

MBA

系列教材

Business Communications

商务英语

主编

张传德

副主编

高增安

李应涛



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内 容 提 要

本书共 17 个单元,结构清晰,适用性强;内容丰富,涵盖商务交际中的主要实务环节,并按其操作的先后顺序编写,包括相关知识、范文实例、相关表达法及练习。全书用英文编写,为教学提供了一本正规完整而又系统的教材,也可为学生提供更多接触使用英语的机会。

本书不仅适合作为 MBA 教材,也完全适合作为经管、商贸、金融专业的教学用书以及有关专业人士的员工培训教材。

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前

言

商务英语的内容涉及面较广,作为MBA的一门课程,由于学时有限,本书内容以商贸的主要实务作为重点。

作者从1988年至今在管理学院担任本科生及MBA硕士生商务英语教学。其间对所编写的讲义不断增删,去粗取精,以适应教学之需要,可以说本书是作者10余年商务英语教学经验之集成。

鉴于目前无论本科生还是MBA硕士生的英语水平已有长足进展,加之现在提倡双语教学,故本书用英文编写,为教学提供一本正规完整的教材,也可为学生提供更多接触和使用英语的机会。

本书共17单元,结构清晰,适用性强;内容丰富,涵盖商务交际中的主要环节并按其操作实务的先后顺序分章编写,包括相关知识、范文实例、相关表达法及练习。

考虑到不同的使用对象及学时安排,作者对使用本书提出以下建议供参考:

1. 1~2单元主要介绍商务写作的特点、原则和格式,可择其要点概述,或在其后的章节中加以提示。

2. 3~14单元为本教材的必学部分。

3. 15~17单元为商务合同、求职书信、个人简历及备忘录的写作,这部分可根据学时及具体教学对象决定取舍。

4. 各单元所附练习也可视教学具体情况选择使用。

本书编写过程中参阅了海内外诸多相关内容的图书,作者对所参阅过的图书的作者深表谢意,并在书后参考书目中一一列出。

本书稿承西安交通大学管理学院博士生导师李怀祖教授审阅,特此感谢。

作者执鞭大学英语教学40春秋。在教学过程中学生给予了我热情、活力、青春和欢乐,为此谨以此书奉献给我钟爱的学生们。

张传德

2003年3月20日

于西安交通大学

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UNIT 1

The Elements of Effective Business Writing

There are a wide range of means open to business communication. However, we focus on the written communication. Whether you are preparing a negotiation through face-to-face or by written communication, you need to think and plan before presenting your message and know the forms in communication. Even though you have a face-to-face negotiation with your client, you need some written forms of communication to help to conclude a deal. For example, notes, memoranda, notices, letters, reports, questionnaires, catalogues, contracts, with their different functions, are often used for a deal. And written communication in business is especially important for its following advantages:

1. The written communication is precise. Specific terms can be used for legal or contractual purposes, and the transaction can be documented on paper or contract forms. Writing is regarded as more permanent than other media and it is customary to use it where a record is required or one wants a communication that is available for reference over a long period.
2. It is potentially more formal than other media and can carry added weight and authority.
3. It avoids the necessity for personal contact, which may be desirable in certain "delicate" situations.
4. It is suitable for conveying long and complex messages which need to

be studied in detail. The obvious examples are detailed instructions, contracts, etc.

The business writing is the chief media of external communication in business—the principal means whereby a firm maintains contact with the outside world. Often enough it is the firm's only contact with its customers, who form their impressions of the firm as much from the tone and quality of its correspondence as from the care and promptness with which their orders are met.

Therefore, business writing makes heavy demands on the linguistic skills of writer and receiver.

The elements of effective business writing are discussed in detail as follows.



Simplicity

Don't be ashamed of simplicity; it goes with naturalness of tone and freshness of viewpoint to make readable writing. If it is appropriate the short word is preferable to the long; it draws less attention to itself as a word and enables the reader to concentrate attention on the idea denoted by it. But this does not mean that you must never use long words. One good reason for the short words is that it has a greater impact than the longer word:

drunk is more emphatic than *intoxicated*.

dead is more emphatic than *deceased*.

rude is more emphatic than *discourteous*.

sad is more emphatic than *sorrowful*.

But there are times when the short word is not strong enough to convey the writer's feeling; the longer word is then more appropriate:

violent is stronger than *rough*.

enormous is stronger than *big*.

powerful is stronger than *strong*.

exhausted is stronger than *tired*.

Nor does the use of simple language mean that short simple sentences are of always best. Your reader will not enjoy a style of writing that always leaps and never flows. What is called for is a prudent blending of both the long and the short so that the monotony of a series of long sentences is broken by the oc-



casional use of a short sharp sentence that keeps the reader awake.

It is in the choice of the most appropriate word and the judicious mixture of short and longer sentences that vocabulary is an important element in style. High-sounding words and phrases are to writing what ostentation is to dress—merely a means of drawing attention and showing off. They reveal the writer for what he is—superficial, conceited and certainly lacking in good taste. To *express a preference for*, to *give consideration to*, or to *arrive at a decision* when all that is meant is *prefer*, *consider*, or *decide* is to elaborate needlessly what ought to be simple. The following are further examples:

Instead of

in the normal course

we are of the opinion that

in view of the fact that

at all times

in the near future

at the present time

grant approval

make a revision

we are aware of the fact

in spite of the fact that

it affords me great pleasure to inform you

Say

normally, usually

we think

since, because

always

soon

now

approve

revise

we know

although

I am glad to tell you

Business letter-writing calls for a plain style—a style that is simple, clear and easily understood; one that makes use for the most part of short and familiar words. Such is the style of much of our greatest literature.



Clarity

When we write letters dealing with such concrete things as orders, shipments and payments the dominant need is for exactness expressed in terms that are absolutely clear. We owe it to our reader to write clearly and to make their task of comprehension as easy as possible at first reading. We fail in this if we abandon simplicity. First be clear about what you want to say and then say it simply and straightforwardly. Clear writing and clear thinking go hand in hand, and a person who thinks straight will usually be able to write straight,

building words into sentences that express his thoughts exactly and clearly. Clarity is achieved through natural forms of expression, the use of familiar words, and straightforward sentences grouped in paragraphs each with one central idea. Letter-writing should be conventional and the language used as natural as everyday speech.

Clarity is also promoted by what is termed parallel structure, i. e. the placing of related ideas of equal importance in parallel positions in the sentence, as in the following examples:

The booklet contains instructions for adjusting the machine and suggestions for operating it.

Transport charges vary with weight of package and distance of transmission.

They decline not only to pay the account but also to return the goods.

Besides making for clarity, parallel structure carries ideas forward in a way that sounds well.

Make sure to write sentences capable of only one interpretation. It is surprisingly easy to write sentences that appear to their writers to have only one meaning, but in which their correspondents see a quite different meaning. For example:

The manager gave his secretary a check, and her husband a watch.

Does this mean:

(a) *The manager gave his secretary a check, and her husband presented her with a watch.* or

(b) *The manager gave a check to his secretary and a watch to her husband?*

It is a golden rule of writing that those parts of a sentence which are closely connected in thought should be placed in the sentence as near to one another as possible, so that their mutual relationship is clear. Failure to observe this rule is a frequent cause of ambiguity. In the sentence:

I can recommend him for the post he applies for with complete confidence.

Are we to understand that he applied for the post with complete confi-

dence, or that his recommended with complete confidence? If the latter, then the phrase *with complete confidence* should be placed immediately after *recommend* him.

And again:

No child shall be employed on any weekday when the school is not open for a longer period than four hours.

Does this mean that no child must be employed when the school is not open for more than four hours, or that no child must be employed for more than four hours when the school is not open? The latter is presumably intended and the phrase *for a longer period than four hour* should be placed immediately after *employed*.

When you write a letter it is an excellent idea to jot down the points you wish to make and to place them in order; in other words, to “write to a plan”. Planning helps to produce the orderly kind of letter that creates a good impression because its message is clear. If your correspondent has to read your letter a second time before he can understand it, the chances are that it is not a good letter.



Coherence

Coherence is an essential part of clarity. Logical arrangement, the topic sentence and the use of connective terms all have a part in coherence.



1. Logical Arrangement

For its full effect we saw that the paragraph depends upon the orderly arrangement of its component sentences in a logical sequence. And so with the business letter, whose overall effectiveness depends upon the orderly arrangement of its component paragraphs. Each paragraph must flow smoothly into the next to form a series that represents a coherent whole in which the mutual relationships or the paragraphs are manifest.



2. The Topic Sentence

Placed at the beginning, the topic sentence serves to link its paragraph with the one before it and to prepare the reader for what is to follow. It pro-

motes the smooth flow of ideas as one topic blends naturally with the next, giving coherence to the communication as a whole. It has been said that the reader can get the gist of a well-written letter by reading the topic sentences, and while this may be an exaggeration, it is certainly true that skilful use of the topic sentence assists comprehension in a very real way.

3. Use of Connective Terms

Coherence is also achieved by using conjunctions, adverbs and phrases as connectives. There is a feeling among some people that sentences and paragraphs should not begin with conjunctions, but this view is not supported by the practice of good writers. After all, if what is written is to form a connected whole, there must be some means of carrying on the thought from one sentence or paragraph to another, and what could be more appropriate than to make use of such connectives, or transitional words, as *but, for, although, because, therefore, consequently, however, otherwise, nevertheless*, besides many others, or even transitional phrases such as *in addition, for example, on the other hand, on the contrary, on the whole*, etc.? Even complete sentences may be used as connectives, of which an example will be found in the second of the following two letters.

The first of these letters is composed of short, poorly-connected paragraphs, which fail to flow smoothly for want of suitable connectives.

Dear Sir,

We are sorry to learn from your letter of 12th October that you have had complaints from customers about our vases. Your letter has caused us a great deal of concern. We are glad you have brought the matter to our notice so promptly. These vases are made from pure Chinese porcelain. They are renowned for their exquisite design and fine craftsmanship. There is a very promising market for them. It is unfortunate that the consignment supplied to your last order should have included a number of defective items. We will then replace them free of charge. We deeply regret the inconvenience you have been

caused. Please accept our apologies.

Yours faithfully,

Now compare the above with the following reparagraphed letter.

Dear Sir,

We are sorry to learn from your letter of 12th October that you have had complaints from customers about our vases. We are very concerned, but nevertheless glad that you have brought the matter to our notice promptly.

As you know, these vases are made from pure Chinese porcelain and are renowned for their exquisite design and fine craftsmanship. It is *therefore* unfortunate that the consignment supplied to your last order should have included a number of defective items.

We feel sure you will wish to continue to stock these vases as there is a very promising market for them, and in the circumstances suggest that you return for replacement free of charge all items still unsold from this particular consignment.

Meanwhile, we deeply regret the inconvenience you have been caused *and* ask you to accept our apologies.

Yours faithfully,

The connective or transitional expressions in this second letter are printed in italics. They take the writers thoughts forward smoothly and naturally and make for comfortable reading.

● 4. Tone and Style

The primary purpose of language is communication; but there is much more to language than the mere conveying of messages. The way in which it is used is important in its effects on personal relationships in both business and

social life. It is not enough for a letter to be grammatically correct. So long as its message is clear, its tone and effect on the feelings of the receiver are more important than its grammar. The two letters that follow convey the same message, but in very different terms.

Dear Sir,

I have to thank you for your application for the post of personal assistant to our managing director, and to inform you that the post has now been filled.

Yours sincerely,

There is nothing grammatically wrong with the above letter, but it is cold and distant and does nothing to allay the disappointment the applicant is bound to feel. And now compare it with the following.

Dear Mr. Barrington,

Thank you for application for the post of personal assistant to our managing director. We received a large number of applications, including some from persons with experience in the special field of electronics in which we operate. The appointment has now been made, but as our work continues to expand there are likely to be other vacancies in which you may be interested. I hope you will feel able to apply to us again when they are advertised.

Yours sincerely,

This letter conveys the same basic message as the first, but its tone is warmer, more understanding, less discouraging and kinder to the applicant's feelings. It addresses him by name and treats him as a human being, and aims to lessen his disappointment at not getting the job. Unlike the earlier letter its

tone is likely to encourage him to try again.

The tone of a letter reflects the spirit in which the writer projects his image to his reader. If the message is effective to and evoke the response the writer is seeking it must establish rapport with the reader and be accepted favorably by him. Good tone in correspondence creates its own psychological impact and does much to foster that sense of considerateness which makes for happy personal relations. In business such relations are important and the power to say what has to be said in an effective, finished and even graceful way is a cardinal part of the art of good business letter-writing.

The tone of a letter must suit both your correspondent and the subject-matter, being firm, persuasive, conciliatory or friendly, and so on, according to the impression you want to convey. Many people who are warm and friendly by nature become persons of another sort as soon as they sit down to write or dictate a business letter. They seem to think that business letters call for a special kind of impersonal and starchy language. They forget that a letter is a sort of “conversation by post” and resort to impersonal constructions that produce the cold and aloof tone evident in the following extract:

Your letter has been received and your complaint is being investigated. When all the facts are known, a further letter will be sent to you.

Personal constructions with the emphasis on the personal *you, we* or *I* produce the warmer and friendlier tone more suited to letter-writing. Instead of the above it is much better to write:

I have received your letter and am investigating your complaint. When all the facts are known I will write to you again.

One of the most important things we all look for as customers is a spirit of friendliness in those with whom we seek to do business. The whole secret of good business letter-writing is to write to another. Make your letters sound as much as possible like good conversation. You wouldn't say on the phone *It is regretted that the goods cannot be sent today*. You would say *I am sorry we cannot send the goods today*, so why not say it in a letter?

To write in the style of good conversation does not mean that you must always “write as you would speak”. There are many expressions in everyday conversational use that are not acceptable in good business letters. You must