



Unit 1

An Introduction to Business Correspondence

商务信函简介



AIMS & REQUIREMENTS

- ☞ To enable S.S. to master the principles of business letter writing.
- ☞ To enable S.S. to know the structure of business letters.
- ☞ To enable S.S. to know the layout of business letters.
- ☞ To enable S.S. to know the envelop addressing of business letters.

Principles of Writing Business Letters

Business correspondence is also called business letters. Generally speaking, the principles are as follows: appropriate layout, logically connected ideas, correct grammar, spelling and punctuation marks, suitable style and tone, and tactfully organized information. Specifically speaking, the essential qualities can be summed up in 7 C's: Clarity, Conciseness, Courtesy, Consideration, Completeness, Concreteness and Correctness.

1. Clarity

First of all, make sure that your letter is so clear that it cannot be misunderstood. If it is ambiguous, further exchange of letters for explanations will become inevitable, thus it wastes both time and money. Next, when you are sure about what you want to say, say it in plain, simple words.

(1) Pay attention to choosing the concise and accessible expressions and trying to avoid using the words or sentences equivocal in meaning.

e.g. As to the steamer sailing from Shanghai to Los Angeles, we have bimonthly direct services.

The basic meaning of this sentence is “we have direct sailings from Shanghai to Los Angeles”, but the word “bimonthly” has two meanings, one of which is “twice a month” and the other of which is “once every two months”. You’d better not use words like “bimonthly” which have double meanings, but use words that can express your idea clearly as the following:

- a. We have a direct sailing from Shanghai to Los Angeles every two months.*
- b. We have a direct sailing from Shanghai to Los Angeles semimonthly.*
- c. We have two direct sailings every month from Shanghai to Los Angeles.*

(2) Pay attention to the position of the modifier. The same modifier will lead to different implications and functions when it is put in different positions of the sentence.

- e.g. 1) We can supply 50 tons of the item only.*
2) We can supply only 50 tons of the items.

In the first sentence, “only” is used to qualify “the item”, meaning the supply is only this item, not something else. But in the second sentence, “only” is used to qualify “50 tons”, meaning the supply is only 50 tons.

(3) Pay attention to the object of the pronoun and the relations between the relative pronoun and the antecedent.

e.g. They informed Messrs Smith & Brown that they would receive a reply in a few days.

In this sentence, what does the second “they” refer to, the subject “They” of the main clause or the “Messrs Smith & Brown”? This cannot be explained clearly. It will be clear if you change the sentence into:

They informed Messrs Smith & Brown that the latter would receive the reply in a few days.

In this sentence, “the latter” is used to clearly refer to “Messrs Smith & Brown”, so no misunderstanding would appear.

- (4) **Pay attention to the rationality in logic, the variety in sentence structure, the compactness in plot and coherence in meanings.**

2. Conciseness

Conciseness is often considered to be the most important writing principle and language feature. It can save both the writer’s and the recipient’s time. Conciseness means you should clearly express your idea in a short and pithy style of writing as possible as you can without sacrificing completeness, concreteness and courtesy. To do so, the following guidelines must be observed:

- (1) **Make a long story short and try to avoid wordiness.**

Make it a rule, to use less words and pithy sentences to express your meaning clearly and concisely. Try to use a word or a phrase to express your idea as much as possible instead of using long sentences or clauses.

e.g.

You shouldn’t use:

at this time →

I want to take this opportunity to tell you

that we are grateful to you →

You’d better use:

now

Thank you.

Compare the following pairs of sentences, you will find which is concise in each pair.

e.g.

a. *wordy: I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to you for your kind cooperation.*

b. *concise: Thank you for your cooperation.*

a. *wordy: In compliance with your request, we immediately contacted ABC Co., Ltd., San Francisco, and now wish to inform you of the result as follows.*

b. *concise: As requested we immediately contacted ABC Co., Ltd., San Francisco, with the following result.*

- (2) **Avoid using the general or out-of-date commercial jargon and try to express your idea in modern English.**

1) Avoid the unusual words and try to use everyday expressions.

e.g.

You shouldn't use:

initiate →

inst. →

You'd better use:

begin

this month

- 2) Avoid the out-of-date commercial jargons and try to use modern English.

e.g.

Out-of-date commercial jargons

acknowledge receipt of →

be in receipt of →

as per →

at an early date →

at this time, at present

at the present →

We are in receipt of →

We beg to acknowledge →

at your earliest convenience →

express one's heartfelt

gratitude to you for ... →

Modern English

Thank you for ..., I received ...

Thank you for ..., I received ...

as, according to ...

soon, give a specific date

now

Thank you for ... or We have received

We have received

as soon as you can

Thank you for ...

(3) Avoid unnecessary repetitions.

Some necessary repetitions can be used to emphasize a certain point of view or an important fact, but unnecessary repetitions, especially the repeat of the same matter without any reason not only looks wordy, but also makes the readers uninterested. So unnecessary repetitions in writing must be avoided.

e.g. *We have begun to export our machines to the foreign countries.*

The word "export" in the above sentence means "selling the machines to foreign countries". If you add "to foreign countries", it unnecessarily repeats the meaning of "export". So, the sentence should be changed into:

We have begun to export our machines.

(4) Control the number of the words, and build effective sentences and paragraphs.

Generally speaking, the average length for sentences should be 10 to 20 words, not over 30. Usually a paragraph consists of no more than 10 lines because short paragraphs encourage the readers to finish reading over the passage.

e.g. *In your letter of April 8, in connection with our order No. 135, we are enclosing herewith as per your demand, a certificate to the effect that the quantity delivered is less than ordered.*

This sentence is wordy, repetitive and confusing. You will gain a better result if you rewrite the above sentence as follows:

As requested in your letter of April 8, concerning our order No. 135, we are enclosing a certificate of short delivery (weight).

3. Courtesy/Politeness

To achieve courtesy, one of the most important things is promptness, especially when a reply is given to a customer's letter, do it without any delay. Next, avoid irritating, offensive or belittling statements. Besides, use diplomacy and tact to overcome differences. Courtesy consists not only in using polite phrases like "please", "thank you", but also in showing your consideration for your reader.

e.g. "We have received with many thanks your letter of 20 May, and we take the pleasure of sending you our latest catalog. We wish to draw your attention to a special offer which we have made in it." is better than "You will be particularly interested in a special offer on page 5 of the latest catalog enclosed, which you requested in your letter of 20 May."

4. Consideration

Consideration means you should be considerate to your readers. It is the quality that enables us to refuse to perform a favor and at the same time keep a friend, to refuse a customer's request without killing all hopes of future business. If you cannot meet your customers' needs or requests, you should show your interest in and concern for their requests, use positive sentences instead of using negative sentences, and stress what you can do, but don't stress what you cannot do.

e.g. "You earn 2 percent discount when you pay cash. We will send you the brochure next month." is better than "We allow 2 percent discount for cash payment. We won't be able to send you the brochure this month."

5. Completeness

A business letter is complete when it contains all the facts the reader needs. Completeness is necessary for several reasons:

- (1) Complete messages are more likely to bring the desired results.
- (2) They can build goodwill between buyers and sellers.
- (3) Complete messages can help avoid costly lawsuits.

As you strive for completeness, keep the following guidelines in mind:

- (1) Write down all the points you wish to cover and then arrange them in a logical order.
- (2) If your letter is a reply, underline those parts which require information and answer all the questions asked.

6. Concreteness

Writing concretely means being specific, definite and vivid rather than vague and general. Try to use specific facts, figures and active verbs, then choose vivid, image-building words.

e.g. We wish to confirm our fax dispatched yesterday.

Like “today” and “tomorrow”, the word “yesterday” is a vague and general concept. It is not suitable to be used here. The sentence should be changed into:

We confirm our fax of July 2nd, 2006.

7. Correctness

Correct grammar, punctuation and spelling are also required in business letter writing. It also means the correct level or style of language for the reader and the accurate facts and figures.

e.g. The goods supplied are exactly equal to the sample.

It is very difficult to guarantee that the goods supplied are exactly equal to the sample. The sentence may be changed into:

a. The goods supplied are similar in quality to the sample.

b. The sample represents as nearly as possible what we can supply.

c. The sample is the nearest in size to the goods you need.

Structure of Business Letters

Sample

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| ① Letterhead (信头) | |
| ② Ref. No. (发文编号) | |
| | Date (日期) |
| ③ Inside Name and Address (封内名称和地址) | |
| ④ Attention Line (注意项) | |
| ⑤ Salutation (称呼) | |
| ⑥ Subject Line (事由标题) | |
| ⑦ Body of the Letter (信文) | |
| | |
| | |
| | |
| | ⑧ Complimentary Close (结尾敬语) |
| | ⑨ Signature (签名) |
| ⑩ Reference Notation (经办人代号) | |
| ⑪ Enclosure (附件) | |
| ⑫ Carbon Copy (抄送) | |
| ⑬ Postscript (附言) | |

1. Letterhead

Letterheads include the essential particulars about the writer — his/her name and postal address, fax number and e-mail address. Good quality paper and a neat, well-balanced letterhead combine to enhance the prestige of the firm that uses them.

2. Reference and Date

Most letterheads provide for reference letters and numbers. When one firm writes to another, each will give a reference, and they mark “Our ref:” and “Your ref:” to avoid confusion.

Always type the date in full, in the logical order of day, month, year. For the date, either cardinal numbers (1, 2, 3, 4, etc.) or ordinal numbers (1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc.) can be used, e.g. *12th October, 2006* or *12 October, 2006*.

To give the date in figures (e.g. *12/10/2006*) is in bad taste, and it may easily cause confusion because in Britain this date would mean 12th October, 2006, but in the United States and some other countries it would mean 10th December, 2006.

3. Inside Name and Address

The preferred position for the correspondent’s name and address is the upper left-hand side of the sheet, three or more line-spacing below the line of the date, depending on the length of the letter.

Mr., Mrs., Miss, Ms., and Messrs are the ordinary courtesy titles used for addressing correspondents.

It is the usual practice to type the inside name and address in blocked paragraph form at the left-hand margin of the letter. This can give the letter a tidy appearance.

4. Attention Line

The phrase “For the attention...” or simply “Attention” is used where the writer of a letter addressing to an organization wishes to direct it to a particular official. It is typed two line-spacing above the salutation, underlined and, except with the fully-blocked letter-style, centered over the body of the letter,

e.g. “For the attention of Mr. Smith” or “Attention: Mr. Smith”

5. Salutation

The salutation is the complimentary greeting with which the writer opens his letter. The particular form used depends upon the writer’s relationship with his correspondent. To some extent it settles the form of the complimentary close; the two must always be in keeping with each other.

For ordinary business purposes, Dear Sir (or Dear Madam for single or married

women) is used for addressing one person, and Dear Sirs or Gentlemen (or Mesdames) for addressing two or more, as where a letter is addressed to a firm.

The salutation always appears on a line by itself, conventionally three line-spacing below the inside name and address, followed by a comma or no punctuation.

6. Subject Line

Often useful as a time-saver is the practice of including at the head of a letter a short title announcing the subject-matter, especially where correspondence is considerable.

The heading belongs to the letter and so is typed two line-spacing below the salutation, underlined and, except with the fully-blocked letter-style, centered over the body of the letter.

7. Body of the Letter

This is the part that really matters. Before you begin to write, you must first of all consider the following two points:

What is your aim in writing this letter?

What is the best way to go about it?

Since the main purpose of the letter is to convey a message, the letter should be written in language that is easily understood. The following serves as a reminder:

Write simply, clearly, courteously, grammatically, and to the point;

Paragraph correctly, confining each paragraph to one topic;

Avoid stereotyped phrases or commercial jargons.

8. Complimentary Close

The complimentary close, like the salutation, is purely a matter of convention and a polite way of ending a letter. The expression must be appropriate to the occasion and be in keeping with the salutation.

The following are the usual matches used in modern business letters:

Salutation	Close	Occasion
Dear Sir(s), Dear Madam, Dear Mesdames,	Yours faithfully, (or: Faithfully yours,)	Formal — very commonly used in Britain.
Gentlemen Dear Sir, Dear Madam, Dear Mesdames,	Yours truly, (or: Truly yours,)	Very commonly used in America and Canada.
Dear Mr. Henry,	Yours sincerely, (or: Sincerely yours,)	Informal — used between persons known to each other.

9. Signature

The signature is the signed name or mark of the person writing the letter or that of the firm he or she represents. It is written in ink immediately below the complimentary close. Because a signature is the distinguishing mark of the one who uses it, the same style must always be adopted.

The written signature and the typed signature must correspond exactly.
Always sign your letter by hand. Never use a rubber stamp.

10. Reference Notation

This notation is typed two spaces below the typed signature, and shows only the initials of the typist. If the dictator's name is not typed in the signature area, the reference notation shows the initials of both the dictator and the typist. The following examples are acceptable forms of reference notations:

RGB rgb FMA/RBG FMA/rbg FMA: rbg

11. Enclosure

Two line-spacing below the reference notation the writer may indicate one or more enclosures in the letter by following any one of these examples:

Enclosure: Price List

Enclosures

Enclosures 4

Encl. As stated

Enc.

12. Carbon Copy

There are two types of carbon copy notations. The first is indicated by "cc" followed by the names of the persons who will receive copies of the letters. This notation is typed on the original and carbon copies.

The second type of copy notation is specified on the copy only by the abbreviation "bcc" (blind carbon copy) and the recipient's name. No one other than the recipient of the "bcc" and you will know his or her receipt of a copy of the letter.

Notations for "cc" and "bcc" would look like this in your letter:

cc Shanghai Branch Office

bcc Mr. Jones

Full names and addresses may be given to help mailing or filing.

13. Postscript

If the writer wishes to add something he forgot to mention, he may type his afterthought two spaces below the copy notation. The adding of a P.S. should, however, be avoided as far as possible, since it is usually a sign of poor planning. Here is an example:

P.S. I, on behalf of my company, sincerely invite you to attend the Guangzhou Fair.

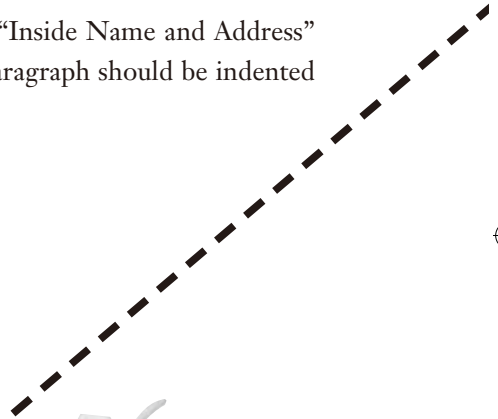


Letter Styles of Business Correspondence

There are several acceptable styles for business letters. The four most popular forms are indented style, full-block, modified block and semi-block.

1. Indented Style

The main feature of this style is that each line of the “Inside Name and Address” should be indented 2–3 spaces, and the first line of each paragraph should be indented 3–8 spaces.



Sample

Beijing Textiles Import & Export Corporation

8 Guanghua Road

Beijing, China.

Tel: 010-66838128 Telex: 010-33587118 Cable: 8898

Our ref. No.

Your ref. No.

January 30, 2004

The Pakistan Trading Company,

15, Broad Street,

KARACHI, Pakistan.

Gentlemen,

First Inquiry

We learn from a friend in San Francisco that you are exporting Nylon Bed-sheets and Pillow Cases. There is a steady demand here for the above-mentioned commodities of high quality at moderate prices.

Will you please send us a copy of your catalogue, with details of your prices and terms of payment. We should find it most helpful if you could also supply samples of these goods.

Yours very truly,

BEIJING TEXTILES IMPORT & EXPORT CORP.

(Signature)

Zhang Dahua

General Manager

2. Full-Block Style

Every line in the full-block style begins at the left margin, and the open style of punctuation has been adopted. For example, a complete absence of punctuation marks from the date, the salutation, the complementary close, and from the ends of lines forming the inside name and address, except the full-stops to mark abbreviation.

Sample

GUANGZHOU ELECTRONICS PRODUCTS
IMPORT & EXPORT CORPORATION
11 Beijing Road, Guangzhou
People's Republic of China
Tel 3456182 Telex 8371 GUELCO CABLE 2284

Ref. GEC 9667

June 21 2004

Ocean Electronics Products Import Corp.
130 Clifford Street
LONDON W 1 England

Dear Sirs,

Re: Chinese Electronics Products

We have obtained your name and address from the London Chamber of Commerce, who has told us that you wish to import electric goods from China.

We manufacture electronic appliance of the kind illustrated in enclosed catalogue, which we hope will be of interest to you. Also enclosed for your reference, is our latest price list.

Should you be interested in any of our product, please let us know and we will provide you with a quotation. In the meantime, should you require any further information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

We look forward to hearing from you soon, and to the possibility of doing business with you in the future.

Yours faithfully,

(Signature)
Liu Sheng-feng
Sales Manager

Encs: as stated

3. Modified-Block Style

In this style, paragraphs are not indented. The “Date”, “Complementary Close” and “Signature” are aligned slightly past the center of the page.

Sample

Powell & Cresci Clothing Company
1207 West 30th Street
Newardk, New Jersey 07109

Your ref.: 256FA/mf
Our ref.: 345LW/jb

March 12, 2006

Shanghai Branch
China National Import & Export Corp.
1040 North Suzhou Road

Attention: Marketing Department

Dear Sirs,

Re: Order No. JP313 200 Dozen Shirts

Your letter of 15th August addressed to our Head Office has been passed on to us for attention and reply.

We now take pleasure in advising you that the price of Brown Crystal Sugar is at US\$... per metric ton FOB Of course we also quote CFR or CIF prices if buyers so desire. The price terms to be employed depend much on the characteristics of the goods as well as their specific transport requirements and shall always serve the best interest of buyers and sellers alike.

We are looking forward to your order at an early date.

Yours truly,

(Signature)
Lee Ozuna
Manager of Foodstuffs Branch

LW/jb
Encl: (1)
cc: Our Head Office

4. Semi-Block Style with Indented Paragraphs

This style is similar to the modified block style with one exception: the first sentence of each paragraph is indented 3–6 spaces.

Sample

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We are looking forward to your order at an early date.

Yours truly,
(Signature)
Lee Ozuna
Manager of Foodstuffs Branch

LW/jb
Encl: (1)
cc: Our Head Office

IV

Addressing the Envelope

1. The address on the envelope must be correct, legible, and placed in the appropriate location. The address of the receiver on the envelope should begin one third of the way across the envelope from left to right and half way down from top to bottom. And the address of the sender's should be placed at the left corner above the envelope. Remember to use the correspondent's full address, including the post town followed by the country name and postcode; both should be typed in block capitals. Don't use "No." before street numbers, but include it when using a post office Box Number, thus: P. O. Box No. ... Type words such as "Street", "Road", "Avenue" in full.

(1) Indented Style

Hunan Foreign Trading Corp. 32 Wuyi Road Changsha, 410005 Hunan, China	Stamp
Oversea Trading Co., 24 Park Street LONDON EC4 ENGLAND	
Registered	

(2) Block Style

Oversea Trading Co., 24 Park Street London EC4 England	Stamp
Hunan Foreign Trading Corp. 32 Wuyi Road CHANGSHA, 410005 HUNAN, CHINA	
Via Air Mail	

2. When a letter is mailed to a third person (or an organization) who is bound to pass it onto the addressee, it is necessary to write the third person's (or the organization's) name down below the addressee's with words "care of" (c/o) in front of it. For example, if an Englishman named John Smith has come to the Hunan Foreign Trading Corp. in China, his own company in England should write to him "care of" (c/o) the Hunan Foreign Trading Corp. which he is staying with.

Oversea Trading Co., 24 Park Street London EC4 England	Stamp
Mr. John Smith c/o Hunan Foreign Trading Corp. 32 Wuyi Road CHANGSHA, 410005 HUNAN, CHINA	
Urgent	

3. If a letter is to be taken from you by someone to the addressee, write his name below the addressee's with the following words in front of it: Politeness of (or Kindness of, Through the Courtesy of, Per Kindness of, Forwarded by, Per Favor of, By Favor of, With Favor of, Favored by).

Oversea Trading Co., 24 Park Street London EC4 England	Stamp
Mr. John Smith Kindness of Mr. Zhang Ming	
Private	

Generally speaking, the name and address of the envelope should agree with the inside name and address. It should be written in the following order:

- (1) Name
- (2) Title (position or department)
- (3) Company name
- (4) Street address
- (5) Town
- (6) County (or province)
- (7) Country

Post notations such as “Registered (挂号)”, “Confidential (密函)”, “Via Air Mail (航空)”, “Sample of No Value (样品)”, “Private (亲启)”, “Urgent (急件)”, etc., should be placed in the bottom left-hand corner. The following is a specimen of an envelope:

<p>B/D Corp. 123 Third Avenue New York, NY10017 U.S.A.</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">Stamp</div>
<p>Mr. John Smith c/o China National Chartering Corp. P.O. Box 592 BEIJING, 100044 CHINA</p>	
<p>Private</p>	



Class Simulating Training

1. Background Information

Name Card of an Importer

<p>Zing & Zack Consultancy Co. <i>Your Life Assurance</i></p>	
<p>Edward Tom Sales Manager</p>	<p>Surmalan Aass 14A Scandey Aoad Singapone 082123 Tel: 65 62251221 Tom: 65 62251222 E-mail: edward@zing&zack.con</p>

Name Card of an Exporter

深圳市 罗湖区 毛巾厂	
鲁志勇	
厂长	
地址：广东省深圳市罗湖区	邮编：518100
电话：0755-31333333	传真：0755-31053333
手机：1380 xxx 7497	E-mail: luzhiyong@public.cs.hn.cn

2. Task

Draft the format and an envelope of a business letter according to the above information, with the body omitted.

Card**E-mail**

The e-mail widely used in modern business circles, refers to computer-based system whereby one computer sends a message to another. In comparison with traditional methods such as telex, the postal service, and telephone, it has become a popular medium because of its relatively low cost and the ability to send Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) messages. In addition, it is more effective and safe. Messages can be sent or picked up anywhere in the world, and stored in the mailbox until they are retrieved. This can be particularly advantageous for users who are communicating across international time zones.

Like a business letter, an e-mail has its own layout, which is quite different from the layout of a business letter. The layout of an e-mail is made up of two parts, the e-mail head and body.

The e-mail head as shown in the following box consists of four parts. In the column of "to", the name, title or/and the e-mail address of the recipient must be accurate and correct. If there is any subject you want to mention, place it in the column of "subject". In the column of "From" and "Date", the writer's e-mail address and the time of sending will be shown automatically. And if the writer sends an enclosure with the e-mail, a column of "Enclosure" will indicate it and the recipient would not neglect.

Usually the body of an e-mail excludes the salutation as a business letter does. If it is the first time for the writer to address the recipient, the salutation and compli-

mentary close can be added for the sake of good order and formality.

A Specimen of an E-mail of Inquiry

To: Jasonzhang@hotmail.com
From: Yanglihua@163.com
Subject: Inquiry for Silk Garments

Dear Sirs,

We learned about your Rose brand products through your advertisement in the SILK GARMENTS. We are interested in them.

Would you like to send us details of your various ranges, including sizes, colors and prices? We are large dealers in silk garments and believe there is a promising market in our area for moderately priced products of this kind mentioned.

Could you give us a discount when we purchase quantities of not less than 100 dozen of individual items? If so, how much?

We hope to be hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,