

A COURSE IN COMMERCIAL ENGLISH WRITING



商务英语写作

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胡鑑明 编著



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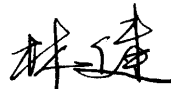
Preface

By the time this book is available to readers, China may probably become a new member of WTO. With more and more international business opportunities, the use of English is a challenge to many Chinese companies and their staff.

Commercial English Writing is a timely book on the use of written English in the business world. Unlike some textbooks on the same topic, it is full of examples from the Pearl River Delta and Hong Kong. It can be the textbook to college students, to people taking a special course on Business English; and it should be a reference book on every Chinese company's bookshelf. And it not only has practical applications, but also is very useful academically for faculty teaching Business English, as the way the materials are presented in this book is based on the author's experience in teaching.

During the past 10 years of preparation for this book while teaching at Wuyi University, Professor Hu Jianming received many feedbacks from his students. He incorporated these feedbacks into this book. Since he is one of the most popular faculty members on campus, I anticipate that this book will be heavily welcomed by readers.

I congratulate Professor Hu Jianming on the completion of this book. And I wish readers find out more benefits from this book than what I briefly mentioned above.



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PART ONE

Chapter 1

Introduction

(绪论)

Section E

Definition of Commercial English

Commercial English is a special term given to English by non-English speaking nations for international trade. In Britain, it is called Commercial English or Commercial Correspondence or Commercial Letter. In the USA, it is usually called Business English, Business Correspondence or Business Letter.

In English speaking countries, all correspondence needed both in domestic and foreign trades is written in English. However, in non-English speaking countries correspondence for international trade is also needed to be written in English because English is widely used in this field.

Is Commercial English a special kind of English? No, it is not. Commercial English is but standard English adapted to specific business purposes. Few international business transactions can be carried through successfully without correspondence at some point. For example, letters must be written to customers, salesmen, agents, suppliers, bankers, shipping companies and many other people concerned. They cover every conceivable phase of business activities. Commercial letters, including cable, telex, e-mail and faxes are the firm's silent salesmen, representing its close contact with the outside world. Hence, the need of efficient letter-writing in English is very essential and indispensable in international trade.

Since the implementation of the policy of reform and opening to the outside world, many coastal cities in our country, have become more and more industrialized and commercialized. Activities in foreign trade have been increasing steadily. Thus, qualified personnel in international trade is urgently needed, and that is why this course in Commercial English is offered to English majors in universities.

Being adapted to specific business purposes, Commercial English has some special technical terms of its own, such as interest (利息), discount (折扣), Cash on Delivery (COD, 货到付款), Free alongside Ship (FAS, 船边交货价), Cost, Insurance, Freight and Commission (CIFIC, 成本、保险费、运费及佣金在内价/到岸价), Letter of Credit (L/C, 信用证) etc. In order to master Commercial English well, we should familiarize

ourselves with these terms.

There always exists intense competition in international markets. The use of Commercial English is, to a certain extent, the kind of tool, which brings you success and profit. That is why people say Commercial English has dollars-and-cents value. Never should we forget that keeping in close contact with a client is to keep a piece of property.

Section 2

How to Write Good Commercial English Letters

In writing good Commercial English letters, the following eight requirements are considered to be a “must”. They are also called the eight “C”s.

1. Clearness (清楚)

Clearness means

a. One sentence for one meaning only.

b. There must be a logical relationship between relevant sentences. No reversion or repetition is allowed to appear.

The underlined words in the following three examples show what are not clear enough and how they should be changed to get rid of ambiguity.

Example 1

“Fluctuation in the exchange rate after the date of contract signing will be for the buyer’s account.”

Changed into :

“Any increase or decrease in the exchange rate after the date of contract signing will be for the buyer’s account.”

Example 2

“They have also a decided advantage in regard to freight.” (运费方面有优惠)

The word “freight” has different meanings

(a) “freight” charges

(b) cargo

(c) transportation

So the above sentence should be changed into :

“They have also a decided advantage in regard to freight charges.”

Example 3

“They informed Messrs. Smith and Richardson that they would receive an answer in a few days.”

The second “they” is confusing. So, the sentence should be changed into :

“They informed Messrs. Smith and Richardson that the latter would receive an answer in a few days.”

c. In a simple and direct way.

Please compare the following two letters telling the same thing.

—Before being simplified (90 words) :

Your letter of July 5, in which you informed us that the goods did not arrive on time and that three of the videorecorders were damaged beyond repair, has been carefully noted.

It is not necessary for us to tell you how much we regret this matter, and we assure you that we shall send you three videorecorders of the same kind to replace those damaged in transit (在运输途中).

Thank you for calling this to our attention and hope we may have your further orders in the near future. We remain.

Yours faithfully,

—After being simplified (43 words) :

In your letter of July 5, we were sorry to learn that our shipment did not arrive on time.

Three videorecorders are being shipped immediately to replace those damaged in transit.

Thank you for calling this matter to our attention.

Yours faithfully,

Through simplification, the original letter is cut short by 50% of its length. It is more simple and direct.

2. Conciseness (简短)

Being concise means all the words/sentences and paragraphs in a letter must be clear-cut and straight forward. So it is with an e-mail or telex or fax.

In order to achieve conciseness, we should pay attention to the following three aspects.

(a) Using simple words instead of phrases or sentences.

—“soon” instead of “in the near future”

—“Please” instead of “Will you be kind enough to...”

—“now” instead of “at the present moment” etc.

(b) Using simple sentences instead of complex ones.

—“We are pleased to tell you that...” for

“It gives us much pleasure to inform you that...”

—“We will fill your order soonest.” for “We will execute your valued order expeditiously.”

—“We do not expect prices to rise soon.” for

“We do not anticipate any increase in prices in the near future.”

(c) Avoiding repetition of words in a same sentence.

—“Please quote your best price for your best quality.”

Changed into :

“Please quote your lowest price for your best quality.”

—“How do you account for the fact that the account is not correct?” Changed into :

“How do you explain the fact that the account is not correct?”

Being concise does not mean that only simplicity is required in Commercial English writing. If all sentences in a letter are very simple, the letter will be monotonous (单调的) and boring (令人厌烦的). Sometimes, a better collocation (搭配) of long, medium-sized and short sentences in a paragraph will be desirable (可取的).

Example

“We regret that you have not yet delivered the garments we ordered a month ago (中句). They are now urgently needed (短句). The customer for whom we ordered the goods threatens to cancel the order unless he receives them during this month (长句). Please deliver them at once (短句)s

More simplified expressions for reference.

Come to a decision — decide

Express a preference for — prefer

Owing to the fact that
Due to the fact that
For the reason that

} ... Because ...

At your earliest convenience — soon, promptly

Please advise us — Please let us know

As a matter of fact — in fact

Be in possession of — have

By means of — By

In accordance with your request
Complying with your request
In compliance with your request

} ... as requested

Dated July 7 — of July 7

3. Correctness (正确)

Correctness includes the correctness of forms of writing, of grammar, spelling and of punctuation, particularly of figures.

In order to be correct, the following four questions should be very carefully considered :

(a) Is the accuracy of all factual information beyond question ?

(b) Are all the statements in strict conformity with policies and decrees (政策法规) ?

(c) Is the letter free from grammatical errors ; spelling errors or misleading punctuation ?

(d) Are the commercial terms correctly used ?

—The correct use of words is a very important part of correctness.

For example, Some nouns are only used in singular form, such as advice (忠告) (except as instructions)

correspondence (通信)
 information (情报/资料)
 merchandise (商品)
 literature (宣传用印刷品)
 dozen (打, 指实数)

Some nouns, such as the names of commodities, are used as collective nouns, not using the plural form. Such as

aluminiumware (铝制品)
 bambooware (竹器)
 chinaware (陶瓷器皿)
 enamelware (珐琅铁器/搪瓷器皿)
 footwear (鞋类)
 flatware (盘碟类)
 hardware (五金器皿)
 glassware (玻璃器皿)
 ironware (铁器)
 kitchenware (厨房用具)
 tableware (餐具)

Note :

“Ware”, as a collective noun is used in compound words, it means “制品”, while its plural form “wares” means commodities (商品). e.g. He sold his wares cheap. (他卖的商品很便宜。)

jewellery/jewelry (珠宝类)
 confectionary (糖果类)
 machinery (机器类)
 drapery (布匹)
 hosiery (袜类)
 perfumery (香水)
 stationery (文具)
 porcelain (瓷器)
 pottery (陶器)
 earthenware/earthenware (陶器)

(但 ceramics 作陶瓷器解时, 动词用复数式, 而 crockery 作陶瓷器解时, 则动词用单数式。)

produce (农产品)
 underwear (内衣类)
 furniture (家具)

When relating to quantity, the following expressions should be used :

a piece (pieces) of
 an article (articles) of ... } piece 及 article 都译为“件”。
 a kind of ... etc. e

Some other nouns often occur in Plural form in Commercial English. They are :

arrangements (安排、准备, 用于 make arrangements 作安排)

chemicals (化学药品)

circumstances (情况)

conditions (情况、条件)

contents (内容)

customs (海关、关税)

details (细节)

funds (资金) 但作“基金”解时, 用单数 Fundo.

exports (输出品, 即 exported goods)

imports (输入品, 即 imported goods)

instructions (指示、规定事项、通知、说明)

means (手段、资产、经济能力) 作“手段”解时, 单复数都是 means. e.g. Is (Are)

there any other means to do it? (办这件事还有其他手段吗?) 但作“资金”解时一般用复数动词。e.g.

This company's means are small. (这间公司资产不多。)

particulars (详细情况)

(when used in singular number, “particular” means “细节”、“细目”)

proceeds (款项、收益、货款)

terms (条件、条款)

thanks (谢意) etc.

The correct use of punctuation is also important in Commercial English.

The following are some examples.

(a) Not using a full-stop after the receiver's name and address

e.g. China Power Company

Kowloon, Hong Kong

(b) Not using a full-stop after the signature at the end of a letter

e.g. Yours truly,

Stephen Zhang

(c) A colon is used after the salutation

e.g. “Dear Sirs :” “Gentlemen :”

(cf) “Dear Paul,” “Dear Mother,”

(d) Using a comma to separate an address or a date.

e.g. “No.1751 Fifth Ave, Manhattan, New York” “July 21, 1999”

(e) Some very often seen abbreviations do not have any full-stop after each letter,

such as :

e.g. “USA”

“IMF”(International Monetary Fund, 国际货币基金)

“FAS”(Free Alongside Ship, 船边交货价)

“EPZ”(Export Processing Zone, 出口加工区)

4. Concreteness (具体)

Commercial letters should avoid being vague and general.

Please compare the following expressions.

- (1) { Our apples are excellent.
Our apples are juicy, crispy and tender (concrete).
- (2) { Smithson Company is our big buyer.
Smithson Company did more than one million USD worth of business with us in 1999/last year. (concrete)
- (3) { We have no hesitation in advising you. . .
We advise you. . .
- (4) { Please inform us of the present situation.
Please inform us how matters now stand (目下情况如何).
- (5) { Due to the unusual nature of the request.
As the request is unusual.

Note :

The underlined words in the above expressions are vague and general and thus should be replaced by a more concrete and impressive ones.

5. Cheerfulness (愉快, 乐意)

Cheerfulness promotes friendship, mutual-confidence and an optimistic atmosphere among people. It is particularly necessary in commercial correspondence to make a good impression on your clients. Being cheerful means that you are ready and willing to serve your clients and willing to cooperate with them for mutual benefit. In a word, you are earnest to render good service to your clients.

Please read the following examples

(1) Your company is regarded as one of our valued customers. You will have our assurance that we shall do our utmost to execute your order as early as possible.

(贵公司是我们非常重视的客户之一, 我们保证尽最大努力尽早执行贵方订单。)

(2) We extend our thanks to you for your cooperation and assure you of our readiness to reciprocate at all times.

(对贵方之合作深表谢忱, 我们准备随时回报。)

(3) Please rest assured that our 20 years' experience in this line of business and our sincerity will enable us to render satisfactory service to you.

(请相信我们在本行业长达 20 年之经验以及我们的诚意定能为贵方提供最满意的服务。)

6. Courtesy (礼貌)

Courtesy has two meanings.

(1) Being very polite, even in asking the addressee (收信人) to pay back the debts or refusing his demands, your letter still should be very mild and tactful (温和, 圆滑).

(2) Being prompt in replying to the opposite party's letter. The reply should usually be sent on the same day. If it is impossible for you to give a prompt reply in detail on the same day, you should write a short note to the client explaining why.

In order to be courteous, the following expressions marked with a (×) should be avoided and those with a check (✓) should be used.

{ Your letter of May 8, regarding ... has been received. " (×)

{ Your letter of May 8, regarding... has received our careful attention. " (✓)

{ Dear Sirs, we are sorry you have misunderstood us. " (×)

{ Dear Sirs, we are sorry we didn't make ourselves clear. " (✓)

{ We can not comply with your request. " (×)

{ We are afraid that we can not... " (✓)

Not using "you" as the subject, when you make a complaint.

{ You did not enclose your check with your order. " (×)

{ The check was not enclosed with your order. " (✓)

{ For two years you have not given us any order. " (×)

{ For two years, no order has been given to us. " (✓)

{ "We cannot understand why you have had trouble with these articles. " (×)

{ "We presume that there must be some reasons for your having trouble with these articles. " (✓)

(“我们估计贵方对这批货意见较大，肯定有其原因。”)

The following expressions are considered (to be) not tactful and thus should be avoided

“You asserted that” (×)

“You promised” (×)

“Your complaints about ...” (×)

7. Consideration (为对方着想)

To be considerate means to consider the whole matter from the stand point of the opposite party. For example, a letter promoting one's own product, should tell the prospective buyer what benefit he will get if he buys the goods. By so doing, it will be easier to arouse his interest and desire to buy.

Please read the following examples.

(1) Acceptance of our offer from many customers has proven that our prices are reasonable. Your order in quantities will surely accord with the market demand at your end and be of great benefit to your company.

(许多客户已接受我方报盘足以证明我方价格是合理可行的，贵公司大量订购符合贵地之市场需求，亦对贵公司十分有利。)

(2) We are sure that you will be interested in our new type Microwave Oven. The special contrivance of which enables it to run on slightly more than half the current required by the same kind of products of equal capacity. If you agree to handle our product as our sole agent in your area, we are prepared to offer you a generous commission of 5