

Introduction to Business Letters

商务信函概说

Because of the popularity of fax-machine and e-mail, business letter writing is experiencing a rebirth. Millions of business communications which were conducted through cable or telex before to save time, are now being sent by fax or e-mail. Thus, the inability to write an effective business letter will doom those who want to represent themselves positively to their customers, competitors and employers.

商业信函的写作随着传真及电子邮件的普及正在经历着一次复兴。成千上万过去为节省时间而用电传或电报传递的商务邮件，现在已改用传真或电子邮件来传递。因此，对于某些商界人士来说，如果不具备撰写实用的商务信件的能力，那么他们就注定无法在客户、竞争对手或老板面前树立起自己良好的形象。

I. The Essence of Business Letters 商业信函的本质

Every business letter communicates in two distinct ways. The reader gets meaning out of **what is said** and **how it is said** in a letter. This kind of communication is not at all peculiar only to business letters. In any face-to-face conversation, for example, a person's manner of speaking, the smile or frown on his face, the tone of the voice and etc. . . all tell something beyond what the words say. This "implied" message can either reinforce or contradict the words. It is the same case with business letters. The combination of a central message and an implied message is the total message a reader gets from reading that letter.

每一封商务信件的交流方式都是双重的。收信人从信件的实际内容和写信者的表达方式中领会全信的意思。这种交流方式并不是商务信件所独有的。比如，在面对面的交谈中，一个人说话的方式、脸上的笑容或蹙眉、说话的语调等都会流露出一些言下之意。这种隐含的信息对语句本身的意思既可起到加强的作用，也可能起相反的作用。这类情形在商务信件中也是一样的。字面意思与言下之意的结合便是阅信者所得到的完整信息。

What importance does this concept of a double message have upon our writing of business letters? Considered in its most fundamental terms, a business letter may be defined as a message that attempts to influence its recipient to take some action or attitude desired by the sender. This desired result may be of immediate importance, such as the collecting of a bill, or just an intangible attitude like goodwill. Therefore, we must make sure that both the clarity of the message (what the letter says) and its character (how the letter says it) help to evoke that reaction. In other words, we need to make sure the implied message works for rather than against our purposes.

这个双重信息的概念对商务信函的写作有何重要的意义呢？从本质上来说，商务信函的目的就在于说服对方按写信者的意图去采取某个举措或接受某个想法。写信者想达到的目的可能是当时就很重要的，比如：要求对方马上付款，也可能只是表示友好。因此，我们必须确保信的字面意义与其言下之意都有助于引起阅信人的共鸣。换句话说，我们必须确保信函本身所表达的言下之意有助于我们想要达到的目的，而不是与之相悖。

Chapters one, two and three of this book will be devoted to **“how it is said”**. Therefore, readers can build up a clear idea of how a formal business letter should be like after finishing these parts. Chapters four and five will be about **“what is said”** in letters concerning international trade. They may help you very directly in composing effective letters in international trade

本书的第一、二、三章将讨论“如何写”的问题。读者在读完它们之后将会对商业信函的格式及特点有一个明确的了解。本书的第四、五章探讨“写什么”的问题。它们将非常直接地帮助你写出实用的国际贸易业务信函。

II. The General Procedures for Letter Writing

写信的基本步骤

How shall we deal with business letter writing? Generally, the writing process consists of the following five steps. While writing, ask yourself the relevant

question(s) following each step:

商务信函应该怎样去写呢？一般来说，写信过程包括以下五个步骤。在写作时，可以按顺序依次向自己提出相关的问题：

1. Determine your purpose of writing

确定写信的目的

Why shall I write?

我为什么要写信？

2. Analyze your reader

分析一下阅信人

What do I know about the receiver?

我了解收信人什么？

What kind of relationship do we have?

我们之间是什么关系？

3. Organize your thoughts

构思

What shall I say?

我应该说些什么？

How shall I say?

我应该怎么说？

4. Write your drafts

草拟信函

Is this the best way to say what I want to say?

这是表达我所想说的内容的最好方式吗？

5. Polish your writing

润色

Is this a really effective business letter?

这是一封真正有效的商务信件吗？

Chapter One

Elements of Business Letters

商务信函中的要素

Although diversity occurs in stylistic features concerning elements in business letters, writers generally agree on the standard elements of a letter. Usually, twelve elements are involved in formal business letters. They are:

尽管商务信函在与要素有关的风格问题上存在一些差异，但通常写信者在信件的标准要素这一问题上还是有所共识的。在正式商务信函中，一般会用到 12 种要素。它们是：

- Letterhead (信头)
- Reference (案号)
- Date (日期)
- Inside address (封内地址)
- Attention line (注意项)
- Salutation (称呼)
- Subject line (事由)
- Body of a letter (信的正文)
- Complimentary close (信尾敬语)
- Signature (签名)
- IEC block (缩写名、附件、分送标志)
- Postscript (附言)

Among these twelve elements, letterhead, date, inside address, salutation, the body, the complimentary close and the signature block are the standard ones that a formal business letter must contain. The others are considered optional.

在上述的 12 项要素中，信头、日期、封内地址、称呼、信的正文、信尾敬语和签名属于标准要素，是正式商务信件中必须包括的。其他的要素则可根据具体情况可有可无。

The general position of these elements is shown in the following sample:
这些要素在信件中的大致位置如下所示：

Letterhead (信头)
Reference number (案号)
Date (日期)
Inside address (封内地址)

Attention line (注意项)
Salutation (称呼)
Subject line (事由)
Body (正文) _____

Complimentary close (信尾敬语)
Signature (签名)
IEC block (缩写名、附件、分送标志)
Postscript (附言)

In the following, we will examine each element according to their order in a letter to see what function(s) it serves and how it should be constructed.

下面 我们将根据各要素在信中的排列顺序 对每个要素作一个说明 看看它们各自的作用以及该如何编写它们。

I. Letterhead 信头

Nowadays, almost every business firm uses letterhead stationery for their letter.

Letterhead is usually the most obvious element in a business letter, taking the topmost part of the paper. It identifies where the letter comes from and it provides the recipient with the first impression of the letter.

如今，几乎每一家商业公司都用带信头的信纸来写信。信头往往是商务信件中最显著的要素，位于信纸的最上端。它标明信是从何处来的，而且给收信者留下第一印象。

A letterhead always contains the company's name, address, telephone number, fax number, internet address, e-mail address, etc. Sometimes a trademark or brief slogan is used effectively too. Many large companies add departmental identification to their letterheads. For example:

信头一般包括公司的名称、地址、电话、传真、英特网址和电子信箱地址等。有时信头中还会充分使用商标或简短的广告。很多大公司在信头中还加上部门的标志。例如：

MINNESOTA MED-EQUIP Subsidiary of Minnesota Wire & Cable Co.	
1835 Energy Park Drive	Telephone: (612)644-1880
St. Paul, MN 55108	Fax: (612)644-1890
USA	Internet: mme@mwccmme.com

However, if a second page is needed for the body of the letter, a second-page heading should be used. Three examples are shown in the following:

但是，如果信件较长需用第二页纸，那么第二页纸上的信头则有所不同。以下是三种样例：

ABC Farm
May 2, 1998

-2-

Mr. Robert Wyatt, May 2, 1998, Page 2

Mr. Robert Wyatt
May 2, 1998
Page 2

The receiver's name and date appearing in the heading of the second page should match those on the first page

第二页上的收信者姓名和写信日期必须与第一页上的相一致。

II. Reference 案号

Big companies usually have to deal with a lot of letters every day. Therefore, it is necessary to classify them according to subject, persons, or time sequence so that it will not be so difficult to find a letter that is wanted on file. Reference line also enable replies to be linked with earlier correspondence and ensure that they reach the right person or department on time.

大公司每天要处理很多信件。因此，有必要根据交易的内容、办事人或时间等来分类，以便于查找存档的信件。案号还有助于将回函与早些时候的信件联系起来，以使它们能及时送达有关的人或部门。

There is no standard form for reference lines. Companies may choose what they think the most effective form for this.

案号没有固定的格式。公司可以选择他们认为最有效的方式来表示。

Your ref: CNN/011

Our ref: 12345/XY

Dear Sir,

Thank you for your letter, reference CNN/011, of March 9, 1998. . . .

III. Date 日期

Date line is a vital part in business letters. Often, in business transactions at all levels, the date has special relevance: it might be a deciding factor as to whether an order is filled, a bill is paid, or a guarantee claim is met. Therefore, never omit the date line in business letters.

日期是商务信函中至关重要的一部分。通常，在所有层次的商业交易中，日期都有着特殊的关系：它可能是确定某个订单是否已执行、账单是否已付款、保修期是否到期等问题的决定性因素。因此，绝对不要遗漏商务信件中的日期。

The date should always be written in standard form: January 27, 1998, for example. All number form (for example: 10/3/98) should not be used. Some people are used to abbreviating the month, but this is not recommended in business letters.

日期应该使用正规的书写形式，如：January 27, 1998。完全用数字表达的方式（如：10/3/98）应当避免。有些人习惯于简写月份，但在商务信件中，我们不鼓励这样做。

There is no fast rule for the placement of the date. It can be aligned with the left or right margin below the letterhead. This is often decided by the style of the letter or the habit of the company. Anyway, the placements of the date line in English business letters are much different from those in Chinese letters.

日期的位置并无固定要求。一般可放在信头之下，靠左边或右边。这通常是由信件的格式或公司的习惯决定的。无论如何，英文书信中日期的位置与中文书信中日期的位置是截然不同的。

IV. Inside Address 封内地址

The inside address is a complete designation of the letter's destination. We

include the address in the letter although it already appears on the envelope, because the envelope is usually thrown away. The letter itself, which is kept on file, must indicate for whom the message was intended. It is usually put two lines under the date line, aligned with the left margin.

封内地址详细指明了信件的目的地。尽管信封上已写有地址，但我们仍须在信中标明地址，这是因为信封一般都不予保留。而存档的信件本身必须要表明信是发给谁的。它通常放在日期下面第三行，与左边界对齐。

Generally, the inside address should include any or all of the following: the person's name and title, company name, street address, city, state/province, ZIP code and the country. For example:

一般来说，封内地址应该包括下面诸条内容的一部分或全部：收件人的姓名和称呼、公司名称、街道地址、城市名、州 / 省名、邮编和国家。例如：

Mr. Roland Pender, President
ABC Company
123 Berry Drive
Minneapolis, MN55106
USA

Personnel Department
Westminster Productions Inc.
51 High Street
Anytown, AY1 2BF

V. Attention Line 注意项

Usually, when the inside address doesn't contain the individual's name, attention line is used to name the specific person the letter is addressed to.

通常，当封内地址不包括收件人的姓名时，可使用注意项来标明具体的收件人。

Johnson Electric Company

8000 Lincoln Drive

New York, NY 12345

Attention: Mr. Paul Myers

Gentlemen,

...

Here are some examples for the typing style of an attention line:

下面是注意项的打印方式：

- Attention of Marketing Manager
- Attention: Mr ...
- Attention Sales Manager
- ATTENTION PERSONNEL MANAGER

Attention line is usually put between the inside address and the salutation, or within the inside address

注意项一般放在封内地址和称呼之间，或包括在封内地址里面。

P&G Company

24 Madison Avenue

Columbus, OH 43004

USA

Attention: Paul Yang

P&G Company

ATTENTION PAUL YANG

24 Madison Avenue

Columbus, OH 43004

USA

VI. Salutation 称呼

A salutation is a greeting to the addressee. Therefore, be sure to salute to the correct addressee appeared in your inside address or in the attention line. Salutations in business letters can be followed by a colon or no punctuation at all.

称呼是对收件人打招呼。因此，称呼必须与封内地址或注意项中提到的收件人相一致。商务信函中的称呼后面可加冒号，或者不用任何标点符号。

Inside Address(封内地址)	Salutation(称呼)
Mr. John Morgan	Dear Mr. Morgan: Dear John: (informal)
Ms. Eva Morgan	Dear Ms. Morgan: Dear Eva: (informal)
Mr. and Ms. John Morgan	Dear Mr. and Ms. Morgan: Dear John and Eva: (informal)
Messrs. Max and Larry Morgan	Dear Messrs. Morgan: Dear Max and Larry: (informal)
Mmes. Lynn and Ethel Smith	Dear Mmes. Smith: Dear Lynn and Ethel: (informal)
Messrs. Max Morgan and Bob Grant	Dear Messrs. Morgan and Grant: Dear Max and Bob: (informal)
Mmes. Sally Morgan and Jane Fox	Dear Mmes Morgan and Fox: Dear Sally and Jane: (informal)
The President	Dear Sir or Madam
Ladies and Gentlemen:	To Whom This May Concern:

VII. Subject Line 事由

A subject line announces what the letter is about. Usually it is placed one or two lines below the salutation. There are different typing styles for this part;

事由栏用来标明一封信的主要内容。它通常可放在称呼下面的第二或第三行。事由栏可有下列不同的打印方式：

- Subject; Proposed delay of the delivery
- Re: Proposed delay of the delivery
- Proposed Delay of the Delivery
- In re: Invoice No. 2221-b
- SUBJECT; ACCOUNT NO. 222

VIII. Body of a Letter 信的正文

This is the most important part of a letter. And the following parts of this book will offer detailed advice for making this part as effective as possible

信的正文是每封信中最重要的部分。本书后面的章节将在如何使信的内容切实有效方面做具体的指导。

Attention here should be paid to the physical precision of the body. It usually begins one or two lines below the salutation. Lines within a paragraph should be single-spaced, with double-spacing between paragraphs.

此处应当注意的是正文格式的准确性。它通常从称呼下面的第二或第三行开始。每一段内采用单倍行距，段与段之间采用双倍行距。

Be careful not to type too near the bottom of the page. You do not want to squeeze in the signature. Instead, use a second page and carry over at least a full paragraph of the body, not just the signature block.

注意不要将信打印的过于靠近底边。你并不希望签名硬挤在结尾处。相反，

最好使用第二张纸，并在第二页纸上打印至少一段正文，而不仅仅是签名部分。

The opening paragraph introduces the letter and is relatively short (with one or two sentences). The middle paragraph(s) supports the first paragraph and provides more information. The final paragraph usually serves as a summation, suggestion or further request.

信的第一段介绍信的大意，相对来说篇幅较短（只有一两个句子）。中间的段落为第一段提供佐证并给出更多的信息。最后一段通常是一个总结、建议或进一步的要求。

IX. Complimentary Close 信尾敬语

The complimentary close ends the letter's message in a polite way, just as a "good-bye" ends a conversation. It is usually put two lines below the last line of the body, aligned with the left margin or the date line according to different format that will be mentioned in Chapter Two.

信尾敬语以友好的方式结束全信，正如同“再见”结束一段对话一样。它通常放在正文下面的第三行，与左边界或与日期对齐，这要根据第二章中提到的格式而定。

You should carefully select the most appropriate complimentary close to match the character of your communication and the salutation. Formal complimentary closes, such as: Faithfully yours, Yours cordially, etc. should be used with salutations like: Dear Sir, Dear Madam, Ladies and Gentlemen etc. If a polite title and the surname are used in the salutation(Dear Mr. Smith, Dear Dr. Hamilton), the less formal complimentary closes may be used: Sincerely yours, Yours respectfully, Yours truly, etc.

你要仔细选择最合适的信尾敬语，以便与信的风格和称呼相一致。较正式的敬语如: Faithfully yours, Yours cordially 等应当与 Dear Sir, Dear Madam, Ladies and Gentlemen 等称呼连用。如果称呼中使用了一个客气的头衔，并且提到了姓名(Dear Mr. Smith, Dear Dr. Hamilton), 可以使用较随便一些的

敬语如 :Sincerely yours, Yours respectfully, Yours truly 等。

The correct punctuation for the complimentary close is a comma. Notice also that only the first word in a complimentary close is capitalized.

敬语的结尾后正确的标点符号应该是逗号。注意只有第一个词的首字母为大写。

X. Signature 签名

While typing a letter, leave three blank lines below the complimentary close, and then type the signature identification and title on the fourth line. (Whether the person's title appears on the same line as the name or on the following line is determined by the length.) Into the space between these two lines goes your signature. The typewritten identification tells legibly who wrote the letter. And the signature, apart from its legal implications, adds a personal touch to the whole letter.

在打印信件时，应在信尾敬语的下面空三行，然后在第四行打上签名的正体和职务。(写信人的职务是否与名字同一行或另起一行，应由长度来决定。)中间的空行留做手写签名之用。打出的签名正体可以清楚地显示是谁写的此信。至于手签的名字，除了其本身的法律意义外，也给整封信加上了一点人情味。

Yours sincerely,

(Signature)

Karen Kipling, Director

Yours faithfully,

(Signature)

Cathy Kurtz,
Marketing Manager

XI. IEC Block (initials 缩写名, enclosures 附件 and carbon copies 及分送标志)

The IEC block appears on the left-hand margin two or three lines below the signature block (including complimentary close, signature, and typewritten identification).

IEC部分出现在签名部分(包括信尾敬语、签名和打印的签名正体)下面两至三行,紧靠左边线。

Usually, the initials of the person who type the letter should appear on business letters. These initials identify the writer and the typist of the letter. If the writer and the typist are the same person, the initials are omitted. The following styles are commonly used:

在商业信件中,通常应标出写信者的缩写名。这些缩写名可将写信者与打信者分别开来。如果写信人与打信人是同一个人,缩写名可省略。下面是常用的格式:

HM/LZ	HMorgan/lz
HM:lz	lz

If a letter is accompanied by any other enclosure, a second line is used in IEC block to tell the recipient about this. The enclosure indicator appears right beneath the initials, usually abbreviated, and indicating the number of enclosures.

如果随信附有其他材料,IEC部分的第二行则用来告诉收信人这一信息。附件标志出现在缩写名的下方,常采取缩写的形式,表明附件的数量。

Enclosure	1 Enc.
Enc.	Attachments: 2
Encls.	Enc. 2
1 Attachment	Enclosure:
	1. Check No. 234
	2. Order No. 345

If the copy of the letter is sent to a third party, a notation of carbon copies(CC) will be used in the third line of the IEC block. Nowadays, many offices are using PC (for photo copy) instead. Any of the following styles may be used:
如果一封信的副本同时还发给第三方, 会用一个 CC 复写本 标志在 IEC 部分的第三行中显示出来。如今, 不少办公室都在以 PC 复印件 来取而代之。下面格式的任何一款都可使用:

PC: Joan Kipman CC: Joan Kipman
pc: Joan Kipman cc: Joan Kipman

So, a complete block may look like this:
所以, 一个完整的 IEC 部分看上去会是这样的:

JAL:mme Encl: 2 cc: J. M. Dixon

XII. Postscript 附言

In business letters, a postscript is usually used not in its original function (to append an omitted idea), but rather as a device to emphasize something. Sometimes, the writer may put a handwritten postscript to the letter in order to add a personal touch to the typewritten letter. It follows the IEC block (if there is), and always in the form of "P.S.". Some people prefer not to use "P.S." anymore (see examples in the following).

在商务信件中, 附言通常并非用于其原始的作用(来提及某件被遗忘的事), 而是作为强调某件事的一种手法。有时, 写信人会手写上一段附言, 以便给打印出来的信件添上些人情味。它跟在 IEC 部分(如果有的话)之下, 总是以 P.S. 开头。有些人不愿再使用 "P.S." (参见下面的样例)

P.S. Wish to see you at the Trade Fair on August 10.
--

Wish to see you at the Trade Fair on August 10.

Chapter Two

Business Letter Format and Outline

商务信函的格式与框架

I. Format 格式

No one can say authoritatively that one specific format of business letter is correct or wrong. Instead, there are certain practices which are widely used in today's business correspondence. They are full-block format, semi-block format and conventional format. The examples of these formats are shown in the following. 没有人能权威地说出哪一种商务信函的格式就是绝对正确或错误的。事实上,有好几种信函的格式都被当今的商业信件所使用。它们包括全齐头式、半齐头式和传统式。下面是这些格式的样例。

1. Full-block Format 全齐头式

	Letterhead
Date	
Inside Address	

Salutation:	
	Body

Complimentary close	
Signature	