

高职高专十二五规划教材·专业英语系列



实用外贸函电

Practical Foreign Trade Letters and Telegrams

主编 彭琳 黄恩成



北京师范大学出版集团
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前 言

本教材的编写秉承转变教育观念、改革人才培养模式、促进工学结合的教学改革精神，紧密结合高职教育教学改革和发展的新形势，体现深化课程体系和教学内容改革的精神。

《实用外贸函电》依据广东女子职业技术学院《商务英语函电》课程实施的项目课程模式，在教材编写过程中对课程体系和教学内容进行了梳理与选择。

《实用外贸函电》为高职高专市场营销、国际贸易、工商管理及其他经济管理类专业学生量身定制：编者根据课程在专业培养目标中的定位，将课程体系由“知识本位”转向“能力本位”，精选教材内容。教材共分为13个章节，其编写依据对外经贸商务活动的实际工作过程分为6大项目：客户开发、价格磋商、合同签订、合同履行、货款支付及后续管理。6大项目下设12个工作任务，分别为：客户开发——书信结构，建立业务关系；价格磋商——询盘、报盘、还盘；合同签订——订购；合同履行——执行订单；货款支付——支付；后续管理——包装、装运、保险、索赔与理赔等。按照书信结构组织各个业务环节编写，材料针对性强、注重实用与交际能力的培养，语言规范，可操作性强。

本书由彭琳、黄恩成两位老师主编和拟定提纲，参加各章编写的有：Unit 1、Unit 2和Unit 3由黄恩成老师执笔，Unit 4、Unit 5和Unit 6由彭琳老师执笔，Unit 7、Unit 8和Unit 9由陈赣萍老师执笔，Unit 10和Unit 11由谢晓琼老师执笔，Unit 12和Unit 13由陈鸿莹老师执笔，全书由彭琳老师统稿。

编者在编写过程中，查阅了大量相关文献以及网站，在此向相关作者表示衷心的感谢。本教材的参编作者在编写过程中反复核对、尽量保证选材的科学性与合理性，在此一并表示感谢。

由于受时间、水平影响，本教材还存在待完善之处，肯请专家和读者批评指正、提出宝贵意见。

《实用外贸函电》编写组

2010年1月18日于广州

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Unit 1 Fundamentals of Business Correspondence



Objectives

Upon completion of this chapter, the learners will:

- *have a thorough understanding of business correspondence: its importance, characteristics and considerations;*
- *grasp the components and formats of business correspondences.*



The importance of business letters

Writing plays an important role in the process of business communication. It makes it possible for wholesalers and retailers, manufacturers and jobbers, retail customers and mail-order firms, though living at great distances, to do business successfully with each other. During the process, much of a company's internal operation and external liaison is accomplished through business letters that function as a vehicle to exchange messages by various kinds of means for the purpose of buying and selling goods or services. Therefore, business letters are a vital factor that enables the

business world to run smoothly and efficiently, without which orders would not be fulfilled, supplies would not be received, letters of credit would not be established and new techniques would not be devised. No one would deny that business letters are a universal implement of business. To some extent, they are threads that weave the web of commerce.

Put it simply, business letters are business talks reduced to writing. When we are writing a business letter, the company is speaking through us. Thus, it is important that the wording and appearance of the letters give the receiver a favorable impression. Yet it is not as easy to write as it is to tell your story in spoken words, because when we talk, our audience is in front of us and we can better adapt our words to the receiver. If what we say is not right and does not have the desired effect, we are likely to have an opportunity to explain. Whereas when we are writing a letter, what we say must stand as it is, and is not subject to immediate change or correction.

Writing letters that pull is not intuition. It is an art that anyone can acquire. But this is the point—it must be acquired. It will not come to us without effort on our part. Fundamental principles must be understood; ways of presenting a proposition must be studied; various angles must be tried out; the effectiveness of appeals must be tested; new schemes for getting attention and arousing interest must be devised; clear, concise description and explanation must come from continual practice; methods for getting the prospect to order now must be developed. There is nothing mysterious about it. On the contrary, it is solely a matter of study, hard work and the intelligent application of proved-up principles.

In business correspondence, arguments—prices, styles, terms, quality or whatever they may be—are effective only when they are used on the right “prospect” at the right time. Therefore, we must gather together a mass of “raw material” —facts, figures and specifications on which to base our arguments—and then select the particular talking points that will appeal to our prospect.

As an architect can sit down and design a house on paper, showing its exact proportions, the finish of every room, the location of every door and window, and give specific instructions for building a house, so the correspondent-architect can point out the way to write business letters: how to begin, how to work up interest, how to present argument, how to introduce salesmanship, how to work in a clincher and how to close. However, when it comes to writing the letter that applies to a particular business, we have to, first of all, gather the material. Just as one selects cement or brick or lumber according to the kind of house he want to build, we must gather and classify the particular kind of material we need for our letter, so that the best can be quickly selected.



The characteristics of business writing

Every business transaction has two sides. When one party is buying, the other is selling; when one is collecting money, the other is expending it; when one is getting a position, the other is hiring an employee. The writer naturally sees his own side of the transaction, but he must learn to look at it from the reader's viewpoint if he hopes to get the reader to act as he wishes.

Suppose, for instance, you received a letter beginning.

"We wish to announce that we have recently perfected and are placing on the market a new and valuable device for keeping the windshield of an automobile clear in rainy weather. It makes it possible for the driver to have unhampered vision and thus to avoid accidents."

Such a letter would obviously not appeal to a reader unless he was so

much interested in the subject that he was really searching for just such an appliance. Certainly he has no particular interest in knowing what the manufacturer has done and is doing. His interest is in his own car and in the comfort and safety of driving it. The letter should therefore be written from the standpoint of the buyer who wants to know what the article will do for him. The following will illustrate:

If you have ever driven your car in a rain storm, you know how annoying it is—and dangerous, too—to have your windshield clouded with water. How many times have you narrowly avoided accidents under such conditions. With the Simplicity Cleaner attached to your car, all you need to do is to turn a button in front of you and instantly every drop of water in your field of vision is swept from your windshield. The glass is left clear and clean.

Obviously, business writing is a particular kind of writing with special characteristics that distinguish it from other forms of writing. Here are three of its chief characteristics.

2.1 Business writing is goal-oriented

Business writing is different from creative writing. Novels and poetry are often written for telling stories, describing some experiences or events, or expressing feelings. However, people write business letters only to achieve their specific business goals. They strive to convey a message to deal with transactions, to make an adjustment, to urge payment, or to maintain goodwill for their firms. Although business messages must be grammatically phrased, correctly spelled, and conventionally punctuated, as the unique purpose of business writing is to achieve the writer's goal, the central criterion that can be used for evaluating a business message is effectiveness. Therefore, whether a business letter is successful largely depends on wheth-

er the preset goal is accomplished or not.

As we shall see later, the ideal business letter secures both immediate response and good will. In other words, it makes the reader do gladly what the writer wants him to do. Letters like this are profitable no matter what they cost. They should bring a profitable response with the least possible expenditure of time, energy, and money.

If we understand that the value of our letters depends upon their power to secure profitable response, we shall be able to build our letter in a way that will achieve this result. We shall also avoid taking a wrong or inadequate standard of judgment for our letters, for, we shall realize that the letter which does not influence the reader's responsive action is not a good letter, whatever its merits may be from any other critical standpoint. Whether the reader acts or not depends upon the incentive the letter gives him and, the impression it makes upon him. It is not enough that it should express the writer's ideas and feelings accurately and clearly. It must also impress them upon the reader.

2.2 Business writing takes place in real time

In addition to being goal-oriented, business writing generally takes place in real time. For example, if we are to compile a dictionary or a textbook, it may take us several years to select, compose and revise materials because the book is composed to edify and guide people over the next decade or even longer. However, it is not the case as far as business writing is concerned, especially when we consider that we are operating in the Information Age. Today, every business firm, government office, or service organization is deluged with typed and duplicated materials, instruction leaflets, letters, interoffice memorandums and proposals, which will take several days to deal with. Executives or other office workers are always so busy with heaps of business letters and documents that they are likely to move on to something easier to read and understand without giving full attention to those messages

full of awkward statements and redundancies.

To meet the immediate needs of here-and-now situations, business writings should enable the reader to understand its implications easily, absorb the necessary information quickly and take promptly whatever action that may be required. This characteristic of business writing decides the style of business letters, that is, they should not start with unnecessary compliments or nonessential preliminaries, but should get right down to the point instead.

2.3 The writer is responsible for successful communication

The purpose of communication is to obtain complete understanding between the parties involved and elicit the responses required. In another word, no code will be of value unless it is perfectly understood by both the sender and the receiver. However, since the writer views the subject one way, and the reader views it another, either of them must translate his or her viewpoints into that of the other. In business, it is the writer but not the reader who must do the job. Since business writing is oriented to achieving certain goals, when receiving a letter, the reader reasonably assumes that it is the writer's responsibility to make the message readable enough for the recipient to figure out easily what it is meant for.

In some non-business settings, writers won't make this assumption, and they even make the opposite assumption. For instance, when scholars compile a textbook for college students, or when men of letters create literary works, they will assume that it is the readers' responsibility to grasp the essence or dig out the deeply embodied meaning. But if a businessperson is forced to spend several days digging out the meaning of a letter, opportunities for business will go by silently, and such a letter is no doubt a complete failure. In the business world, therefore, it is the writer but not the reader who shall be responsible for successful communication.



Four considerations of a business letter

When we write a business letter, we must take into consideration four areas. Namely, they are 1) subject, 2) audience, 3) purpose, 4) style/organization. If we do not consider each one of them, the letter will be ineffective.

3.1 Subject

Every piece of writing—from the business letter to the novel—revolves around a subject. Luckily, in the business world the subject is usually specific. Quite often it is supplied by someone else, such as a boss or colleague, or demanded by a situation such as hiring or congratulating an employee. The more specific the subject, the easier it is to write.

For example, let's say that we need to request information about an order that did not arrive when it should have. If we are in charge of the account, writing the letter is easy. If we are not in charge of the account, it is harder for us to write the letter than it is for the person who knows all the particulars.

3.2 Audience

This area is tricky because we may not know our audience. If we do, we can tailor our letter to that audience. Many times, however, the audience is larger than we expect. Our letter may be addressed to Terry Smith but may be read by several other people in his firm. The most important point is that, when writing a business letter, we should not assume that our audience has as much knowledge of the subject of the letter as we do, or it may lead to over-generalization and absence of some important details.

3.3 Purpose

In the business world, correspondences are not the final goal. On the

contrary, they are only the means or tools to achieve it. Unfortunately, many people, when writing a letter, focus on the piece of writing—the tool—itsself, not on its purpose. Such letters often miss the chance to be as effective as it should be. Many a business thus is lost.

To plan a letter efficiently, we must understand two points: 1) Why the letter is needed, 2) The response it should bring. As we think through our letter and the background facts, the purpose of the letter becomes clear. Then we should clearly establish what we want to achieve from the letter. Is the letter to inform? Is it to request information? Is it to offer congratulations or condolences? Is it to get the recipient to act on a request? All of these are very different purposes. Whatever the aim, we should create our letter from these goals. If the purpose was not clear, the letter would leave the reader confused because he didn't know exactly what it said.

3.4 Style / Organization

The first three areas dictate the content, direction and emphasis of the letter. Now we should think over HOW we are going to write the letter. The first three areas can be determined in a matter of minutes if we are familiar with the ideas that need to be communicated. The fourth area—style and organization—takes more time.

Generally speaking, the basic organization for the body of a business letter is composed of three parts. Each bears different functions. Part 1 of the body usually states our purpose. Part 2 explains what we want to happen or explains the information we have. Part 3 may request a dated action, conclude or thank the reader for his response.

Notice that these are parts or sections rather than paragraphs. In some cases, particularly in Part 2, the parts may consist of more than one paragraph. Let's take a look at each of these parts.

Part 1 of the body

This part is usually a short paragraph. Anything too long will cause the

reader to lose patience. So we need get right to the point in the first sentence of the letter, for, when the reader reads our letter, he expects to be told immediately what will happen. Remember, our reader doesn't have any more time to wade through a long letter.

Part 2 of the body

This is the bread and butter of the letter. It explains the information we are giving, or it explains what we want the recipient to do. It doesn't need to be elaborate, but it does need to include all of the information the recipient needs. If there is a lot of information, it would be wise to break it into short paragraphs, make a list or refer to an attachment. Meanwhile, we may use underlining to highlight key points for the reader.

Part 3 of the body

This, like the first part, is usually a short paragraph. In writing classes, it's called the clincher—not a bad way to remember its function. Depending on the purpose of the letter, it will do one of three things.

1) Conclude. In an informational letter, this allows us to point out the most important item or draw all the key points into one statement.

2) Request action. In letters that require a response, such as collection letters, we define the action we want the recipient to take. Under such circumstances, we tell the reader what to do and when to do it.

3) Thank the reader. In some letters, this part is simply a thank-you expression for the recipient's attention, response or concern.



The process of writing

Business letter is more formal than a personal letter. It should have a

margin of at least one inch on all four edges. It is always written on “8 $\frac{1}{2}$ × 11” (or metric equivalent) unlined stationery.

Main steps

- 1) Identify your aims
- 2) Establish the facts
- 3) Know the recipient of the letter
- 4) Create a sample copy
- 5) Decide on physical layout of the letter

Identify your aims

Clearly establish what you want to achieve from the letter—whether it is to win back a dissatisfied customer or to reprimand an employee. Whatever the aim, create your letter from your goals.

Establish the facts

Make sure you have the relevant accurate facts available. For a late payer, this might include relevant invoices, complaint forms, talks with your sales department and any previous correspondence from the customer.

Know the recipient of the letter

Write in the language of your recipient. Try to put yourself in the position of the recipient. Read it from his point of view and see whether the letter is clear or open to misinterpretation. If you know the recipient, use this knowledge to phrase the letter to generate your desired response.

Create a sample copy

Having established your aims, amassed the relevant facts with a conscious view of the recipient—write down the main points of your letter.

Decide on physical layout of the letter

The physical appearance of a letter consists of the paper and the envelope.

The first thing a recipient sees is the envelope. It is essential that it is of suitable quality with the name and address spelt correctly. Quality envelopes and paper suggest a professional company. Therefore, letterhead pages, continuation sheets, and envelopes should match in paper weight, size, color, and design. At the same time, the weight, size, and color of the paper should also be chosen with care.

- Use 20-to-24-pound bond paper. Thinner, lighter paper feels weak; thicker, heavier paper feels formal and stiff. The 20-to-24-pound paper folds cleanly, takes ink crisply, and works well in most office machines.

- Use 8.5-by-11-inch paper. This size is the standard and files easily. Other sizes (monarch or baronial) may be used for personal correspondence, executive letters, or mass mailings.

- Use white paper for most letters. For a softer look, go to cream or ivory. Be careful with other colors. Light, subtle colors mean business (light gray, blue, tan). Bold colors scream, "I'm an ad!"



Components of business letters

There are seven essential elements in business letters: letterhead, date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary close and, signature. In very formal letters, some other elements may appear, such as reference number, attention, subject, identifications, enclosure, copy notation, etc..

The general position of these elements is as following: