



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.



2

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.



Questions for Comprehension

1. What are the functions of business writing?
2. What are the six C's developed by American business communication experts?
3. What are the characteristics of modern business writings?
4. What does adaptation mean in business writing?
5. What is "goodwill effect"?
6. What are the elements that help build goodwill?
7. What is the essence of you-viewpoint?
8. Why should we use positive words instead of negative words in most circumstances?
9. What is meant by the direct order and under what circumstances should we use direct order?
10. What is meant by the indirect order and under what circumstances should we use indirect order?



Sample Analysis

Sample 1-1

Dear Sir:

We wish to acknowledge receipt of¹⁸ your credit application dated February 17 giving trade and bank references, and we thank you for the same. Please be advised¹⁹ that credit accommodations are here-with extended as per your request²⁰ and your order has been shipped.

Hoping you will give us the opportunity of serving you again in the near future, we remain²¹

Very truly yours,

Dear Sirs:

Thank you for sending so promptly the trade and bank references we have asked for. I am glad to say that your order has already been shipped on the terms you requested.

We hope you will give us the chance to serve you again.

Very truly yours,

例 1-1 中的第一封信语气显得生硬，使用的语言有些老套，例如 acknowledge receipt of your credit application... , please be advised... , hoping... we remain 等，读起来难懂，而且没有亲切感。第二封信比较口语化，一读便懂，更有效地传达了信息。



IN OPENINGS

In compliance with yours dated... 根据你×日信函

We have before us 我们收到……

Responding to yours of even date 回复你本日(当日)信函

Yours of the 12th to hand 收到你12日函

IN CONTENT

Deem it advisable 认为是明智之举

Wherein you state as per your letter 根据你信中所述

Attached hereto 在此附上

Take the liberty 冒昧地

IN CLOSINGS

Trusting this will meet with your favor 相信这会满足你的
要求

Anticipating your favorable response 期望你会给予有利的
答复

Assuring you of our cooperation 保证与你们大力合作

Trusting to be favored by your further orders, we are,
Gentlemen, 相信将受益于你们的进一步定货

例 1-2 中例示的句子均属于比较陈腐的商业用语,它们的特点是死板,缺乏个性,在英美现实商务信函中也少见,因此在我们的信函中不提倡使用。

**Sample 1-3**

We have received your request for permission to use our computers during the next session for summer school. We are pleased to inform you that you may use all 15 of the laptop computers you requested. Would you please come in and fill out the necessary paperwork any time before April?

Good news, Jessica! All 15 of the laptop computers you requested will be available to use during the next session of summer school. Please come by the office before April 1 to fill out the necessary forms.

例 1-3 是写给同一请求的两封回信，两封信内容相同，但是写作风格截然不同。前者采用的是以自我为中心的写作风格，后者采用的是以对方为中心的写作风格。前者给读者的感受显然不如后者简明、亲切。



Sample 1-4

15

Chapter 1

Group 1

We cannot understand your negligence.

We will not tolerate this condition.

Your careless attitude has caused us a loss in sales.

We have no intention of permitting this condition to
continue.

We have had it!

Group 2

We can deliver the goods on July 11.

So that you may have the one sofa you want, will you
please check your choice of fabric on the enclosed²²
card?

Your check will be mailed on October 1.

Please format this letter in the block style shown in
the Office Procedure Manual.²³

例 1-4 这两组句子要求读者做的事情是一样的，但选词不同，角度不同，给读者的感受也不同。第一组用的是消极气愤的词汇，第二组用的是积极的词汇。第一组容易使对方感到不舒服；第二组则容易接受，不但表明了要对方做的事情，而且有助于保持良好的关系。

Language for Writing

Notes

1. EDP: Electronic Data Processing 电子数据处理
2. ... contributes substantially to his/her self-confidence—a necessary quality for business success. (熟练的写作技能)将大大有助于培养自信,而自信恰好是商业成功的一个必要因素。
contribute: *v.* 有助于, 促进。
破折号后面的成分是 self-confidence 的同位语。
3. ... to what extent it induces a favorable response from the reader. ……(商业信函)在多大程度上能引起读者的好的反响。
induce: *v.* 诱导
4. stilted: *adj.* 生硬的, 不自然的(文中指旧式的商业用语)
5. goodwill effect: 友好效果
6. stale expressions: 陈腐过时的表达方式, 指一些表达方式用的太多太久, 没有新意。
7. flowery language: 词藻华丽的语言, 指旧时贵族使用的语言
8. manipulation *n.* 巧妙/熟练的处理
His manipulation of the data was beyond my expectation.
9. ... put the reader in the right frame of mind. ……使读者有好的心情。
10. single out your readers: 突出读者个人, 这种做法强调的是每封信的措辞应针对各个不同的读者, 而不是千篇一律。
single out: 挑出, 使突出
11. ... his/her identity as individual is recognized. ……作为个人的身份得到承认, 即表示重视各个读者。
12. ... to sound like a ward politician out for votes. ……听上去像四处拉选票的小政客那样。
这句话的意思是说政客拉选票时对选民过于殷勤, 在信中称呼读者的名字可以拉近和读者的距离, 增进感情, 但是不能过分使用这种技巧。
13. blow off steam: (被禁止后)发泄情绪, 发火



14. **deductive approach:** 演绎法, 即从一般到具体的写作方法, 在商务写作中也称直接法, 即开门见山, 直接说明信的目的, 然后加以说明。
15. **inductive approach:** 归纳法, 即从具体到一般的写作方法, 在商务写作中也称间接法, 即先说明原因, 然后再道明要做什么。
16. **cushion:** *v.* 缓和; 减轻
17. **buffer:** *n.* 缓冲器。在信函中如果讲的是不好的消息, 开头最好采用一些技巧做铺垫, 缓冲器就是一种技巧, 可以使读者对坏消息感到不突然, 能够接受。
18. **acknowledge receipt of:** 兹收到, 此种表达以及注 19、20 中的表达方式属于古板的旧式表达方式
19. **please be advised:** 在此通知
20. **as per your request:** 按你的要求
21. **Hoping you will give us... , we remain:** 这是过去信函中常用的一种结束语, 一种固定用法。它的语法结构应是 “we remain hoping...”。
22. **enclose:** *vt.* 随函附寄
As requested, enclosed please find our illustrated catalogue and price list.
按要求, 随函附上我方带有插图的详细目录及价目表。
23. **Please format this letter in the block style shown in the Office Procedure Manual.** 这封信按办公室工作程序手册上标示的齐头式格式排版。

Exercises

I. Revise these sentences so that they are positive rather than negative.

1. Unfortunately, your order cannot be sent until next week.
2. To avoid the loss of your credit rating, please remit (汇寄) payment within ten days.
3. Your misunderstanding of our January 8 letter caused you to make this mistake.
4. You cannot visit the plant except on Saturday.
5. Our stone-skin material won't do the job unless it is reinforced.
6. Your negligence in this matter caused the damage to the equipment.
7. Do not walk on the grass.



8. Smoking is not permitted anywhere except in the lobby.
9. We regret to inform you that we cannot permit you to use our clubhouse for your meeting, as the Boys Corp asked for it first. We can, however, let you use our conference room, but it seats only 60.
10. We regret to inform you that we must deny your request for credit.

II. Write you-viewpoint sentences for each of the situations described.

1. We will be pleased to deliver your order by the 16th.
2. We have worked for 20 years to develop the best model car for our customers.
3. I am pleased to inform you that I can grant your request for payment of travel expense.
4. We are happy to report approval of your application for membership.
5. We can permit you to attend classes on company time only when the course is related to your work assignment.
6. We have received your letter of May 16.
7. We have been quite tolerant of your past-due account and must now demand payment.
8. We have shipped the Dove desk set you ordered on May 3.
9. Our long experience in the book business has enabled us to provide the best customer service possible.
10. We can sell at discount prices, but we cannot permit returns of merchandise.

III. Indicate whether direct or indirect approach is preferable in each of the following situations, and briefly give your reasons.

1. A letter turning down a job applicant.
2. A letter from a recent college graduate requesting a letter of recommendation from a former instructor.
3. A letter asking when next year's automobiles show will be held in the local place.
4. A letter to express thanks after a visit to a friend's house.
5. A letter to decline a request for help.
6. A letter to sell a new product.



IV. In the following there are two pairs of letters. Compare and tell which one is better and why.

Letter 1-a

Dear Mr. Hua:

We are in receipt of and would like to thank you for your letter and catalogue of June 14, 1999. After close examination we have come to the conclusion that your products are of no interest to us but we wish you every success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely,

Letter 1-b

Dear Mr. Hua:

Thank you for your letter and catalogue sent on July 14, 1999. We appreciate your interest in our company though your products fall out of our line for the time being. We wish you every success in your future endeavors.

Sincerely yours,



Dear Mr. Fritz:

We are sorry to have your complaint about the poor performance of our Monay batteries. You claimed your flashlight was damaged. Under separate cover we are sending you a new flashlight which we hope is not inferior to the one you submitted to us under our guarantee. Monay batteries are included. They were tested beforehand for any obvious defects.

Less than 1/2 per cent of our total production is unsatisfactory, and we are usually inclined to feel that the user of the flashlight is at fault, not the batteries. Since it is possible for some defective batteries to slip by our rigid inspection process, we follow the practice of replacing any damaged flashlights that are called to our attention.

It is unfortunate that you have had this inconvenience. We trust you will experience no further difficulties with our product.

Very truly yours,





Letter 2-b

21

Chapter 1

Dear Mr. Frita:

Your recent experience with a set of Monay flashlight batteries is given proper attention. Under separate cover please find a new flashlight of comparable value with the one you submitted to us under our guarantee. Fresh Monay batteries are included.

For more than 99.5 per cent of our entire Monay battery production is satisfactory. It would be nice if this record was 100 per cent, but in the absence of a perfect record, we do appreciate it when a customer brings an unsatisfactory experience to our attention.

We are sure that the fresh Monay batteries we are sending you will give you the same dependable service that has made Monay batteries so famous all over the world.

Very truly yours,

