

TOPIC

WRITING ENGLISH BUSINESS LETTERS
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– OUTLINE –

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TEXT OF THE OUTLINE

I. BUSINESS COMMUNICATION: GENERAL AND INTERCULTURAL ASPECTS

- The English language is a well-established language of international business. It is the main language in Australia, Canada, Great Britain, New Zealand, the United States. It is also the language of business in the Caribbean, India, Japan, the Netherlands. The usage of the English language may differ in any of these countries and thus one should be aware of the intercultural aspects of business communication. These may be reflected in language usage, values and attitudes, religion, knowledge, etc. as well as types of legal system. This may lead to misunderstandings (regarding stereotypes, time and space concepts, body language, etiquette standards, translation problems, etc.) that may be prevented. Written business communication in English has also absorbed this intercultural aspect of communication. This also partly pertains to business letters that are the most common form of intercultural business communication.
- Meanings of words as well as concepts the words describe may differ in various versions of English or in other languages. Knowing these may save from misunderstandings. It is common that spelling of some same words may differ, for example, in American, British, and Canadian English. It may be advisable to use the spelling used in the language of the foreign partner addressed.

Examples: Difference in Spelling

USA	Britain	Canada
Harbor	Harbour	Harbour
Neighbor	Neighbour	Neighbour
Labor	Labour	Labour
Center	Centre	Centre
Meter	Metre	Metre
Theater	Theatre	Theatre
Defense	Defence	Defence
Offense	Offence	Offence
Draft	Draught	Draught
Mold	Mould	Mould
Tire	Tyre	Tire
Inquire	Enquire	Inquire
Traveling	Traveling	Travelling
Check	Cheque	Cheque

Difference in Words and their Meanings

USA	Britain	Canada
Trunk	Boot	Trunk
Hood	Bonnet	Hood
Truck	Lorry	Truck
Interstate	Motorway	Highway
Chips	Crisp	Chips
Fries	Chips	Fries
Restroom	Toilet	Washroom
First floor	Ground level	Main floor
garbage bin	Litter bin	Garbage can
Baggage	Luggage	Suitcase
Candy	Sweet	Candy
Can	Tin	Can

II. WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS

A. Envelope

- An address (to which a letter is to be sent) on an envelope should be printed by typewriter or computer printer. In the first line put addressee's name, in the second below – the house number and the name of the street. In the third line below – the name of the town and its postal code (ZIP code (stands for "zone improvement plan" – the U.S. equivalent of the postcode), finally – the name of the country.
- Above the address, in large print letter indicate a type of deliverance: a) REGISTERED; b) AIR MAIL; c) EXPRESS DELIVERY; d) TO BE CALLED FOR or POST RESTANTE.
- The returned address is written on the other side of the envelope or on in the left upper corner of the front side of the envelope. At times, it may be preceded by the phrase "If not delivered, please return to [..address of return..]".
- If the letter is addressed to a person, whose exact address is unknown, it may be sent to an address of the organization to which the person keeps business connection. In this case, the name of the organization is preceded by words "In care of" or "Care of" or its abbreviation "C/o".
- If the letter is addressed to an addressee in the United States, the name of the state should be indicated. Because there are many towns in the United States that have same names, this way the postal service will be enabled to send the letter to the required town (e.g., there are five towns named "New York", five towns named "Philadelphia", twelve named "Boston" in the United States). So if the letter is addressed to the New York City in the State of New York, it is appropriate to write on the envelope in the line after the name of the street "New York, N.Y." or "New York City". The names the U.S. States may be abbreviated, as noted below.

A list of abbreviations for the names of the U.S. States

AK – Alaska	IL – Illinois	MT – Montana	RI – Rhode Island
AL – Alabama	IN – Indiana	NB – Nebraska	SC – South Carolina
AR – Arkansas	IA – Iowa	NC – North Carolina	SD – South Dakota
AZ – Arizona	KS – Kansas	ND – North Dakota	TN – Tennessee
CA – California	KY – Kentucky	NH – New Hampshire	TX – Texas
CO – Colorado	LA – Louisiana	NJ – New Jersey	UT – Utah
CT – Connecticut	MA – Massachusetts	NM – New Mexico	VA – Virginia
DC – District of Columbia	MD – Maryland	NV – Nevada	VT – Vermont
DE – Delaware	ME – Maine	NY – New York	WA – Washington
FL – Florida	MI – Michigan	OH – Ohio	WI – Wisconsin
GA – Georgia	MN – Minnesota	OK – Oklahoma	WV – West Virginia
HI – Hawaii	MO – Missouri	OR – Oregon	WY – Wyoming
ID – Idaho	MS – Mississippi	PA – Pennsylvania	

B. Clarity is the Key

- Clarity stands out among the most important qualities of writing business letters.
- To achieve clarity:
 - use formal style of writing;
 - use short, precise words corresponding to the meaning desired;
 - use specific terms to concretize the meaning;
 - avoid slang, professional jargon, buzz words, idioms, figurative expressions, abbreviations, acronyms (pronounceable names made up of a series of initial letters of or parts of words, for example UNESCO), county-specific product names;
 - use short paragraphs (up to 10 lines);
 - use expressions like "first", "second", "third", "in addition", "finally" to structure your thought for the benefit of the reader.
- Pay attention to other countries' system of measurement and currency values.
- Indicate dates clearly (avoid confusing 12/2/2003 or 2/12/03, instead spell out the month).

C. Standardized Letters

- Many documents (e.g., invoices, bills of lading, letters of credit, shipping and collection documents, etc.) are standardized in form. Samples usually are on the file with the company. It is advisable or sometimes compulsory under company's policies to use them.
- Letters are usually written on organization's letterhead stationary.

III. ENGLISH BUSINESS LETTER

Letterhead: Name and address of the organization or the firm, correspondence requisites tel. numbers, correspondence and subject matter identification codes, e.g. reference number, etc.

Original names of the organization should not be translated, but transliterated. At times, abbreviations, such as *Ltd.* ("limited liability company") or *L.L.P.* ("limited liability partnership") or others are put after names of foreign business organizations to connote its type.

Reference or reference numbers are used to refer to a particular subject or matter of the communication and the sender asks to refer to it when communicating. Typical phrases include: "In your reply please mention our reference ..."; "In your reply please refer to ..."; "Kindly mention ... in your reply ..."; "Please refer to number ..."; "Our file No. ..., etc."

Date: The date is usually put in the right corner. It is to written, for example as "5th November, 1992" and is pronounced as "the fifth of November, two thousand three". The date of the day should be written using endings: st, nd, rd, th; for example: 1st, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, etc. Comma should be placed after the month. The names of months may be abbreviated e.g. 5th Nov., 2003 (Abbreviations: January – Jan., February – Feb., March – not abbreviated, April – Apr., May – not abbreviated, June – not abbreviated, July – not abbreviated, August – Aug., September – Sept., October – Oct., November – Nov., December – Dec.).

Inside Address: The inside address is the name and / or address of the organization or the person addressed. The name of the organization and the person are to be written in separate lines. It is to be situated in the line below the date.

Address form: If the letter is addressed to an organization which name has names of persons in it, the word "Messrs" (abbreviated "Monsieur") usually precedes the name of the organization. For example:

Messrs. R. B. Black and Sons,
10 Miss Street,
New Haven, CT
U.S.A.

Note, however, that the word "Messrs" is more widely used in the UK than in the U.S.

Consult special reference sources regarding forms of address to governmental officials, diplomats, etc.

If the name of the person to be addressed is unknown, the name of person's job position may be used e.g. "The Managing Partner". The article "the" is used because and if there is only one position as such in the organization it indicates.

The word "Mrs." is used to address a married woman and "Miss" – an unmarried one.

Forms of Greetings: Letters addressed to organizations open with greetings "Dear Sirs" (in the U.K.), "Dear Gentlemen" (in the U.S.) and those addressed to particular persons – "Dear Sir" (to a man), "Dear Madam" (to a woman). Closing greetings are: "Yours faithfully", "Yours truly", "Truly yours". The form "Yours very truly" is commonly used in the U.S.

If the letter is intended to reach a particular person, e.g. Mr. John Brown, within the organization, it is appropriate, after the opening greeting, to write "Attention: Mr. John Brown". The opening statement in this case should be written in plural (e.g. "Dear Sirs" or "Gentlemen").

Before the main text of the letter it is common to indicate the subject of the letter using forms "RE:" or "SUBJECT:". "Re" stands for "In re" (in Latin) and is used in the meaning "regarding". For example:

Dear Sirs,
RE: ORDER No. 250
We have received your letter of ...

Body of the Letter: This the most important part of the letter spells out reasons for writing the letter. It may include requesting, thanking, mandating, etc. It is common to use certain forms of expressions pertaining to specific occasions, as follows.

Formal request: "I would be grateful if you could...", "I would appreciate it if you could...", "Could you please...", etc.

To explain reasons for writing: "I am writing to inform you that...", "I am writing to apply...", "I am writing to request...", etc.

To thank: "We were very pleased to...", "Thank you for..."

To apologize: "I apologize for...", "I am sorry that...", "I am afraid that...", "I regret that...", etc.

To refer to enclosed / attached documents: "Please find enclosed / attached...", etc.

To express urgency: "... as soon as possible", "... without delay", "... at your earliest convenience", etc.

To confirm: "I confirm that...", "I am pleased to confirm that...", "This is to confirm...", etc.

Ending the letter: "I look forward to ...", "I am sure that...", "I hope...", "See you soon..." (informal style), etc.

Signature: The signature is placed in the right side of the letter under the closing greeting and takes at least two lines. The closing greeting is always followed by comma then is followed by a *printed* name of the organization or stamp affixture with its name. The former is then followed by a *hand-written* signature of the authorized person, followed below or next to it by a position of the person. For example:

Yours truly,
The R. B. Black and Sons,
[hand-written signature]
Secretary

Important letter-documents should be signed by an authorized persons and the name of the organization may be preceded by words "For and on behalf of" or "Per pro." (the former is an abbreviated form of "per procuracionem" that is translated from Latin "upon the arrangement").

IV. AMERICAN BUSINESS LETTER

The main differences between British and American business letter are listed below.

Category	British Business Letter	American Business Letter
Date	5th November, 2003	November 5, 2003
Address form	"Dear Sir(s)" / "Dear Madam(s)"	"Dear Gentlemen"
After address form	"," (e.g. "Dear Sir,")	":" (e.g. "Dear Gentlemen,")
Closing greeting	"Yours faithfully" or "Faithfully yours"	Yours very truly, Sincerely,

V. BASIC LETTER STYLES FORMATS

A. Blocked style

All letter lines start without indentions i.e. all lines start from the front-left side of the letter. There is one-line interval between indents (new paragraphs) of the text.

B. Unblocked style

There are indentions i.e. all new paragraphs start with a space interval on the left. There is one-line interval between indents (new paragraphs) of the text. Address of the sender, date and ending lines somehow placed to the right – a bit more than to the center.

C. Semi-block Style

This is a form of the blocked style. No indentions to the right, one-line interval between indents (new paragraphs) of the text. Address of the sender, date and ending lines somehow placed to the right – a bit more than to the center.

The blocked style is most commonly used by big companies and organizations. It is also received widespread popularity among other forms of business organizations, perhaps, thanks to its paper-save format.

VI. CONTENT-TYPES OF LETTERS

A. "Good News" Letters

Job applicants know that good news comes over the phone and bad news appears in their mailbox. The writer on this occasion has to ensure that the letter is organized effectively and positive attitude with the addressee is maintained. The letter should begin with a positive "you" attitude, placing the emphasis on the reader's needs and using pronouns to add that personal touch. Then, in the body of the letter, the writer should again take into account the reader's needs by being as specific and concrete as possible, supplying enough information keep the reader from being puzzled or ill-informed. Finally, in the conclusion the writer should strive to nurture a true sense of good will. In an effective conclusion to a "good news" letter the writer should try to build a relationship that will lead to good feelings about the writer's organization and, in some cases, future business. Together, these three elements will make for "a good news" letter that goes way beyond simply telling good news.

B. Persuasive or "Appeals" Letters

The art of persuading through appeals is not always easy. It takes an effort on the writer's part to select just the right appeal that fits writer's audience. Basically most appeals fall into three categories" rational, ethical, and emotional. In other words, the writer can reach his audience through reason, through appeals to their sense of what is right and wrong, and through eliciting emotions such as fear.

Rational appeals are used often in organizational settings, especially when professionals have to deal with each other on a day-to-day basis. Some professionals would not think of resolving problems in any way but through logical and reasonable consideration and debate. They consider reacting emotionally or emotionally or ethically to a problem inappropriate in the workplace.

Example: "...As you know, Phillips has always responded quickly to your needs in the past, and we do manufacture the only industrial quality rotary unions on the marker. We would like to continue selling you our products and add your name to the list of our satisfied customers. However, we believe that unless you settle this past-due account now, we will be unable to honor your purchase orders in the future, perhaps in a time when you might need our products the most".

Ethical appeals go beyond reason and attempt to tap the reader's moral sense, arousing him or her to take responsibility, e. g. for the debt. Thus, in credit and collection cases a strong appeal is often made to fair play. The language in such letters is correspondingly stronger.

Example: "We are indeed disappointed that we have still not received payment from you concerning our Invoice # 11111 from \$ 500.50. And, frankly, we are puzzled why you have decided to conduct your credit business in a way that runs contrary to standard business practices.

We would like to believe that a Saunders' purchase order is an earnest document, one that is made in good faith, like many of the others we receive daily. In fact, we believe that shipment before payment is the only way that we can satisfy your immediate sales needs. But we must insist that you uphold your end of our business relationship.

Please send us your check today."

Emotional appeals may be used when rational or ethical appeals produced no effect. The reasoning of the reader may be strong enough to refute the logic of the rational appeal; moreover, the reader's sense of right or wrong may not be affected. Thus, the writer may consider appealing to reader's emotion. Emotional appeals, such as those to fear and anger, are often powerful tools for an organizational writer. They are most often used, for example in the case of credit and collection matters. The writer should, however, carefully weight the merits of using an emotional appeal in a letter before it goes out, for it can also backfire.

Example:

"...YOUR ACCOUNT WILL BE REFERRED FOR COLLECTION ... unless you send your overdue payment of \$ 753.51 today.

When your account is placed for collection, you will be dealing with the collection agency of Smith and Smith directly, a company known for its success at dealing with delinquent accounts. This agency will also turn in a report to the credit bureau that includes your recent credit problems with us. The report will obviously affect your credit reputation in the area.

But it's not too late yet. Send your payment today".

C. "No" Letters

Saying "no", which is almost always difficult in person, is easier in a letter. The wording and approach have to be careful. The best way to prepare a reader for bad news is to demonstrate that what the reader requested or proposed has received due consideration. This consideration can be indicated by referring specifically to the situation at hand and by assuring the reader you know who she or he is. The more specific and personal the reference, the more palatable the refusal.

The opening of a "no" letter should contain a buffer statement to get the reader into the right frame of mind. After the buffered beginning, the next step is to present the refusal along with the explanation. What the writer wants the reader to do is to come to a conclusion similar to the one expressed in the letter – that is, the negative outcome is the only outcome possible under the circumstances facing the writer.

Example: As you know, we received a large number of job applications and, unfortunately, have a limited number of job openings. Our decision does not reflect any lack in your professional qualification but rather our inability to enlarge our staff more considerably.

After having conveyed the bad news in the body of a "no" letter, the writer has the opportunity to sweeten the reaction of the reader with a closing encouragement or alternative.

- Example:
- 1) Statement of regret / sincere goodwill: "We regret that we were unable to fund your program, but we wish you well in seeking fund from other sources"
 - 2) Suggesting alternative: "Though we no longer handle the RX line, we understand that it is still available from ____".
 - 3) Encouragement in doing further business: "Though we are unable to honor your claim at this time, we suggest that you try one of our other product lines that have similar capabilities and maintenance agreements available".

VII. WRITING LAW-RELATED BUSINESS LETTER

Lawyers engage in writing of many documents on their own behalf or behalf of their clients. These may include letters, memoranda, briefs, etc.

In terms of writing organization, a lawyer should follow these basic principles of good organization: 1) discuss each issue separately, 2) discuss each sub-issue separately, 3) for each issues or sub-issue, describe the applicable law before applying it to the factual situation, 4) state reasons for supporting conclusion on an issues or sub-issue before discussing counterarguments.

Describing the law, a lawyer should follow these basic principles: 1) be accurate, 2) describe only the relevant law, 3) describe the law in enough detail to enable you reader to understand the discussion, 4) summarize the law whenever possible, 4) synthesize the law whenever necessary.

Explaining the analysis, a lawyer should follow these basic principles: 1) be precise, 2) show every step in the analysis, 3) describe every reasonable basis for your conclusion, 4) explain the context.

Signposting, a lawyer should follow these basic principles: 1) use thesis statement to state your conclusion for each issue and sub-issue, 2) use paragraph to divide the discussion into manageable parts, 3) use topic sentences to define a purpose for each paragraph, 4) use transitions to show the relationship between ideas.

Address form: In the U.S., when addressing a lawyer, the word "Esquire", abbreviated as "Esq." is used in the body of the address of the lawyer. The word "Esquire" accompanies the family name of publicly prominent persons, including lawyers in the U.S. (Mr. R. B. Black, Esq.). A judge in the U.S., for example Mr. White, should be addressed as "the Honorable Mr. White" or "the Honorable Judge White".

Closing form: When a letter is submitted to a court of law or other official organization in the end of the letter a closing form such as "Respectfully submitted, ..." may be used. If a letter is presented on behalf of an organization (e. g. a law firm), rather than a person, the name of the organization is followed by the name of the person-in-charge.

Example:

SAMUEL, PARKS & RIORDAM

By _____ [Signature] _____

Julia P. Chan

Attorneys for Defendant

VIII. LIST OF REFERENCES AND SOURCES

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