THE BUSINESS LETTER

Write the Way You Talk

A business letter should be clear, direct, and businesslike. But it should also sound like it was written by a human being and not a machine. Business writing is often cold, stiff, and unnatural. Unthinking writers fall back on business cliches and passive sentences. They try to disguise uncertainty in a cloud of words. According to editor Malcolm Forbes, business writers should be positive, be nice, and be natural. Be natural—write the way you talk, says Forbes. This is good advice. Compare these two sentences:

NO: I acknowledge receipt of your letter and I beg to thank you.

YES: Thank you for your letter.

Consider the Reader

Another good piece of advice is to write a business letter from the point of view of the reader. Don't waste your readers' time with long, wordy letters. Edit ruthlessly. Cut every unnecessary word. On the other hand, make sure your readers don't have to puzzle over meaning. That's a timewaster, too. Add the facts, figures, and details needed to make the message clear.

NO: The recall affected their profits.

YES: Profits were down 10.4% the month following the recall.

Keep It Short

A good way to get a favorable response from a business letter is to keep it under one page in length. Keep paragraphs short, too. And make the letter *look* appealing. Type it on good quality bond paper, and make sure that there are no typos, misspellings, or factual errors on the copy that you send out.

Rewriting Letters

Part V contains several sample business letters that need editing and revision. Read each letter carefully. Look for sentences that should be reworded or shortened and for errors in spelling and mechanics. Make notes in the margins, if you like. Then rewrite the letter. Compare your finished letter with the revised version on the overleaf. Don't worry if your revision and the author's are not identical. One change is as good as another as long as the finished product is more readable.

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A CHECKLIST FOR THE BUSINESS LETTER

- Tell what your letter is about in the first paragraph.
- If you're answering a letter, refer to the date it was written.
- Read your letter aloud when you are done to see if it sounds natural.
- Have a sense of humor, but don't be cute or flippant.
- Be specific.
- Use the active voice instead of the passive.
- Keep the letter short.
- For emphasis, underline important words.
- Make the final copy perfect.
- Don't exaggerate or try to pass off opinions as facts.
- Be clear and honest.
- Read the first draft of your letter and edit ruthlessly.
- In the final paragraph, tell the reader exactly what you want him or her to do, or what you are going to do. Don't omit this important "action step."
- Close with something simple like, "Sincerely."

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EXERCISE #22—REVISING A BUSINESS LETTER (1)

Revise the job application letter reprinted below. Trim unnecessary words and rewrite awkward sentences. Note especially that this letter's author has been careless about details. Correct errors in grammar, punctuation, and mechanics.

(POOR)

Mr. William Frank
Personnel Director
ABC Design, Inc.
291 Front St.
San Francisco, Ca., 94128

Dear Mr Frank;

Searching for an employee with qualifications to fit management or a position of responsibility with a degree in adversity. The job description you described in the *Western Placement Annual 1987*, is particularly suited to my qualifications. My previous positions in the federal government has provided me with skills to overcome problems and manifest myself as an achiever.

Mr. Frank, my graduation from Cal State University, Hayward Business Department, in June of '85, has provided me with skills along with my previous employment in government. Hearing your company has an opening in their Marketing and Sales department, I am applying for such a position. Knowing your company deals with a variety of products, I feel that my scope of knowledge of consumer wants and needs can widen your target market areas. My ability to work with the public and quickly locate their interests makes me a likely candidate.

The enclosed resume will clearly show my qualifications and abilities. Please read for yourself and be the judge.

In closing I would appreciate an interview at your convenience. Your company office is located near my home and I would like to meet with you at a time convenient for you. My home phone number after 2:00 pm is415-385-0049. If any of my skills or experience interests you, please write or phone. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely

Ronald Talbot

(Corrected letters shown on pages 59 and 60)

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