

拓展

Business English Writing

商务英语写作

主编 胡英坤 车丽娟

高等学校英语拓展系列教程



语言技能类

语言应用类

语言文化类

商务英语类



外语教学与研究出版社
FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING AND RESEARCH PRESS



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过去30年中,随着中国改革开放步伐的加快,英语教育发生了巨大的变化,其突出特征是英语教学越来越突出其实用性。入世以来,我国经济与世界经济接轨的步伐大大加快,国家的经贸活动已远远超出传统的外贸范畴,扩大到金融、保险、工商管理、法律、海外投资等一系列领域。国际商务渗透到人们工作生活中的各个方面。英语教学受到市场需求的影响和制约,学生学习英语的目的不再局限于通过各种考试,他们期望在未来的工作中运用英语,运用英语做生意、在外资企业工作、直接与外国人交流。为了顺应时代的要求,很多院校不仅设立了应用型英语专业方向,大学英语的模块课中也设立了应用型的课程,商务英语写作就是其中的一门。

我国商务英语写作的教学可以追溯到上个世纪50年代。当时的商务英语写作多称为外贸英语函电,它主要针对进出口业务各个环节,教授学生函电写法,这门课程仅限于为外贸专业的学生开设。上个世纪90年代以来,商务英语写作课应运而生,这门课程与外贸英语函电相比发生了巨大的变化。首先,在内容上它超越了贸易范畴,包括了公司活动的方方面面;其次,在写作原则上,受英美80年代兴起的交际教学思想的影响,它强调一般交际原则和技巧在商务活动中的具体运用。

本书运用的正是国内外商务沟通的最新研究成果,从交际原则出发,强调写作过程中读者的心理接受过程,突出商业写作的特点,强调通俗易懂、简明完整、清楚正确的写作风格和原则。本书的特点是在学习写作的同时注意培养学生的分析创造能力和判断能力,启发学生思考,而不是简单的模仿。因此,在内容安排上,每个单元在第一部分提出完成该单元写作任务的基本指导原则,然后给出两个按照指导原则写作的标准样本,接着结合样本就写作原则提问,以巩固学生对写作原则的理解和掌握。第二部分为范例分析,其中有好的例子,也有不符合写作原则的反面例子,每个例子后面有中文评述,通过实例学习和对比加强学生对写作原则的理解。第三部分列出了本单元的难点注释和常用的句型和表达方式。第四部分是练习,包括选择填空、改写和写作练习。本书共18个单元,所选例文多出自英文原版商务写作教材,但经过改写,部分是作者在实际商务活动中所写,所有例文都具有相当的代表性。

我们真诚希望,通过该书的学习,学生不仅可以提高商务英语语言的基本功,而且可以了解和学习商务英语应用的社会环境,掌握有效沟通技巧,全面提高商务英语写作能力。同时我们恳请使用本书的老师和学生以及商界的朋友对书中的不足之处提出批评和建议,我们将不胜感谢。

本书在编写过程中受到外语教学与研究出版社领导的大力支持和鼓励;杨天天编辑为本书提出了许多宝贵的建议;东北财经大学研究生刘宏玉、徐佩文为本书的编写做了大量的工作,在此对以上人员表示诚挚谢意。

编者

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Chapter 1 An Overview of Business Writing

商务写作概述

The ability to write effectively is a valuable business asset. One reason is that a great deal of business is transacted in writing. With the wide use of fax and recent development of EDP¹, even more writing is involved in every part of business. More than at any previous time business people feel the need to put ideas and information into written form. Another reason is that effective business writers can use their skill to help increase their company's sales and profits by promoting good relations with customers, employees, and the general public. Still another reason is that proficiency in writing gives the man or woman in business a personal advantage over less capable writers and contributes substantially to his/her self-confidence—a necessary quality for business success.²

Functions of Business Writing

Every business message is designed to achieve a specific business objective. Its success depends on what it says and to what extent it induces a favorable response from the reader.³ Thus, business writing has three functions: to inform, to persuade and to entertain.

Messages to inform are used to convey the vast amount of information needed to complete the day-to-day operations of the business—explain instructions to employees, announce meetings and procedures, acknowledge orders, accept contracts for services, etc. The major purpose of most of these messages is to have the receiver understand a body of information and concentrate on the logical presentation of the content.

In addition to providing information, some business messages must also influence the reader's attitudes and actions. These messages might include letters promoting a product or service and seeking support for ideas and worthy causes presented to supervisors, stockholders, customers/clients, and others.

To secure the desired response, it is necessary to have an adequate knowledge of the English language and an understanding of human nature. The writer should have an acquaintance with the particular interest and, if possible, the emotions of the reader. It seems easy enough, for example, to ask payment of a bill, but it is quite difficult to secure payment without offending the reader and losing his or her future patronage (光顾, 惠顾). No communication is wholly successful unless it retains the reader's goodwill.

Criteria for Effective Business Writing

A business message is considered successful when (1) the receiver interprets the message as the sender intended it and (2) it achieves the sender's purposes. In order to meet these objectives, American experts in business communication developed six C's principles: Courtesy, Correctness, Conciseness, Clarity, Concreteness and Completeness.

1. Courtesy 礼貌

Review of actual business correspondence reveals that special attention should be devoted to assuring the courtesy of business communication. By courtesy we mean treating people with respect and friendly human concern. Effective writers visualize the reader before starting to write. They consider the reader's desires, problems, circumstances, emotions and probable reactions to their request.

2. Correctness 正确

Correct grammar, punctuation and spelling are basic requirements for business writing. In addition, correctness means choosing the correct level of language and using accurate information and data.

3. Conciseness 简洁

Effective writing is concise—each word, sentence, and paragraph counts. Conciseness means to write in the fewest possible words without sacrificing completeness and courtesy. Because a wordy message requires more time to write and read, business people put a high premium on conciseness in business messages. Conciseness will give emphasis to the message.

4. Clarity 清楚

Clarity tells the reader exactly what he or she wants and needs to know, using words and a format that make your writings totally understood with just one reading. Short familiar words and simple short sentences rather than long difficult words and complex long sentences are better for this purpose.

5. Concreteness 具体

Business writing should be vivid, specific and definite rather than vague, general and abstract, especially when the writer is requiring a response, solving problems, making an offer or acceptance, etc.

6. Completeness 完整

Include all the necessary information and data in the message because information and data can help senders get receivers' responses and achieve desired objectives. An incomplete message may result in increased

- 4 communication costs, loss of goodwill, sales, and valued customers, cost of returning goods, and more time trying to make sense out of the incomplete message.

Adapting to Modern Changes in Business Writing

Languages are products of the times and always bear the marks of a particular time. The rapid development of technology has brought changes to business writing. Fax and e-mail send messages quickly, and narrow the distance between people in different locations. Business writing, in general, has more and more assumed a friendly, easy, and conversational style.

There were times when the prevailing rule for business writing was that it should be written in the driest possible manner and in language so stilted⁴ and formal that the true personality of the writer was completely hidden. The awareness of change—the appreciation of up-to-date ways of doing business—is most important to anyone who aspires to become a successful writer.

The primary concern in business writing is to communicate information. Clarity is important in such business writing as reports, memorandums, procedures, and proposals. However, when you write letters, you will be concerned about communicating more than information. The information in the letters will be important, of course. But you will also need to communicate certain effects.

1. Goodwill Effects⁵

One effect that you need to communicate is the goodwill effect. Building goodwill through letters is good business practice. Wise business leaders know that the success of their businesses is affected by what people think about their businesses. What they think about businesses is influenced by their human contact with the businesses, and letters are a major form of human contact.

The goodwill effect in letters is desirable not only for business reasons.

It is the effect most of us want in our relations with people. We enjoy doing and saying things that create goodwill. They are the friendly, courteous things that make relations between people enjoyable.

2. Other Effects

Other effects sometimes ensure the success of business letters. For example, in writing to persuade a reader to accept an unfavorable decision, you can use the techniques of *persuasion*. In applying for a job, you can use writing techniques that *emphasize your qualifications*. And in telling bad news, you can use techniques that *play down the unwelcome part*.

Achieving the desired effects is a matter of writing skill and of understanding how people respond to words. It involves keeping certain attitudes in mind and using certain writing techniques to work them into your letters.

The following are some helpful suggestions.

1. Conversational Style

A letter—a good letter—reflects the personality of the writer and also should be pleasing to the reader. In a good letter a conversation is held. The reader must be made to forget that he or she is reading a letter. Instead, the writer has traveled on a piece of paper to talk to him or her. People who write with a sense of personal contact have a better chance to make what they say interesting and convincing than those who feel they are “writing letters”. Whatever you talk about in the letters, the language you use should be the same as if you met the person on the street, at home, or in the office. Such language is warm and natural. It leaves an impression that people like. It is also the language we use most and understand best.

2. Resisting Tendency to Be Formal

The executives of your company do not want letter contacts to be cold and formal. They know that the most loyal customer is the one who feels like “one of the family”. But when faced with a writing task, many of us tend to change character. Instead of writing in friendly, conversational language, we write in stiff and stilted words. There is a misconception that big words and difficult words are preferred in business letters, but the result of such words is a cold and unnatural style—one that does not produce the goodwill effect you want your letters to have.

3. Avoiding the Old Language of Business

Good writers take care to avoid stale expressions⁶. Early English business writers borrowed heavily from the formal language of law and from the flowery language⁷ of the nobility. From these two sources they developed a style of letter writing that became known as the “language of business”. It was a cold, stiff, and unnatural style, but it was generally accepted throughout the English-speaking world.

For example, Your letter of the 7th inst (本月), received and contents duly noted; Please be advised to... ; wherein (在那里面) you state as per your letter; Thanking you in advance.

It is obvious the tone is cold, and the expressions “7th inst, please be advised to... , wherein” are out of date and should be avoided.

4. You-viewpoint

Writing from the you-viewpoint (also called you-attitude) is another technique for building goodwill in letters. You-viewpoint is to focus interest on the reader. It is a technique for persuasion and for influencing people favorably.

In a broad sense, you-viewpoint writing emphasizes the reader’s interest

and concerns. It emphasizes “you” and “your” and de-emphasizes “we” and “our”. But it is more than a matter of just using second person pronouns. It is an attitude of mind. It is the attitude that places the reader in the center of things. Sometimes, it just involves being friendly and treating people in the way they like to be treated. Sometimes it involves skillfully handling people with carefully chosen words to make a desired impression.

When you use you-viewpoint in writing, avoid insincerity. You-viewpoint can be used to the point of being insincere, and it can be obviously flattery. Remember the objective of you-viewpoint is to treat people courteously—the way they like to be treated. You cannot afford to sacrifice sincerity by overdoing it. Use the you-viewpoint for good goals. If you use it for bad goals, it will have the effect of manipulation⁸. Use the you-viewpoint only when it is friendly and sincere and when your goals are good. In such cases, using you-viewpoint is “telling it as it is”—or at least as it should be.

5. Accent on Positive Language

People enjoy and react favorably to positive messages. A positive tone builds the reader’s confidence in the writer’s ability to solve problems and strengthens personal and business relationships. Positive words are usually best for letter goals, especially when persuasion and goodwill are needed. Positive words emphasize the pleasant aspects of the goal and tend to put the reader in the right frame of mind⁹. They also create the goodwill atmosphere readers seek in most letters. Negative words tend to produce the opposite effect. They may stir up your reader’s resistance to your goals, and they are likely to be highly destructive of goodwill.

6. Singling Out Your Reader¹⁰

Letters that appear to be written for one reader tend to make the reader feel important and appreciated. To single out your reader in a letter, you

- 8 should write for his or her particular situation. What you say throughout the letter should make it clear that the reader is getting individual treatment. Consider the following situation: A company training director is writing to the director of a management-training program asking for additional information on the program. The individualistic closing should be something like “We look forward to the possibility of sending our executives to you in the years ahead.” It is much better than one that fits any similar case “We look forward to hearing from you.”

7. Using the Reader's Names

As you have probably noticed in some letters, using the reader's name in the letter text is another way to show that the reader is being given special treatment. It makes the reader feel that his/her identity as individual is recognized.¹¹ That letters begin with customer's name makes him or her feel important. Use it once or twice in the letter, but not so often as to sound like a ward politician out for votes.¹²

8. Avoiding Anger

Rarely is anger justified in letters. It destroys goodwill. Most of comments made in anger do not provide needed information, but merely serve to let the writer blow off steam¹³. Such comments take many forms—sarcasm, insults, and exclamations.

The effect of angry words is to make the reader angry. With both writer and reader angry, the two are not likely to get together on whatever the letter is about. A tactful writer refers courteously to the subject matter to avoid jeopardizing (危及) goodwill. But, when pleasant, positive words have not brought desired results, negative words may be justified.

Basic Patterns of Business Writing

You can organize business messages either deductively¹⁴ or inductively¹⁵ depending on your prediction of the receiver's reaction to your main idea. However, learning to organize business messages according to the approaches that are outlined below will improve your chances of writing a document that elicits (引起, 引出) the response or action you desire.

1. Directness in Good-news and Routine Messages

Good-news or routine messages follow a direct order (deductive sequence)—the message begins with the main idea. To present good-news or routine information deductively, begin with the major idea, followed by supporting details, and end with goodwill.

Routine inquiries and replies, favorable response to claims and adjustment requests, recommendation letters, good news about employment, congratulations, messages of appreciation, condolences, announcements, and greetings fall into this category.

2. Indirectness in Bad-news Messages

When the main message of a letter is bad news, you should usually write in indirect order. The indirect order is especially effective when you must say “no” to a request or when you must convey other disappointing news. The main reason for this approach is that negative messages are received more positively when an explanation precedes (处……之前) them. In fact, an explanation may even convince the reader that the writer's position is correct. In addition, an explanation cushions¹⁶ the shock of bad news.

The indirect plan consists of four parts: 1) a buffer¹⁷, 2) reasons supporting the negative decision, 3) a clear, diplomatic statement of the negative decision, and 4) a helpful, friendly, and positive close.

Bad-news messages include: bad news about orders such as back orders (迟交订货, 积压的订单), substitutions (替代品), unfillable orders (无法满足的订单) and non-confirming orders; negative answers such as denying cooperation with routine requests, declining invitations and request for favors, and refusing adjustment of claims and complaints or rejecting job applications; and conveying unfavorable news about people such as refusing to write recommendation letters, giving negative performance reviews and terminating employment.

3. Indirectness in Persuasion

Persuasion is the art of influencing others to accept your point of view. In all occupations and professions, rich rewards await those who can use well-informed and well-prepared presentations to persuade others to accept their ideas or buy their products, services or ideas. By persuasion, we mean reasoning with the reader—presenting facts with logic that support the case. Persuasive messages aim to influence readers who are inclined to resist. To succeed, therefore, you have to begin by convincing them. In this approach you should generally follow the indirect order plan. Open with words that set up the strategy—needs and appeals, emotion, logic, and credibility, and gain attention. Then present the strategy (the persuasion), using persuasive language and you-viewpoint. End the letter by describing precisely what you would like to happen, restating how the audience will benefit by acting as you wish and making action easy to take. Common types of persuasive message are sales letters, claim letters and letters that request special favor or information.