



*English For
International
Business
Communication*

外经贸英语函电

上海对外贸易学院外语系

《外经贸英语函电》编写组编

英语读本

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International Business Communication

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前 言

《外经贸英语函电》的前身为《外贸英语函电》，是上海对外贸易学院的一本主要教材，原共三十课，全用英语编写，分上下两册，由甘鸿同志任主编，会同凌华倍，李九皋，唐德荣，金道明，王其升，顾树瑛等同志于1980年编写，1981年开始试用。1985年和1986年由王兴孙、凌华倍，曹广裕等同志根据试用情况对教材作了部分修改和增删。该教材自试用以来受到各方面关心爱护，需用数量逐年增加，临时打印远远不能满足需要。为此，我们决定在原有教材的基础上选择和合并若干重点课文，增加电传内容，改编成《外经贸英语函电》，由上海科学技术文献出版社出版。

本书侧重于实例，且与实际业务紧密结合，使学者能通过实例举一反三，学会撰写符合规格的外经贸英语函电和草拟有关的业务合约。本书既是专业英语教材又是外经贸业务联系的基础知识读本。为了便于自学，本书每一单元的正文、信函、电报和电传等已另编译成汉语并且附有习题答案，自成一册，配套出版，供对照参考。

《外经贸英语函电》仍由甘鸿同志主编，参加编写的有凌华倍，唐德荣，曹广裕，袁松玉，金道明等同志。曹广裕同志在原教材的基础上对电报、电传和支付方面的内容作了较多补充。

邹博文教授对本书进行了审阅，特此表示感谢。

由于编者水平有限，编写时间较为仓促，其中错误或不妥之处难免，希使用本书的同志予以指正。

上海对外贸易学院外语系
《外经贸英语函电》编写组
1989年11月

CONTENTS

Unit One Business Letter-writing	1
Essential of Business Letter-writing	1
Layout of Business Letters	2
Envelope Addressing	9
The Tendency of Business Letter-writing.....	9
Figures — 3	10
Exercises	13
Unit Two Establishing Business Relations	15
Introduction	15
Specimen Letters — 3	16
Vocabulary	19
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	20
Useful Expressions	22
Exercises	23
Letters for Optional Study — 2	25
Unit Three Status Enquiries	27
Introduction	27
Specimen Letters — 3	28
Vocabulary	31
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	31
Useful Expressions	33
Exercises	34
Letters for Optional Study — 3	36
Unit Four Enquiries & Replies	38
Introduction	38
Specimen Letters — 4	39
Vocabulary	42
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	42
Useful Expressions	43
Exercises	44
Letters for Optional Study — 2	45
Unit Five Sending Proforma Invoices	46
Introduction	46

Specimen Letters — 3	47
Vocabulary	50
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	50
Useful Expressions	52
Exercises	52
Letter for Optional Study — 1	54
Unit Six Telegrams & Telexes	55
Part One: Telegrams	55
The Structure of a Telegram	56
Examples of Telegram Exchanged	58
Rules for Simplifying Telegram Messages	60
Vocabulary	62
A List of Some Common Abbreviations & Combinations Used in Telegrams.....	63
Exercises.....	65
Part Two: Telexes	67
The Structure of a Telex	68
Differences between Cables & Telexes	69
Rules for Simplifying Words or Phrases Used in Telex Mes- sages	70
Examples of Telex Exchanged	73
Vocabulary	75
Exercises.....	76
Appendix I	79
Appendix II.....	85
Unit Seven Quotations, Offers & Counter-offers	105
Introduction	105
Specimen Letters — 4	106
Vocabulary	110
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade.....	110
Useful Expressions	111
Exercises	112
Letters for Optional Study — 2	113
Unit Eight Sales Promotion	115
Introduction	115
Specimen Letters — 3	116
Vocabulary	118
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade.....	118

Useful Expressions	120
Exercises	120
Letters for Optional Study — 2	122
Unit Nine Orders & Thier Fulmient	124
Introduction	124
Specimen Letters — 4	125
Reply to a Trial Order by Telex	130
Vocabulary	133
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade.....	133
Useful Expressions	135
Exercises	136
Letters for Optional Study — 2	137
Unit Ten Terms of Payment	139
Part One: Payment	139
Specimen Letters — 2	140
Vocabulary	144
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade.....	144
Useful Expressions	146
Exercises.....	146
Letters for Optional Study — 2	148
Part Two: Urging Establishment of L/C	150
Specimen Letters — 3	151
Urging Customers to Open L/C by Telex	153
Vocabulary	154
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foregin Trade.....	155
Useful Expressions	156
Exercises.....	157
Letters for Optional Study — 1	159
Part Three: L/C Amendment & Extension.....	160
Specimen Letters — 3 and Telexes — 2	161
Vocabulary	164
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foregin Trade.....	164
Useful Expressions	166
Exercises.....	167
Letters for Optional Study — 2	169
Unit Eleven Packing	171
Introduction	171

Specimen Letters — 3	173
Vocabulary	175
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	176
Useful Expressions	177
Exercises	179
Letters for Optional Study — 2	181
Unit Twelve Insurance	183
Introduction	183
Specimen Letters — 3	185
Vocabulary	189
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	189
Useful Expressions	190
Exercises	191
Letters for Optional Study — 3	193
Unit Thirteen Shipment	195
Introduction	195
Specimen Letters — 3	197
Vocabulary	202
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	203
Useful Expressions	204
Exercises	205
Letters for Optional Study — 5	207
Unit Fourteen Agencies	212
Introduction	212
Specimen Letters — 4	214
Agreements — 2	218
Vocabulary	222
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	223
Useful Expressions	224
Exercises	225
Letters for Optional Study — 4	227
Unit Fifteen Complaints & Adjustments	231
Introduction	231
Specimen Letters — 5	232
Vocabulary	237
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	238
Useful Expressions	239

Exercises	240
Letters for Optional Study — 2	241
Unit Sixteen Trade Dispute	243
Introduction	243
Specimen Letters — 6 and Report — 1	244
Vocabulary	252
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	253
Useful Expressions	254
Exercises	256
Unit Seventeen Joint Venture	258
Introduction	258
Specimen Letters — 6	260
The Law of the PRC on Joint Ventures Using Chinese & Foreign Invest- ment.....	264
Vocabulary	270
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	270
Useful Expressions	272
Exercises	273
A Joint Venture Contract	275
Unit Eighteen Compensation Trade	283
Introduction	283
Specimen Letters — 6	285
Agreement on Compensation Trade	291
Vocabulary	293
Words & Phrases Commonly Used in Foreign Trade	293
Useful Expressions	294
Exercises	295

Unit One

BUSINESS LETTER-WRITING

Essentials of Business Letter-writing

Broadly speaking, the functions of a business letter may be said to be (1) to ask for or to convey information; (2) to make or to accept an offer; (3) to deal with matters concerning negotiation of business. In addition, there are letters with no other purpose than to remind the recipient of the sender's existence.

Letter-writing does not differ from any other form of creative writing. Good English is one of the important bases of good business letters. What you write should be free from grammatical blemishes, and also free from the slightest possibility of being misunderstood. There are certain essential qualities of business letters, which can be summed up in the Three C's, i. e. (1) Clearness; (2) Conciseness; (3) Courtesy.

I. Clearness

First of all, make sure that your letter is so clear that it cannot be misunderstood. A point that is ambiguous in a letter will cause trouble to both sides, and further exchange of letters for explanation will become inevitable, thus time will be lost.

Next, when you are sure about what you want to say, say it in plain, simple words. Good, straight-forward, simple English is what is needed for business letters.

2. Conciseness

Clearness and conciseness often go hand-in-hand and the elimination of wordy business jargon can help to make a letter clearer and at the same time more concise.

A concise letter is not necessarily a short one. Sometimes a letter dealing perhaps with a multiplicity of matter cannot avoid being long. If conciseness conflicts with courtesy, then make a little sacrifice of conciseness. Generally speaking, you will gain in clearness and conciseness by writing short sentences rather than long ones.

A letter can be made clearer, easier to read and more attractive to look at by careful paragraphing. A paragraph for each point is a good rule.

3. Courtesy

It should hardly be necessary to stress the importance of courtesy in your correspondence. One of the most important things is promptness. Punctuality will please your customer who dislikes waiting for days before he gets a reply to his letter.

It is nearly always wrong to doubt a statement made in good faith by the other side and even worse to contradict it. Differences are bound to occur in business, but with diplomacy and tact they can be overcome and settled without ill-will on either side.

Before we go on to the detailed structure of the business letter there is one general principle, on which the American writers lay great emphasis, that is, the 'you' attitude. In our letters we should always keep in mind the person we are writing to, see things from his point of view, visualize him in his surroundings, see his problems and difficulties and express our ideas in terms of his experience.

Layout of Business Letters

Although formality in business letter-writing is rapidly giving way to a less conventional and more friendly style, the layout or mechanical structure of a letter as it is called still follows a more or less set pattern determined by custom and not resulting from any deliberate plan. Choice of layout is a matter of individual taste, but it is better to follow established practice, to which the business world has become accustomed. A good plan to make correct practice habitual is to adopt one form of layout and to stick to it.

The modern business letter is nearly always typed. It has long been customary to set it out in the semi-indented style (Fig. 1). Many people regard this as the most attractive of all letter styles. The blocked inside name and address is liked because it is compact and tidy. This style appeals to most readers. They like the indented paragraphing and claim that it makes for easy reading. Others dislike the indentations because, they claim, they waste the typist's time. So the blocked style (Fig. 2) has now come to be much more widely used than before.

The open style of punctuation in the inside name and address is often used with the modern letter style, but is not essential to it. Closed punctuation can also be used if preferred.

The business letter consists of seven principle parts: (1) the letter-head, (2) the date, (3) the inside name and address, (4) the salutation, (5) the message, (6) the complimentary close and (7) the writer's signature and official position.

1. The Letter-head

The letter-head expresses a firm's personality. It helps to form one's impression of the writer's firm. Styles vary considerably, but they all give similar information and besides the name and address of the firm may include telephone numbers, telegraphic addresses, the telegraphic codes used, telex numbers, and the kind of business carried on,

2. The Date

Always type the date in full, in the logical order of day, month, year, e. g.

12th October, 19... or 12 October 19...

For the day, either cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) or ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.) can be used, thus:

1st March 19... or 1 March 19...

3rd April 19... or 3 April 19...

29th October 19... or 29 October 19...

The day can also be written after the month, for example:

March 1st, 19...

October 29, 19...

In this way, a comma must be used between the day and the year.

To give the day in figures (e. g. 12/10/19...) is in bad taste, and it may easily cause confusion because in Britain this date would mean 12th October 19..., but in the United States and some other countries it would mean 10th December 19...

3. Inside Name and Address

The usual practice is to set out the name and address of one's correspondent at the head of the letter, as in Figs. 1 and 2. However, in official (i.e. Government) correspondence, it is sometimes placed at the foot, in the bottom left-hand corner.

Where the appropriate head of department is known, address the letter to him by his official title, thus:

The Sales Manager
The Hercules Engineering Co., Ltd.
Brazenose Street
MANCHESTER M60 8AS
England

When addressing a correspondent personally by name, take care to spell the name correctly.

English addresses may have the following parts: (Not all addresses have all

the parts)

- (a) name of house
- (b) number of house and name of street
- (c) name of city or town
- (d) county or state and its post-code
- (e) name of country

In order to avoid ambiguity, when you write letters to other countries, always include the name of the country, even if the city mentioned is the country's capital. Here is an example:

The Vice President
The Eagle Press Inc.
24 South Bank
BIRMINGHAM
Alabama
U. S. A.

The courtesy titles used in correspondence are Mr. (or Esq.), Mrs., Miss, Messrs. and Mmes. But there are certain rules of using these titles. Esq. (for Esquire) is legally restricted to certain classes of persons in America (e.g. judges, magistrates, barristers). For addressing a single person Mr. or Esq. is used in England. Mr. always precedes the name, Esq. always follows the name, separated from it by a comma, e.g. Mr. John Hayling or John Hayling, Esq. The latter form is considered more polite, but as the Americans never use it, we recommend our readers to make 'Mr.' the rule. Mrs. (for mistress) is used for a married woman and Miss for an unmarried woman. In recent years it has become customary to use Ms. as the courtesy title for all women, married or unmarried, and many women, particularly career women, strongly object to being addressed as Mrs. or Miss.

In our correspondence the use of Mr. and Messrs. as the courtesy titles is common. However, Messrs. (abbreviated from the French Messieurs) as the plural form of Mr. is used only for companies or firms, the names of which include a personal element, e.g.

Messrs. J. Harvey & Co.
Messrs. MacDonald & Evans

It is not used in any of the following cases:

- (a) When an individual is addressed:

J. A. Simpson, Esq.
Lloyd, Harris & Brown

The Chief Accountant
Edward Collins & Co., Ltd.

- (b) When the title is impersonal:
 - Utility Furniture Co.
 - Cabinet Industries Ltd.
- (c) When a courtesy title is already included:
 - Sir James Murphy & Co.
 - Dr. H. Willis & Co., Ltd.
- (d) When the title begins with The:
 - The Robinson Furniture Co.
 - The Grayson Electric Co., Ltd.

4. The Salutation

The salutation is the greeting with which every letter begins. The customary greeting in a business letter is Dear Sir, or Dear Sirs (when a partnership is addressed). But the Americans usually use Gentlemen instead of Dear Sirs. Note that you cannot use Sirs alone and that Gentlemen cannot be used in the singular. In American letters a colon is always placed after the salutation, e.g.

Dear Mr. White:

Quite often now companies are owned and/or managed by women, and it is more and more customary to use the greeting: Dear Madam or Sir, if the writer is not sure whether the letter will be read by a man or a woman.

5. The Message

This forms the body of the letter and is the part that really matters. Before you begin to write, you must first of all consider the following two points:

- (a) What is your aim in writing this letter?
- (b) What is the best way to go about it?

Since the main purpose of the letter is to convey a message, the letter should be written in language that is easily understood. The following serves as reminders:

- (a) Write simply, clearly, courteously, grammatically, and to the point;
- (b) Paragraph correctly, confining each paragraph to one topic;
- (c) Avoid stereotyped phrases and commercial jargon.

6. The Complimentary Close

The complimentary close, like the salutation, is purely a matter of custom and a polite way of bringing a letter to a close. The expression used must suit the occasion. It must also match the salutation. The following salutations, with their matching closes, are the ones most commonly used in the modern business letters:

<u>Salutation</u>	<u>Close</u>	<u>Comment</u>
Dear Sir(s)	Yours faithfully	Formal — used as standard practice in Britain, but Americans object to using this as the complimentary close.
Dear Madam		
Dear Mr. Harris	Yours sincerely	Informal — used between persons known to each other, or where there is a wish to dispense with formality.

“Yours respectfully”, at one time used in letters to superiors, is now obsolete. Avoid ending letters with “I am, We are, I remain, etc.” These phrases are old-fashioned.

“Yours faithfully” is obsolete in America. “Yours truly” or “Sincerely yours” is usually used.

7. The Signature

The Signature is the signed name or mark of the person writing the letter or that of the firm he or she represents. It is written in ink immediately below the complimentary close. To “sign” with a rubber stamp is a form of discourtesy.

Miscellaneous Matters

(a) References

Reference numbers and letters enable replies to be linked with earlier correspondence and ensure that they reach the right person or department without delay. Failure to quote your correspondent’s reference causes inconvenience. Many letter-heads provide spaces for references, e.g.

Your ref:

Our ref:

Where the letter-head does not provide for it, the reference may form part of the first paragraph of the reply letter:

Dear Sir

Thank you for your letter, reference ALM/PS, of 15th September. Or the reference may be typed as a heading:

Dear Sir

Your Ref: ALM/PS

Thank you for your letter of 15th September.

(b) “For the attention of ...”

This phrase is used where the writer of a letter addressed to an organization

wishes to direct it to a particular member. It is typed two line-spacings above the salutation, underlined, and centred over the body of the letter:

The Secretary
The Ajax Electrical Co., Ltd.
Fernhall Drive
REDBRIDGE, Essex IG4 5BN
England

For the attention of Mr. T. Waterhouse

Dear Sir

(c) Subject Headings

There are two kinds of subject headings — main headings and paragraph headings.

1/. Main Headings — The heading is typed two line-spacings below the salutation, underlined, and centred over the body of the letter. It helps to ensure that the letter is passed to the right person or department without delay, e.g.

Your Order No. 3456

A heading will be appropriate if one has already been used by your correspondent, in which case your reply should carry the same heading, or if you are beginning a correspondence likely to lead to a number of letters on the same subject.

2/. Paragraph Headings — The heading is placed at the beginning of each paragraph to show what subject this paragraph is dealing with. Block capitals may be used, followed by a full stop (though some prefer a colon, or even a dash) to emphasize the distinction between heading and text. Main heading does not take a full stop.

Paragraph headings may be useful, but it is better to confine each letter to one subject if possible, because different subjects may need attention by different departments or different persons.

(d) Enclosures

When there is something enclosed with the letter, type the word "Enclosure", or an abbreviation of it (Encl.) in the bottom left-hand under the identification marks, with a figure indicating the number of enclosures, if there are more than one.

(e) "Per Pro." Signature

Per Pro. is the abbreviation of per procuracionem, which is a Latin phrase denoting agency. Strictly speaking, only a partner is entitled to sign the name of his firm, but for convenience authority to sign is often given to a responsible employee by a

document known as a power of attorney, though the authority to sign may also arise from custom. In either case the attorney or agent, as the authorized signatory is called, signs per procuracionem or per pro., sometimes further abbreviated to p. pro. or even p.p., for instance:

per pro. Hopkins, Wright & Co.

Signature

(f) Identification Marks

The identification marks (or reference notation) are made up of the initials of the person who dictated the letter and those of the secretary or typist. The initials usually are in capital letters and typed two spaces below the signature against the left margin. The two sets are separated by a colon or a slant. The following examples are acceptable forms of the identification marks:

AS/hu

AS:hu

(g) Postscript

A postscript (P.S.) is an afterthought, and in formal letter it is usually a sign of poor planning. But as a special device, it has two legitimate functions:

1/. Some executives, to add a personal touch to their typewritten letter, occasionally add a postscript in pen and ink.

2/. Writers of sales letter often withhold one last convincing argument for emphatic inclusion in a postscript.

Example:

P.S. ... to see you at the Annual Sales Meeting at the Hillside Plaza on January 10.

P.S. I understand the special entertainment is great.

(h) Margins

Margins contribute substantially to the visual impression a letter makes upon its reader. Margins should create the effect of a well-framed picture. Both left- and right-hand margins are generally 30 mm. A brief letter can have margins as wide as 34 mm.

(i) The Second Page

With the exception of sales letters, business letters are usually one page long, but sometimes a message is sufficiently complex to warrant two or more pages. When you have a second page, use the following second-page heading:

The Asian Trading Co., Ltd. July 5, 19- p.2

The phrase “- to be continued-” may be added on the right hand side at the bottom of the first page. The second and succeeding pages should have the same quality, size and colour as the first page.