

Business Correspondence

3.1 Importance of Written Business Correspondence

Written business correspondence is an effective means of keeping ourselves in touch with those whom we cannot talk face to face with. Today we talk of globalization where the entire world has come closer. Various countries of the world have developed business relations with one another. We have business relations with those who are separated by distance, hence in business world, it is not always possible for us to meet and talk with our fellow business partners or fellow employees or customers or clients or suppliers who belong to distant places. Consequently, we seek the help of different means of communication. We adopt some sort of oral and written modes of communications. But oral communications such as telephonic conversation do not always suffice the purpose of both the parties—the listener and the speaker. People, thus, have to depend on the written mode of communication.

3.2 General Principles of Written Business Correspondence

In business people often use written mode of communication as it is the most effective and time-saving method of communication. Moreover, people in business need permanent written records of what was said, to whom and on what topic. It makes the written business communication indispensable. From phone message to faxes, letters, memorandums, notices, forms and reports—each document type is used for different purposes in business. Effective letters, memorandums and reports are written to facilitate the smooth running of business relations.

Business correspondence actually refers to all written communications, done for the purpose of business. Among all modes of business correspondence, professional letter is the chiefest source of conveying message. Letters play a vital role in bringing people closer all over the globe. A letter is sent from a person to another to express the desired or required message. The letter writing, thus, occupies a key position in the field of communication. Prior to the modern discoveries of computer and internet, letter writing was the chief source of conveying message. But in spite of the modern scientific and technological advancement in the field of communication, the role of letter writing cannot be minimized. Different types of letters are written according to the writer's purpose. An aesthetically fine letter, written scientifically, reflects the skill and the ability of the writer. The technique of writing letters varies in accordance with the kind of the letter.

A letter writer must make arduous efforts in order to attain effective writing skills. A haphazardly written letter can do much damage to the business relations. The writer, therefore, should make sure what he wants to say, to whom he is going to write a letter and also why the letter is being written. Precisely speaking, effective writing cannot be done in one step. The writer has to follow a series of actions or steps to achieve an end. He must follow the following steps :

- Planning
- Writing
- Revising
- Editing

At the first step, the writer determines the purpose for writing the letter, about the subject-matter of the letter and also the person to whom the letter is being written. At the second step, the writer writes the first draft of the business letter, using the information gathered at the first step. The next step is revising the message where the writer can add or delete certain things if he wants. The last step is the step of editing where the writer reads the entire document carefully to check the spelling, punctuation, syntax and grammar.

3.3 Important Features of an Effective Business Letter

Business letters are an important part of any professional's job. They are written to different persons with different motives. Letter writing is basically an art. The writer can cultivate a good style of writing various sorts of letters by a constant and regular practice. Below are mentioned certain important features which should be closely followed by a letter writer :

1. **Brevity** : "Brevity is the soul of wit", said Shakespeare. This dictum proves true also in relation to a business letter. The writer should be able to present the subject-matter in brief because too much words often mar the beauty of a business correspondence and lead to confusion.
2. **Clarity** : Another essential of a business letter is its clarity. The letter writer has to be cautious to avoid vagueness or ambiguity. In plain terms, the style of writing a business letter should be direct. In order to sound natural, the writer should use plain conversational English. Howsoever serious matter is presented in a letter, the writer should use a relaxed, clear tone. But too familiar style should also be avoided. Bombastic language can spoil even a well-written letter. In order to avoid ambiguity difficult and obsolete words should be avoided.
3. **Accuracy** : An effective well-written letter conveys genuine information. A business letter is like an ambassador, representing a firm, an industry or a business concern. It strengthens the business relations between two business firms or two individuals. Hence, facts mentioned by the sender must be true and genuine. The accuracy of facts results in building goodwill between the sender and the receiver and we know that the goodwill is the back-bone of all business relations.
4. **Politeness** : A business letter should be courteously written as politeness is a keyword in business world. A good letter should include expressions such as 'thanks', 'I regret', 'please', 'my pleasure' etc. Whether it is a letter of request or a letter of complaint, efforts should be made to avoid unpleasant and rude expressions.
5. **Consideration of the Addressee** : The letter should be written while keeping in view the type of the addressee or the receiver of the letter. The writer must take into consideration the nature, the post and also the mental level of the receiver so that the reader can read it with ease. As one writer, R.L. Stevenson, puts it, "I must write with pains so that my reader may read with ease".
6. **Use of Jargons** : Just as one often-quoted "rule" of letter writing is to *keep each letter as short as possible or Be concise*, use of jargons also requires a special attention of the writer. What is a jargon? "Technical terms that are peculiar to an industry are described as jargon" (Poe and Fruehling). What makes the use of jargons right or wrong is the addressee or the reader of the letter. The writer should use only those technical terms which the reader or listener of the letter is sure to understand.

3.4 Basic Letter Formats or Forms of Business Letters

A letter that helps the writer to achieve his purpose is said to be an effective letter. An effective business letter can be formatted in one of the three styles :

- (i) **Block Format** : Block format is a popular format of business letter in India. In the *Block Format*, all the elements such as date, address, salutation, paragraphs and the close, all start from the left hand margin. In this form of letter the first word or each paragraph need not be indented. Different parts and paragraphs of the body of the letter are typed in double spacing while within each part and paragraph single spacing is preferred. The greatest advantage of this method is that it can be typed quickly and easily.
- (ii) **Modified Block Format** : This *Modified Block Format* is a mixture of *Block* and *Indented Format*. This format is actually the same as the full *Block Format* except that date line and closing signature are here placed on the right-hand side of the page.
Modified Semi-block Format which is a variation of the *Modified Block Format* is almost identical to its parent form except that the first line of each paragraph is indented five spaces.
- (iii) **Simplified Format** : The *Simplified Format* is a favorite style for the impersonal situations. Generally it is used for those situations where the identity of the recipients is not known. In this format, no salutation and no complementary close are included. But in personal situations, the letter writer starts the letter with the name of the recipient.

Certain examples of each format are given in the latter part of this chapter.

3.5 Structure of a Business Letter or Ramifications of a Business Letter

A business letter is an official letter dealing with such subjects as enquiry, order, request, complaint and apology. An official letter may be formatted in one of the three styles as discussed above. No matter what style is used, all letters must have the following elements :

- (i) **Heading** : Heading here means the return address (the sender's address) and the address of the recipient. The return address should include the company name, street address, city, state, zip-code, and also the telephone number. But if the letter is written on the company letter pad with the company name and address, the sender's name and address need not to be included.
- (ii) **Date** : Date should include the month, day and year with no abbreviations. Dates can have one of three forms : March 6, 2002 (American Style); 6 March, 2002 (Oxford University Style) and 6th March, 2002 (English Style). In recent times use of ordinal numbers (as used in English Style) is avoided. Date can be placed towards the right-hand margin or beginning flush with the left-hand margin in accordance with the basic format used by the writer.
- (iii) **Inside Address** : The inside address should include the addressee's name, the company name, street, state and zip code. This address is the same as the address that appears on the envelope. The title of the recipient should also be written.
- (iv) **Salutation** : Salutation is used in the block and modified block letter styles. It names the person or people addressed. It should be placed two space below the inside address. In the simplified letter format, salutation is replaced by the subject-line. Salutation is also known as courteous greeting. If the recipient of the letter is a man, *Dear Sir* should be the salutation. *Dear Madam* is the salutation for a woman. But if the letter is addressed to a business firm, the greeting is *Dear Sirs*.
- (v) **Subject Line** : Certain business firms prefer to write subject between inside address and the salutation. In the simplified block format only subject is written which indicates the topic or purpose of the letter. *Subject* should be written with a colon and the subject line should be underlined.
- (vi) **Body or Substance of the Letter** : Normally it forms the main organ of a letter. In official letters, generally, one subject is dealt in one letter. But in business letters even more than one subject may be taken up. The message that a letter conveys must be divided into short paragraphs. Unnecessary repetition should be avoided. It should begin two lines below the salutation/subject line. The body of the letter should contain short sentences and straightforward style.

(vii) Subscription or Complimentary Closing and Signature : Subscription or complimentary closing marks the end of the body of the letter. It consists of certain courteous words. Use of these courteous words depends upon the tone or nature of the letter i.e., whether it is a formal or informal letter. Some examples, ranging from least formal to most formal are : *Sincerely, Sincerely yours, Cordially, Cordially yours, Yours sincerely, Yours truly, Respectively yours* and *Yours respectively*. In official letters, the words *Yours faithfully* are written. While writing to a high official, *Yours obediently* may also be used.

(viii) Superscription : Superscription or address on the envelope is the last important step in writing business or official letters. Full postal address of the addressee should be written neatly and properly on the envelope so that the letter may reach its destination quickly. In the business letters or the official letters, name of the recipient with his title or the name of the company should be written. Name of street, sub-location, city, state and zip-code should also be neatly written. The sender must sign the lower left hand corner of the envelope, along with his address.

(ix) Optional Lines : A few things can be added in an official or business letter :

- Place the typist's initials in lower-case letters, flush left.
- Add an enclosure line if the envelope contains additional material. Use 'Enclosure' or 'enc.' Place the name of the enclosure such as resume and reminder etc.
- If copies are sent to other people, place 'c' (for copy) at the left margin and place name to the right.

Certain examples of writing these different elements in official, demi-official and business-letters are given in the ensuing part of this chapter where certain questions and their answers are given.

3.6 Types of Business Letters

- Sales Letters
- Credit Letters
- Types of Credit Letter
- Letters of Enquiry
- Letters of Quotation
- Letters of Order
- Letters of Claim & Complaint
- Letters of Adjustment

The business letters are written with various purposes in various context. Some important types of business letters are : letters for placing order, letters of request, letters of inquiry, letters of complaint, letters for inviting tenders, notices, memorandums etc. The rest of the theoretical part of this chapter discusses several types of business letters in brief and also suggests how to structure their contents.

3.6.1 Sales Letters

For promoting the sale of their goods, the manufacturers adopt many ways such as advertisement, personal contacts or door-to-door canvassing and sales letters. Out of these three, the last method is most popular because it enables the manufacturer to reach to the buyers at low cost. A good sales letter serves almost all those purposes for which advertisement and canvassing are used. Some such purposes which a good sales letter serves are listed below :

- Like an advertisement, it aims at converting the reader into a customer.
- In order to convert a reader into a buyer, it first grips his attention and rouses his desire to purchase that product.
- It promotes the sale of that product.
- It eventually results in expanding the customer network as it wins a permanent customer.

3.6.1.1 Parts of a Sales Letter

Like other business correspondence a sales letter should be organized into three parts :

- (i) **Introduction** : The first sentence in all types of letters is a key sentence which is read by all. Hence, the first sentence of a sales letter should be able to grip the reader's attention. It would begin with the special offer it makes. Also it will high-light the special features of the product in brief and give some suggestions to persuade the buyer.
- (ii) **Main Body** : Special features of the product will be given in detail in order to convince the buyer that there was no exaggeration in describing the qualities of a product. This part may include the interviews of some users who are satisfied with the quality of the product. The statement of guarantee or any other statement which ensures the durability of the product will be given.
- (iii) **Conclusion** : The last part of a sales letter is very important since it completely persuades the buyer and motivates him to take necessary action. It will induce him to quick action for which some more devices may be used such as limited time, special bargain offer and address of some local office (so that order can be made conveniently).

While writing about a successful sales letter, Lesikar and Flatley, give certain suggestions to the writer how to write a successful sales letter. Some such key points are mentioned below :

1. Include all necessary information
2. Drive for the sale
3. Urge action
4. Recalling the appeal
5. Adding a postscript
6. Reviewing the general sales plan
7. Evaluating contrasting examples

Sample Sales Letter 1

Dear Sir,

Introduction

We have manufactured houses of your dreams - The Palmgreens. Supertech promises to provide you economical and comfortable house which will not lay heavy upon your purse.

Main Body

Supertech provides 2/3/4 Bedroom Luxurious Apartments with all modern amenities on the Mall road. There are beautiful lushgreen parks, swimming pools, gymnasium, centrally located supermarkets, provision for power backup, proper sanitation, safety gates, parking spaces and many other facilities available.

Conclusion

As you will see from the enclosed pamphlet, there are three models for you to choose from Popular, Deluxe and Royal for approximately Rs. 10,000,00, Rs. 15,000,00 and Rs. 20,000,00 respectively. Book one which you want by sending the enclosed proforma duly filled, alongwith a DD for Rs. 50,000. Apply before 30th March, 2008 and get a surprise gift. Contact our local office at the address. 25 Mall Road, Arrow-51, Manchester or talk to us today on 4397331.

Our commitment, your comfort.

Sincerely

J.J. Paul

Manager

The Palmgreens