	72
Material Included	72
Descriptive Information	72
Evaluative Information	73
Elements in Writing the Sales Call Report	74
Judgment	74
Brevity	74
Headlines	74
Objectivity	74
Exaggeration	74
Correctness	74
Sample Sales Call Report	75
Exercises	77
Appendix	78

Notetaking

1

Effective Notetaking

Notetaking is personal. There is no universal “right” way to take notes. However, all notetaking involves condensing, organizing, and outlining. When you take notes at a meeting or a conference, you are trying to condense someone else’s thoughts into your own words without changing the essential meaning. The key to doing this is to understand precisely what was said and record it correctly with the understanding that you may need to refer to the notes in the future and know just what the ideas they represent were intended to convey. Because it is impossible and usually undesirable to take down word for word what a speaker is saying, an outline may prove most useful to you for recording and then organizing essential ideas. If there is an agenda for a particular meeting, it can help you organize your notes more easily in an outline.

Good notetaking is especially valuable to the manager who has to convey important company decisions and information to his or her subordinates. If the notes are correct, then there can be no doubt as to what an executive wants to have done. Also, notes can be helpful to a manager in answering personal questions or doubts that may arise after an important oral report or an executive speech.

Organization

Order of Delivery

Organization of material is absolutely essential to good notetaking. You should keep together notes that belong together. All notes proper to a section should be kept in that section. The same holds true for notes concerning one topic or one subject. You should use enough words so that, when you return to the notation at a later date, you will be able to understand the significance of a particular phrase or word. Conversely, you should take care to avoid all details that, noted in haste, may detract from or confuse the major points. In a business meeting or in a conference with one’s boss, the speaker usually presents ideas backed by examples that make theoretical statements or main ideas relevant and clear. This order of speaking is so commonly used that you may sometimes anticipate the format and take notes accordingly. Example:

2 *Successful Business Writing*

- I. Business has been lagging
 - A. Three factors contribute to a 5% decrease in sales.
 1. The northeast division has lost two salespeople to competitors.
 2. Plant No. 5 is working only at 80% capacity.
 3. Research on a new product is behind schedule.
 - B. Three possible solutions to the problem of decreasing sales need examination.
 1. Two new salespeople could be hired.
 2. The machinery in Plant No. 5 could be better maintained.
 3. More staff may be hired temporarily until research is back on schedule.

This order might be turned around; examples may precede the main ideas. The notetaker needs to pay close attention to the order being used. By presenting examples before the main ideas, the speaker forces the notetaker to decipher what the main ideas are. When this method is used, the notetaker should listen for key words and phrases that flag the main ideas: "Therefore, one can only conclude . . ." or "It is, therefore, quite evident. . . ."

The normal pattern that speakers follow in presenting their ideas is: introduction, main body, and summary. The notetaker should be aware that the item or topics usually will be listed in the introduction. In the second part, or main body, the speaker will cover each important item in detail with examples and factual support. The summary will consist of the most important information, including details highlighting each item. If you, the notetaker, are aware of these three parts of every business speech or conference, then you can anticipate and take notes more efficiently.

Digressions

One of the problems of taking notes is that some speakers wander aimlessly off the topic or digress from the main point. A speaker often gives a hint of going off the track by casually saying, "This reminds me of the time" or "fifteen years ago this happened" If you, as a notetaker, are aware of how a speaker may digress, you can automatically rest your pen until he or she returns to the main point.

Accuracy

The notes you take must be accurate. Therefore, you must listen carefully to the spoken information. Details such as dates, numbers, and technical terms must be written down immediately during the talk, not reworded or paraphrased later.

Key Words

If you are taking notes on a main idea, you need not slavishly copy down every word. Be selective in taking notes. You should try to determine what are the main ideas of the presentation, along with major examples or pieces of evidence presented to support them.

Techniques of abbreviating words and omitting verbs, adjectives, and adverbs can prove to be very helpful, especially if you are listening to a rapid-fire speaker. If, for instance, the speaker says “The Royal American Tire Company has gone through six years of steady growth,” you may simply write: “R.A.T.C. 6 yrs of growth.” You must identify key words while the statement is being made, but at the same time you must leave out all excessive information. You won’t have time to copy down every word a speaker says. Abbreviation, then, is a necessary timesaving device in business communication. However, be sure to write your notes out fully while the meeting is fresh in your mind.

Body of a Speech

You must identify the main body of the business speech. You will need to take more comprehensive notes on this than on the introduction. You should pay close attention to verbal cues, such as “Let’s now cover in detail,” or “Let us get down to the key issues” If the speaker does not clearly announce his or her entrance into the main body, you should be able to detect this when the speaker reiterates point by point the issues mentioned briefly in the introduction.

Summaries

You should pay close attention to the summary or conclusion; it points out the topics that the speaker considers most important. At times, the summary will indicate specific conclusions drawn from the material. The notes you take during a summary should be brief because you have already taken detailed notes on each topic of the main body.

Outlining Material

As pointed out before, recognizing the relationships between bits of information is essential to good notetaking. One of the best ways to indi-

4 *Successful Business Writing*

cate these relationships is the outline. In an outline, the main idea of a section will always appear first; details supporting the main idea will be indented. Example:

- I. Business has been lagging.
 - A. Three factors contribute to a 5% decrease in sales.
 1. The northeast division has lost two salespeople.

Some notetakers may be turned off by the word "outline." Such persons may feel they can be as effective taking notes by simply using an indentation in the outline instead of Roman numerals, capital letters, and Arabic numerals. But the letter and number notation in the outline make it easier to tell the major ideas from the minor ones.

Sample Speech

Farm Strike in 1978

The last time you purchased a steak, did you really stop to consider what you were paying for? Or, what were your reactions when you saw those large parades of tractors, pickups, and trucks motor-ing down the main streets of the larger cities of this country? What I would like to do today is to give you a few insights or provide you with a few thoughts regarding a large problem within our country.

The plight of the small farmer *is a problem*. When viewing farming or agriculture in this country, we should keep in mind three things. First, the decline in the number of farmers each year; second, the decline in farm prices and the increase in production costs; and third, the decline in the amount of arable farmland each year.

First, I will discuss the decline in the number of farmers each year. Driving through the countryside, one notices fewer farm homes occupied. In 1959, there were 4.1 million farmers in this country. Last year the number had declined to 2.8 million. This is a decline of nearly 50% in less than 18 years.

Along with the decline in the number of farmers is the decline in farm prices and the increase in production costs. Over the past ten years alone, farm production costs have risen from 32 billion dollars annually to 87 billion dollars. In 1976, it was estimated that the cost to the average farmer for producing one bushel of wheat was \$5.06. When the farmer took this same bushel of wheat to the market, he received only \$2.70. During this past year the figure dropped even farther to \$2.40 a bushel.

There is a shrinkage not only in the number of farmers and the prices for their crops, but also in the number of acres of arable farmland each year. Since the beginning of this country, farming has been the main means of making a living and supporting a family. Today farming is one of the biggest businesses in this country. With the advances of the Industrial Revolution, the United States began looking at itself as industrial rather than agricultural; friction between industry and farming began to arise. It is estimated that each year 1.5 million acres of land are lost to urban and industrial development. This is equivalent to a three-mile strip from San Francisco to Washington, D.C.

Now let us take a look at the actual reasons for the farm strike. There are two: (1) the increase of farm production costs and the decrease of farm commodity prices, and (2) the inconsistency of governmental assistance to the farmer.

First, we'll look at farm costs. In 1973–74, the annual net income for an average small farmer was \$9,950. Last year that dollar figure declined to \$5,300. It's interesting to note that an average person, working 40 hours a week at the minimum wage figure, will earn \$5,512 in a year. In other words, the average farmer last year made \$200 less than the minimum wage. I'd like to use a personal example to further illustrate this point. My father farms approximately 720 acres; his net income for 1977 was \$6,000. Analysis shows that this comes to less than \$2.00 an hour. An average person working 40 hours a week for a year will work approximately 2,080 hours. My father, however, worked an average of 3,000 to 3,200 hours last year. Therefore, my father worked for \$1.80 to \$2.00 an hour.

The one thing affecting farm costs the most is inflation. The farmer must pay inflated prices for fuel and farm equipment. For instance, a tractor, the most basic piece of farm machinery, costs as much as \$45,000. A truck, the second most necessary item on a farm, could cost another \$11,000. The price of farmland, too, is inflated. Around Christmas time, it was necessary for a family near my home to sell their 160-acre farm. It sold for \$2,200 an acre. This amounted to well over a quarter of a million dollars. It would be virtually impossible for a farmer within a lifetime to pay off the original purchase price of the land.

The second reason for the farm strike is the inconsistent governmental policy in assisting the farmer. In the early 1930s to the early 1970s, Congress enacted what is known as an "Idle Acre" Incentive Plan. The federal government asked the farmer to leave 10% of his

land lie idle in return for a prorated reimbursement for what he would have gotten off the land if he had planted it. In 1973-74, the government stated that there were to be no restrictions on the number of acres planted in crops. The farmer was allowed to plant whatever he wanted, as much as he wanted, and wherever he wanted. From 1975 to the present, the government has restricted the number of acres that could be planted. Congress has tried on numerous occasions to give direct financial aid to the farmer. In September of last year, Congress passed a price-support bill. This bill assured the farmer a certain market price for produce. What is not generally known about this bill, however, is that, of the 13 million dollars allotted for direct payment to the farmers, nine million has already been spent on nonfarm programs such as food stamps and school lunches.

But let us look briefly at the reactions to this farm strike. For the first time since 1932, farmers officially have organized to strike. The movement started in southern Colorado with a group of small-town businessmen and farmers called the American Agriculture. This group stated that, unless the farmers received 100 percent parity by December 14, 1977, the farmers of this country would strike and boycott. Parity is a formula used to measure the buying power of the farmer by comparing farm prices with other prices within the American economy. It is based on the years of 1910-14 because these were the most stable years in the nation's economy. Parity was last adjusted in 1967; it currently stands at 60 percent. Farmers, however, are asking for 100 percent parity, or full reimbursement, for production costs.

Conversely, the nonsupporters of the farm strike say that Congress will never agree to 100 percent parity. If Congress did agree, food prices would rise by 20 percent at the retail market, and inflation plus the cost of living would both rise. The American Farm Bureau (AFB) and the National Farmers' Organization (NFO) cannot support the strike because of antitrust laws. These laws were set up in the early 1900s in order to make it unconstitutional to restrict trade.

One might ask the question at this point: "Why is this farm strike so important?" The answer is simple. The world's population is expected to double within the next 35 years. If the number of farmers and the amount of arable farmland both shrink each year, how can this world population be fed? Our moral objections to reducing the supply of food apply not just to the United States, but to the entire world.

Model Outline of Speech by Notetaker

Introduction

- I. Opening statement
 - A. Steak
 - B. Tractorcades

Body of Speech

- II. Important factors to be considered
 - A. Decline in number of farmers
 1. In 1959 . . . 4.1 million
 2. In 1977 . . . 2.8 million
 - B. Decline in farm prices and increase in farm production
 1. In past 10 years from \$32 billion to \$87 billion
 2. \$5.06 to produce a bushel of wheat in 1976
 - C. Decline of arable farmland
 1. Industrial vs. agricultural nation
 2. 1.5 million acres lost yearly to roads and industry
- III. Basic reason for strike
 - A. Increasing farm costs and decreasing farm prices
 - B. Inconsistent government assistance
- IV. Farm costs
 - A. Decline of farm income
 1. 1973-74 average net income of \$9,950
 2. 1977 average net income of \$5,300
 - B. Inflation
 1. Energy and fuel costs
 2. Farm equipment costs: tractor up to \$45,000 and truck, \$11,000
 - C. Land inflation
 1. Definition
 2. Example of a neighbor whose farm sold for over \$2,000 an acre
- V. Inconsistent federal government intervention
 - A. 1930-70 the "Idle Acre" incentive plan
 - B. 1973-74 no restrictions on crops planted
 - C. 1975 restrictions on crops planted
 - D. Direct financial aid by price support
 1. Farm bill misnomer
 2. Of \$13 million allotted, \$9 million to nonfarm programs: food stamps and school lunches

8 *Successful Business Writing*

VI. Impact of strike

- A. Supporters' reaction: 100% parity for crops
- B. Nonsupporters' reaction to farm strike
 - 1. Claim Congress won't support 100% parity policy
 - 2. NFO and AFB won't support 100% parity policy

Summary

VII. Why is this an important issue?

- A. World population to double in 35 years
 - 1. Decline in number of farmers yearly
 - 2. Decline in amount of arable farmland yearly

Exercises

1. Attend a public lecture and take notes in outline form. Read your notes a week later. Are they clear? Do they cover the main points? Do they include supporting examples and facts? Do you understand your abbreviations?
2. Attend seminar class in the business school and take notes in outline form on what you hear.
3. From a set of outlined notes, write out minutes in complete sentences and paragraph form.
4. Take notes in outline form on a speech that is likely to be reported in depth in a newspaper (a candidate's speech or a presidential address on television). Compare your notes to the news story. Did you leave out any main ideas or supporting examples?
5. (a) Listen to a number of speeches and identify the speakers' clues to the audience to the introduction, the main body, and the summary. What phrases did the speakers use? Did a speaker wander from the main topic? How did he or she begin the digression?
(b) Make a list of key words and phrases used in an organized speech and learn to recognize them. Remember, efficient note-taking requires good listening habits.

Writing an Effective Memo

A memorandum, or memo, is an informal note to one or more people. Normally, the memo is used for interdepartmental correspondence within a company or organization. It may be written by a colleague to a colleague, a supervisor to a subordinate, or a subordinate to a supervisor. A memo conveys, in writing, important and useful information for the day-to-day operation of a business or organization. It may announce or confirm a meeting, briefly describe a new company policy, or summarize a forthcoming report.

Effective memos combine four elements: (1) conciseness, (2) completeness, (3) correctness, and (4) strength.

Conciseness

A concise memo is one that is brief and clear. Under conciseness, let us examine economy of language, word choice, use of the right jargon, and the use of descriptions.

Economy of Language

The effectiveness of a memo will be in direct proportion to the writer's economy of language. Since time is an important element for any efficiently run company or organization, word economy is absolutely necessary. A simple rule to follow is, don't use five words when one will do. Wordiness has no place in a memo and can often confuse the reader. The simple word can often pack the most punch. Remember, too, a memo should be short. When you write a three-page memo to state a simple message, you are wasting time—yours, the reader's, and the company's. Lack of economy of language can cost businesses millions of dollars and countless hours per year.

Word Choice

Being specific in the choice of words is important. A general statement does not give the reader enough information. For example, "The fabric was good" may have the reader wondering *what* fabric, *what* was good about it. The sentence can be improved by stating: "The imported silk had a delicate weave." An effective memo writer chooses simple and exact words because clear and quick action cannot be undertaken if the

10 *Successful Business Writing*

memo is not understood. Example: “The conflagration of Building 3 will necessitate the fabrication of a new structure.” This sentence could be better worded: “Building 3 will have to be rebuilt because of fire.”

Use of the Right Jargon

Words used in the memo should be appropriate to the reader’s outlook and interests. Each vocation has its own special jargon. Consequently, in order to communicate successfully with persons of other professions, the memo writer must be a master of *vocabularies*, not of a single vocabulary. For example, doctors, lawyers, carpenters, and plumbers all use special vocabularies; their memos to one another often mean nothing to those outside their calling. By using the correct technical word, the memo writer can avoid confusion and misinterpretation.

Use of Descriptions

Certain descriptions are useful in memo writing; these are the psychological tools that allow the reader to see, hear, enjoy, and profit from the words. For example, memos exchanged between buyers and sellers of clothing might include elaborate descriptions of the texture or “feel” of a certain type of cloth; all these details are extremely important in business negotiations. Example: “The Cartier Collection of suits has flattering designer details such as the bowed lapels. Meticulously tailored, these 45% worsted wool suits have a soft, textured weave featuring a bright sheen finish.” To a buyer or seller of clothing, these descriptions increase the effectiveness of the memo.

Completeness

Format

All memos must include a subject heading, receiver’s name or distribution list, date, and sender’s name. The subject heading indicates what is discussed in the memo. If the memo is not to be filed and if the sender works with the receiver, then the first name, nickname, or even initials may be used. The date is essential on all memos for reference purposes and to avoid confusion.

Anticipating Misunderstanding

Before writing the memo, the sender should anticipate possible misunderstandings by asking himself or herself pertinent questions. Who am