

PRACTICAL BUSINESS WRITING IN ENGLISH

实用商务英语写作

胡亦武 编著



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华南理工大学出版社

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·广州·

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前 言

随着我国加入世贸组织的步伐日益加快,对外经济贸易往来将会更加频繁,更多的外资企业也将不断涌入中国。面对竞争日趋激烈的现实,一个人只懂专业知识而缺乏应有的英语应用能力显然会觉得“力不从心”。英语写作能力作为反映一个人的英语应用能力的主要因素将成为企业,尤其是外资企业衡量员工潜能及录用、提拔人才的重要依据。笔者长期从事高校商务英语的教学,常常遇到许多欲在外企求职却又困难于找到一本较系统地介绍商务英语写作知识、技巧及其应用的教材而感困惑的学生。为填补这一空白,编者不避浅陋,在教学实践的基础上进行了这方面的尝试。

在本书编写过程中,笔者参阅了大量英美国家出版的有关商务写作的书籍及资料,力求做到结构严谨、重点突出。全书共分十六章。第一至第六章详细地介绍商务英语写作的格式、要求、原则及技巧;第七至第十一章是关于商务英语写作原则及技巧在不同商业情景下的应用;第十二至第十四章重点探讨如何撰写各种商务报告;第十五及第十六章分别阐述外贸函电、经贸合同的写作要求及其他注意事项。

突出实用性和指导性是本书的一大特色,所选示例大多出自实际的商务活动,在介绍每一类写作时,顺序安排为:一般性要求—具体写作步骤—实例讲评—参考文本。这样,读者就能知其然,并知其所以然。每一章还安排了大量的情景练习,旨在培养读者实际应用的能力。

本书初稿完成之后,承蒙秦秀白教授拨冗审阅,并提出许多宝贵意见,在此特致诚挚的谢意。

本书可作为外贸、工商管理及英语专业学生的商务英语写作教材,也可作为已在或将在外资、外贸企业工作的朋友们的写作手册,还可作为剑桥商务英语证书考试写作部分的参考资料。

由于编者水平有限,书中不妥及疏漏之处在所难免,敬请各位同行、专家批评指正。

编 著 者
1999年6月

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PART I COMMUNICATIONS IN FOREIGN BUSINESSES

CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION

People in business communicate in various ways: face-to-face talks, informal group discussions, seminars, conversations on the phone, writing in letters, memos, and reports. All this is referred to as verbal communication, or communication that involves use of words. Nonverbal communication, on the other hand, does not rely on words, but rather on people's facial expressions, the way they dress themselves, and how long they keep a visitor waiting, etc. Undoubtedly, effective communication of both types are equally important to individuals and organizations as a whole, because they may exhibit an image of courtesy, friendliness, sincerity, and efficiency, which is critical to the success of individuals and organizations as well. Our major concern in this text, however, is to focus on the written verbal communication, leaving oral and non-verbal communication, which is more characteristic of personal traits, to the practice of the readers themselves. Therefore, unless otherwise stated, the term communication used throughout the text refers exclusively to written verbal communication.

Importance of Communication in Business

If you observe carefully enough, you will find the higher one's position in business, the more communicating one does. Although production workers communicate occasionally — and what they communicate may deserve attention, their supervisors spend far more time communicating, and the bosses higher up spend even more. It is estimated, according to a survey, that top level management spend from 45 to 65 percent of their working time communicating.

As an individual planning a business career, you may obtain your initial job by virtue of technical knowledge and skills in computer science, accounting, or marketing, etc., but the ability to speak and write English effectively may help you sustain it. As you progress up the organizational ladder, technical skills become less important, because managers spend less time in actual operating situations and are more concerned with broader aspects of the organization. General skills, including interpersonal skill, conceptual skill, diagnostic and analytic skill, determine how fast and how far you go.

Communication is the activity that enables human being to work together. More specifically, it allows businesspeople to follow a plan of operation, to avoid duplication, to coordinate effort, to share knowledge, to report progress, and to solve problems. Communication, in a similar fashion, contributes to building up and enhancing harmonious relationship with those outside the organization. In short, business organizations can not function properly in the absence of communication.

Classification of Business Writing

Exhibit 1-1 Common Types of Writing in Business¹

Name of Document	Purpose of Documents
Transmittal	Memo accompanying document, telling why it's being forwarded to the receiver.
Monthly or quarterly report	Report summarizing profitability, productivity, and problems during the period. Used to plan activity for coming month or quarter.
Minutes of meeting	Summary of meeting
Policy and procedure bulletin	Statement of company policies and instructions.
Credit report on a customer	Recommendation to extend or not extend specific amount of credit to a customer.
Performance appraisal	Evaluation of an employee's performance, with recommended areas for improvement or recommendation for promotion.
Memo of congratulations	Congratulations to employees who have won awards, or have been promoted.
Job description	Description of qualifications and duties of each job, used for performance appraisals, setting salaries, and for hiring
Quotation	Letter giving price for a specific product, or service.
Claims adjustment	Letter granting or denying customer request to be given credit for defective goods.
Beginning-of-year letter	Goodwill letter to major customers.
Annual report	Report to stockholders summarizing financial information for the previous year.
Thank-you letter	Letter to suppliers, customers, or other people who have helped individuals or the company.
Articles in business journal and advertisement	Provide information about the company or its product to a large audience.

Roughly, written documents in business context can be classified in terms of purpose and orientation of the communication.

Classification on the Basis of Purpose

People in business produce a great variety of documents among which letters, memos, and reports are the most commonly found types of writing in a business organization.

At first glance, the variety seems overwhelming. However, the labor of classification becomes much easier if we make two significant distinctions among them².

The first distinction is that between **direct communication** and **indirect communication**. The former refers to writing which is specifically addressed to a person or group of people, while the latter is intended for a large number of people who might or might not read it, depending on whether they have time and inclination.

The second distinction is that between an **expository communication**, which is designed primarily to provide information and objective interpretation for its readers, and **reaction-evoking communication**, which aims at evoking a specific response from its recipients.

With these two distinctions in mind, any particular piece of business writing can conveniently be classified as either direct or indirect, and as either expository or reaction-evoking. We have, then, four kinds of written communications in business: **indirect expositors**, **indirect reaction-evokers**, **direct expositors**, and **direct reaction-evokers**. Therefore, the classification made in Exhibit 1-1 may be regrouped as follows:

indirect expositor	indirect reaction evoker	direct expositor	direct reaction evokers
articles in business journal, annual report	quotation, leaflet, brochure, catalogue, advertisement	monthly & quarterly report, minutes of meeting, policy & procedure bulletin	memo of congratulations, thank-you letter, performance appraisal, claims adjustment

As letters, memorandums, and reports are by far the most frequently used forms of writing in business, we shall be mainly concerned with these direct communications throughout the text. The reason is simple: young people intending to make a business career are normally not required to write first-rate advertisements or brilliant technical articles for publication, but they are expected, from the very first day on the job, to write effective memos, letters, and reports.

Classification on the Basis of Orientation of the Communication

Viewed from the perspective of where the communication heads for, business writing falls into two major categories: internal communication and external communication.

Internal Communication A host of methods are employed in most organizations to transmit information through the formal communication system. They move downward, upward, or

horizontally. The messages that move downward in most cases outnumber those moving upward or horizontally. Downward communications, often in the form of memos, can perform the following functions.

1. To inform the employees of their duties, responsibilities, rights, and opportunities.
2. To build up and maintain employee morale and goodwill toward the organization and management personnel.
3. To keep the routine and special activities of the organization moving smoothly and efficiently.
4. To invite and encourage upward communication, or feedback.

One of fundamental purposes for upward communication is to provide information for management decisions. The upward flow of communication, often in the form of reports, furnishes information and recommendations on which intelligent decisions are made. Horizontal communication occurs when employees who are on the same corporate level communicate with one another. Marketing manager's exchange of message with his/her counterpart in the production department is an example of horizontal communication.

External Communication Writings whose addressees are people outside the business organization belong to external communications. It is the business's ties with its suppliers, customers, service companies, and the general public.

Business letter is the most typical example of external communication. The kinds of letter frequently written are listed below.

<i>inquiry and request letters</i>	<i>general administrative letters</i>
<i>replies to inquiries and requests</i>	<i>goodwill messages</i>
<i>letter about employment</i>	<i>claim and adjustment</i>
<i>credit and collection</i>	<i>sales and sales promotion</i>

The importance of effective external communication to business hardly requires supporting comment. A business organization's survival and success are contingent upon its ability to satisfy the customers' diversifying needs. Equally important, in today's complex business settings, businesses become increasingly interdependent in the manufacturing and distribution of goods and services. And this interdependence understandably gives rise to the need for effective communications.

Exercises:

A. Interview someone who works in business about the writing he or she does. Possible questions to ask include:

What kind of documents do you write? Which ones are the hardest to write? Why? Which ones are most important? To whom do you write? Do you write to other people in the organization? Do you write to customers, suppliers, the union, or government agencies? How well do you know the people you write to? How many different people read what you have written?

How much time in an average week do you spend reading materials you've received? How much time do you spend writing?

How do you write? Do you dictate? Draft with pen or pencil? Compose at a computer? Do you do lots of planning first? Does anyone else help you plan or revise? Do you ever work in a group to produce a document?

How important are communication skills — reading, writing, speaking, and listening — to success in your particular job?

How do you expect the speaking and writing you do to change in kind and amount as you advance in the organization?

1. Write up the result of your interview in a memo to your instructor.
2. Report the results of your interview orally to the class.
3. Write a letter to the interviewee thanking him or her for taking the time to talk to you.

B. Presume that the following letter has come to you from your instructor. Write a letter, answering it as completely as you can, using only such facts as are true to your own life.

Dear Students:

Welcome to Business Communications. I hope the benefits that you obtain will exceed those you anticipate. The work we do together will be challenging. The class should be interesting and eventually very worthwhile to you.

Essentially, this course will provide opportunities for you to "resolve business situations by your writing." I hope we may develop your ability to communicate completely, efficiently, and effectively. If you achieve this objective, you should be rewarded handsomely in some future position.

Class assignments will require some understanding of business transactions and terminology. Business courses taken previously, as well as any on-the-job training or work experience will be helpful. Class discussion of problems will provide necessary information, but I can make these situations more understandable for each of you if I know your background; also, why you are enrolled in this course. For this purpose, write to me answering the following questions.

1. Have you had office or other business work experience? What and how much?
2. What business courses have you taken in high school and college?
3. What do you hope to gain from taking Business Communications ?

Please let me hear from you by next Friday.

Sincerely yours,

Instructor,

Business Communications

Notes

1. Kitty O. Locker, Business and Administrative Communication (Boston: Irving, 1989), 9.
2. Walter Wells, Communications in Business (Boston: Kent, 1985), 5.

CHAPTER TWO

FORMATS FOR LETTERS AND MEMOS

The overall appearance of a letter, memo, or report affects, to a considerable extent, the reception of the intended message. Attractively displayed messages create a positive image, leaving an impression on the addressee of courtesy, care, and competence to the work involved.

A couple of acceptable formats for letters are commonly adopted in current business world, preference of one over another is purely a matter of personal taste. Despite their apparent differences, they must serve the same purpose: the recipient should be able to tell - at a glance - when, where, and by whom the letter was written, exactly for whom it is intended, and how its writer should be addressed in reply.

Formats for Letters

Modified-Block Letter Format

In this format each typed element - except the date and the signature block - begins at the left-hand margin. The date may be backspaced from the right margin point to align at the right margin; it may be centered, or it may begin at the center. The most attractive placement of the date, however, may depend on the letterhead design.

Semi-Block Letter Format

This format resembles to the modified block in every other regard except that the paragraphs in the body of the letter are indented.

Full-Block Letter Format

The full block format is illustrative of the trend toward simplicity and ease of use. All lines, including the date and the signature block, begin at the left margin. Paragraphs are always blocked.

This letter arrangement is more efficient than the modified block or the semi-modified block in that no extra time is required for paragraph indentation or placement of the date and closing lines. In addition, many writers believe that the full-block arrangement provides an attractive, business-like appearance.

Simplified Letter Format

As in the full-block format, all lines in the simplified format begin at the left-hand margin. It leaves out the conventional salutation and complimentary close, invariably containing a sub-

ject line in lieu of the salutation indicating what the letter is about. Supporters of the simplified format argue that salutation and complimentary close contribute little to the message except for a waste of time. Others, however, are reluctant to omit the tonal qualities of the two components because they have been used so routinely over years and readers expect them.

Functional Letter Format

This format differs from simplified format only in that it contains no subject line. Both of these two formats, though not in the favor of many business writers, enjoy advantages in certain correspondence situations. For example, in letters to an organization, not to an individual, the customary salutation for many years has been "Gentlemen," in the United States, and "Dear Sirs," in the United Kingdom. These forms of salutation, however, are now considered discriminative language, as discussed in Chapter 3. By using letter style that calls for no salutation, such as in the simplified and functional formats, you can be free from being accused of discrimination.

Requisite Components in Business Letters

With the exception of the simplified and functional letter formats, business letters are always composed of the following elements:

Letterhead

The majority of business organizations use a pre-printed letterhead stationery for correspondence for two purposes: one is to help the recipient identify where the letter comes from, the other is to look attractive. Letterheads normally consist of the company's name, address, telephone number, and fax number. There are still some letterheads carrying a distinctive logo or symbol which identifies the companies.

Dateline

On letterhead stationery, the dateline is simply made up of the date of writing. Three points about date writing should be kept in mind. First, use the standard form, e.g., November 18, 1995; secondly, avoid using ordinal suffixes (-st, -nd, -rd, -th) which seem not only stiff but also out of fashion; thirdly, stay away from using abbreviations, hyphens, and diagonals, e.g., 12-12-95, 2/2/95.

On stationery without letterhead (as in the case in which individuals write a business letter), the writer usually places his own address, not his name, before the date:

15 Patrician Way

New Jersey 13469

August 18, 1990

September 16, 1994

Inside Address

The name, title, and complete mailing address make up the part of the letter described as the inside address. Some people might argue why there should be an inside address since it already appears on the envelop. The rationale for the existence of inside address lies partly in the long-established tradition, partly in the fact that the recipient frequently throws away the envelop once it is torn open; therefore, the letter itself must indicate clearly to whom it is addressed.

Courtesy Title When writing to a specific individual, make sure you use the proper courtesy title which includes Mr. , Mrs. , and Miss. If you are not sure of a woman's marital status, simply use Ms. Why make a distinction between married and unmarried women, the feminists argue, when we do not distinguish between married and single men? As you will notice, Ms. appears throughout the text, referring to the female recipient as a whole.

When writing to a person whose name sounds neutral in terms of gender, you can be assured to use the abbreviated title M. For example, M. Leslie R. Higgins.

One common mistake frequently found among Chinese students in addressing is that they use courtesy title along with the recipient's first name.

Examples:

Mr. David (wrong)

Mr. David White (right)

Mr. White (right)

Organizational Title If the addressee has an organizational title, indicate it (a) immediately after the person's name, (b) partially on the first line with the rest on the second line, and (c) completely on the second line — whichever arrangement is most attractive and balance-keeping.

Examples:

(a) *Mr. Paul Smith, Manager*
Smith and Sons, Inc.
3107 Western Avenue
New London, Connecticut 06320

(c) *Dr. Robert Dixon*
Associate Dean of Student Activities
District of Columbia Polytechnic
900 Avenue E. NY
Washington, DC 20025

(b) *Ms. Linda Cook, Assistant*
Direct of Public Relations
3117 Avenue E
Seattle, Washington 20103

(d) *Ms. Gillian Johnson*
Export Sales Manager
Block and Brown PLC
55 Horizons Drive
Bough BN5 9KL

Salutation

Salutation should be considered on the basis of your familiarity with the reader as well as the formality of the situation. As a general rule, if the writer knows the reader well, he can salute the reader

by the first name (Dear John). Salutation by the family name is, however, appropriate in most cases.

Windsor Knitting Mill, Inc.
315 Commercial Way
St. Louis Missouri 63108

Take particular care that the sexist words such as *sirs*, *gentlemen*, and *madam* are outdated and very inappropriate in business today. Hence you'd better stay away from using the following salutations which might get you into trouble with some readers.

The correct punctuation for most business salutation is colon. Sometimes comma can also be used if you are on good terms with the reader. Be sure never to use semicolon.

Several guidelines may be helpful for the writing of the body. First, do not write a single paragraph letter. Even if you have only one point to make, you'd better add a comment or two (We appreciate your cooperation. . . , or Let us know if additional information is needed) to ensure inclusion of at least two paragraphs. Second, the opening and closing paragraphs should be relatively short, aiming at arousing the reader's interest, reemphasizing one particular point, or requesting action. Third, use single space within a paragraph and double space between paragraphs. Fourth, if a letter must go beyond one page, use a second or third, as the case may be. To the extent that you use more than one page, make sure they contain at least the last three lines of the body to make the letter look neat and business-like. Moreover, print the subsequent pages on stationery similar to the first page in terms of quality, but without letterhead. The following two ways are typical in identifying these pages:

or

Signature Block