

N. K. ATTHREYA

# MODERN CORRESPONDENCE

how to increase  
efficiency  
and  
reduce costs

MMC  
SCHOOL OF  
MANAGEMENT

Corrected copy

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# **MODERN CORRESPONDENCE:**

How to Increase Efficiency  
and Reduce Costs

**N. H. ATTHREYA**

**MMC SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT  
BOMBAY 20**

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*This book is presented  
in the "phrase reading" format  
to facilitate speed of comprehension.*

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To

G. Vanmikinathan

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N. H. ATTHREYA

## INTRODUCTION

Whether it is a letter, a report or a memorandum, we write for a purpose, we have a result in mind. In my earlier book *Written Communication and Results* I discussed the lessons derived from research on and study of the works of practising writers.

Even as the book was in progress, some of my reader-friends pointed out the need for companion volumes, one slanted to report writing\* and another to letter writing. They pointed out and rightly so that these two are forms of *applied writing* and beginners in particular would welcome getting a headstart.

Some very good books on the subject have been published, particularly by U. S. professors. I benefited greatly by reading them.

Books available in our market, however, are mostly of the examination variety, dealing with grammar and composition; giving 1000 letters for "all occasions".

This book, then, is in response to a felt need.

No other form of written communication is used more frequently than the letter— for it is the most convenient and effective substitute for direct conversation.

Even in the smallest office  
as much as 20 per cent of the work

\* The author's *Effective Report Writing* was published in 1971.

(and also a supplement and compliment)



is done through letters.  
In a bigger office,  
the per centage can be as much as 70.

Most executives spend  
25 to 50 per cent of their time writing ;  
there are some who spend  
almost all their time at it in the work place.  
How effectively are they doing the job ?  
How much better would they do  
if they could do it better ?  
How much time would be saved  
if they could do it better ?

*and critical*  
Strangely, this complex  
mental and physical activity called writing  
has received far less  
sympathetic attention than it deserves.

Organisations do not treat writing proficiency  
as a job requirement.  
In technological (educational) institutions,  
language study is played down and further down.

Young men realise—a little later than they should—  
that few accomplishments can serve them  
so well in so many varied ways,  
all through the work life,  
as the ability to write effective letters.

Every step taken to improve letter-writing  
is a contribution to improvement  
of over-all efficiency.  
It is good to know how to do letter writing  
a little better.  
To the movement for doing things a little better  
this book is a humble offering.

My work in communication consulting tells me  
that for best effect

the correspondent should treat each letter as unique. This means that we should size up each situation, think through the matter to be communicated, and compose it with clarity, strength, tact and freshness.

**This book therefore emphasises the basics of judgement, thinking and expression in relation to a letter.**

In Part I, the book talks about the objectives of a letter. It points out that once the overall objectives are clear, developing the skill of writing to a purpose becomes easier.

In Part II, it talks about tested approaches in achieving the main and sub-objectives. It draws the guidelines from the experience of able letter-writers here and abroad. It particularly highlights **the sub-objective of optimum cost and discusses the many approaches to cost reduction.**

Part III is especially addressed to the beginner.

Part IV takes the many types of special and routine letters and points out special precautions called for. It also discusses difficult letters like the 'no' letters.

Besides illustrating the points with samples, I have reproduced quite a few letters—some are intended for reflection by the reader; some for highlighting the before-after effect; some for providing case-history material.

Many effective letters are being written daily in our country.

If we can collect them and  
get the permission of the authors to publish them  
for the benefit of the many, it will be well.  
This is not practicable at the moment—  
**management methods are confused  
with process know-how,  
and people are hesitant to share information.**  
I do hope things change in the years to come.

As in all difficult things,  
we should make a beginning.  
We can **together** make a start  
in compiling such a book.  
*You do come across effective letters.*  
When you do next time, please make a copy of it  
and send it to me  
with the name and address of the author.  
I will get in touch with him and seek permission.  
We may thus succeed sooner than we expect!

Bombay  
1 August 1972

N. H. ATTHREYA

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## THE COMMON OBJECTIVES

Trifles make perfection; and perfection is no trifle.

*Michael Angelo*

If we want precise action, we must state our objectives in precise language.

David E Olsson

In any human endeavour, a clear idea of objectives and a constant awareness thereof makes for significant success.

NHA

## 1. THE OBJECTIVES

It is true  
that the aim of one letter  
differs from the aim of another.  
In broad terms, however,  
we can consider  
the objectives or aims of \**“business”* correspondence.

What, according to *you*  
are the objectives of a business letter ?

---

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## THE APPROACHES

What approaches have you observed  
help achieve these objectives ?

You have received  
many letters from many people.  
Some of these you have found  
particularly effective ;  
and some not so effective.

What approaches have you observed  
**What do the effective letter-writers do ?**  
What do the not-so-effective letter-writers do ?  
Can you recall some of the characteristics  
of the good, bad and indifferent  
correspondence you have come across ?

---

---

\* The term *“business”* is used in the broad sense of an action situation, where we want to transact business or get things done through others. Whatever is discussed here is as much applicable to an industry as to a hospital, as much to a travel agency as to a government department.

## 2. THE EFFECTIVE LETTER

We call a letter effective when it meets the objectives.

The objectives of one letter differ from the objectives of another.

All the same, all the letters have **some common objectives.**

They can be summed up as:

1. To be read
2. To be understood
3. To be accepted
4. To be acted upon
5. To build goodwill.

We want the letters *to be read* in the first instance. We want them to be received well; in other words, the reader should feel like reading our memos, etc. He should feel favourably disposed towards us right from the beginning.

The letter has a purpose.

The purpose may be to inform, to instruct, to entertain or to get action.

**Whatever the purpose, the message should be clear to the reader.**

If he does not readily understand what is conveyed in the letter, or, what is worse, if he misunderstands it, the purpose of the letter is defeated.

The message may be clear to the reader; but the way it is presented may not be *acceptable* to him.

If it is not, the progress of the communication stops there.

In work situations, many letters are response or result-oriented. While understanding *helps* response, it does not *assure* response. "To be acted upon" becomes, therefore, an objective to be singled out. *emphasised.*

At least in industry and business— if not in all aspects of economic life— transactions are repetitive.

One transaction affects the next.

If the first transaction through the letter builds *goodwill*, the second becomes smoother.

If the first transaction is only present-oriented, it *may* get a single result;

but it may not get a repetitive result.

**For repetitive results, we need to build goodwill.**

**The fifth objective of the letter, therefore, is to build goodwill.**

If we remember these five objectives every time we write a letter, ours will be purposive action, a results-giving action, a relations-building action, a reputation-bringing action.

**Each letter has its specific objective,**

**but that is over and above** *and each letter also has* these five common and pervasive objectives.

*Notes: preferable to drop as other objectives are not similarly numbered and 'fifth' suddenly appears.*

*the objectives are immediately repeated almost in same terms. The section can appear at the latter part of the book and can also be used as a section to a summary.*

### 3. THE OBJECTIVES RESTATED

We saw the objectives of a "business"\* letter to be:  
To get the other people

- \* read,
- \* understand,
- \* believe or accept,
- \* act,
- \* and develop goodwill.

We may add now one more objective:

- \* To do it all at optimum cost.

Since the principle of objectives is all important, we are restating a few points in this section.

The reader should welcome the letter ;  
he should readily understand the message ;  
he should believe and accept what is said ;  
he should respond favourably to the message ;  
and he should feel well-disposed  
to the writer.

If the reader acts on it *now*,  
and he is put in a mood to respond in the future too,  
the correspondence has proved *effective*.

**All the objectives  
should be simultaneously satisfied.**

Thus, it is not enough  
for a letter to be acted upon  
if it does not build goodwill.

Also, the objectives are inter-related ;  
one leads to the other.  
For example, if acceptability is not ensured,  
goodwill will not be possible.

---

\* The word "business" is here used in the sense of a letter that seeks action in any human area.

The central point is that  
all letters are *results-oriented* ;  
they should be read, understood, *and* acted upon.

The results may be  
action to-day or action to-morrow ;  
but action is what is sought  
of the reader.

Even information is a form of action,  
since information today is likely  
to affect results tomorrow.

Information may guide action  
or it may spark action  
when an opportunity arises.

*And because of this tomorrow,*  
a letter should build goodwill,  
a letter should help good relations,  
a letter should enhance  
the reputation of the writer,  
a letter should make for  
the good name of his organisation.

And finally a letter costs money—  
the average letter costs Rs. 3.00 or more—  
and consistent with  
*the results-relations-reputation objectives,*  
the letter cost should be minimum.

**A clear idea of these fivefold objectives  
and a constant awareness thereof  
makes one score in business correspondence.**

In the coming pages,  
we will take each of the sub-objectives and see  
what approaches will enable us to achieve them.  
What approaches will enable us to get the letter read,  
to enable the message to be understood,  
to obtain the projected action,  
to retain the goodwill of the reader ?

Some of the approaches contribute to *more than one* of the five objectives. Thus, courtesy makes a letter read ; it builds goodwill too. Conciseness makes a letter read ; it also makes a letter understood ; further it keeps down the cost.

**This additionally emphasises the point made earlier, namely, a letter is one whole and should be balanced and, therefore, all the objectives should be simultaneously satisfied.**

By adopting these approaches, we do not maintain that we will get the action *we wanted* from everyone or every time.

**But we do say that we have a better chance of getting the response we are working for.** That is why we ask ourselves: what type of correspondence will *facilitate* action ?

The emphasis is on facilitating. If we make it easy for the reader to read, understand, act, he may, other things being equal, make it easy for us too, by acting fairly and in time.

Before we consider the approaches let us examine a few letters which are taken from real life but which probably are samples of what-can-be-improved-further.



## II

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### WITHOUT COMMENT

1970's often too old today  
Santayana change to another quote.

All about us today are examples of executives struggling to solve problems of the 1970's with the management tools of the 1930's.

*George Frank*

These traditions may have been all right fifty years ago, but today when government and industry move on paper, they don't make any more sense than canvas-covered fighter planes.

*John O'Hayre*

Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

*George Santayana*

#### 4. WITHOUT COMMENT

Here are a few randomly selected letters. They are samples of the "unedited", conventional, common letters. Perusing them will enable us see the relevance of the points made in the coming pages.

Dear Sir:

"Your esteemed favour of the 1st has come to hand. In reply we beg to advise in view of stated facts we are remitting attached hereto our cheque No 7462 in remuneration for the balance due totalling the sum of Rs. 92.50 (Rupees ninety two and fifty paise only) Kindly rest assured that as per our records our account with you is clear to date.

We beg to remain.

Yours sincerely,

...."

\* \* \*

"Your favour received and order duly noted. In reply, I wish to state that your request will receive our immediate attention. In reproduct mentioned above we would point out that it is packaged under different names, sizes and packages. If you will kindly inform us, at your earliest convenience, the name of the brand you prefer, we will comply with your desire."

\* \* \*

*(change examples. Too far from reader's present experience)*

Sir/Madam,

I am directed to point out that this office bill No. PI-9/8222, dated 13th July, 1959 was for Rs. 6.65 and sum of Rs. 6.36 should have been paid after deduction of Rs. 0.29 allowable on account of discount. Payment of Rs. 6.35 only was, however, received from you vide Cash Receipt No. 35010/8 dated 16-7-29 and a sum of Rs. 0.01 has, therefore, been paid short. This balance may please be paid at once to clear the account.

In case payment is not received before the issue of the next bill, the amount due and the amount of discount will be shown as an arrear. Please note that, under the existing rules, no discount on any subsequent bill will be allowed unless this arrear is paid.

Yours faithfully,  
Sd/- for Secretary  
Municipal Committee

P. S.: If the payment of Rs. 0.01 is made before 29.7.59 the discount of Rs. 0.29 will be allowed to you.

Dear Sirs,

### EXECUTIVE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

With reference to your letter dated 6th December 1958, addressed to the undersigned, we regret we are not interested in your offer.

Yours faithfully,

\* \* \*

change Sample.  
Too trivial. Take also slightly derogatory to Services.

## INTERNAL MEMO

Chief Engineer,  
Delhi.

Reference your Memo. No....., dated.....  
Although the total man hours including repairs and inspection are high as compared to 1965-66 but if we go through the attached statement there is no variation in the main build up man hours of various sub sections. The increase which is quite apparent is under the head "Cleaning" which is due to latest system where total man hours of Grade 1 and 2 staff are divided on zero hours engines equally and also due to extra time required to remove caked oil after 5000 hrs. which is pretty hard. This distribution does not represent true picture of actual man hours spent on cleaning of main engine parts. In fact we do not take more than 250 man hours for actual cleaning of engine details.

Regarding repairs and rework it will be noted that though 300 men hours are allotted, but it is difficult to achieve these hours as the number of DRS, DRM and modifications an engine are on the increase as the total hours since new done by these engines are going up.

As there is no separate heading for inspection of salvage, DRM, DRS and Modification work, all man hours spent on such rework is booked on main Engine Overhaul Job.

This increase is due to normal wear and tear and it would be appreciated if the man hours allotted are reviewed in the light of increase in repair work.

Although total man hours on the engine are high, but there is a substantial decrease in material cost a fact sight of which should not be ignored.

Reply — Congratulating a Firm Who Have  
Overcome Their Difficulties

New York, Dec. 5th, 18—

Gentlemen — We beg to acknowledge receipt of your esteemed favor of the 3rd inst. The contents have given us great pleasure. We rejoice over the evidence of the prosperity of your house at last, after the dark shadow that so long hovered above it. It is refreshing to learn that you have succeeded in maintaining your position in the mercantile community, and are now sailing along again with the stream. Your success is a perpetual reminder to others that "Where there's a will there's a way." The energy and business tact which has superseded the old order of things must tell to the advantage of your house in the future and you may rely upon us, as heretofore, to give our special attention to your demands when pleased to forward them. Until then, with many wishes for your success, we remain,

Yours truly,

Wright, Banks & Co.

—*Payne's Business Letter Writer and  
Book of Commercial Forms, 1884.*

## 5. THE MODERN LETTER : HOW DID IT GET STARTED ?

If we peep into the history of letter writing, particularly business letter writing, we may see the relevance of the points emphasised in the course of this book.

There was the age of crafts.  
The mail business was small then.  
When any letter  
(epistle they called it)  
was to be written,  
they got the help of an educated person—  
often a lawyer or a priest.

The educated persons wrote the letters formally and elegantly,  
using fine and flowing language.  
The readers admired such letters and imitated them.  
For a long time, books of samples of such letters proved the letter "bible" of the businessman.

When business grew in size,  
and in terms of geographical locations,  
there was more and more correspondence.  
Businessmen being businessmen  
chose to use the lawyers less ;  
they perhaps argued  
that letter writing is mostly in repeat situations  
and that if you keep the lawyers' writings as models,  
the correspondence job is simple and less expensive.

**Till recently, the way to learn letter-writing  
was to look at the old files and  
emulate the letters of our elders  
who in turn had done the same.  
It all traces back to the book of samples  
prepared centuries ago.  
We had standard forms and expressions**

and we saw no need to change them.  
In fact, we felt a need to frown at changes.

The typewriter came in about the year 1890 ;  
it affected only  
the rate of the productions of letters,  
not the way letters were written.

In the early twenties,  
cost reduction studies were made extensively.  
Cost reduction efforts spread  
from the factory to the office.  
Since a major part of the office cost  
is the letter cost, letters were studied in depth.

*ordinary type*  
**When correspondence was streamlined and simplified,  
there was a by-product: *great surprise. what emerged was*  
a better letter, a clearer letter,  
a more effective letter.**

*when bold type*  
It was observed that the impact of a letter,  
particularly a sales letter,  
is more important than the mere cost of a letter.  
The better letter, therefore,  
came to be studied for its own sake. *bold type and a fresh para*

Effective letters were studied ;  
guidelines were developed ;  
manuals were prepared ;  
and correspondence-improvement courses were given.  
The impact of these efforts was felt  
both on the cost-reduction front  
and on the results-relations front.  
Correspondence-improvement thus became  
a function in itself.

In other words, modern correspondence  
is not an American fancy or a local fad.  
**It is, like many things in the twentieth century,  
the result of the scientific spirit,  
and the professional approach to getting things done.  
It is part of the general search  
for a better-still method of getting things done.** *save this line to accommodate the new*

## SETTING THE STAGE

*little  
mystery*

Your manners are always under examination and by committees little suspected, awarding or denying you very high prizes when you least think of it.

*Ralph Waldo Emerson*

It is a funny thing about life ; if you refuse to accept anything but the best, you very often get it.

*W. Somerset Maugham*



## 6. FIRST IMPRESSIONS

First impressions are often final impressions.

“ People look at you.  
They judge you and they trade-mark you  
and put you in a pigeonhole, saying:  
‘ That is where you belong ’.  
And they do that *just by looking at you.*”

If people do this  
with vibrant beings like you and me,  
what of the poor letter!

The reader makes snap judgements.  
**Rightly or wrongly, he judges by appearances.**  
**It is a common, human habit.**

When we walk into a room, we create an impression  
first by the general effect of our clothes  
and the way we carry ourselves.

Second, by our voice, enunciation  
and facial expression.  
And finally, by what we say and do,  
and how we say and do it.

We all know how much the first two factors  
can affect the reception of the third—  
for better or worse.  
In much the same way, every day,  
millions of letters enter business offices and homes  
and are sized up.

No matter how careful the word choice,  
how thoughtful the plan, how vivid the ideas,

the effect can be ruined by, say,  
a few ill-chosen typing strokes.  
Effective internal content is important;  
attractive external appearance is equally important.  
**Appearances do count.**

Letters are our representatives,  
our salesmen, our ambassadors.  
Would we tolerate a rude,  
untidy salesman to represent us?  
We wouldn't.

Still, some of us tolerate paper representatives—  
our letters—that are shoddy and bad-mannered, *ill-prepared*  
that reflect discredit upon our organisation.  
**And we need not do so.**

*Should not*

## 7. TO BE READ

The first sub-objective is to be read.

WHAT MAKES YOU READ A LETTER ?

When do you feel like reading a letter ?  
What kind of letters do *you* welcome ?

We are not referring here  
to letters that bring good news ;  
we are referring here  
*to the way a letter is presented.*

Regardless of style and importance of message,  
its mechanics make the first impression on the reader  
and help to set the stage.

*Please give your views here :*

---

---

---

## TO BE READ

Studies show that  
for a letter to be read,  
it should be

- \* comely
- \* courteous and
- \* concise.

The letter *presentation*  
should be attractive.

The letter *tone*  
should be courteous.

The letter size  
should be reasonably short.

We will see these aspects  
in some detail  
in the coming few pages.

#### WHAT MAKES A LETTER COMELY ?

A comely letter is an inviting letter.  
You feel like opening it,  
you feel like reading it,  
you feel like reading it through,  
you feel well-disposed  
to the writer *and* to his message.

What, according to you,  
makes a letter comely or attractive ?

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Regardless of our style and  
the importance of the message,  
the mechanics of the letter  
make the first impression on our reader  
and aid or detract from clarity.

When we talk about  
the importance of the first impression,  
one may be tempted to ask:  
Is the reader such a soft and touchy person ?  
Perhaps he is not. *Nor* is he a saint.  
Being an above-average person, he tends to  
react in certain ways to certain impulses.

**It pleases him if the letter is attractive.**

#### AND WHAT MAKES A LETTER ATTRACTIVE ?

**The desire to make it quietly attractive  
is more important than the niceties of doing so.**

Many factors  
make for the comeliness of a letter—  
aesthetically attractive and easy on the eye—  
and these are a few:

- \* The display
- \* The balance
- \* The proportion
- \* The letter-head design
- \* The typewriter ribbon
- \* The typing
- \* The way the letter is folded.

Each one is "a little thing";  
cumulatively, however, the impact is *not little*.  
For example, typing the correct address,  
giving instructions, like "*personal*"  
at the left hand corner of the envelope,  
are little things.

So are the routine proprieties.  
If any of these are treated as little *and overlooked*  
the letter gets a bad start.

Whatever suggests sloppiness,  
ignorance or inefficiency  
forfeits the most important thing in business—  
confidence in our ability to deliver the goods.  
Our letter must suggest, therefore,  
by its very appearance that we are  
a competent, alert organisation.

The same is true of form.  
Form creates the first impression  
and a comely form creates  
a favourable first impression.

We create a comely form  
by giving meticulous attention to the mechanics of it,  
like the arrangement of the page or  
the width of the margins.

**A letter looks comely  
when it looks like a picture in a frame.**

This means some planning on the part of the typist ;  
and given the suggestion,  
he or she will give the letter a good effect.

The typist should, however, be given the tools—  
a well-maintained typewriter, with clean types,  
a fresh enough ribbon and crisp letter paper.  
All these tools—including good letter paper—  
are now available in our country.  
True, all that is available is not the best.  
With some effort, however,  
what is good for our purpose  
can be found in the market.

**The added effect  
warrants the extra effort and expense.**

The typist may need some additional training ;  
but once we start *insisting* on good, clean typing  
without over-typing and stains—  
we get it.

We can make it a rule  
that a letter not well-typed  
will not be signed by us,  
will not be sent out from our organisation.

This may mean additional cost and delay  
because of the need for re-typing ;  
but unless we *keep our level of acceptance  
high enough* at this stage  
we will be risking some of the precious intangibles.

What the typist makes, the despatcher can mar ;  
therefore, we need to train the despatcher too  
in folding the letter.  
Otherwise, we run the risk of  
his folding it in a clumsy way,

and thereby spoiling all the good effect produced by the care and effort taken till then.

This is not much ado about nothing. Attention-getting plays an essential part in business correspondence. Our letter is competing with other letters for the reader's attention.

**Getting that attention, making the addressee feel like reading our letter, is our first sub-objective.**

### WE ARE JUDGED BY OUR LETTERS

A business letter represents an organisation; it can be compared to a company's representative.

A letter represents the writer too. The writer wants to be represented favourably and not as careless or rude, not as tactless or thoughtless.

A letter is as revealing as one's clothes, speech—often even more revealing than one's manners.

Let us be as well-groomed in our letters as we are in our dress—  
as well-mannered as we are in our personal contacts.

Let us not write a letter and send it, if we are not proud of it.

Even our intimate friends judge us by our letters. So, let us not allow any letter to go out unless we are sure it does justice to us, it does credit to us in every way, it creates a good impression on the reader.

## 8. COURTESY ELEMENT

What do we mean by courtesy ?

Sure enough, we can say whether it is present or not in a letter.

Courtesy, as applied to business letters, can be stated as:

1. Prompt and complete replies to all letters that require acknowledgement ;
2. Intelligent and sympathetic understanding of a customer's problems and a genuine desire to be of service ;
3. Casting aside suspicions and giving the customer the benefit of the doubt until he proves himself unworthy ;
4. A friendly, cheerful, cordial and urbane style of writing ;
5. Use of correct titles and salutations ;
6. Putting ourselves in the other person's place and treating him as we would like to be treated.

In Western countries, companies give the greatest attention to courtesy ; they go all out to train their staff in courteous behaviour.

Some of us might have seen a delightful Bell Telephone advertisement in the Post which read:

### ON THE SPOT

*Some materials for new telephone service are still scarce . . . but reasonableness, courtesy and kindness we can provide in full quantity, for we make them ourselves on the spot . . . . .*



Why do they do so ?

In business correspondence, no quality does more to impress a reader favourably than courtesy.

Clearness, conciseness and correctness make one readily understood, but courtesy makes one *liked*.

Whether we look at it from the business goodwill point of view, or we look at it from the point of view of smooth relations, courtesy is all important.

If courtesy is such a constructive and positive power, we should know its enemies.

The main ones are anger, tactlessness, bluntness and stereotyped language.

How can one be courteous ?

We all know the answer.

Basically, courtesy is an attitude of mind.

It is based on

self-respect, kindness and understanding.

It must come from the heart as well as from the head.

#### WHAT MAKES A LETTER COURTEOUS ?

From a simple thing */ direct*  
like the right spelling of the addressee's name,  
to an intangible thing */ implied*  
like the tone of the letter,  
many items make a letter courteous.

More than knowing those many items, what is significant is realising the place of courtesy in business correspondence.

We do not react favourably

to a discourteous letter,  
and others don't either.

We do not explain it away by saying *overlook it*  
the discourteous letter was written  
when the writer was in a depressed mood.  
In fact, we hold it against him  
and, of course, his organisation.  
Other readers do the same.

Permitting a letter not-so-courteous  
to leave our table or office  
is risking business today,  
is risking business tomorrow.

We will now quickly see the obvious  
and the not-so-obvious  
that makes a letter discourteous or courteous.

#### WHAT MAKES A LETTER DISCOURTEOUS ?

Overlooking routine proprieties does so.  
For example, overlooking  
the right spelling of the addressee or  
not prefixing the name  
with the appropriate honorifics.

#### AND WHAT MAKES IT COURTEOUS ?

*A friendly greeting does so.*  
When possible and permissible,  
greeting the reader *by name* helps.  
All of us like to see and hear our name.

I say "permissible" because  
some readers like to be addressed as "Sir".  
And we have to abide by their preferences.  
Courtesy, however, lies  
not so much in courtesy expressions  
as in the way we say things.  
While courtesy expressions cannot be ignored.  
they are not all that matter.

The friendliness is more in the attitude.

The effective letter-writer concedes that the other man is just as concerned, that the transactions proceed smoothly without confusions, upsets or losses. If there has been a delay in a payment, or in a despatch or in the transfer of papers, he goes about on the assumption that there is probably a good reason for it. This attitude enables him to take an understanding, tactful and courteous approach *even in a difficult situation.*

It is possible to use a cordial tone of letter in normal times:  
only when we are provoked,  
do we tend to write an impolite letter.

It would be well to ask at this stage:  
What do others consciously do  
to make their letters courteous?  
And particularly when  
they have reason to be discourteous?

When a situation upsets them,  
they "count ten"—  
they postpone writing the letter.

Or if they do write a "chew out" letter  
to fellow employees or outsiders,  
they hold it over to the next day—  
for re-reading and, often, re-writing.  
They also dictate a nasty letter—  
to get it off their chest—  
but add an instruction to the steno:  
**Don't type it out!**

The guideline they have is that  
whatever the provocation,

they will not permit a discourteous letter  
to go over their signature,  
to go on their letter-head.

An offensive communication sounds doubly offensive  
when put on paper;  
and we cannot retract it.



Counting Ten

## IV

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### DELIVERING THE MESSAGE

Unless one is a genius, it is best to aim at being intelligible.

*Anthony Hope*

If language is not clear, then what is said is not what is meant; if what is said is not what is meant, then what ought to be done remains undone.

*Confucius*

Regarding language as an apparatus of symbols for the conveyance of thought, we may say that, as in mechanical apparatus, the more simple and the better arranged its parts, the greater will be the effect produced.

*Herbert Spencer*

## 9. WHAT IS THE MESSAGE ?

**The second sub-objective is to be understood.**

We have seen  
that it is desirable *to set the stage*  
or get the reader in a favourable frame of mind  
for the message being received,  
*and* received well.

The basic purpose of business correspondence is  
that the message in our head  
should reach the head of the reader.  
If the reader does not clearly understand our message,  
he cannot promptly respond to our letter.  
**The first essential for understanding, therefore,  
is CLARITY.**

**The message should be clear to us**  
before we can make it clear to the reader.  
We should check to see  
whether the matter we wish to convey  
is clear to us in the first instance.

*A message being clear to us*  
**does not, however, automatically mean**  
*it will be clear to others.*  
We have to make some effort  
to create the effect of clarity.

And achieving clarity is not easy.

It is not easy  
because of the many barriers  
in the communication process.

One way to tackle these barriers  
is to *give conscious attention*  
to this prime element in communication—  
namely, clarity.

There is considerable "fog"  
in a good part of our writing.  
And when there is fog,  
to use an airline analogy,  
the message cannot "land".

One may argue that  
we can remove the fog in our head,  
the fog from the way we express ourselves,  
**but what of the fog in the reader's head?**

The fog in the reader's head  
is certainly a possibility;  
but that comes under the non-controllable category.

Even assuming that possibility,  
**we need not aggravate it**  
by making our writing foggy!

If what we write is not clear to the reader,  
if he misunderstands what we write,  
we have wasted our time, energy and stationery;  
we have not communicated.

If we are goal-oriented,  
we will be reader-centered too.  
If we are reader-centered,  
we will vote and work for clarity—  
in thought *and* expression.

#### WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO FOG?

What do you think contributes  
to fog or non-clarity?

From your experience and observation  
(of letters received by you)  
what would you say are the approaches  
that stand in the way  
of the message being readily understood?

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## 10. COMPLEXITY & CLARITY

### Complexity makes for fog.

Here is a one-sentence paragraph of 188 words.

To consider the world in its length and breadth, its various history, the many races of man, their starts, their fortunes, their mutual alienation, their conflicts; and then their ways, habits, governments, forms of worship; their enterprises, their aimless courses, their random achievements and acquirements, the impotent conclusion of long-standing facts, the tokens so faint and broken of a superintending design, the blind evolution of what turns out to be great powers or truths, the progress of things, as if from unreasoning elements, not towards final causes, the greatness and littleness of man, his far-reaching aims, his short duration, the curtain hung over his futurity, the disappointments of life, the defeat of good, the success of evil, physical pain, mental anguish, the prevalence and intensity of sin, the pervading idolatries, the corruptions, the dreary hopeless irreligion, that condition of the whole race so fearfully yet exactly described in the Apostle's words: "having no hope and without God in the World"—all this is a vision to dizzy and appal, and inflicts upon the mind the sense of a profound mystery which is absolutely beyond human solution.

This is a single sentence. It has 188 words.

It was written by Cardinal Newman.

Newman wrote it in the nineteenth century.

We are not in the nineteenth century;  
and we are not in the same "business" as Newman.



Complex sentences loaded with ideas  
give the reader too much to grasp at one time.  
Here is a message written in two ways.  
Won't you say that  
the second version is easier to read ?

On the fabricated plastic parts, which are a substantial part of our total finished product cost, we anticipate only a moderate increase, in our own case, because several companies are competing for our business, and barring a major war, we can anticipate continuation of unrestricted buying in a free market. (One sentence: 50 words)

The cost of fabricated plastic parts affects the cost of our finished product materially because these parts constitute a substantial portion of our product. Fortunately, several companies are anxious to sell us the parts we need. This competition will keep the anticipated increase in the cost of fabricated items moderate, we believe, unless a major war interferes with the operation of a free market. (Three sentences: 64 words)

Complex sentences often result in  
the separation of words that should work together.  
Here is an example:

Although this *company* seeks constantly to improve the quality of the *service* provided and to maintain the excellence of the *catalogue* furnished free of charge, the regulations which refer to *it* prevent accomplishment of these aims. (One sentence: 36 words)

In this sentence, what does the pronoun *it* refer to ?  
Company ? Service ? Catalogue ? Who can tell ?  
Again complex sentences often shift  
the burden of organizing ideas

from the writer, who should do the job,  
to the reader.

Consider this example:

In many instances we write a second letter asking for clarification unless we find we ourselves made an error, but then we send an explanatory form letter except when the amount involved is more than Rs. 50 in which case the whole matter is brought to the attention of Mr. . . . . or if he is away we go to Mr. . . . . superior, and sometimes his secretary can handle the problem. (One sentence: 69 words)

A better way of saying this would be:

Usually we ask for clarification. If we find, however, that we made an error and the amount involved is Rs. 50 or less, we send an explanatory form letter. Mr. . . . . is responsible for correcting errors of more than Rs. 50. When he is away and his secretary hasn't been authorized to correct errors in his absence, cases of this kind go to Mr. . . . . , superior. (4 sentences: 64 words)

Complex words also add to confusion.

For example, see the following instruction:

These forms are obsolete and should be consigned to the receptacles utilised in disposing of your daily accumulation of trash.\*

Complex construction, complex sentences, complex expressions, and complex words make for fog.

They are an additional but avoidable hindrance to clear communication.

\* To mean, "since these forms are obsolete, "throw them away".

To reduce fog, therefore, effective letter-writers play down complexity, and play up simplicity. They go in for simple constructions, simple sentences and simple words.

**In a country where English is the language of business, and where the status of English is still uncertain, simplicity becomes almost a situational necessity.**

Pedantic expressions are neither necessary nor wise ; instead of impressing, they irritate the reader. We are writing to inform and influence, not impress or irritate.

The uninformed way of writing is to say what one has to say in as complicated a way as possible. **The more efficient and modern way is to make the message as clear as words can make it.**

#### TO KEEP IT SIMPLE

To keep our writing simple,  
what do we do ?  
Can we spell it out ?

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#### WHAT DO OTHERS DO ?

They observe that constant awareness is needed because habit, custom and tradition are all in favour of complexity.

They point to the customers' familiarity with the English language and say:  
The simpler the language the better the chances of being understood properly.

They add that even highly educated people don't mind simple language. *welcome*  
"They too are in business".  
They want to read your letter faster, get the point with certainty.

They deliberately avoid parading their education, showing off a big vocabulary or vast technical knowledge.  
They use the findings of readability research.\*

### **They keep their paragraphs short.**

They point out that the very sight of long paragraphs is forbidding. Often, they use one para for one idea. Occasionally, they even use two paras for one idea if, in that way, the meaning stands out more clearly.

They find that the longer the sentences are, the more the words ;  
the more the words,  
the more the relationships between them—  
and so, the more the effort for the reader.  
Why not make it easy for the reader, they ask, and for that reason, **they prefer simple and compound sentences to complex sentences.**  
They pause for breath by using full stops liberally.

They play down complex expressions—  
they express the same ideas  
in two or more simple words.

They go in for familiar words,  
words that are familiar to the reader.  
Such words are easy for the reader to understand.  
They prefer *pay to remuneration,*  
*error to inadvertency, after to subsequent.*  
They play down or keep out latinised words,  
e.g., *ab initio, ad infinitum, pari passu.*

\* Please see appendix.

*There is no where in  
this book  
any appendix*

**They use short simple words.**

They explain it thus:

“In your conversation you use simple words, not five-syllable ones.

Why not do the same in paper-conversation?”

For example, they ask:

|             |    |     |               |
|-------------|----|-----|---------------|
| Why not use | do | for | accomplish    |
| write       | „  |     | correspond    |
| try         | „  |     | endeavour     |
| help        | „  |     | assist        |
| often       | „  |     | frequently    |
| so          | „  |     | consequently  |
| about       | „  |     | approximately |
| but         | „  |     | however       |
| sent        | „  |     | forwarded     |
| read        | „  |     | peruse        |
| live        | „  |     | reside        |
| keep        | „  |     | retain        |
| find        | „  |     | locate        |
| go          | „  |     | attend        |
| bought      | „  |     | purchased     |
| talk        | „  |     | converse      |
| tell        | „  |     | acquaint      |
| expect      | „  |     | anticipate    |
| fire        | „  |     | conflagration |
| talks       | „  |     | negotiations  |
| end         | „  |     | terminate ?   |

**They exercise caution when they use complex terms.**

They concede that unusual words—

for example technical terms—

are sometimes necessary and

we should not hesitate to use them.

But they add that we should remember

to define, explain or illustrate them.

## 11. VERBOSITY AND CLARITY

**Another contributor to non-clarity is verbosity—  
“fat”, undue fat.**

If we use too many *avoidable words*,  
the message tends to get clouded,  
the message tends to get lost in words.

*unnecessary*

Some of us are so fond of words  
that we lose sight of the message.  
We try to impress the reader  
and we forget that our job is to express.

Let us remember this too:  
when any piece of writing is unduly long,  
the reader does not get the mental set to read it.  
“I shall read it later”  
is the busy man’s reaction,  
and it is often an unspecified “later”!

We should always remember  
that our mail reaches the reader  
in unfavourable conditions—  
the reader is in the midst of  
telephone calls, summonses to conferences,  
and a flood of compelling mail.

To compete for attention,  
a letter should be brief, not discouragingly long.  
In a sense, a concise letter is a courteous letter.  
It respects the other man’s time.

The modern letter is functional, not leisurely.

### CONCISENESS CONTRIBUTES TO CLARITY

Let us consider this extract from a letter:  
If we come to consider whether we should allocate  
this particular expense to the current revenue

account or whether we should treat it as a deferred expense we have to take into account the question as to whether or not in our opinion it relates to a future period because of the benefit derived from the expense in question is more likely to accrue in this future period than in the period with which we are dealing and in this case we should charge it only in this future period and not against current revenue.

This is not clear.

A wordy letter is often vague and confusing.

Let us consider a rewritten para:

If this expense relates to a future period, we should charge it only <sup>the benefit from an</sup> then and not against current revenue. at that period

When the writing is concise, the message tends to stand out.

Being precise, being to the point does take effort but it pays in more than one way.

Firstly, the message is clear.  
Secondly, the chances of being misunderstood and the consequences thereof are less.  
Thirdly, the labour cost of correspondence is less.  
Fourthly, the reading time and effort for the addressee are less.  
Fifthly, it contributes to force, tempo and suggestiveness.  
And finally, it gives a good impression about the writer and his organisation.

#### TO KEEP IT CONCISE

Do we welcome a concise letter?  
If we do, we may have noticed

a few characteristics of such letters.  
What could they be?  
Can we spell them out here in brief?

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## WHAT DO OTHERS DO ?

### **They think the message through.**

Having a clear idea of what they have to write, they say, makes for concise writing.

### **They call off false courtesy.**

They adopt a direct, friendly tone. Just as it is not courtesy to be abrupt, they realise it is not courtesy to waste the reader's time by irrelevancies.

### **They get to the point.**

They get to the point right at the beginning of the letter. They do not repeat a large part of the incoming letter. They do not say, for example, reference is made to your letter of . . . in which you requested a copy of . . . They answer questions directly without repeating them.

### **They reconsider conventional writing.**

They say "Please note that" *instead of* "We wish to bring to your attention",  
"On July 15 you asked" *instead of*  
"reference is made to your letter of July 15 in which you have asked".



They are thrifty, not stingy with words.  
**They use all the words necessary.**

They say what is necessary in their letter  
and then stop.

They keep out words and phrases and sentences  
that contribute nothing to the reader's perception  
of the writer's meaning.

They avoid what Dr. Flesch describes as  
"sentence elephantiasis".

**They drop the pointless epithets.**

The adjective, it has been said,  
is the enemy of the noun.

Epithets can be excessive in quantity  
and deficient in quality.

They avoid unnecessarily heavy phrasing.

They avoid the use of five words when two would do:  
they avoid big words where common ones would do.

For example.

|           |        |                |                            |
|-----------|--------|----------------|----------------------------|
| They find | for    | is better than | for the purpose of         |
|           | if     | „              | in case of                 |
|           | to     | „              | in order to                |
|           | please | „              | will you be good enough to |
|           | when   | „              | on that occasion           |
|           | now    | „              | at the present time        |
|           | soon   | „              | in the near future         |
|           | like   | „              | along the lines of         |
|           | so     | „              | for this reason            |
|           | stop   | „              | put an end to              |
|           | by     | „              | in accordance with         |
|           | before | „              | prior to the start of.     |

They apply a test like this to their writing:  
**Every reader should reflect either** *word*  
**what we wish to convey or**  
**what he wants to know.**  
**Anything else is superfluous.**

They use the blue pencil.  
On important letters, and periodically,  
they go over the draft or the copy  
with a "blue pencil".

## BEING CONCISE AND BEING CURT

Conciseness is not curtness.  
Conciseness is saying what has to be said  
in the fewest words possible.  
If we have to say "no", for example, we should  
give the reader explanations,  
offer possible alternatives,  
and extend assurances of careful consideration.  
To retain or salvage goodwill,  
we have to use the needed words.

Let us not, however, make a fetish of conciseness.  
Our idea is to avoid avoidable fat, <sup>only</sup>  
not all flesh <sup>with</sup> that the bones show: <sup>ing</sup>

Let us not tend to the other extreme of curtness.

Being curt is  
mechanically applying the guideline: Be concise.  
When a message is curtly conveyed,  
an action may result,  
but it may leave a bad taste,  
it may affect future transactions.

The following example gives an idea  
of the two extremes of curtness and obsequiousness  
and the happy middle course of conciseness.

*Curt :*

Dear Sir:

Your order for 1 dozen lamp shades was despatched  
by passenger yesterday.

Very truly

Concise :

Dear Mr. Doshi:

Your lamp shades-1 dozen assorted-were despatched by passenger yesterday, June 11. They should reach you by Friday, June 13.

We will be interested to know if they sell as well as other retailers have led us to believe. I'll be watching for a repeat order.

Sincerely

Insincere :

Dear Mr. Doshi:

We went to special pains to select the designs in the lamp shades you ordered. These were despatched yesterday by passenger and you should have them on Friday.

Please let me know how fast they sell. I have always expected your stores to set the pace on a new item and in this case I am positive you will have a runaway sale.

I will be looking forward to your letter. So, don't disappoint me. You are our favourite customer.

With friendly regards

## 12. CONCRETENESS AND CLARITY

Another contributor to clarity is concreteness.

The aim of writing is to make our meaning plain.  
The concrete word helps in the process ;  
the abstract word hinders.

Concrete words are ones that stand for things  
that we and our reader can see,  
hear, taste, touch or smell.

Concrete picturable verbs and nouns  
reflect facts and events  
as directly as it is possible for language to do.

The more specific and concrete the word,  
the larger is the agreement  
on the meaning of the word  
among those that share a language.  
On the other hand,  
the more general and the more abstract the word,  
the less agreement there is on its meaning.

Abstract words are difficult to pin down.  
They often mean different things to different people.  
Abstract words make our writing dull and foggy.  
The more of them we use,  
the harder our writing is to understand.

Consider this sentence:

In industrial communities the chief motivation  
for the purchase of curtains is practicality.

It is abstract and hard for the reader to understand.

Consider this one:

In factory towns housewives buy curtains  
that wash well.

This one is concrete and easy to grasp.

Let us take another pair of sentences:

It is suggested that the voucher be rewritten with  
the explanation that official business was  
performed on July 10.

This does not answer the natural questions  
that arise in the reader's mind:

Who suggests? Who should rewrite the voucher?  
Who performed official business?

We suggest that you rewrite the voucher, explain-  
ing that Vijay Sarkar did official business  
on July 10.

Instead of saying "as soon as possible"  
if we say 'August 28th', it creates the image  
we want to create in the reader's mind.

In fact, the very function  
of a word is to create an image.

If concreteness does help clarity,  
why then are we not concrete?

It is not as if we *wish* to confuse people—  
it is that we are not aware of the implications,  
it is that we do not give  
sufficient thought *and* effort  
to go in for concrete expressions.

When *we* become familiar with an abstract word,  
we generally forget that it may bring only a fuzzy  
or misleading idea to the mind of our reader.

One other practical reason is  
that concrete writing is not easy;  
it is hard work in the beginning.

It may also be because of the undue influence of the politicians. The habitual use of woolly abstract terms is said to be the occupational disease of the politician, afraid as he is of committing himself.

#### WHAT DO WE DO TO MAKE WRITING CONCRETE ?

To make our writing concrete let us spell out the conscious steps we are taking now.

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#### WHAT DO OTHER PEOPLE DO TO MAKE THEIR WRITING CONCRETE ?

They accept William Cobbett's dictum, namely, "to so express as to defy the ingenuity of man to give our words any other meaning than that which we intended to express."

They see the limitations of "natural" writing. What comes naturally to them are expressions like the following—

We are hoping to despatch a substantial percentage of your order at an early date.

They note that this "natural writing" makes for vagueness, and therefore, they rewrite it:

100 pieces will be sent on Thursday, the 15th.

They strive to use words that will help the reader see precisely what they see, feel what they feel. Their words have colour, warmth and sharp outlines.

They go for picturesque language,  
a language that produces sense images,  
a language that stirs the imagination,  
a language that appeals to the senses.  
The idea is to add reality, freshness, colour,  
tone, motion or sense to thought.

They use picturable words.

For example, instead of '*unsuitable conditions*',  
they say '*no plumbing, few roads, sweltering climate*'.

They use similes and metaphors.

They say, for example,

'*He's about as organized as a can of worms.*'

They use precise words like '*house, flat, lodging*'  
as against omnibus words like '*accommodation*'.

They choose the words for the reader  
instead of letting him guess—

they will not use the word '*realistic*'  
and let them guess

whether they mean

'*sensible, practical, feasible, or workmanlike.*'

They try to empathize with the reader.

The very effort of writing to the other man  
(instead of to oneself),

takes them, they say,  
nearer to concrete writing.

The moment they strike

something abstract or unfamiliar

they try to compare it to something

that is familiar and concrete,

things their readers already see and know.

They get down to the world of people and things,  
and explain through concrete cases,  
illustrations and examples.

### 13. READABILITY & CLARITY

When any writing is readable  
it not merely gets read,  
it gets understood.

By 'readability' we mean  
"easy and interesting to read".  
"Reading ease" and "human interest"  
are the components of readability.

And what makes for readability?\*

One is the conversational style.

#### CONVERSATIONAL STYLE AND CLARITY

Relatively speaking,  
the conversational style makes for  
much easier understanding.

In a conversation,  
we use personal pronouns, we use shorter sentences,  
we use contractions (e.g., You'd), we quote, we repeat,  
we have questions and exclamations,  
we permit dialogue,  
and we make it an exchange between two:  
**all these make for clarity.**

**When we really think of it,  
writing is only talking on paper—  
it is a substitute for conversation,  
occasioned by geographical and other limitations.**

In conversational writing, however,  
the conversational touch

\* For a note on Readability Research & Readability Formula,  
please see appendix. ??



is almost deliberately removed ;  
with the result that clarity suffers.

Fiction writers realise the value  
of directly addressing the reader ;  
and they use this knowledge to good advantage.

If we introduce the conversational elements,  
if we write as we talk, face to face,  
if we use simple, *direct* English,  
our writing should be clearer to the reader.

When one speaks face to face,  
the practical and responsive nature of communication  
is very clear.

Readers understand us better  
when we write as we talk.

Here is a small sample  
of a letter couched in conversational terms:  
If you need more of these forms (Form No. 742—sample  
attached) call me at Extn: 410.—*as against*  
F / In the event that you are desirous of obtaining  
additional supplies of the form No. 742, kindly  
contact this office at your earliest convenience.

## WHAT CHARACTERISES CONVERSATION ?

Short sentences, the active voice,  
and to-the-point phrases,  
as against  
involved sentences, guarded phraseology,  
the passive voice and stuffy expressions,  
characterise conversation.

When we converse, we use simple,  
common words, not five-syllable ones.  
We say 'pay' and not 'remuneration',  
we say 'lives' and not 'is domiciled in'.

We do not use long, involved sentences,  
weighed down by big, sometimes vague, words.

We realise that  
in conversation there is no place  
for stuffed-shirt expressions  
like '*we beg to advise*', '*the writer regrets*'  
and '*yours of the 10th ultimo*'.

When we converse,  
we think of the other man,  
*his* interests, *his* activities,  
*his* likes and dislikes.

### HOW FAR CONVERSATIONAL ?

It is true that in conversation  
we are not very particular about grammar and idiom.  
The suggestion, then, is not  
that we should make our writing  
conversational in the sense that  
we take liberties with the conventions  
of language, grammar or syntax.

As we do over the phone,  
or in an interview with a person across the table,  
to get the message across,  
we should talk on paper—  
in a simple, straight, clear way.  
But it must be put together pleasingly  
and with grammatical accuracy ;  
it must be factually correct,  
with a touch of dignity suiting the occasion.

The answer to the question:  
*How far conversational*  
is that we keep the personal touch.

### BE PERSONAL

We write to a person we know

or to a person we do not know,  
but all the time we write *to a person*.

The logical slant therefore is the personalised slant.

At this moment, we need not fathom  
why most of us turn impersonal  
the moment we apply pen to paper.

What is relevant is to know  
that the trend in letter-writing is to personalise.

We address people by name.  
"A man's name is music to his ears".

Even where we don't, we use the personal touch;  
we talk in terms of you and I.

We say, for example,

*instead of*

I checked.

We have received.

A thorough study con-  
vinced us that we could  
submit. . .

A thorough and complete  
study revealed that with  
regard to the possibility  
of our submitting. . .

If we keep in mind that  
letter writing is talking on paper,  
if we visualize the reader sitting across the table,  
we can easily give the personal touch to our letters.

Here are some obvious ways of giving that touch.

We can use personal words and personal sentences.

Personal words are:

- a. all first, second and third person pronouns (except the neuter pronouns.), e.g., I, you, he, she and they;

- b. all words that have masculine or feminine genders, e.g., mother, brother, actress, Rajesh, Laxmi ;
- c. the group words, e.g., people and folks.

Personal sentences are:

- a. Spoken sentences, marked by quotation marks or otherwise ;
- b. Questions, commands, requests and other sentences directly addressed to the reader, e.g.,  
Does this sound reasonable to you ?  
This is a point you should not overlook.  
Do this for 10 minutes a day for 6 weeks.



Writing is talking on paper.

#### 14. FAMILIARITY AND CLARITY

What is familiar is easier to understand than what is not familiar.  
That it is familiar to us is not material—that it may be familiar to our reader is.

It is not the big word or the small word, the technical word or the non-technical word that matters; it is the word likely to be unfamiliar to the *reader*. If we use familiar words— words likely to be familiar to the reader—it becomes easy and convenient for him to understand us. If we use unfamiliar words, the simple are puzzled and the sophisticated annoyed.

This is such a simple matter. Still we mention it here. Why? The very simplicity of this matter tempts us not to give it attention. For reasons of showmanship or for other reasons, we tend to display the big, strange words that we know. **We would do well to ask: Is it familiar to the reader? If it is not likely to be, we have to relate what we say to something that is familiar to him.**

Using the familiar expressions is not hard. We happen to know the reader in many cases. We know therefore what is likely to be familiar to him.

## 15. ORGANISATION AND CLARITY

### Organisation makes for clarity.

Organisation refers to thinking in advance (or planning) what to say, and in what order, where to start, where to go first, second and third, and where to end.

To emphasise the place of organising a letter, one thinker has put it this way:

If you don't know any grammar,  
you will have much trouble with writing.

If you don't know how to organise,  
you simply can't write.

When we don't plan, we write letters like this:

"We do not understand why you have permitted your account to remain unpaid for four months. Of course, you understand that our terms are full payment of an account by the tenth of the month following the purchase. The only reason we can think of for your failure to make payment is that you are a careless person who does not value contracts.

This letter is written in the friendliest spirit, but we are obliged to judge a man by his record and to act accordingly."

When we don't organise, we tend

- \* to produce a letter that has no clear-cut purpose ;
- \* to omit something essential to the accomplishment of our purpose ;
- \* to introduce some irrelevant material ;

- \* to zigzag from one topic to another ;
- \* to repeat points ;
- \* to produce a needlessly long letter or one too short to accomplish its purpose.

When we observe skilled letter-writers, we note that they ask themselves a few questions and set themselves a few guidelines. The following comments are based on these questions and guidelines.

1. Just what do I want the reader to do, specifically ?  
 "Specifically" is the key word.  
 Being specific helps give direction and get action.
2. What kind of person is the reader ?
3. To determine the proper tone, what we should stress in our message, what appeal or approach we should use, how much information is necessary, and how simple our style must be—to determine all these, we must "know" the reader.  
 Age? Profession or kind of work ?  
 Title or status in that work ?  
 Geographical locations ?  
 Political, economic, sociological and religious views ?  
 Interests ? Economic status ?  
 Education ? Living habits ?  
 Attitude towards us ?  
 Knowledge of the subject of our letter ?

If the reader is our acquaintance, we can easily personalise our answers.

If the reader is not known,  
we have to look for clues.  
We do get some clues  
if we analyse the other man's letter.

4. What facts will the reader need to know ?
5. What can I offer the reader  
that will induce him to act ?

We will act only when we get something we want.  
Our reader is not any different.  
So unless we can offer him something  
which he'll want,  
we may not ask anything of him.  
He won't oblige.  
This footnote is necessary at this stage  
and at many another.  
The slant is on the sales letter.  
The sales letter is the more difficult  
and more important letter.  
All letters in a sense are sales letters ;  
it is only a matter of degree.

6. What objections may the reader raise ?

We must foresee the objections and answer them  
before they are raised.  
That does not mean we tell him—  
These are your likely objections  
and here are my rebuttals!  
That way we'll remind him of objections  
he never thought of.  
What we do is to word our statements  
so carefully  
and weave them into our letter so delicately  
as to answer likely objections.

7. What is the best order of ideas and facts ?

A chronological one, a logical one or one  
that goes for a desired psychological effect ?



Competent writers give three good rules to themselves:

- a. If you've good news for the reader, begin with it and then give necessary explanations.
- b. If you have disappointing news for the reader, start pleasantly and give your justifying reasons before the bad news; and end it pleasantly.
- c. If you are asking the reader to do something he may be reluctant to do, apply your selling techniques. The first part of the letter will emphasize his interests and desires. Then you can ask him to do what you want as means of getting something he wants.

Planning, we see,  
gives letters a sense of direction.  
Because of letter organisation  
and sequence of ideas,  
it makes them clearer.  
It helps to put the emphasis where it belongs.  
It assures complete coverage  
of all necessary points  
and thereby avoids a further exchange of letters  
which cost money and time.  
It gives them the proper psychological effect.  
It pays off.

Can letter on p 53  
be rewritten and  
given here.

4 conts 5 lines long  
& in one para

## 16. A SELF-IMPOSED LIMITATION

The major obstacle to effective letter writing is a superstition.

The superstition is that when we write, especially an official letter, we "should" be formal, stuffy.

**No one requires us to be incomprehensible. If we are incomprehensible, it is a self-imposed limitation.**

This self-imposed limitation arises out of certain misconceptions.

One is that we unconsciously assume that formal, unreadable rhetoric is expected of us in the position we happen to fill or the organisation we belong to. *feeling*

If we check or analyse, we will find that this is not true ; but we rarely check or analyse.

*2/2/5*  
*feeling*  
Another reason is the feeling that we are going on record and what we write should have dignity and the additional feeling that simplicity is not dignity. We have a mistaken notion that it shows better education to use long, fancy words and roundabout phrases ; that simplicity is not dignity.

A *third* is the belief that to be brief is too brusque, and politeness requires

the bare facts to be wrapped up  
in "the cottonwool of qualifying words or clauses."

A *fourth* is to impress our boss;  
and we assume we impress the boss  
by making letters involved.

A *fifth* is we tend to think communication skill  
is for the specialist—  
the advertisement and public relations men.  
The fact is that the skill—  
the skill in untangling detail  
and absorbing its meaning;  
and the skill in passing the meaning to others  
in a form that will result in projected action—  
should be as much ours as it is of the specialists.

Maybe, our schools and colleges are responsible—  
we have probably been given the impression  
that "writing is some rather mystical, special thing"  
and that, therefore,  
it has to be on the "flowery" side.  
At schools and colleges we have learned formal,  
not functional or situational writing.  
The fact is that writing simply and clearly  
does not mean  
writing flatly, without beauty or style.  
Clear writing can have substance and vigour,  
colour and expression.

# V

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## PAVING THE WAY

More ordinary writers on more ordinary themes must keep the sympathy of their reader, if they would produce their full effect, or perhaps any effect at all. Even a scientist discussing neutrons or dwarf stars may damage his case by acrimony or arrogance.

*F. L. Lucas*

The mischief of pet words and phrases is that they become such favourites that they seduce their users from clarity of thought; they mesmerise them and numb their discrimination. They are so lost in their pet phrases that the purpose and the reader get ignored.

*Sir Ernest Gowers*

## 17. THE TONE

Whatever the contents of the letter, whatever the immediate purpose of the letter, it has to be acceptable to the reader ; otherwise, the response becomes uncertain.

Consider the following letter:

Your reminder came today and your application for the advertised position yesterday. You are 46 years old. So I am obliged to inform you we cannot consider you for employment with us.  
Very truly yours

Consider too the following oft-used expressions:

You are not entitled to . . . . .  
You claim that you did not receive our reminder . .  
We must tell you that you . . . . .  
We regret to note that . . . . .  
You must send us the information without fail  
by . . . . .  
You misunderstood our letter . . . . .  
Please explain why we should not . . . . .  
Your undated letter addressed to the wrong  
branch . . . . .

The letters are clear, concise and well-organised ; and so are the other statements ; but they cannot be called effective. They are not effective because they are not acceptable ; they are not acceptable because they lack the proper tone.

**The tone of a letter determines whether the letter is acceptable to the reader or not.**

Even though a letter may be clear,  
complete, concise and correct,  
if it is faulty in tone, it antagonises  
the reader.

The faulty tone makes the reader  
sick of us (the writer), our organisation  
and our economic system.

The reader does not want to "do business with us",  
if he can help it.

If tone is all that important,  
what is tone and what is the right tone?

The tone of a letter refers to the way  
it sounds to the reader.

Tone is not what we say,  
but how we say it!  
It is what reveals our attitude towards our reader.

How do we get the right tone in our letters?

In theory, the answer is simple:  
it takes a few attitudes, disciplines and techniques.  
In practice, however, it is hard:  
it takes thought, care and effort.

A good tone is a product of a good *attitude*.  
If we are arbitrary, affected,  
commanding, critical, grudging, insincere,  
inconsistent, insulting, offensive, petulant,  
stereotyped, superior, or suspicious,  
it will show in the tone.  
To get the right tone, we should tackle it  
at the source, namely, our attitude.

Tone, it has been noted,  
is basically a matter of attitudes.  
This is how one authority relates tone to attitudes.

The negative tone may result from  
any one of the following attitudes:

anger, bluntness, curtness, complaint, carelessness, defeat, disinterestedness, displeasure, discontent, egotism, failure, fear, hesitance, irritability, insolence, obstinacy, refusal, suspicion, selfishness, slothfulness, slovenliness, trickery, uncertainty.

The positive tone may result from one or more of these attitudes:

accuracy, assurance, adjustment, ambition, confidence, courtesy, calm, cooperation, diplomacy, desire to serve, generosity, honesty, initiative, level-headedness, pleasure, neatness, success, satisfaction, trust, triumph, tact, thoughtfulness, willingness.

*Discipline* refers to tone control; it means not letting our "downs" or "tempers" be reflected in our letter. It means that we do not "do and then think". It means that we are alert to the implications before we write a letter, if we can; before we mail it anyway.

If we are alert to how the words sound we will keep off the jarring tone. We will keep off the jarring tone even if the other person adopts an unreasonable or offensive tone.

Effective letter writers say they place themselves in the addressee's place and ask themselves questions like these:

How will this letter sound to the reader?  
Will it create a jarring effect on the reader?  
Will the reader think I am fair?  
Will the reader think I am sincere?  
Will the reader think I have done  
all that I can do to perform a service?

Given these attitudes and disciplines,  
a few *techniques* come handy, and they read:

Be positive  
Be fresh  
Be courteous and friendly  
Be sincere and helpful  
Be natural  
Be reasonable.

In the following sections we will see in some detail  
two of these techniques, namely,  
*Be positive* and *Be fresh*.

The rest have been referred to  
in the course of the other sections.

One point deserves underscoring at this stage.

That is, we are seeing  
elements of a letter in some detail  
only for purposes of study and understanding.

Every element affects every other element  
and there will be seeming overlaps.

**A letter is a totality  
and what we aim at is  
total effectiveness.**

Parts give the effect only where  
they are intelligently integrated.



## 18. BE POSITIVE

All messages have content and intent—  
the expressed words and the underlying tone.  
The reader reads and reacts to both.

A positive expression appeals to people.  
In letters, as in personal contact, people respond  
most eagerly to enthusiasm and good cheer.

In a recent contest  
of "Best business letter of the year"  
twenty winning letters were selected.

Comments one of the judges:

"The writers drew up words so gracious, so genuine,  
so sincere that readers would say

'these are men we should like to do business with.'

Such words cannot be ignored.

They are like friendly handshakes . . .  
signs of goodwill."

Here are some of the words  
that were found in the 20 letters.

|                 |            |             |             |
|-----------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| Thank you       | Genuine    | Smile       | Enjoy       |
| Your confidence | Satisfying | Loyal       | Honestly    |
| Grateful        | Serve you  | Clean slate | Best wishes |
| Willingness     | Splendid   | Good folks  |             |

You can sense the pleasant glow  
that hovers over these positive words.

Now look at the other end of the scale.  
Here are some words that were nowhere to be found  
in any of the twenty letters.

|                         |                  |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| Why have you ignored    | Your neglect     |
| Your insinuation        | We take issue    |
| Your complaint          | Why not be fair  |
| Frankly, it seems to us | We are surprised |

Not our responsibility  
Surely you don't expect  
We do not intend  
Suggests the chiseler  
Like a deadbeat

Your own carelessness  
You should know  
We must insist  
Mildly ridiculous  
Simply nonsense.

These are "chip-on-the-shoulder" words.  
They create enemies for the misguided writers  
who think they can afford to use them. *Such words*

Negative expressions depress and antagonise readers.  
Words such as 'blame', 'impossible',  
'failed' and 'neglected'  
arouse feelings of hostility unconsciously.

Even conditional words like 'if' and 'whether'  
carry a negative tone  
and give readers a feeling  
of frustration and annoyance.

Some see insults and threats in such negative words.  
"You misunderstood the simple directions"  
they interpret as "you are stupid".  
Such supersensitive people are few  
but, as writers, we cannot  
take the chance of hurting them.

**Once we see the possibility of the positive approach  
we will be able to adopt it consistently.**

Here are a number of examples:—

Positive: We appreciate your giving us this  
*opportunity* to improve our service.

Negative: We assure you it will *never* happen  
again.

Positive: Although the demand has been un-  
expectedly heavy, *we can* get your  
order to you by . . . .

Reported  
at end of page

Negative: Because of a heavy run on our stock we will be *unable* to despatch your requirements before . . . .

Positive: *Glad* to report . . . .

Negative: *Sorry* to inform you . . . .

Positive: *I am glad* to explain more fully about the terms . . . .

Negative: You made *a mistake* . . . .

Positive: We make adjustments *promptly* on the basis of careful inspection of the merchandise involved in the request for a refund.

Negative: We *never* make adjustments without seeing the merchandise that *failed* to satisfy.

Positive: *Please* call on us *whenever* we can supply information about this mechanism.

Negative: *Do not hesitate* to call on us if you need further information about this mechanism.

Positive: *Choose* the brand that is *fairly priced*.

Negative: Don't *squander* money on *overpriced* brands.

Positive: Demand exceeded supply ; but *we can* get your order for the No. 10-B generator out by September 1.

Negative: *Unfortunately* the demand for the No. 10-B generator was unusually heavy ; we will be *unable* to get your order out until September 1.

- Positive: *You'll be glad to hear that we have made a change in shipping procedures in an effort to prevent a recurrence of the incident you called to our attention.*
- Negative: *We're very sorry ; but, as you know, mistakes are bound to occur.*
- Positive: *We shall be glad to quote you a price just as soon as we have the specifications.*
- Negative: *We cannot quote you a price until we have seen the specifications.*
- Positive: *Your February payment was credited to the account of another Mr. F. Mehta. It has now been credited to your account. The account clerk responsible has been instructed to check account numbers as well as names in the future. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to improve our procedures.*
- Negative: *We sincerely regret the negligence of our account clerk who credited your February payment to another account. The error has been corrected.*
- Positive: *You get these items at this low cost because we sell them in lots.*
- Negative: *It is too inconvenient and expensive for us to sell in less than carload lots.*
- Positive: *Just as soon as we know the quantity of carburetors you wish to have, we shall be glad to get the order out for you.*
- Negative: *In your recent letter you failed to state the number of carburetors you want.*

The following suggestions from Dr. Homer L. Cox  
deserve repetition and reflection:

**Think and talk and write about  
what you can do, about what you will do;  
say all the things your reader will be glad to hear.  
You'll make more sales,  
smoothen more ruffled feelings,  
and build more goodwill.**

**Remember that your readers would rather find  
the better than the bitter in your letters.  
Serve them lemonade instead of lemons!**

skip one example  
& accommodate in  
previous page

## 19. BE FRESH

Crispness or freshness in writing adds to acceptability.

People feel favourably disposed to fresh, crisp writing.

In addition, crispness adds to clarity and vigour.

We are indeed capable of crisp, fresh writing. We do not show our capability in our letters for a number of reasons.

One reason is a superstition, a superstition that almost says: you have to be formal when you write.

Another is the jargon habit. Unconsciously, we develop this habit both during our school days and in the early part of our career.

To shed the jargon habit is hard, but we can try. Since the first step in shedding a habit lies in awareness, a fairly long section has been devoted to it.

## 20. CRISPNESS AND JARGON

The uniformed letter-writer tends to go in for one or another class of jargon. The result is that in his writing crispness suffers. It is not merely crispness that suffers, but clarity and conciseness also suffer.

Jargon is an addiction often unconsciously cultivated. This addiction may be due to an unhelpful tradition, a mistaken impression, blind imitation or the wrong focus.

The remedy is partly a matter of awareness and partly habit.

### **Awareness is half the battle.**

If we know what jargon is and what it does, if we know what the alternative is and how it is likely to help our purpose and image, we will see the point in playing down jargon in our writing.

### **We can start with the focus.**

The focus of jargon addicts (JA for short) is on impressing people, *not* expressing the message clearly. The remedy is to become goal-oriented, reader-centred.

Our goal is that the reader should welcome our letter, understand our communication, respond favourably to the message, and feel well-disposed to us and our organisation.

Our approach, therefore, should be towards clarity and acceptability.

As we will see shortly,  
jargon does not help clarity or acceptability.  
Jargon jars and irritates the reader  
and thereby makes for non-acceptability.

**JA prefers the roundabout language ;**

he does not call a spade a spade.

He does not say: The old lady died.

He says: The old lady's spirit gently released itself  
from the body.

He says:

In connection with the subject of  
wages our practice with regard  
to payment is devised with a  
view to speed.

He does not say:

Our method of  
wage payment is  
devised for speed.

Maybe, he does it all as a matter of politeness,  
or to soften the blow.

If he does so consciously, it is not jargon.

The trouble starts only

when he does it as a matter of habit.

Some centuries ago,  
the roundabout language, circumlocution,  
was a fashion ;  
*but that was centuries ago.*

**JA wishes to impress the reader.**

One way to impress the reader, according to him,  
is to use big, bold, uncommon words.

He always goes for the out-of-the-way word  
while a more familiar one is available.

He prefers "succumbed" to "died",  
"bilateral concordance" to "two-way pact".

He will say that

"a manager's authority is irrefragable as his  
responsibility is ineluctable",  
to mean

"a manager's authority is beyond dispute and he must  
accept full responsibility".



He also uses words he has recently picked up, even out of context—for example, charisma, milieu, vignette, meritocrat and archetype.

This may be for the same reason that he chooses the uncommon words.

|                            |                 |
|----------------------------|-----------------|
| He writes:                 | while he means: |
| was enamoured of           | wanted          |
| cognizant of the fact that | know . . . .    |
| readily discernible        | see . . . .     |
| pronounced                 | said.           |

The addict prefers the vague, abstract or wordy to the definite and concrete.

He says "had a fondness for" instead of "liked", "decrepit" instead of "toothless and paralyzed".

*Some of these*  
**JA has his pet phrases and words—**

character, factor, condition, in the circumstances of, in the event that, are examples— and he generously sprinkles them in his writing.

He seems to think they impress the reader. Perhaps somebody using them impressed him.

|   |   |
|---|---|
| He says:  | He will not say:                            |
| In the circumstances of Ashok returning, we must give up the claim. | If Ashok returns we must give up the claim. |

|  |   |
|--|---|
| The specialist was a strong factor in Suresh's recovery. | The specialist greatly aided Suresh's recovery. |
|--|---|

**Another way JA shows off is by being obscure.** Understand me if you can, he seems to challenge.

He comes out with expressions like this:

In conformity with the preceding point, if all the interacting parties view the given overtly similar or dissimilar traits: A, B, C, D, N, as negligible values or as no values at all, as comprising even no similarity or dissimilarity, such overt similarities/dissimilarities are innocuous in the generation of either solidarity or antagonism.

Perhaps he sincerely believes that that which is difficult is worthier than that which is clear. Or, maybe, he classifies a readable writer as a childish writer.

Or can it be that he confuses simplicity of language with juvenility of thought? He may not be aware that even men like Albert Einstein made special efforts to be intelligible to the average reader.

**JA uses cliches liberally.**

"Tender mercies", "conspicuous by its absence", "leave no stone unturned" and "acid test", are examples of cliches.

Intrinsically, there is nothing wrong with these expressions. In fact, at one time they were fresh and telling. Over a period, through over-use, they have become worn out and dull.

They have been expressively described as "ready-made language," "rubber-stamp phrases".

From the reader's point of view, a cliché has no sharpness.

Politicians are the leading customers of cliches.

They use terms that, except in a general way, are not supposed to mean

anything to the audience.

Here is a sample:

The time for evasions has passed. We must face the facts, put our shoulders to the wheel, put our house in order, meet the challenge of the dictators, carry aloft the torch of liberty, fulfil our high destiny, face the future with confidence, and march forward to victory at the polls.

Next to politicians are the untrained letter-writers. Rubber-stamp phrases come readily to them and they use them at the beginning, middle and end of their letters. If they have been in traditional organisations like the government, their stock and usage of rubber-stamp phrases is more.

Here are some samples.

*Openings :*

As per your request,

We beg to acknowledge with thanks your letter of . . .

Confirming our conversation of . . . . I wish to state . . . .

*Body :*

Please be advised that . . . .

Under active consideration . . . .

We regret that . . . .

*Closings :*

Assuring you of our best services at all times . . . .

Thanking you in advance . . . .

I look forward to hear from you.

Your prompt reply will be greatly appreciated.

**One further way he often goes about is to fill pages by saying nothing or by leaving things delightfully vague.**

For example, he says:

In the proposed study I wish to describe and evaluate representative programmes in these fields

as a means of documenting what seems to me a trend of increasing concern with the role of higher education in the improvement of inter-personal and inter-group relations and of calling attention in this way to outstanding contributions in practice.

Perhaps he has admired this capacity  
in his student days  
and cultivated it assiduously  
while he was at school or college ;  
he carries it to work-places.  
By the time he realises it does not work,  
he has done enough damage to himself  
and to the organisation to which he belongs.  
Of course, a JA here or a JA there,  
does not realise this at all.  
If he is strategically placed,  
people suffer him and  
do not dare to point out his faults.  
And, who knows, others in the organisation  
may emulate him!

## 21. OTHER TECHNIQUES THAT FACILITATE ACCEPTABILITY

To complete the argument, let us recall in brief some of the points about the other techniques (detailed elsewhere in the book.)

### **Be natural**

Real dignity lies in being oneself.  
To be cold and pompous is not natural.

One way to project ourselves as we really are, and to achieve a natural style of writing is to visualise our reader sitting across our desk.

If we do, we will be spontaneous and yet disciplined.  
We will avoid the artificial, stuffy style.  
We will not be casual or overformal.  
We will be personal and conversational.

### **Be sincere**

Nobody can tell us exactly how to make our letters sincere.  
From letters that have the ring of sincerity, we can say what gives it to, or robs it of, a letter.  
If we treat man as man and not as a computer dot, if we genuinely concede his place in the scheme of things, the following approaches become logical and easy:

Be human, not impersonal.  
Use words that stand for human beings like the names of persons or personal pronouns like *you* or *he*.

Admit mistakes: it is ever so graceful.  
Don't ignore mistakes; don't cover up mistakes.  
The other man can see through the game.  
Once he does, he will suspect all your moves.

Don't overwhelm your reader  
with intensives and emphatics.

Do not be arrogant or too modest.

Express yourself with simple dignity.

### **Be reasonable**

We are all anxious to give  
the impression that we are reasonable people  
who appreciate the other fellow's point of view,  
that we believe in give-and-take.

To maintain this impression,  
some effort is called for on occasions  
when we have to say 'no'.

In such situations,  
if we state the reasons and then the refusal,  
we sound more reasonable.

### **Be helpful**

One way to be reasonable is to be helpful.  
We may not be able to *help* every time,  
but we can *be helpful* all the time.  
Even when we are unable to help directly,  
we can help with information and leads  
that may help the other person reach his goal.

Another way to be helpful is to help him save face.  
Instead of saying, for example,

"you have not understood . . . ."

we can say

"I am glad to explain more fully about the terms . . . ."

## Be courteous and friendly

One way to be reasonable and helpful is to be courteous and friendly.

Courtesy is a lubricant of business, and every little act of courtesy makes for greater acceptability:

We can use words like "please" and "kindly" and phrases like "will you please" and "thank you".

We can use words with pleasant or natural overtones and avoid words with unpleasant or jarring overtones. Words like "filthy" and "delay" have negative overtones; words like "faith" and "genuine" have positive overtones; and words like "indicate" and "book" have neutral overtones.

Self-esteem is important to our reader, as it is to us.

We can avoid trampling on his self-esteem, even if provoked.

More positively, we can do all that we can to let him preserve it.

*we have been*

## 22. WHY THIS CONCERN FOR WORD-MANAGEMENT ?

The beginners on the one hand,  
and the technically-oriented on the other, may wonder:  
Why this much concern for word-management ?

We have already seen that the way we use words  
affects acceptability on the reader's part.

So does the way we choose words.

In conversation, what is spoken  
is done with and gone.

A careless or thoughtless remark can be retraced  
or explained or made to seem unimportant  
by the friendliness of a gesture or a smile.

In a letter, such words are on record.

In a conversation, we have  
voice, gesture and expression to help us  
make our meaning clear, our sincerity plain.

When we write, however,  
we have only the words in black and white.  
What is meant to be amusing may cause offense.

We have to take care, therefore, not to say anything  
that can be misunderstood, that can be misconstrued  
as unkind, unfriendly, ungracious or rude.

We should never use a word that might  
humiliate or belittle the reader.

We should check our letters before they are mailed.  
Particularly the ones we write in anger or despair.

We may write to pour out our feelings,  
but let us *not* mail them to any reader.

**Words are dynamite :**  
**they can help remove blocks ;**  
**they can also blast cordial relationships.**



## VI

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### GETTING ACTION

The difficulty of literature is not to write, but to write what you mean; not to affect your reader, but to affect him precisely as you wish.

*R. L. Stevenson*

"Facts speak for themselves". This is nonsense; facts don't talk at all; they have no meaning whatsoever, until they're arranged, analyzed, or interpreted.

*Leo Rosten*

The true meaning of a term is to be found by observing what a man does with it.

*P. W. Bridgman*

### 23. FACILITATING ACTION

When the reader understands our message,  
one major hurdle is overcome.

**But understanding is only a midway step.  
Action or response is the final step.  
And how can we facilitate that step?**

WHAT DO YOU DO ?

What do you consciously do  
in your correspondence  
to facilitate action  
on the part of your reader ?

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WHAT DO OTHERS DO ?

What do people do  
to get action ?

You have no doubt come across letters  
which make you feel like responding favourably.  
Can you recall  
some of the characteristics of such letters ?

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## 24. THE YOU-ATTITUDE

We seek to induce the reader  
to take a certain action.  
We want to influence ;  
we want to persuade.

One key factor in persuasion is  
the "you attitude or the you viewpoint".

And what is this "you attitude or you viewpoint" ?  
It is the attitude that enables us  
to put ourselves in the reader's place.

If I see and present ideas from your  
(that is the reader's) point of view,  
I am adopting the "you attitude".  
Without this insight  
we will not be able to persuade the reader  
that it will be to his advantage  
to act in the way we want.  
Only by adopting the "you attitude"  
can we perhaps answer his  
unspoken, perhaps unconscious, question:  
*What do I gain from all this ?*

When we are the readers,  
we react the same way.  
When a sales letter comes to us,  
we ask almost automatically:  
What concrete benefit will *I* get ?  
We demand a satisfactory answer, if we are to act.

And such a satisfactory answer  
(e.g., if the letter starts with the statement:  
"you will save a minimum of Rs. 1000")  
is a product of the *you attitude*.  
This attitude develops in one the ability to get

on the reader's side of the fence  
and to look at what is offered through his eyes.

**How will it benefit the reader  
to do what we suggest he does ?**

This he can himself find out if he makes the effort,  
but is it not better to save him this effort ?

For one thing,  
if we make it easy for him,  
he will make it easy for us.

For another, if it is not explicitly pointed out,  
he may see only what we get out of the deal—  
and that too he may see in an exaggerated way.

The idea is *not* to give him the impression  
that we are just giving things away,  
without any expectation of a return for ourselves.

The idea is to highlight the fact  
that both of us benefit—  
that it is indeed a "business transaction".

**This attitude helps us  
to win the reader's co-operation ;  
he realises that we are fair.**

The aim is not only to have the reader's  
interest at heart,  
but to make this apparent to the reader.  
It calls for two things—  
visualising the benefit the reader will get,  
and pointing that out in a forceful way.  
We have to make it clear to him  
that we are truly considerate.

The accompanying pair of replies  
to an enquiry for a concrete drive  
gives an idea of what  
the you-viewpoint is and what it is not.

Dear Mr. . . . .

I am offering you a special price because I have a slack season now. I have some debts to pay and this work will be a big help to me.

Dear Mr. . . . .

I can give you a good, solid drive with a six-inch bed of cinders and three inches of concrete. Properly graded and drained, this should last you 20 years without cracking.

(The latter got the job)

#### DEMONSTRATING CONSIDERATENESS:

How do we do it?

How do we demonstrate

our considerateness for the reader?

Can we recall in a few words?

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#### HOW DO OTHERS DO IT?

They exercise their imagination;  
and "the test of genuine imagination  
is the power to put yourself fully  
in the place of another being".

Considerateness is for them  
a matter of fundamental ethics,  
and not a superficial trick.

They observe "the golden rule".

They have the other man's interest at heart.

They point out his interest to the reader  
and tie his interest to theirs.

They get to know the reader,  
his interests and activities, likes and dislikes.  
They are thoughtful.

They vary their approach—  
the approach is not the same  
for a business-like executive  
as it is for a well-known friend.

They are sincere and they show their sincerity  
by *being* friendly ;  
by not being arrogant or over-modest ;  
by not overwhelming the reader  
with intensives\* and emphatics ;  
by being human and  
by admitting mistakes.

#### IMAGINATION HELPS SHOW CONSIDERATENESS

There are ingenious ways of showing  
how the proposition benefits him.  
You have surely come across some.  
Can you recall them ?

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With a little exercise of imagination  
we can effectively point out  
how a particular proposition  
benefits a reader—  
as it does the writer.

How is the faculty of imagination  
to be cultivated ?

\* Intensives include adjectives and adverbs like *highest*,  
*deepest*, *very much*, *extremely*, *undoubtedly* and *so on*.

Says Arnold Bennett:

"The test of genuine imagination is the power to put yourself fully in the place of another being.

"Nearly all cruelty in human relations springs from lack of imagination.

"How is the faculty to be cultivated ?

"By privately questioning oneself about the other man. What does he want more than anything else? What is his weak point? What is his strong point? Why is he gloomy today? Why is he radiant? What are his worries? What is his notion of himself? How can I give him pleasure? Is he unwell? What are the things that annoy him? What is he thinking about? How can I pep him up? How should I feel in his place ?

"The faculty will grow as a muscle will grow ; also, it will wither just as a muscle withers and for the same reason."

This imagination can be misused  
and *is often* misused.

When it is misused,  
the reader feels he has been tricked.  
Once bitten, twice shy.

Future response becomes difficult.  
This is why we have to remember  
that aspect of the goal  
which emphasises future action.

*Action today is not the goal.*

*Action today and tomorrow is the goal.*

*And there is no substitute for sincerity*

## 25. ADAPTATION AND ACTION

Adaptation to the reader is another technique of persuasion. It means creating a common bond between ourselves and the reader.

It normally consists of adapting the letter form, message, language and style to the person we write to.

It may be adaptation even in the lay-out of the letter.

The purpose of adaptation is to economize the reader's efforts.

This can be done in two ways.

One is to deliberately avoid minor irritations.

The other is to make it easy for him to read.

We can adapt the language to suit the reader's educational level and his temperament.

The following letter is clearly not adapted to a not highly-educated policy-holder.

"Surrender of the policy is permissible only within the days attendant the grace period, in compliance with the citation relevant options accruing to the policy. We are stopped from acquiescing to a surrender prior to the policy's anniversary date.

"We are confident that an investigation relevant to the incorporation of this feature will sub-



stantiate that the policies are not at variance with policies of other insurance companies”.

Such writing makes for the discomfort of the reader.

To make for comfort,  
we can use familiar expressions,  
legal terms to lawyers, medical terms to doctors,  
trade terms to members of the trade and  
plain talk to laymen like me!

When we do so, we can choose conversational words.  
Better understanding apart,  
people feel more friendly to us  
when we use “talk language”.

Simpler phrases are comfortable,  
and can be as accurate.  
There is no need to confuse or confound people.

The idea is to remember we are writing to a *reader*,  
and we should make it easy for him  
to read, understand and act.

## 26. COMPLETENESS AND ACTION

I write you a letter ;  
and just one point is missing ;  
and you write me, therefore,  
asking me for the missing item ;  
then I write back.

Result ?

*Three* letters instead of *one* letter.

*Three weeks* instead of *three days* !

And, all the implications  
of needless correspondence, vexing delay,  
excess costs and thinning profits.

When a message is not complete,  
the reader cannot take the needed action.

Incomplete writing leads  
to delayed action.

Probably to no-action!

The time you are set to act  
is when you read my letter.  
If for reasons of incompleteness  
you are unable to act,  
it is in a sense a loss of opportunity—  
the action-set gets lost or wasted.

The action tempo gets *avoidably* lost.

When you read my papers the second time  
you may not have the same zest ;  
the letter has lost its edge, in a sense.

This point deserves emphasis, a restatement.

If our letter is not complete,  
the reader will have to write to us  
for additional information  
which introduces three elements.  
One is the additional-cost-element,  
the other is the delayed-time-element  
and the third the inertia-element.  
It is easier for the reader to act on a letter  
the first time he sees it  
than when he looks at it again.

If we are dealing with a government agency  
we may face a fourth factor:  
when our supplementary letter  
with the added information arrives,  
the first letter may be difficult to trace!

#### WHAT DO WE CONSCIOUSLY DO TO MAKE OUR CORRESPONDENCE COMPLETE ?

Before we see what others do  
let us spell out what we currently do.

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#### WHAT DO OTHER PEOPLE DO ?

Effective letter-writers ask two basic questions:  
Does the letter say *all* that is necessary  
to accomplish its purpose ?  
Does it answer *fully* all the questions  
asked or implied in an incoming letter ?

They give themselves the following guidelines:

1. Read and analyze all incoming letters.
2. Consult files of past correspondence.

3. Plan your letter to cover all the points raised in these letters.
4. ANTICIPATE and answer questions that may be raised.
5. Say, where necessary, you cannot answer questions and why you are unable.

They give guidelines to their juniors through a company bulletin.

For example, one company letter Bulletin reads:

“ Replies that are incomplete, indefinite, or obscure irritate and confuse the inquirer, delay progress, create distrust, and increase the volume of correspondence. Haste and inattention lead to unnecessary letters. Too often we fail to concentrate on the question asked. Too often we fail to re-read the questions asked and the answers we have given to assure ourselves that the latter will not be misunderstood and that every part of our reply is complete ”.

They also bring to the attention of letter-writers in the company cases of incomplete letters, with or without comments.

Here is an example:

A leading company wrote a letter leaving the subject column blank and mentioning the “ above-captioned loan ”. The reader was naturally confused and he wrote back:

*“ I received yours of Sept. 27 saying that my Re.: Loan No. 48027 was captioned and I have not heard any more from it. So I am asking you to please quote me at once who had it captioned and what was it captioned for. Write me of the details . . . ”*

Here is another:

*I have been asked by the chairman of our company, the Gay, Glour and Glum Hardware Co., to inquire*

*as to whether you have in stock the brass candlesticks which we bought from you last year, or whether an order would have to be made up.*

The letterhead obviously provides the identity of the company, so that wordage is unnecessary. Further, he doesn't say what quantities he is interested in buying, nor does he tell you what exactly they were. You are apparently expected to search your files for the earlier order. An answer is not possible until this has been done.

Suppose that he had planned his letter carefully and used good business sense, he would have said:

*Can you duplicate our last year's (June 21) order for a gross of brass candlesticks (3473) from stock?*

*If it is necessary to manufacture the item, please query me before proceeding, for time is important in this case.*

Wouldn't the second letter get prompter action? It is clear, concise and to the point. There is nothing discourteous about it; yet it asks for action.

The incomplete letter makes unnecessary work for several people and it may not be answered promptly. The delay may lose the order.

Written communication is a substitute for face-to-face communication; unlike oral communication, we cannot expect the listener to ask for clarifications. We have to visualise the queries that will come up in his mind; and answer them in our *initial* communication.

If we are speaking to a person  
and if he does not understand us,  
he will look puzzled or ask a question.  
We can then explain what we mean.  
If he frowns or smiles,  
we temper our speech accordingly.  
When we write, we cannot count on  
such immediate "feedback".  
Feedback is more expensive and time-consuming  
in written communications than in speech,  
since it takes the form of  
an additional exchange of letters or memos.  
And failure may cause delay,  
improper action, or loss of a customer.

## 27. CORRECTNESS AND ACTION

A large number of people would like to act immediately they receive a letter.

They hesitate possibly because they are not sure our letter is correct; they want to check and make sure.

Or maybe, they acted on an earlier letter of ours. They subsequently found it not correct; and they paid for it, if not in cash, in embarrassment.

They don't want this to happen again. They would like to make it doubly sure. It is natural for people to argue:

"If I act on incorrect data, not merely my organisation will suffer but my personal reputation as well. If I smell such a possibility, I would rather not act on your letter, certainly not as promptly as you desire.

### WHAT DO YOU DO TO MAKE SURE YOUR CORRESPONDENCE IS CORRECT ?

Please make your notes here:

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### WHAT DO OTHERS DO TO MAKE SURE THEIR CORRESPONDENCE IS CORRECT ?

Effective letter-writers define in detail what they mean by a correct letter.

1. All statements conform to the firm's policy ;
2. All information is factual ;
3. It is free from errors in spelling, idiom, etc ;
4. It conforms to accepted practices of letter forms.

They emphasise what happens when there is a mis-statement.  
There is:

1. Unnecessary correspondence ;
2. Loss of confidence, reputation, goodwill of the customer ;
3. Financial loss, besides the defeat of the purpose for which the letter was written.

They point out that even " little " errors can be costly.

A government clerk copied a tariff bill under consideration by the U.S. Congress. The clerk added one comma that was not in the original draft.

The bill with the extra comma was passed. Here is what happened:

The bill listed certain items to be allowed entry into the U.S. duty free. Among them was the item "all foreign fruit plants". The clerk had placed the extra comma after the word 'fruit'. The bill now meant that all foreign fruit *and* all foreign plants would gain entry duty free. The one extra (and erroneous) comma, it is reported, cost the U.S. Government some two million dollars because the error could not be corrected until the following session of Congress.

They give themselves and their men guidelines like the following—

1. Read the customer's letter carefully ;



2. Be sure you understand what he wants ;
3. If you do not know the correct answer, seek information from one who does, from files or from libraries ;
4. Let your staff know that keeping a schedule is important ; equally, if not more important, is giving correct information and expression.

In words like these they commend the final once-over.

Before any letters are presented to the person who dictated them for signature, or before you sign letters you have written over your own signature, reread them to make sure there are no grammatical or typographical errors. Just a few minutes' time so employed will save you many unnecessary embarrassing moments. Before any letters are placed in the envelopes, whether you wrote and checked the letters yourself before they were signed or whether you are only mailing them, check for signatures, enclosures, and make sure each letter is placed in its own correctly addressed envelope. Last but not least, letters should be carefully folded so as to add to, rather than detract from, their appearance.

*Also, make sure all the Enclosures are really enclosed and arranged in the same order as listed on the letter*

## 28. STRENGTH AND ACTION

A forceful letter is an action-inducing letter. While substance lends strength or force to a letter, form also does. And we examine the form here.

To give strength to their letters, able letter-writers have the following guidelines:

1. Use concrete, specific words ;
2. Use more of action verbs ;
3. Don't hedge: be direct ;
4. State first and explain later (if necessary).

### Use concrete, specific words

Many of our customers like the new design.  
*Twenty-seven of our customers like the new design.*

Mr. Rao could not speak clearly because of a cold.  
*Mr. Rao could not speak clearly because of laryngitis.*

Even the above pairs of sentences give an idea of the force concreteness and precision lend to writing.

In an earlier chapter\* we have discussed at length the place of, and approaches to, concrete writing.

Here we will discuss the other three guidelines.

### Use more of action verbs

Letters have more force when they have more action verbs, when they have more specific action verbs.

\* Page 51

Is the appropriate field earlier in the book - the reverse has been

What are *action verbs* ?

Action verbs are those that express action, unlike *link* or *being* verbs which express a state of being.

The verb "be" and its variations like "is", "was", etc. are "linking" verbs or "being" verbs. The following pairs of sentences will make clear the force difference between these two types of verbs:

# There *was* a week-end of discussion of bonus problems by the head office and factory executives. The head office and factory executives *discussed* the bonus problems last week-end.

A prompt reply to a customer's letter *is* a must for every manager. Every manager must promptly *reply* to the customer's letters.

The colour code *is* a factor in helping the operator. The colour code *helps* the operator.

Action verbs can be *general* action verbs or *specific* action verbs. The *specific* action verbs are more forceful than the general ones. "Fly" and "cling" are examples of specific action verbs; "Effect" and "accomplish" are examples of general action verbs. We see the difference in impact in the following simple pair:

He *effected* a change in the draft.  
He *changed* the draft.

Even among specific action verbs,  
the vivid ones are more effective.  
For example, let us consider the following sentences:

The living index *was* up 20 points last month.  
The living index *increased* by 20 points last month.  
The living index *climbed* by 20 points last month.

Not in Italics  
Weak language format

Carrying as it does the weak verbs,  
the passive voice saps the strength  
and adds to the length of a sentence.

only circled words  
need be italics

Let us see a few examples:

The lower court's decision *was upheld* by the High Court.

The High Court *upheld* the lower court's decision.

Your application *is under consideration*.

We are *considering* your application.

An immediate reply *would be appreciated* by this office. *Kindly reply* by 15 July.

The project *must be completed* by this month end.  
*Completion* of the project by us is necessary for this month.

We *must complete* the project this month.

The clue then is:

**Go for action verbs instead of linking verbs.**

**Prefer the active to the passive voice.**

**Preferably, go for an active verb while writing.**

**At least while rewriting,**

**replace a link verb by an active verb.**

Another precaution to take in using verbs  
is not to separate the subject and the verb.

This separation destroys force and clarity.

For example, consider these alternatives:

This policy, which protects the owner against both fire and theft, which requires small annual premium payments, and which is in force until January 1, 1972, contains many benefits and easy terms.

This policy contains many benefits and easy terms. It protects the owner against both fire and theft and requires only small annual payments. The policy is in force until January 1, 1972.

*next line*  
The investigator treated the report in such a manner that he ignored the two middle paragraphs. # The investigator skipped the two middle paragraphs of the report.

### Don't hedge

Some hedge; they don't talk direct:  
Their letters are sprinkled with words like the following:

*Use Commonly or official techniques wordy*  
*Apparently Ordinarily As a rule It appears Usually In most cases Seemingly As a usual case In many instances It seems Generally Seems to indicate Normally In general Commonly*

They are authors of statements like these—

This material seems to be unsatisfactory and I believe it can be returned...Will you be good enough to transmit a substantial cheque in liquidation of the arrears?...Apparently, you failed to enclose the money order receipt mentioned in your letter of . . . . It would probably be possible to make an affirmative finding, subject to the usual requirements normally established for situations seemingly of this general type.

The reader asks: What is he saying? Yes or No?

It is not as if the writer does not know what to say.

He knows, but he does not say it directly.  
He could have as well said:

This material is unsatisfactory and we are returning it.

Please let us have a cheque for Rs. 500 within a week.

We did not receive the money order receipt mentioned in your letter of \_\_\_\_\_. Did you forget to enclose it?

We used to think and speak direct when we were young.

All over the world, age develops in us a sense of pseudo-politeness and, therefore, a roundabout way of communicating.

Glenn Kerfoot\* gives a delightful example of a ten-year-old writing to Santa Claus and the same person writing when thirty. (Please see pages 102-3)

**State first your answer and then explain if necessary.**

Let us see a few examples.

When someone asks us: What time is it?  
We don't begin by telling him the make of the watch, how many jewels it has and why it keeps accurate time, and then conclude: The time now is 10 o'clock. We tell him the time and very often stop there. If conditions warrant it, we may give the details.

\* From *Keep it Simple* by Glenn Kerfoot and reprinted with permission of The Economics Press, Inc. New Jersey.

If the same question is asked in a letter  
we can give the answer  
and then elaborate it, if necessary.

When all is said, writing  
is only a substitute for speaking.

If we don't write as we speak,  
we try the reader's patience  
and to that extent we weaken the force of our letters.

*Bobby (at 10) writing*

Dear Santa,

Here is what I want for Christmas.  
Gas engine for a model airplane  
Winchester cap rifle with play bullets  
Hunting knife like the one in the yellow stamp  
catalogue  
Army suit with helmet and canteen  
Basketball.

When you come on Christmas Eve I will have  
coffee and cookies waiting for you.

Your friend,  
Bobby Brown.

*Same Bobby writing—at 30.*

Dear Mr. Claus,

It has recently been called to my attention that you are currently planning your annual visitation to those sectors of our planet heretofore serviced by your organization.

Please be advised that I would appreciate your presence in this vicinity at your earliest convenience, at which time I would like to requisition the following merchandise from your extensive stocks.

| Item                              | Number | Quantity |
|-----------------------------------|--------|----------|
| Gasoline engine, model airplane   | 0032A  | 1        |
| Winchester cap rifle with bullets | 4569B  | 1        |
| Hunting knife                     | 6742   | 1        |
| Uniform, army, with accessories   | 52190  | 1        |
| Basketball, regulation            | 34800  | 1        |

In the event that one or more of these items are unavailable at this time, kindly substitute items of like quality and value per our previous conversations.

Suitable refreshments will be provided for the duration of your visit.

Thanking you in advance, I remain,

Yours Respectfully,

Robert S. Brown.



## 29. CLEVER WRITING AND ACTION

Clever\* writing helps get action.  
It is the kind that sticks in the mind.  
It arrests attention ;  
it makes the point ;  
and it urges action.

For example, a renewal subscription letter  
read as follows:

Your subscription has expired—and I'm sorry  
that the cover is all I can send you of this issue  
of LIFE.

A Melbourne firm wrote a letter in this form  
to overcome a difficult lag  
in the erection of a sign for them.  
And it worked!

### *The unfinished signphoney\*\**

Way back in August '48 we ordered to have made  
A 25 foot sign, to fix up on our balustrade.  
When Smith Signs took our order, neither party  
could foresee  
The power cuts, the hold-ups and the lag in  
industry.  
And so we had to be prepared to wait till '49.  
But now in late October we have had to redesign.  
Our Sign has been erected ; you can see it from  
the street ;  
What makes us so dejected is, the damn thing's  
incomplete.  
We're waiting on a Mr. Green, a most elusive man,  
To call and show us how he had to work this three-  
year plan.

\* We use the word "clever" in the original sense, in the  
sense of "ingenious", not scheming.

\*\* Rydges: March 50, p. 301.

It looks as though we're going to get another lame  
excuse  
Before our sign is finished, so—

Oh, what the Hell's the use?

Yours resignedly

To be clever  
and at the same time  
not to be hurtful  
calls for great skill.  
But it has a place  
in result-getting situations.

A good part of advertising copy-writing  
is supposed to be of this sort;  
also, sales promotion letters  
and credit collection letters.  
More on such letters in the coming pages.



The idea is that . . . . .  
human inertia

### 30. LITTLE THINGS HELP GET ACTION

We write something to somebody for some purpose ;  
and if that purpose is a specific action,  
we can make it easy for the reader  
to respond favourably and promptly.

We can visualise things that will delay response.  
We can help him to help us.

Has he, for example,  
to search for previous references ?  
Why not help him with copies of letters ?  
Technically, we are right in saying:  
"He has all the information with him,  
why should he not look it up ?"  
If we are keen on results,  
we will be inclined to do the little things for him.

Has he, again for example, to locate an envelope,  
go to the post office and buy a stamp ?  
Why not help him  
with a self-addressed, stamped envelope ?

In some situations  
(like direct mail to home addresses)  
a self-addressed stamped envelope  
helps get prompt action.  
The idea is not that  
the reader may hesitate to spend 20 <sup>on the</sup> ~~np~~ stamp ~~on us.~~

**The idea is that we should provide for human inertia.**

In cases where we are asking for a favour  
we should enable him to do the favour—  
the favour of replying to our letter promptly.

A self-addressed stamped envelope does help action. Just sign the enclosed post card and mail it to us in the attached envelope (which requires no postage) and our representative will be happy to call on you. You are under no obligation, of course.

Sincerely yours

At times, the one action that we are particular about is the reader receiving the letter and acknowledging it. He may or may not appreciate our anxiety. He may tell himself: "Our postal service is efficient. The writer knows it too. Why should I send a letter just to acknowledge a letter?"

If an acknowledgement will give us relief, the way to assure it is to attach a self-addressed post card.

These are but suggestive examples of facilitating action. We should do all that we can to help the reader respond favourably and promptly.

## VII

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### BUILDING GOODWILL

*read your heart!  
not clear, wholly quoted?*

If the injured one could read you hear, you may be sure that he would understand and pardon ; but, alas! the heart cannot be shown—it has to be demonstrated in words.

*R. L. Stevenson*

Essentially style resembles good manners. It comes of endeavouring to understand others, of thinking for them rather than yourself—of thinking, that is, with the heart as well as the head . . .

*Arthur Quiller Couch*

### 31. TO BUILD GOODWILL

The fifth sub-objective is to build goodwill.

It is not enough if we get action today; there must be a response-atmosphere for tomorrow as well.

We are selling something every time we write a letter—the idea that we are a good man to do business with, if nothing else.

Much of what we have seen so far does help to build goodwill.

Besides observing the spirit of courtesy and cordiality, effective letter-writers consciously use opportunities to build goodwill.

A few of them are outlined below.

#### SAY "THANK YOU"

We should look for occasions to say "thank you".

Such occasions are great opportunities for building goodwill.

Strangely, very few use these opportunities.

Many tend to take for granted anything done for them—a gift, a compliment, a special service.

Some say "thanks" in a mechanical way—they send a printed card or a cyclostyled letter.

**Those who consciously build goodwill through letters write "thank you" notes that are specific, original, intimate.**

The steps are simple and they are:

- \* *Feel* thankful
- \* Say thanks
- \* Say it promptly
- \* Say it cheerfully
- \* Say it genuinely
- \* Say it heartily
- \* Say it thoughtfully.

The accompanying examples are suggestive of the possibilities.

Dear

Thank you so much for the lovely flask. It was an unexpected sign of appreciation, and I shall use it at home with pleasure.

Thank you also for the thoughtful way in which you made my stay in Rajkot enjoyable. I enjoyed meeting your group, and I hope the group enjoyed and benefited by the evening programme.

\* \* \*

Dear

On behalf of the Junior Chamber I wish to thank you for your excellent contribution to our two Conferences on "Leadership through Human Relations". Your insights were both timely and stimulating. Many participants spoke to me afterwards and said that they had gained a great deal out of your talk.

I realise that it's difficult for a busy person to get away to come talk to a group such as ours, and

I am most appreciative of the effort you made to be with us.

I greatly enjoyed your talk myself and got a great deal out of it. I came home quite enthusiastic over the possibility of developing the discipline that makes a more harmonious home and work-place.

Sincerely yours,

\* \* \*

Dear Shri

How thoughtful! That is a letter I will treasure.

Many thanks indeed.

Sincerely,

We get many opportunities to thank people.  
We don't use them for a few odd reasons:

"I want to thank but I don't know how".

"We will thank later . . . ."

"Now it is too late to thank . . . ."

"I don't believe in these silly formalities."

"What is there to thank—he only did his duty."

Some see the point but thank clumsily.

Maybe because of habit, or because of inertia, or a false sense of cost, some say:

"Thank you in anticipation."

Do they mean that they would not like to take the time to write a thanks letter when the material arrives, or when the request is conceded?

It is true it adds to cost, but can't we afford to say "thanks" at least *after* the action takes place? Is it not ever so graceful?



## TO BUILD GOODWILL: BE THOUGHTFUL

The readers—  
call them colleagues,  
employees, customers, suppliers,  
or public servants—  
are *people*  
and many of them appreciate  
our sharing their joy and sorrow.  
Letters of congratulations  
and letters of sympathy  
are therefore found  
to build goodwill.

My dear——

Congratulations!

The arrival of a baby daughter should be cheering to all the members of your family. Particularly your three sons. May I join the many in wishing this little one well? My blessings to her.

Yours sincerely,

\* \* \*

Dear . . . .

I am extremely sorry to hear of the unexpected death of your beloved mother. All who knew her loved her. May God comfort you in your hour of sorrow!

Sincerely yours,

The guideline given for such letters is:  
If you hear of something pleasant  
that has come to someone you know,  
sit down right away,  
while you are elated and excited by the news,  
and write a letter of congratulations.  
Sincerity comes more easily and naturally

to your written words at such a time,  
and your note has truer ring to it.  
**Write it to mail it rightaway ; don't postpone it.**

You will find that all your letters  
of thanks, of sympathy, of congratulations  
are much easier to write  
if you write them on time.  
A timely note of congratulations or sympathy  
can give a big lift  
and is often remembered a lifetime  
with pleasure and appreciation.  
And make it personal ;  
a printed card is not as welcome as a personal note.

#### TO BUILD GOODWILL: SHOW APPRECIATION

It is common to send telegrams  
when things don't go right,  
for example, when deliveries are delayed.

Also to emphasize urgency,  
for example, when payments are overdue.

Less common but a potential for goodwill  
is the telegram that goes to thank people  
for acts of special consideration.

You could have waited for the conventional  
30 days. You didn't. Your prompt cheque has  
meant much to us this week. Many thanks.

\* \* \*

Your order for 50 engines of Model C. Many  
thanks.

Shall despatch them by 30 September.

#### TO BUILD GOODWILL: SAY SORRY

Feeling sorry for our failures  
and saying so genuinely  
builds goodwill in most quarters.

It is not easy to admit mistakes  
but it is the graceful thing to do.  
It is graceful to seek forgiveness  
for mistakes committed,  
consciously or unconsciously.

If we say "thank you" rarely,  
we say 'sorry' still more rarely.  
We have a false sense of pride.  
We do not realise  
that the person knows of our failure  
and he can see through our attempt to cover it up.  
**The readers think poorly of us  
not for saying 'sorry'  
but for not saying 'sorry'.**

Many thanks for pointing out our slip. We are  
sorry to hear you are getting reminders for bills  
*already paid by you.*

We are checking our procedure and we hope this  
type of embarrassment won't happen again. And  
if it does, please bring it to *my* personal attention.

Renewed thanks for drawing attention to our  
error.

Sincerely yours,

## TO BUILD GOODWILL: DON'T BE CURT

People are curt for a number of reasons.  
Some are "naturally" curt ;  
they have not yet seen the point of being civil.  
Some are curt because  
they think "it is businesslike".  
Some others are curt because  
they are over-sold  
to conciseness in letters.

Whatever the reason, curtness hurts ;  
it makes for ill-will.

It is, however, not the length of the letter  
that makes it curt ;  
it is the spirit, the tone, the attitude.

For example, consider this letter:

Dear Shri Vinodbhai:  
Your parcel. How thoughtful!  
Many thanks indeed.

Yours cordially

\* \* \*

And also this:

Dear Mr. . . . .

We regret we cannot comply with your request  
regarding literature.

Yours very truly,

### TO BUILD GOODWILL: SAY 'NO' SOFTLY

Nobody wants a "no"  
but a "no" has to be said on occasions.  
We can't retain a responsible seat  
if we keep on saying "yes" to every request.  
In fact, mature people do not mind  
receiving a "no" to their requests or suggestions.  
They realise that in the larger interests,  
and even in individual interests at times,  
"no" should be said without hesitation.

The word "no" merely disappoints ;  
the way it is said sometimes *hurts*.  
**We have, fortunately, control over  
how it is said.**

It is true that saying unpleasant things pleasantly  
takes thought and sometimes more words,

but doing so makes a difference  
in retaining the goodwill of the other person.

Here is how one declined an invitation to be  
the chief guest and speaker at a banquet:

Dear . . . .

I am sorry that a previous engagement prevents  
my accepting your invitation to be the chief guest  
at the annual banquet of the Junior Chamber.  
There are few things I enjoy more than speaking  
to a group of fine young men on a subject dear  
to my heart. I hope you will ask me some other  
time.

Regretfully yours,

Here is how an industrialist said "no"  
to an invitation to join the council of a civic body:

Dear . . . .

You have done such a valuable job in our commu-  
nity with the Boy Scouts, that if my schedule  
permitted, I would surely enjoy working with you.  
Thank you for inviting me to join the Council.  
However, since I must be travelling about half the  
time during the coming year, I do not feel that I  
should take on the responsibility you suggest. My  
best wishes to you for continued success in your  
important programme.

## TO BUILD GOODWILL: SHOW COURTESY

Show courtesy.

Acknowledging a letter is courtesy.

This we readily concede  
if the letter benefits our purse or ego.

The problem arises only in cases where we "need not reply". For example, if a letter is received and for some reason ("boss isn't in town") we are not able to reply immediately, the tendency is not to acknowledge the letter.

The poser here is,  
why not send an interim reply like this ?

Many thanks for your letter of October 10. Mr.—  
is on tour now, but he will reply as soon as he  
returns on November 5.

Worse still are situations where we see no point  
in replying to a letter, e.g., an employment application.

It is true we cannot hire everyone  
who offers himself for employment.  
In other words, we cannot *help* every applicant ;  
but we can be *helpful* to every applicant.  
We can thank him for thinking of us.  
We can give him some information  
about our organisation,  
our products, services, or activities.  
We can even guide him to agencies  
who may be able to help him.  
As a measure of public relations, we can even  
help him with some notes on careers.

Dear . . . .

Thank you very much for your employment appli-  
cation.

All positions in our organisation requiring the  
services of a person with your qualifications and  
background are, at the moment, filled. We are  
certainly glad to know of your interest in becom-  
ing associated with MMC and would like to retain

your letter in our files in case something should unexpectedly turn up in the near future.

Best wishes,

Sincerely yours,

PS: The enclosed Recommended Reading on Careers and Self Development may be of interest to you.

“What can they do if we don't acknowledge?”

This is a tempting question.

Don't you think it is a treacherous question too?

They can't do a thing, and for that very reason

don't you think we should acknowledge their letters?

In the present state of our economy we can get away with it when we don't acknowledge an employment application.

The fact, however, remains that we as a company lose an opportunity to rise in a young man's estimation.

What is more sad is that

we as part of an economic system get a bad name and qualify ourselves for an anti-vote.

**To be courteous is expensive—**

**in terms of cost;**

**not to be courteous is even more expensive—**

**in terms of business goodwill.**

If someone has cared to write to us, he deserves a reply.

This reply may only be an acknowledgement.

Yes, this does cost money.

If we wish to retain the goodwill of the public, we should spend this money

*for what society has given us.*

In today's context, we owe this to society.

Realising the public relations value

of correspondence, one company has established the following "do's" for their correspondence:

**Every letter should be answered**, and the answer should express the company's personality. We want our replies to be warm, friendly, gracious, and conversational.

**Every letter must be answered promptly.** If he receives a reply promptly, he is already well on the way toward being pacified. But every day he waits, the "wrong" grows in his mind.

We also like to reply immediately to those making suggestions or requesting information. If the letter poses a question that calls for reference or consultation with lawyers or technical people, we are not afraid to write an interim letter, promising a full reply later.

**Assume that everything you say will be shouted from the housetops.** While the tone of the reply must make it clear that the letter is written to the individual, the writer must always be certain that anything said in the letter can stand the clear light of day, whether it falls into the hands of a competitor, is read in a courtroom, or is published on the front page of a newspaper.

## TO BUILD GOODWILL: BE COURTEOUS ALWAYS

Goodwill is built over a period ;  
And it takes care, time, effort and money ;  
but it can be spoiled overnight ;  
and some do spoil goodwill in a split second.  
For the sake of a few rupees, false prestige,  
some insult a good customer.

In every organisation  
there are people who have a chip on their shoulder,



who are discourtesy-prone.  
It would be well to watch out for  
letters that go out from *their* desk.

One guideline many give themselves is:  
Be pleasant—*all the time*.

They explain it thus:  
whenever possible,  
start on a pleasant note.

If the reader is right about one thing  
and wrong about another,  
begin by telling him  
where he is right.

If you have to say anything unpleasant,  
say it, but say it as pleasantly as you can.  
Explain, for example, the reasons  
which led you to say "no".

Remember, unpleasant news  
sounds doubly unpleasant on paper.

#### TO BUILD GOODWILL: BE COMPASSIONATE

It is easy to be courteous  
in normal times.

Not so in rough times.

One such rough time is when an amount is  
overdue from the customer.

It is easy to be sarcastic on such occasions.

"After all, he has not kept  
his part of the word  
and played the gentleman".

We can argue thus and get tough on paper  
and we may get the money now;  
but it may drive away  
the customer from us for ever.

Business tomorrow

is as important as business today.  
Commercial debts should be collected,  
but they can be collected in a graceful fashion.

We can say, for example:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

When an account runs *past the due date*, we find that most of our customers appreciate a brief note about it. This note is sent to call your attention to the overdue amount shown on your last statement (Duplicate enclosed for ready reference).

If your cheque has not crossed this letter, won't you please rush it to us this week?

Sincerely,

*P. S. If you do want further accommodation, please tell us why and we will do our best.*

*I personally do not agree  
that this should be added.  
It completely nullifies the entire  
letter above.*

## VIII

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### PRINCIPLES WHEN APPLIED

Good prose travels light.

Polonius said to Hamlet:

"What do you read, my Lord?"

And Hamlet replied: "Words, words, words."

That is the common trouble of all who write.

We think too little and say too much.

We need less rhetoric and more reflection.

And a large vocabulary is no help:

The words within you are enough.

Use a dictionary for guidance, not profusion.

*Frank Fletcher*

## 32. PRINCIPLES WHEN APPLIED

When the principles discussed so far are applied with understanding, the letters have clarity, power and persuasion. To have a feel of the impact, we are reproducing a few pairs of letters in the original—rewritten form.

### PRINCIPLES APPLIED: SOME CASE HISTORIES

#### ORIGINAL†

Dear Mr. . . . .

We regret to inform you that your request for increase in coverage must be declined. It was the judgement of the underwriter that you present too great a risk to absorb for coverage under the Plan.

Of course, your present valuable insurance will remain unchanged.

Sincerely,

#### IMPROVED

Dear Mr. . . . .

One of the most distasteful tasks we have is to tell an insured we cannot increase his coverage. But unfortunately that is what happened on your request.

We know you will be disappointed—and so are we, for we had looked forward to being able to

increase your protection. All we can do is to express our regrets, and hope you will understand that no other decision was possible.

But we are glad to tell you your present insurance will remain the same, and thus afford you and your family security against the uncertainties of the future.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL†

Dear . . . .

On January 15, February 10, March 24 and April 15 I wrote to you asking to get me the signed acceptance for this Plan.

You have not answered any of my letters, nor have you sent in the acceptance. Please do it right away.

Sincerely,

IMPROVED

Ok—I'm standing on my head\* and I don't practise Yoga. Now will you get me the signed acceptance—please?

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL†

Dear Miss . . . .

Thank you for your letter of May 13. In checking our files, we find that you are correct and the amount of our cheque should have been Rs. 55.48.

\* Figuratively—of course.

† From *Bad Letters be Hanged*, a publication of the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York.

If you will return the cheque to us, we will make the correction and send you a cheque in the proper amount.

We appreciate your continued co-operation. Thank you for bringing this to our attention.

Sincerely,

### IMPROVED

Dear Miss . . . .

You are absolutely right, and we apologize for sending you the incorrect amount. Our check should have been for Rs. 55.48.

If you will kindly return the one we sent you, we will promptly mail you a new cheque. Enclosed is a stamped, return envelope for your convenience.

We are sorry to put you to this trouble, and thanks very much for letting us know of our mistake.

Sincerely,

### ORIGINAL†

Dear Sir:

This will acknowledge receipt of yours of the 20th, again requesting us to furnish manuals for our equipment now being used on your Broadway location.

I thought we made it very clear in our last letter that we furnish only one set of manuals for

every machine. These were sent you or your company when you bought the machine. If you have lost them, that's just too bad. You'll have to look elsewhere for a replacement set or else pay the Rs. 50 which you claim is exorbitant.

Yours truly,

IMPROVED

Dear Mr. . . . .

Thank you for your letter of December 20 again asking for a set of manuals on our equipment being used at your Broadway location.

Since these manuals are very complicated and expensive to print, we can furnish only one set of them with each machine. Your company received a complete set when they bought the machine. Although the complete set you requested actually costs us Rs. 50, we are glad to let you have a replacement set for only Rs. 25.

Shall we despatch one to you immediately ?

Sincerely yours,

ORIGINAL

Dear Sirs:

This will acknowledge receipt of your letter of September 1, in which you informed us that your address was changed from 3 Chagla Street, Bombay 3 to the address above.

As your letter was addressed to the Atom Bank Company, Bombay 1, it was delivered to our main

office. However we have been unable to locate any record of an account in your name at this office. In fact, our Central Files reported no record of your name in any of our Bombay branches.

We are therefore returning your letter with the request that you address it to the office, where your account is maintained, so that your address may be changed in accordance with your wishes.

#### IMPROVED

Dear Sirs:

We believe you intended the enclosed letter for one of our mofussil branches, because we have no account in your name in Bombay.

Will you forward it, please? We should be happy to do so, but we do not know in which of our many branches you have an account.

#### ORIGINAL

Dear Sirs:

Reference is made to our notice of May 10 of an outstanding shortage on your account in the amount of Rs. 250/- when this account is, in fact, in good standing.

It will be appreciated that the large volume of accounts handled by this office renders it virtually impossible to completely eliminate small errors, particularly those that originate because of a similarity of names like Patel. However, you are assured that every effort is being made, and will



continue to be made, in this office to give subscribers the best possible service and prevent the occurrence of such inadvertencies.

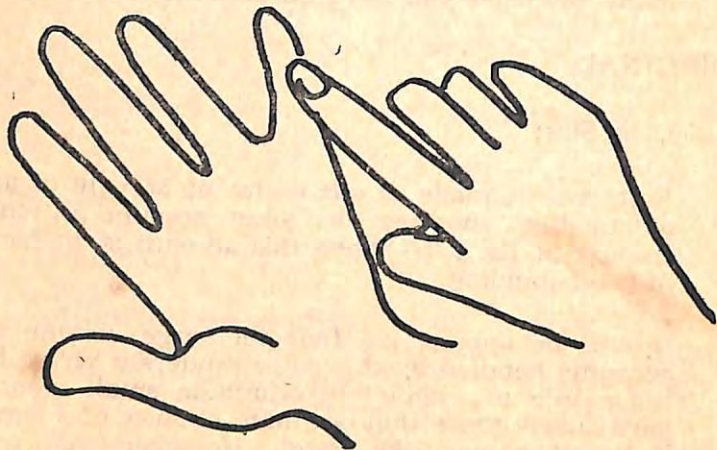
Any inconvenience you have been occasioned by reason of notice of May 10 is sincerely regretted.

## IMPROVED

Dear Sir:

We made a mistake in notifying you on May 10 that your account is overdue Rs. 250. Our notice must have been confusing to you because you have always been prompt with your payments. The fact is that your account is in good standing with no payment due until July 1, 1965.

Why this should happen to a good customer like you, it is difficult to understand . . . and all we can say is "excuse it, please!"



Five-fold objective.

## IX

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### KEEPING THE COST DOWN

If a typist can save 30 words in one short letter she can save three thousand on a hundred letters, and that, at 60 words a minute means 50 minutes and a big firm with a hundred typists each doing a hundred letters, could save three hundred thousand words, which means five thousand minutes or eight-three hours and twenty minutes—or about a week's work for two typists ; and I have not yet included the saving of dictater's time, nor the economy in paper, carbons, envelopes, typewriter ribbons and ink.

*A. P. Herbert*

### 33. ELEMENTS OF A LETTER COST

A secondary objective but an integral objective is the optimum cost of the letter.

The story of a better letter is the story of a less expensive letter. When office costs were pruned, because of competitive conditions, letters were looked at closely— for perhaps the first time! This close and systematic look threw up the possibilities of a still better letter.

Things have changed since then. The by-product, namely, a better letter is now pursued for its own sake.

The search for the less expensive letter, however, continues and will continue because the average letter keeps costing more and more.

Studies show that the cost of a letter can be three rupees and higher, depending upon the salary of the person who writes it. If we are mailing out 100 letters a day, it means we are spending (Rs. 52,000) a year on our correspondence. *Value?*

And this cost is, and will be, going up.

Why it is costing more and more will be seen from the chart on page— where the breakdown cost of a letter is given.

**Even a passing look at this breakdown of cost will tell the reader that TIME is the major cost component.**

Pro forma Cost breakdown of a letter

Average cost  
Rs.

1. *Drafting and Dictating time*  
Based on a salary of Rs.——— a month———hours a month; and an average of———minutes for each letter written.
2. *Stenographic Cost*  
Based on a salary of Rs.——— a month———hours a month; and an average of———letters a day, including time taking dictation.
3. *Non-Productive time*  
Time lost by dictator and steno due to waiting, illness and other causes (studies show 61% of 1 and 2).
4. *Fixed charges*  
Depreciation, supervision, rent, light, interest, taxes, insurance and other overheads.
5. *Materials*  
Letterheads, envelopes, carbon papers, typewriter ribbons, pencils and other supplies.
6. *Mailing costs*  
Postage, collecting, sealing, stamping and delivering to post office.
7. *Filing costs*  
Clerical time, depreciation on filing equipment, cost of filing supplies, etc.

This time or 'labour' cost would include:  
cost of giving dictation ;  
cost of taking dictation ;  
cost of transcription ;  
cost of waiting ;  
cost of filing ;  
cost of mailing ;  
and other costs of handling.

The major cost-saving possibility therefore lies  
a) in the dictating skill of the letter-writer and  
b) in executive-secretary team-effectiveness.

The cost of time  
of the letter-writer and the stenographer  
makes up the bulk of the cost of a letter.  
Special sections are therefore devoted  
to dictating skill  
and to the boss-steno team-effectiveness.

### 34. DICTATING SKILL

There is a lot of difference between writing a good letter and dictating one. When we write a letter we can see if a sentence is misplaced, awkward, or ungrammatical. We can edit it, so that our letter is well organised when it is typed.

But when we dictate, we're talking direct to our audience, and the way we do it may be either good or slipshod. Unless we organise our presentation mentally before we begin to dictate, our letter will probably ramble.

Rambling wastes not only our time and that of our secretary but takes valuable minutes from our addressee's day while he has to unravel our meaning. To avoid much loss of time is the chief reason for learning to dictate well.

**When we dictate well,  
we save time\* for others and for us as well.**

That dictating itself saves time we all know; we can write about 15 words per minute, while we can dictate 100 words per minute.

Again, it has been observed that, for thirty minutes of dictation effort, we get only ten minutes of effect. Yes, because of inadequate organisation on the part of the "dictator".

Dictating is more than speaking out words at some speed.

\* What is your time worth can be seen from chart on page 134

The phrase "dictating skill" refers to the total process.

Any skill takes time to acquire and dictating skill is no exception. If acquired systematically early in one's managerial career, it will be well for all concerned.

The next best is to refine one's skill as one goes along through added knowledge, guided practice and objective review.

**One way to have the added knowledge is to know how skilled "dictators" go about it.**

WHAT'S YOUR TIME WORTH?

*Can be left out doesn't add any effect*

| If you cost the organisation annually | Every Hour Is Worth | Every Minute Is Worth | In A Year One Hour A Day Is Worth |
|---------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Rs 5,000                              | Rs 2.56             | Rs .0427              | Rs 625                            |
| 10,000                                | 5.12                | .0854                 | 1,249                             |
| 15,000                                | 7.68                | .1281                 | 1,874                             |
| 20,000                                | 10.25               | .1708                 | 2,501                             |
| 25,000                                | 12.81               | .2135                 | 3,126                             |
| 30,000                                | 15.37               | .2561                 | 3,750                             |
| 40,000                                | 20.49               | .3415                 | 5,000                             |
| 50,000                                | 25.62               | .4269                 | 6,251                             |
| 100,000                               | 51.23               | .8538                 | 12,500                            |

Based on 244, eight-hour working days.

## EFFECTIVE DICTATING PRACTICES

A well-produced letter is the product of a team—  
an effective “dictator” and  
an intelligent steno-typist.

**The effective “dictators” are found to recognise  
the need for, and the nature of, this team work,  
and they play their part.**

And in this way,  
“Great dictators” take their dictation seriously.  
They keep a regular dictation period or two every day,  
preferably early in the day—  
before the day’s pressures mount up.  
They point out that  
good dictation needs concentrated attention.

They bunch their letters together  
and devote an hour or two to dictating letters,  
instead of interrupting their work  
with dictation throughout the day.

They tackle  
the most important and urgent letters first.

They train their secretaries  
to dispose of semi-routine letters.

They read carefully the letters to be answered.  
They go over the file and  
have all information collected  
before beginning to dictate.

They ask themselves:  
What is the purpose of this letter I am to dictate?  
What do I want to accomplish?  
What is the message?

They make a mental note or, preferably, a pencil note  
of the points to be covered in the letter.  
They arrange the points in logical order.



They visualise the reader: "Who is my reader?  
What is his attitude likely to be  
to me and my message?  
Does he know as much about the subject as I do?  
What information should I give him?  
What information does he need to make his decision?  
Why is it to his advantage  
to do what I want him to do?  
What should I emphasise to arouse him to action?"  
They flash a letter purpose,  
and suggest a filing niche.

**They give extra care  
to wording the opening sentence.**  
They try to make it attractive and arresting.

They break right into the heart of their message.  
They waste no time in needless lead-ups.

They select the point of contact  
nearest to the reader's interest.  
For example, if they can say  
"yes" to the other man's request,  
they do so right at the beginning.

They "talk" on paper.  
They say they picture themselves  
talking to the reader  
and his listening to their talk.  
That way they strive to make their letter  
natural, warm and friendly.  
From time to time they have their letters read back  
to see whether they sound natural and friendly.

They develop their subject in a straightforward,  
coherent, and sequential manner.

They finish one thought  
before passing on to the next.

They don't repeat except for special emphasis.  
Saying the same thing twice, they say,  
often weakens the thought.

**They choose the closing sentence carefully.**  
**They realise that it has an echo.**

They arm themselves to do an increasingly good job.  
They have on their shelf books like the following:

1. A good dictionary
2. A good thesaurus
3. Fowler's *Modern English Usage*
4. A desk encyclopedia
5. A year book
6. A relevant handbook or two.

#### WHILE DICTATING

While dictating good "dictators" have been found  
to observe the following steps:

They dictate at an even rate,  
not in rushes and spurts.  
They do not dictate too fast or too slow.

They group their words naturally ;  
they do not run on and on.

They *enunciate distinctly* ;  
they don't mumble their words  
or dictate with pipe or *pan* in their mouth.

They keep a full sustained tone  
to the end of sentences,  
so that their stenos can hear without straining ;  
they don't let their voice "trail off".  
They spell out long words  
when they have to use them.

They dictate periods, paragraphs,  
special spellings and the like

to help the steno transcribe their letters.  
(They know Iyer, Ayer, Aiyer and Ayyar  
all sound the same way  
and their correspondents may prefer  
one spelling to another.)

They stay put; they don't wander around the room:  
yes, so that their voice can  
register from one spot, in a clear, steady tone.

Since they plan and organise their thoughts  
before they start to speak  
they don't ask for frequent "read backs".

They do not dictate anything that is  
printed, typed or handwritten.

They read the typewritten copy carefully  
before they sign it.

Though not in so many words, they ask these questions  
before signing their letters:

Have I told him all he wants to know?  
Have I said clearly what I want to say to him?

Is the entire meaning clear,  
complete and concise?

Is it tactful and courteous?  
Would I react favourably  
if I were to *receive* this letter?

They review copies of their letters  
several days after writing them.  
Yes, to spot and stop any inadequacies in future.

From time to time they record their voice  
as they dictate  
and listen back to see how they sound to others.

**They take conscious and continuing efforts  
to upgrade their dictating skill.**

### 35. USING SECRETARIES AS SECRETARIES

Dictating machines are still rare in India. We therefore dictate our letters to people.

This clearly is an advantage—the stenographer gets an opportunity to understand the purpose of each letter; he or she gets an opportunity to ask for clarification; and, more importantly, he or she gets an opportunity to help us improve the effectiveness of the letter.

“Those two paras are conflicting, sir.”

“Should we also not add this point?”

“He may take offence at this phrase, I fear.”

Helpful comments like these are given *by secretaries who are allowed to be secretaries.*

Even an average secretary can contribute greatly towards better letters at lesser cost. Yes, if he or she is treated as an active member of the letter-writing team.

He/She can do still better if given the needed training and encouragement.

Some of us tend to forget that the secretaries and the executives form a team and that they should respect each other's role. **If we concede their creative role, the steno-secretaries can substantially contribute to the effectiveness of a dictated letter and the game of correspondence generally.**

The minimum a secretary can handle independently for us are:

1. Letters of appreciation, congratulation, condolence, transmittal, acknowledgement.
2. Letters giving instructions.
3. Letters making or cancelling appointments or reservations.
4. Letters issuing or replying to invitations.
5. Inquiries and answers to inquiries.
6. Orders and cancellations of orders.
7. Follow-up letters.

As for the maximum, experience shows, there is hardly a limit.

## 36. SIMPLIFIED LETTER SAVES MONEY

What is a simplified letter ?

In the words of the originators,\* here is a comparison between the conventional letter and the simplified letter.

A comparison of the chief physical characteristics of the simplified letter with those of the more traditional "standard" letter will show how we can profit by a change.

### A *The Conventional Letter*

1. The date is at the far right. Why ?
2. The address shifts to the far left. All's well.
3. The meaningless salutation stays put but is waste since it's not you, but form that dictates it.
4. To be fancy, the paragraphs are intended five spaces. This job is multiplied by the number of paragraphs.
5. Back to the left margin for the body of the letter.
6. Zoom! Over to the right again for "complimentary" close. Is it really necessary ?
7. The company name picks another spot—why use it when it's shown in the letter-head ?
8. A final zig to the left to put in the dictator's initials (why ?) and the typist's to the right.

---

\* National Office Management Association, now known as Administrative Management Society, Willow Grove, Pa, 19090



ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT SOCIETY  
215 OL 94300 WILLOW GROVE, PENNSYLVANIA 19090

Dated Today

Mr. Administrative Manager  
Progressive Company  
1 Main Street  
Anytown, Your Country

#### SIMPLIFIED LETTER

Since 1947, Mr. Manager, AMS has sponsored the Simplified Letter as a more effective format for business correspondence.

What is it? You're reading a sample.

Notice the left block format and the general positioning of the letter. We didn't write "Dear Mr. ---," nor will we write "Yours truly" or "Sincerely yours." Are they really important? We feel just as friendly toward you without them.

We typed the full address at the left -- ready for a window envelope and as permanent reference on the letter itself. We added a subject line at the left -- a provocative opening and filing clue. We started each paragraph without indentation and tabular delay. And we typed the signature, again at the left, so that the reader knows who wrote it regardless of signature legibility.

What does all this add up to? A more readable document and, for the typist, a reduction in keystrokes meaning more production.

Try the Simplified Letter. Your correspondence will have greater impact and, at the same time, you will realize savings in both time and money.

K. H. KOSTENBADER - STAFF DIRECTOR

## B *The Simplified Modern Letter*

1. The date is at the left—you're starting where the typewriter starts.
2. The full address is at the left—ready for reference on the letter itself.  
Think of the key strokes saved by not having to retype the address on the envelope.
3. Next the subject—at the left. A provocative opening and filing clue.
4. No indentation—paragraph starts without tabular delay.
5. The typewritten signature again at the left.  
No matter how weirdly the letter is signed . . . the reader still knows who wrote it.

Every important feature of this letter is on a flag-pole. In a pile of papers, by lifting the left edge of the covering page a little, all the reference information springs into view. Try that with a conventional form!

### *The logic*

A comparison such as this may seem to be based on unsupported opinion, but here are the cold facts: A basic motion unit analysis of the typing alone on a 96-word letter proves a saving with the Simplified Letter of over 10.7%

A saving like that can't be ignored.  
To what does all this add up?

1. Reduction in keystrokes . . . more production
2. Reduction in motion for positioning typewriter . . . more production



### 3. Improvement in typist's morale . . . more production

The typewriter follows its simplest mechanical course with minimum use of space bar, tabulator-set key, tabulator bar. The letter looks as the typewriter was made to make it look.

#### MORE THAN FORM

The originators emphasise that mechanical improvements are only a small part of the streamlining.

All set? Mechanically, perhaps. But what's in your letter? There's a good reason for the slogan: "There's more to a truly Simplified Letter than simply dropping 'dear' and 'yours truly!'" The form is important but more important is the improvement in the content of the business letters you write.

Remember to whom you're writing. Everyone who writes a letter, a report, a memorandum . . . giving, asking, or exchanging information . . . is faced with a creative problem of the first degree. The mere adoption of the Simplified Letter won't end the thinking required in good letter writing but the philosophy behind the Simplified Letter formula leads to fast thinking because of the fast start.

With the Simplified Letter philosophy, you can remain on beam with a normal, friendly, relaxed type of attitude you'd use in a successful conversation.

At the start, instead of trying to decide whether to begin, "Dear Sir, Mr. X, Dear Bob, or Esteemed Sir," you forget it altogether.

Then comes the subject. Stated first, your letter is one step closer to the desired clarity.

Then your first sentence . . . all-important in getting your reader to read. The first line of your letter, like the first handshake, is your introduction to your reader. Make it firm and convincing. Make it different . . . not stereotyped. Make it pertinent.

It makes sense to plan your letters. Organize your facts in a logical order. Follow your logic. When you've spoken your piece, break it off . . . not by fatuous "yours truly," but by a little reminder that **YOU'RE YOU.**

And please be friendly. Warmth and friendliness . . . when dispensed with an intelligent and courteous touch . . . can make up other letter deficiencies. Go as far as you can in putting a soft collar on your business correspondence . . . never write a letter without being fair to yourself and to your reader. Simplified Letters make sense . . . try sensible simplification today.

The A M S provides a few guidelines for the boss and the secretary! It is possible that all the points may be acceptable to both. If not, we can start with the points where we have ready agreement.

# Memo To The Manager...

## SUGGESTIONS FOR DICTATING

1. Use the subject to catch reader attention, state letter purpose and suggest a filing niche.
2. Dictate as if you were facing your reader. Make your letter warm and friendly. Use "you" more often than "I".
3. Forget the stock phrases of business letters. Bring your letter alive with facts of interest to the reader.
4. Try for simplicity in words and phrases but don't allow yourself to write telegrams.
5. Give extra care to wording the opening sentence. Your subject has started you on the right track; use it as your guide. Start each letter differently.
6. Develop your subject in a straightforward and coherent manner.
7. Repeat only for special emphasis. Saying the same thing twice weakens the thought. The reader usually knows you're groping around.
8. Be careful with your closing sentence. It has a lasting echo.
9. Review your letters several days after writing them. Possibilities for future improvement will stand out.
10. Remember, there's much more to a truly Simplified Letter than simply dropping "Dear Sir" and "Yours truly."

# *Memo To The Secretary . . .*

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR TYPING**

1. Use block format.
2. Place date in top position on left-hand margin.
3. Type name and address in block style at least three spaces below date (for use in window envelope). Use abbreviation Ms. if not sure whether to use Mrs. or Miss. This modern style solves an age-old problem.
4. Omit the formal salutation.
5. Type subject in capitals at least three spaces below address.
6. Use a double space between paragraphs.
7. Omit the complimentary close.
8. Type name of dictator in capitals at left-hand margin at least five spaces below end of letter.
9. List, on the left-hand margin below the typed signature, names of individuals who should receive carbon copies. Precede by "cc:."
10. Align initials of typist, if used, at left below the typed signature.

### 37. GUIDE LETTERS & FORM LETTERS

We saw that time is the major cost component of a letter.

**One way to reduce the cost of a letter is to explore ways of taking less time to produce a letter.**

A letter can be written in more than one way. We can individually compose and individually type; "once for all" compose and from time to time type; "once for all" compose and duplicate; or "once for all" compose and print off.

The relative costs for 10,000 are seen from figure 1. The relative time and cost factors are indicated in fig. 2.

|                                 | Medium Letter<br>about 175 words<br>Rs. | Full page letters<br>about 300 words<br>Rs. |
|---------------------------------|---|---|
| Dictated & typed                | 26700                                   | 44500                                       |
| Typed (no dictation)            | 7650                                    | 11400                                       |
| Form (printed or<br>duplicated) | 2700                                    | 2700  |

Figure 1. Typical Correspondence Production Costs

| Action:                 | Minutes Required   |                      |                  |                 |     |
|-------------------------|--------------------|----------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----|
|                         | Steno<br>Dictation | Machine<br>Dictation | Guide<br>Letters | Form<br>Letters |     |
| Planning What to Say    | 10                 | 10                   | 0                | 0               | 0   |
| Dictation               | 10                 | 5                    | 0                | 0               | 0   |
| Looking up a Letter     | 0                  | 0                    | 2                | 1               | 1   |
| Transcribing-Typing     | 7                  | 8                    | 6                | 1.5             | 1.5 |
| Reviewing-Signing       | 2                  | 2                    | 1                | 0.5             | 0.5 |
| Total Minutes           | 29                 | 25                   | 9                | 3               | 3   |
| Cost in Terms of Salary | Rs. 2.10 to 7.35   | Rs. 1.80 to 6.75     | Rs. 60 to .90    | Rs. 24 to .45   |     |

Figure 2. Time and cost factors in creating a typical one-half page, 175-word letter

When we analyse letters, we find some do require individual composing and typing but many permit other approaches.

Where conditions do permit other approaches, the advantages are substantial:

These letters save cash.  
These letters save time—  
there is no delay occasioned by the “dictator”;  
and in the case of form letters,  
there is no delay occasioned by the typist.  
These letters save goodwill.  
The form letter, for example,  
reaches the reader promptly.  
No time is required for dictating or typing.  
They are correct in every detail,  
easy to read and easy to understand.  
They are carefully composed,  
not hurriedly dictated.

The permissible conditions are:  
a) where the other person is keen  
only about a *prompt* reply;  
and b) where the other person  
is expecting only *information*.

## GUIDE LETTERS

The guide letter will, of course, serve the further purpose of an individually prepared letter. In fact, since the guide letter is prepared with care, it will be much better than a hurriedly composed mail letter.

How to go about using guide letters is outlined below.

If we take any department—purchasing or personnel—and if we analyse the letters sent from the department, we find that a good percentage of letters is repetitive in substance, though not in details.

These letters lend themselves to a sort of once-for-all treatment. These letters—in parts or in full—can be carefully and skilfully drafted and assigned a reference number. When letters are to be sent, the typist gets only the reference number and a few specific details ; these letters are *not composed afresh each time*.

From the view point of *the quality* of letter, this arrangement should be doubly welcome. Unlike the ordinary letter produced under pressure, these letters are refined with thought and composed with care.

Secondly, for a one-time effort we get a many-time effect.

Thirdly, our secretary or assistant is able to handle a good bit of the correspondence aspect of our communication.

Fourthly, we can spend more of our time on non-routine correspondence.

Fifthly, of course, it saves company time.

We mention the cost aspect last to emphasise that cost savings are a byproduct of letter methods improvement.

**In other words, we need not use the guide or form letter just because they are less expensive : we use them on occasions where they give equal or better effect for less cost.**



Where they have used this letter-improvement and cost reduction measure, the following steps have been observed:

Step 1. *Collecting*. Have one extra copy made of each typed letter and memorandum. Collect the copies long enough to get a fair sampling.

Step 2. *Sorting*. Make up a short list of 'key' subjects like the principal subjects in a filing system. Sort collection of copies accordingly.

Step 3. *Inventorying*. Take one key subject at a time and list the repetitive letters by their specific topics.

Step 4. *Organizing*. Take the topics from the inventory, and make the index to the letters.

Step 5. *Drafting*. Take the repetitive letters on each topic, and draft guide letters or paragraphs to replace them.

Step 6. *Testing*. Find out how well the guide letters work by trying them out in actual practice.

## FORM LETTERS

What are form letters ?

Form letters are letters printed or otherwise reproduced and stocked in advance of their actual use.

They *include* not only conventional business-style letters, but also printed memoranda, printed postal cards, and printed informational slips that take the place of letters.

They *exclude* a form letter that serves its purpose in one mass mailing.

There are situations where form letters are acceptable and can be used with advantage.

One can however run away with enthusiasm either way.

We may say: "All letters are to be typewritten"; or "Let most letters be form-letters."

The desirable approach lies somewhere in between.  
**Let us use form letters where appropriate.**

#### WHEN MAY WE USE A FORM LETTER ?

We can apply two tests—  
the appropriateness test and the economy test.

A form letter is considered *appropriate* if it is about a routine business or informational matter and if it is in good taste.

A form letter is *economical*, according to one study, if:

| Line count | Monthly    |
|------------|------------|
| is:        | usage is:  |
| 5          | 30 or more |
| 10         | 20 or more |
| 15         | 15 or more |
| 20 or more | 10 or more |

**There are letters that should not be sent as Form Letters.**

If done, they will damage our public relations.

We should exercise judgment.

For example, a letter of sympathy or a letter of special thanks cannot be sent as a form letter.

#### A FEW HOW'S OF A FORM LETTER.

Form letters should be written with care and skill. They should be clear—easy to read and understand.

The trend is to use the findings of readability research.\*

Form letters can be sent as they are in some cases, and in others, with their fill-in completed.

Where fill-ins are called for, sufficient space is allocated so that the letter does not look crowded or clumsy.

## OTHER PRECAUTIONS

Identify the form letters by a Code Number.  
Reproduce form letters in standard letterhead sizes.  
To avoid obsolescence and consequent waste, consider 6 to 12 months' stock.  
When re-ordering, review and revise where necessary.  
Where possible, assign the responsibility of standardising and controlling to *one* person in the organisation (the O & M Manager, say).

In most cases, when form letters are used, office copies can be dispensed with.  
A notation in the original letter may be sufficient; yes, of the form letter number and the date.

Organisations do, even now, have form letters. What is commended here is a systematic approach to it. A department in an organisation can go about it in this way:

1. Collect copies of existing letters and count the frequency of use of each in a month or so.
2. Collect an extra copy of each letter typed during that time.

---

\* The reader is referred to the author's book *Written Communication and Results* (MMC School of Management, Bombay 20)

3. Sort out and group letters (copies) that are similar in meaning and purpose; these provide form letter possibilities.
4. Examine whether any letters should be discontinued either because of the nature of the communication or of the frequency. Examine whether some need be rewritten (maybe, the language needs improving or simplifying: there is always scope), or redesigned (to help in mailing).

Examine whether the grouped letters lend themselves to use as form letters (either because of the subject matter or the number or both).

Dear Sirs,

Attention:

Re: Hotel accommodation for:

---

This confirms the telephonic talk your had with our \_\_\_\_\_ on the \_\_\_\_\_

We thank you for consenting to reserve \_\_\_\_\_ single/  
double air-conditioned/un-airconditioned rooms(s).

We note that your total charges will be Rs. \_\_\_\_\_ per day, per head, for board and lodge/bed and breakfast.

We will appreciate your confirmation of the reservation(s) on the copy of this letter.

Please send the bill(s) in our name.

Yours faithfully,  
H. P. X. Company Pvt. Ltd.

cc: Accounts Dept.—for information.

### 38. REPLY MEMO

We saw the logic of the simplified letter.

A similar logic makes possible another cost-saver—namely, the *reply memo*.

This is particularly applicable to in-company correspondence.

Some organisations have extended it to external organisations as well, **after the needed 'educational' work.**

The system is simple.

Briefly speaking, we prepare original and two copies of a letter. The original is *white*.

The reply and file copy are *coloured*—the reply copy can be of one colour and the file copy of another colour.

When we originate a letter, we retain the file copy and send the original and the reply copy.

The reader inserts a pencil carbon\*, writes his reply on the white copy, retains the white copy, and despatches the reply colour copy.

Once the reply is received, we may destroy our file copy or use it for follow-up purposes.

The advantages are:

- a. The replies can be a word, phrase or figure.

\*Once the carbon-impregnated paper is available in India, it will be simpler still.

- b. The drafting and typing time (and so cost) will be minimum.
- c. The operation of "putting up" of our letter is automatically avoided.
- d. Filing space can be economised.

Pro Forma of a Reply Memo

|  |  |
|--|--|
| TO<br>From                               |  |
| Message                                  | Reply                                    |
| <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> | <br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br> |
| Date                      Signature      | Date                      Signature      |
|  | From<br>To                               |

### 39. CIRCULAR LETTERS

When an organisation grows, when a department grows, geographically and/or in size, circular letters become necessary.

The circular letter introduces a new dimension to the cost of a letter, the cost of the reader's time.

On a one-to-one basis our time may be more valuable than that of the reader (?). When there are a number of readers, the time cost of reading-translating can be considerable indeed.

An example would be a circular to the medical representatives of a pharmaceutical company.

The accompanying chart will give an idea of the *total cost* of a letter.

*The total cost of the written word = (is equal to)  
Preparation time plus  
Reading times number of Readers.*

The chart will emphasise that both from the effect and cost point of view, effort put on the part of the writer is worthwhile. The simple economic principle here is:  
**A writer can afford to increase his writing time in direct proportion to the number of people who have to read and understand his memo**

REPRESENTATIVES "FOR ACTION"

g-writing costs and savings

| Cumulative costs for 230 readers to read-understand memo | Total writing reading costs | Total Rupees saved |
|--|-----------------------------|--------------------|
| Rs. 575.00   | Rs. 579.00                  |                    |
| Down to<br>Rs. 384.10                                    | 390.60                      | Rs. 188.40         |
| Down to<br>Rs. 287.50                                    | 299.00                      | 280.00             |
| Down to<br>Rs. 190.90                                    | 212.40                      | 366.60             |
| Down to<br>Rs. 115.00                                    | 156.50                      | 422.50             |
| Nothing  | Nothing                     | * 1579.00          |

adapted from  
*OBLEDYGOOK HAS GOTTAGO* by John O'Hayic  
 U. S. Government Printing Office, Washington)



#### 40. LITTLE WAYS TO SAVE IN LETTER COSTS

Cost saving possibilities in letter costs lie all the way—  
in mailing and filing, in typing and signing.  
Let us see some of them.

##### IN-COMING AND OUT-GOING MAIL:

The following practices work and help:

- a. A well-trained person for the functions;
- b. Proper layout and needed equipment and tools (e.g., Sorters weighing scales, rubber stamp racks);
- c. Where volume warrants, a franking machine;
- d. Steps to reduce peak loads and, where not avoidable, help during peak periods;
- e. Understanding cooperation from other departments;
- f. Methods simplification steps (e.g. Selective inward and outward registering).

##### HANDLING MAIL:

- a. Mail is separated between routine and special;
- b. Only special is handled by the 'boss';
- c. Non-recorded dictation—typist typing as she is dictated to: of course this calls for some training for all concerned;
- d. Handling of routine mail is streamlined, standardised and given to assistants concerned (e.g. where to use phone, where telex, and where a handwritten note);

- e. Methods simplification steps including delegation (e.g. Blitz reply, namely, writing the reply on letter and sending it as it is or photocopying and sending it; signing done by person who handles a paper, not by the boss);
- f. Initial and refresher training to personnel in policies and procedures on the one hand and written communication on the other.

#### TYPING:

- a. Well-trained and fairly paid typists ;
- b. Good equipment (e.g. well-serviced typewriters, suitable chairs etc.);
- c. Fair working conditions (e.g. adequate and even lighting);
- d. Electric typewriter (where possible);
- e. Methods simplification (e.g. Window envelopes);
- f. Friendly, helpful and fair supervision understanding and atmosphere ;
- g. Cash incentives (where conditions permit).

#### FILING:

- a. A functionally sound, easily understood system ;
- b. Well-trained, appropriate staff ;
- c. Planning the weeding out of material that is only temporarily required.

## 41. LETTER AUDIT

New people join.

Old habits persist.

Inertia has its ways.

Review of letters, therefore, becomes necessary from time to time, once in two years or so.

Systematically done, letter audit, whether handled by an internal group or an external agency, makes for better letters at lesser cost.

Here are the steps usually taken:

1. The organisation chooses one
  - a) who is well acquainted with company policies, procedures ;
  - b) who had some sales, public relations and other experience ; and
  - c) who is a good letter-writer himself.

He is given the objectives of the correspondence improvement programme, e.g.,

- a) To produce high-quality letters that will serve as creditable representatives of the company—letters that will build business and promote goodwill ;
  - b) To produce these letters with a minimum of effort on the part of those involved ;
  - c) To produce these letters at the lowest possible cost. (This is not to mean cheap letterheads or fast, inaccurate typists or curt letters.)
2. He is given the needed authority and backing to do this rather delicate job of audit.

3. The organisation arranges for an extra-carbon made of every letter written in the office over a one-week or two-week period.
4. The officer on special duty analyses these thoroughly:

Here are some of the things he looks for:

- a) The over-all quality of the letters;
- b) Which persons are writing good letters and which poor ones?
- c) What are the more common mistakes?

Here are some of the common weaknesses he often finds:

- a) Lack of standardisation in form;
- b) Improper placement on the letterhead;
- c) Mistakes in grammar, spelling and punctuation;
- d) Delays in answers or follow-ups;
- e) Inconsistencies of policies, e.g., in the same department identical situations are handled differently by different people;
- f) Repeat dictation of the same or almost the same letters;
- g) Statements that reflect unfavourably upon an individual, a department, or the company as a whole;
- h) Long, rambling, time-taking, patience-trying letters;
- i) Trite phraseology (Common examples are: advise, per, in the amount of, enclosed herewith, enclosed you will find, attached hereto, we wish to acknowledge, referring to your letter, and the writer);

- j) Long quotations from letters ;
  - k) Negative statements ;
  - l) Poor arrangement of material, e.g., too many paragraphs of 20 or more lines.
5. He then works with people in the departments. Thus, he may work with legal, technical or research departments and get their co-operation in simplifying their terminology (where possible) and dropping some of their pet but puerile expressions in their letters to customers and prospects.
  6. He also reviews with individuals letters that are usually too long or too curt, letters that are involved, repetitious or tactless.
  7. The person in charge of letter-audit then determines whether the company's policies and procedures are up-to-date and well-defined. (Policies and the way personnel interpret them affect the quality of the letters.)
  8. He then looks for letters that are being individually dictated on recurring situations. He works with the executives concerned and develops guide and form letters.
  9. Arising out of this audit, he will have a number of points to share with his colleagues in the organisation. He shares them from the platform or through an informal note.
  10. He may also come up with a correspondence manual. If there is already one, he may up-date it.

# X

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## THE VARIABLES

The first essential is to know what one wishes to say ;  
the second is to decide to whom one wishes to say.

*Harold Nicolson*

To find out what makes a reader believe, remember,  
and act upon what you write, you must study people  
rather than words themselves.

*Robert Gunnina*

## 42. THE VARIABLES

Message from                      Through                      To  
WRITER                      WRITTENWORD                      READER

Effective and efficient communication depends upon skill in word management.

In letter writing, we reach *readers* through *the written word*.

We should know therefore about readers in general and our reader in particular.

We should also know about words in general and the written word in particular.

We should not merely know about the reader in particular ; we should know him in relation to a particular situation. We don't communicate in a vacuum, we do it in a context ; and we should have a fair idea of the context.

### THE READERS

Readers to-day are busy ; and they often *look* impatient.

They say, though not in so many words:  
Make it easy for me and  
I will make it easy for you.

In a sense, readers to-day are lazy.  
If they have to, they read carefully.

If they don't have to, they ignore a letter,  
(or read it casually).

They seem to ask:  
If you don't care to make it easy for me,  
why should I exert myself?

Thirdly, readers are like writers:  
they are preoccupied with themselves,  
their needs, their wants, their goals.

They do not hesitate to ask:  
What's in it for me?

Fourthly, readers of today are more touchy  
than readers of yesterday.  
They do not look at a letter  
as a cold piece of document;  
they react to the niceties in a letter,  
whether positively or negatively.

Fifthly, they have come to prefer  
something new, fresh, novel.  
Change and novelty used to upset them,  
but no longer:  
mass communication is having its impact;  
it is tilting them in favour of something fresh.

This is why every letter should satisfy the following  
minimum requirements:

- 1) The letter must be easy to read.  
There should be no haziness of meaning.
- 2) The letter should be so organised  
that readers will have no problem  
in following the ideas presented  
or locating passages of special interest.
- 3) The ideas expressed must follow  
a logical and obvious pattern,



and all the relationships between the ideas should be made clear through the use of appropriate paragraphs and transitional words.

So far about readers in general.  
As letter writers, we are concerned with readers in particular.  
Each reader is unique, complex ;  
and **to him** we are writing,  
and **through him** we want to get something done.  
**It is not enough therefore to be people-centred ;**  
**we should be reader-centred.**  
**We should slant our letter to the reader.**

## THE WORDS

Written words embody sounds,  
and sounds symbolise things and ideas.  
Written words are second-degree abstractions.  
Sounds abstract ideas and symbols abstract sounds.

Words symbolise things and ideas.

Words have a dictionary meaning.

In understanding words, however,  
the dictionary helps us upto a point  
but no more.

The meaning of the word  
is not in the word itself  
but in the head of the person  
who interprets it.

Words are an inadequate  
medium of conveying meaning  
from our head to the other man's.

If we realise this limitation  
and if we know more about the nature\* of words

\* Please see appendix. Also the chapter "Nature of language" in the author's book: *Written Communication and Results.*

we provide for the limitation,  
to the extent possible.

Spoken words themselves are slippery ;  
they have, however, the advantage  
of our being present in a face-to-face situation.  
The " reader " is able to supplement  
the meaning of the words  
through non-verbal symbols  
like gestures and facial expressions.

The " reader " is able to explain, clarify,  
and correct his meanings  
since the listener is there to react to them.

Written words reach the reader  
unaided by such facilities.  
The letter goes to the reader  
all by itself.  
The writer does not know  
in what mood the reader will be  
when he reads the letter.

As if the natural limitations  
of the language are not enough,  
we have the added limitation  
of the written word  
while corresponding with people on paper.

Learned books have been written  
on the nature of language  
in its relation to human behaviour.

This chapter does not aim at summarising  
these many insightful findings.  
It only seeks to highlight the point  
that written words call for double care  
in handling them.

# XI

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## IF YOU ARE A BEGINNER

<sup>e</sup>/<sub>e</sub> To write <sup>e</sup>will, we must write easily and naturally. For example, if you want to write a letter to me, you should consider what you'd say if you were with me and then write it in plain terms, just as if you were conversing—by that means you will, by degrees, write perfectly well with ease.

*Lord Chesterfield*

### 43. IF YOU ARE A BEGINNER . . . . .

N.B.: *If you are not a beginner,  
please pass over this chapter.*

#### REMEMBER THE PURPOSES:

- a) To effect transactions without personal contact ;
- b) To provide a record of the facts of a transaction ;
- c) To create in the reader's mind a picture
  - i) of the writer's organisation, as an efficient trust-worthy concern, and
  - ii) of the writer as a clear-headed, capable person anxious to help the reader.

#### MAKE THE PREPARATION

Whether it is a reply to a letter,  
or it is one initiated by you,  
before you begin, make sure

- a. you know what you want to say ;
- b. of the sequence in which you are going to say it,  
preferably on paper, in the form of notes.

#### DECIDE ON THE HEADING

A heading will be beneficial

- a. if it helps to shorten your letter,
- b. if you are beginning a correspondence which will probably lead to a series of letters on the subject, and
- c. if your correspondence has already <sup>been</sup> used one.

Give your correspondent's reference.

Give your reference <sup>and</sup> date,

e.g., your order/letter No. . . . dated . . . for . . .

## SOME POINTS FOR OPENING

Whom to address and in what form:

Address the firm—as Dear Sirs or Gentlemen.

You may add “For the Attention of Mr. . . . .” if you do know Mr. . . . is handling the papers. (If it is with a government agency, use ‘Shri’ instead of Mr.)

If you are addressing a position in a company, say Sales Manager or Research Director, use *Dear Sir*.

The opening paragraph:

Your aim here is to make clear why you are writing the letter.

If it is a reply to a letter, you acknowledge receipt of it; and unless you have given the subject in a heading, the first sentence should recall it.

E.g.: Thank you for your letter of 29th May about Chromium plating.

## THE BODY OF THE LETTER

Your object here is to convey to your reader the information, problem, question or request which you have or should have clearly in your mind.

It follows that:

- a. you should be brief;
- b. your letter should cover the subject;

- c. your letter should do so in a logical sequence ;
- d. and each sub-division of the subject should form a separate paragraph.

You may number the paras if you wish to see that no point is overlooked in the reply.

### THE CLOSE

If the letter ends logically,  
no closing para is necessary.

If you wish to re-emphasise some point  
or sum up the letter,  
you may use the final para.

At any rate **avoid** stereotyped meaningless formulae like:

Awaiting the favour of your esteemed communi-  
cation

Assuring you of our best attention at all times

Thanking you

### HOW TO SIGN YOUR LETTER

Say: 'Yours truly' or 'Very truly yours'—  
it serves all occasions.

If you address your letter to an individual by name,  
use '*Yours sincerely*'.

Don't say: "I remain, dear sirs" or even "I remain".  
If it is a sort of contract,  
you may put your company's name—  
"may" because your letterhead is proof enough  
in a law court if necessary.

Type your name and, maybe, the position.  
The reader may like to phone you  
and your signature *may* not be legible.

If you sign for somebody else, say so,  
e.g., "For Sales Manager."

Except in real emergencies,  
avoid "dictated but not read by . . . ."  
A letter signed by someone else is better  
than an unsigned letter.  
Avoid a rubber stamp imprint of your signature.

## SUPERSCRPTION

Check the superscription.  
Errors of title and address can have serious results.

Check address for completeness and correctness.  
If the addressee is a person, use the prefix Mr./Shri.  
If it is a lady and you are not sure  
whether she is a Mrs. or Miss, use Ms.  
If an organisation, just state its name—  
the prefix *Messrs.* is not necessary.

## LETTER OPENINGS AND CLOSINGS

Pay special attention to openings and closings.  
Whether the reader will read your letter  
and whether he will act on it  
often depends on your letter openings and closings.

## LETTER OPENINGS

"The first five words" are an opportunity.

The beginning of a letter is an opportunity  
to arrest the reader's attention  
so he may feel like reading the rest ;  
to indicate the purpose of the letter  
so he gets prepared to receive the message ;  
to summarise the contents of the letter  
so he knows what amplifications are likely to follow.

The beginning is particularly valuable in a sales letter.

Good sales letter writers do not waste it on making reference to a past situation or restating a fact.

They realise that the opening sentences can win the reader—or lose him.

**If he has to read the letter,  
we need not discuss this point.  
Often the reader does not have to.  
If we have to win his attention,  
the first few words do set the stage.**

Many find it difficult to get started. They resort, therefore, to the conventional, pointless rubber-stamp warm-ups.\*

Reader psychology tells us that the two questions readers want answered are:  
What's this *about*?  
How can this help *me*?

The opening sentence should therefore not merely tell the reader what the letter is *about*, it should also include a message that will *interest the reader*.

What happens to the *courtesy* part of the letter?

The courtesy part of the opening can be made a subordinate idea. For example:  
Here is our latest price list which you  
asked for in your kind letter of 1 May.

If it is a reply to a letter, how to go about it is relatively easy.

\* A few examples are—'We beg to advise', 'Yours of the 10th ultimo to hand', 'We acknowledge the due receipt of your letter no . . . dated . . . .'



The reader has asked for something.  
What he is expecting in the reply  
is an answer to the question or the request.  
What is uppermost in his mind is:  
What have you got to say to it?

If we answer the question in the first few words,  
it will be most acceptable to the reader.  
E.g.: "Yes, I can supply you 10 kgs. ex-stock."  
"Of course, you can mention me as a reference."  
"The attached note gives you the details you  
asked for."

This type of beginning becomes possible  
when the answer is positive, when it is "yes".

If it is negative,  
**another aspect of audience psychology  
has to be taken into account.**

The reader can take a 'no';  
but he would like to know why.  
The approach preferred in "no" letters therefore is  
to give the reasons first and conclude: 'Sorry, no'.

A "no" is a "no" and the reader will resent it  
but the recommended approach gives the reader  
the fair feeling that we've not been arbitrary,  
that we are reasonable.

In the case of one "no" letter, for example,  
the opening was:

Thank you for your letter of . . . I thought over  
the proposition and discussed it with my colleagues.  
I am summing up their thinking here . . . You will  
now see why I am unable to say "yes". Maybe,  
the position will change in the next year or two.  
For the moment I fear the answer has to be "no".

## WHEN WE INITIATE A LETTER.

In most cases at any rate, we can plunge into the subject.

E.g.: Will you please send me the literature on your new photo-copying machine?

Generally speaking, effective openings are brief, courteous and to the point.

Here are 15 valuable suggestions from Professor John P. Riebel.

1. *Begin with the subject of your letter*—The Christmas trees you ordered are being shipped today, Mr. . . . .
2. *Use the YOU Point of View*—Your nice letter of January 15 was very much appreciated, Miss . . .
3. *Ask a Question*—When may we expect shipment on our order of February 22?
4. *Accentuate the Positive*—You are quite right, Miss B. . . . . Conduct like that is not tolerated at the Regent.
5. *Use an "Appreciation" Opening*—Thank you for your last order, Mr. . . . It was gracious of you to . . . . We certainly appreciate your . . . . I am delighted to have your reservations for . . . . Your courtesy in sending me this information is very much appreciated.
6. *Make a Courteous Request of Command*—May I trouble you for a minute, Mr. P. . . .
7. *Give a Gift or Make an Offer*—The enclosed tickets to the annual Monday Club fashion show are sent with the compliments of the management, Miss K. . . .

8. *Use a Familiar Name as Your Point of Contact*—Mr. G. . . . , Manager of the . . . Theatre in . . . , has suggested that I write you about . . . .
9. *Express Sincere Regret. If the Occasion Warrants it*—I want you to know how very sorry we are that you experienced that kind of service at our . . . Dealership, Mr. . . .
10. *Begin with an Appropriate Quotation*—"Has anybody seen Kelly?" may be a flip remark to some people, but not to the Kelly Construction Company!
11. *Don't Be Afraid to Use a Novelty or Startling Opening. If it Ties in with Your Message*—You don't owe us a cent, Mr. . . . —we certainly wish you did!
12. *Open with a Friendly Bit of Sentiment—but Don't Get Sentimental.* Congratulations on your promotion, . . . ! It couldn't have happened to a more deserving fellow!
13. *Use a Seasonal Opening*—Merry X'mas, Mrs. N.
14. *Make a Statement of Fact*—We certainly appreciate your business, Mr. . . . .
15. *Open with a Reference to Time*—July 27 is a very important date for both of us.

#### LETTER CLOSINGS:

A letter is in a sense a substitute for a visit. The leave-taking should be as thoughtful as the greeting.

Parting sentences leave a lasting impression.

Modern letter writers make the ending of a letter natural, courteous, fresh and, where possible, emphatic.

They consciously avoid using thoughtless, formula closes.\*

Instead they make strong and meaningful exits.

If it is a letter expressing thanks for a payment, they may conclude with a thoughtful expression like:

Renewed thanks for sending the cheque so promptly.

If it is a long letter making a point, they may conclude:

In summary, the position is this:

If it is a letter making a specific request, they may end thus:

Please therefore send me the analysis data by . . . . to enable me to send the quotation to the customer in time.

If it is a letter asking for action, they may restate the position like this:

I hope you will be able to reschedule your deliveries soon, to help us solve the problem I have described above.

I have described above.

How about a confirmation by July 1?

If it is a personal letter, they may conclude using expressions like "with regards" or "with all good wishes".

## REWRITE, REVISE

It is true you do not write great prose.  
Your aim is not to be remembered as great writers.

\* A few samples are: "Thanking you", "Thanking you in advance", "Assuring you of our best services as always".

All the same, you would do well to know the approaches of the skilled full-time writers.

One common practice among such writers is to revise what they have written. Some revise many times. That is how they succeed in coming out with the graceful phrase, the vivid description and the witty dialogue.

At every stage and particularly in the early stages, therefore, you would do well to start with a rough draft and then polish it up as much as you can in the time available to you. You wish to get results and to create a good impression. The more important the occasion the more you have to work for it.

#### A CHECKLIST FOR BEGINNERS

Analyse your letters by asking:

1. Do I think my answer through before starting to write or dictate?
2. Do I make my most important point first?
3. Do I anticipate my reader's "show me" attitude by considering and answering his probable objections to what I am saying?
4. Have I emphasised some point vitally important to my reader's interest?
5. Does my letter make it easy, logical and advantageous for the addressee to do what I want him to do?

6. Do I picture myself talking directly across the desk to my correspondent, even though I am dictating to my steno?
7. Have I given complete information? Can the recipient of my letter act without hesitating or asking further questions?
8. Does my letter sound human when I read it over? Or is it coldly commercial?
9. Do the points I have made ring true? Do they make the subject, point or order seem attractive?
10. Does my whole letter sound as though I were interested in the man I am writing to?
11. Is every point I made correct in every detail?
12. Have I checked the points requiring answers to make certain none has been overlooked?
13. Is my language concise and to the point, yet easy to read?
14. Have I made it a rule never to sign a letter until it has:
  - a. answered every question, point, detail?
  - b. made immediate action on the part of my correspondent appear advantageous to him?
  - c. covered the subject-matter completely, yet objectively and without exaggeration?
  - d. indicated a sincere interest in my reader's problem or business?
  - e. been made to sound as though I were sitting across the desk, talking to him?

- f. made me feel I would be satisfied with his answer if I were in his place ?
15. Have I made sure my letter is:
- a. neat ?
  - b. punctuated correctly ?
  - c. clear without being wordy ?
  - d. cordial, considerate and complete ?

### LETTER SAMPLES

You find in this book samples of letters written for particular occasions and situations. They are given in order to demonstrate the guidelines described in this book, namely, **remember purpose, visualise reader, write clearly and acceptably, and observe common rules of grammar.**

You are welcome to use these letters as thought-starters but please **do not** copy them word for word. You **can** compose a good letter, a letter good for the situation. *Please don't let go your talent.*

## XII

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### LETTERS CLASSIFIED

To sell John Smith with what John Smith buys  
you must see John Smith with John Smith's eyes.

*Anon*

Think like a wise man but communicate in the  
language of the people.

*W. B. Yeats*

Nothing so compliments a friend as when a busy man,  
known to have an adequate staff, takes time to write  
a letter with his own pen.

*Clarence B. Randall*



#### 44. LETTERS CLASSIFIED

For purposes of detailed discussion letters can be classified into  
Internal letters and  
External letters.

Internal letters can be grouped into memos and circulars.

External letters can be further classified into  
Letters to parties abroad  
Letters to the government  
Letters to customers and suppliers  
Letters to the public  
Social and personal letters.

External letters can also be classified into  
Routine letters  
Special letters.

Special letters would be normally made up of  
Sales letters  
Complaints and  
Adjustment letters  
Collection letters  
Legal letters  
Letters saying "no".

A section will be devoted to each of these subdivisions of common letters.

#### 45. INTERNAL MEMOS

As an organisation becomes larger, as its operations become wider, a large part of correspondence is of the internal memo nature.

An internal memo may be required for a follow-up or reference purpose. It may be required for record purposes.

It may be required because the departments or branches concerned are geographically apart.

Essentially a memo is a major means of integrating an individual's efforts into the total activity of the Company.

While internal memos thus have a place in the orderly scheme of things, we also find at times a memo-flood in some organisations.

**This is occasioned by**

- a) a general atmosphere of distrust
- b) a compulsion to impress the boss.

Occasionally, streaks of sadism also account for this undue production of memos— we try to fix the colleague on paper; and, of course, he returns the compliment: and the typists are fully occupied with internal memos and on a priority basis.

Local scores have to be settled first; the customers can wait!

What it costs the organisation  
in terms of invisible waste,  
the key men do not realise ;  
and by the time they realise it,  
the habit is set!

I am emphasising this point  
because I have observed that  
for a number of reasons  
correspondence-happy persons  
take advantage of even a single cabin wall  
to send memos across.  
I have also known of organisations  
where people communicate with  
their next-desk neighbours  
through a typed letter!

**The point to remember is that  
it is a memo at best, not a formal letter.**

It is often a substitute for conversation ;  
and only occasionally a supplement to it.  
Remembering this,  
let us ask ourselves the basic question:  
*Is an internal memo necessary ?*

Can I not go to his desk and talk it over ?  
Can I not talk it over the phone ?  
Having talked over it, can I not record  
only such items as call for later reference ?

Even where distances warrant it,  
we can bring in an element of informality  
by sending a handwritten memo,  
by returning the memo with the reply on the margin  
and, of course, wherever possible,  
talking it over the phone.

Another point worth emphasising is  
that internal memos can be far more courteous  
than they normally are ;

that threats and innuendos can be played down:  
we cannot afford avoidable internal friction.

The usual "sinners" are the head office folk,  
the accounts department and the staff departments.  
They give the impression in the internal memos  
that they alone are interested in the company  
and the rest are not.  
The tone of their letters creates this impression.

I am only referring to a tendency,  
I am not apportioning blame.  
Parkinson's Law of Thousands\*  
is a warning to all of us—  
when an organisation becomes large,  
we tend to forget that  
we all belong to the same organisation ;  
and we have to support and supplement each other  
for a common purpose.

As a consultant, I have noticed  
the amount of damage caused to a company's vitality  
by the inter-departmental rivalry  
vividly exhibited in the internal memos.

I concede that those who are used to  
an atmosphere of no-trust  
behave oddly even in the work sphere.  
My submission is that we should control this tendency  
and not make it a flaming contagion.

**An internal memo should be  
particularly cordial and understanding.**  
It can well afford to shed costly  
formalities on the one hand  
and the equally costly  
emotional build up on the other.

\* When an organisation has over a thousand people, it has  
released the forces of self destruction.

It pays to keep an organisation *an* organisation through well-worded, help-giving memos.

One company has this to say on inter-office memos:

You, as a part of this growing organisation, have a definite responsibility. Just as machines run on oil, so efficient business operations run on go good-will and clear, accurate communication. You may protest that your writing is a minor part of your work. Even if that is so, it is still an important part of it. Writing provides a checkable record of what you accomplish or fail to accomplish.

Inter-office communication requires the same accuracy and courtesy as in outside communications. Goodwill between you and your supply department, for example, pays dividends in the form of willing co-operation.

Human relationships are more important than machines in any business. It pays you to appreciate the contribution each of your co-workers makes to the smooth operation of the entire organisation.

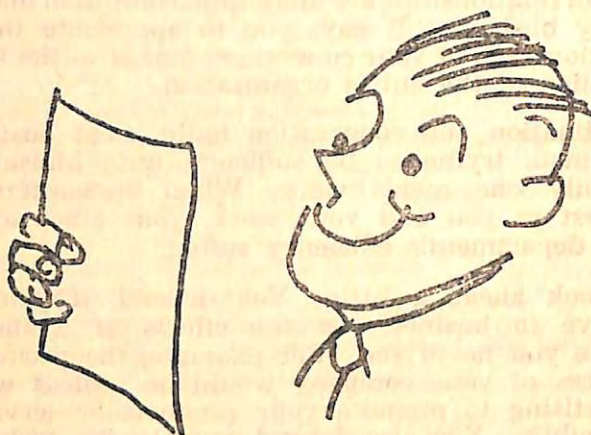
Coordination and cooperation build great businesses. One man, trying to be sufficient unto himself, can do only one man's work. When co-workers lack interest in you and your work, your efficiency and your department's efficiency suffer.

Do look ahead a little. You depend, if you're to survive in business, on the efforts of a thousand people you never see. For example, the products or services of your company would be useless without advertising to promote your products or services to the public. You also depend upon trucks, trains, and planes to deliver them. We couldn't get very far either without our amazingly efficient post office.

Your letters, in short, form a life-line of goodwill from your office to your correspondents wherever they may be. Their foundation is co-operation. Let's consciously tend it.

Operationally speaking,  
an effective inter-office memo  
is found—

1. To have an early statement of purpose
2. To have a clear statement of purpose
3. To be logical
4. To be pointed
5. To be readable
6. To be cordial.



Feel like reading it.

#### 46. AVOID VERBAL INSTRUCTIONS

In some companies, the rule is:  
Avoid verbal instructions.

Like many other things,  
this can be taken literally.  
When it is taken literally,  
we will have the flood  
we were talking about in the previous section.

This rule *does not imply*  
that you can't phone another department,  
give emergency instructions,  
or enquire about some shipment  
that has gone wrong.

It does, however, imply that  
the instructions must be repeated in writing  
if the other section head is to carry them out,  
through one of his men, or at a future date.

The idea is to avoid confusion or conflict.

**If it is a company requirement  
that all instructions should be  
given in writing only,**  
we would do well to check with someone higher up  
what actually is meant by the instruction.  
Such checking will save the company  
an exaggerated and avoidable resort to memos.

#### 47. EXTERNAL LETTERS : TO GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

In the case of correspondence with government departments, our objective is twofold.

We want to minimise delay.  
We want to get the necessary sanction.

A third objective may be added.  
We want to avoid ill-will.  
In respect of non-government parties, building goodwill is important ;  
**while dealing with government preventing ill-will is important.**  
If ill-will is created, future actions become more problematic.

In the case of non-governmental parties, if our first letter does not say it in full or properly, a supplementary letter hardly helps—tracing original letters is not easy in government offices. Their filing system is yet to be up-dated to suit the modern tempo of work. Also, tracing papers is fast becoming a proposition that calls for personal intervention and monetary incentives. (I would personally call it a search fee—and the people that do the search deserve it: the existing record system calls for complex skills!)

This situational constraint should be remembered when we write to government.



Once we do, we will make our letters to government  
*not merely clear, but complete and correct.*

**Those in the government are  
usually fair-minded people.**

**They are keen to dispose of the papers.**

Since they are part of a very large machinery,  
and since what they do in one part  
may affect another part,  
they have to check and double-check  
and then only say "yes" or "no".

We make their job more difficult  
if we do not give sufficient intimation  
or sufficiently authenticated information.

In fact, if we write 'cleverly,'  
they are almost put on their guard against us.

Once we have put them on their guard  
they develop virtually an allergy for us,  
for our organisation, for our community group  
and for our very competitive enterprise system.  
It becomes necessary then that  
when we write to the government,  
we remember the larger picture,  
we make our message clear and direct,  
we make our letter complete and correct.

#### 48. EXTERNAL LETTERS : OUTSIDE THE COUNTRY

Some of us more often, and most of us sometimes, write letters to outside countries.

These countries could be English-speaking countries or non-English-speaking countries.

If clarity is generally important, it is all the more so in such letters.

Even when we correspond with parties in English-speaking countries, we have a handicap. We tend to think that conditions obtaining in India are the same as those in Canada, say.

Regulations are not merely different in our country ; our very approach to regulations is different from that in other countries.

For the sake of a copy of a "worthless" document, our authorities are capable of holding up the traffic and thereby delaying manufacturing operations for weeks.

(Maybe the reason for this is the general lack of trust.

Why they do what they do is a different matter ; what we are concerned with is with a harsh reality.)

This phenomenon the parties in other countries hardly realise.

Their reaction often is: Why make a hubbub about an innocuous document!

Taking things or people for granted has been described as the commonest folly in dealing with people.

I have noticed it as a frequent folly  
in dealing with people abroad.

I have seen a number of embarrassing cases  
and the resulting endless correspondence  
just because this "minor" point  
was not looked into in time.

It is well, therefore, to make a letter  
as explicit as possible,  
to explain where necessary  
why we are seemingly "sticky".

The second major area where I have observed  
a little caution worthwhile  
is when corresponding with  
non-English-speaking countries.

We are an English-speaking country.  
An English-speaking country is not the same as  
an English-writing country  
as far as communication is concerned.

For all that we know what we write in English  
may be translated into German or Japanese  
and given to the people concerned.  
What they write in German or Japanese  
may be translated into English and sent to us.  
Sometimes it has been found useful  
to get the original German or Japanese composition  
and get local help to translate it  
instead of going through the translation department  
of the foreign company.

## 49. ROUTINE LETTERS

In most offices, routine letters—  
inquiries, orders, bills, etc.,—  
make up the largest part of the correspondence.

Unlike special letters,  
they do not call for any “art” as such  
but they should be

clear,  
courteous,  
complete and prompt,  
and correct.

### WHEN WE MAKE INQUIRIES

In an inquiry letter, we state  
simply and directly what we want to know.  
Our question is an inclusive one.

### WHEN WE ANSWER INQUIRIES

When we answer an inquiry letter,  
our reply should be full and precise.  
The other party should have no need  
to come back to us to clear up points.

If we send a booklet or catalogue  
which carries the information asked for,  
we should refer to the page  
and the paragraph where it appears  
in our covering letter.

If the point inquired about is not answered  
in the booklet or not answered adequately,  
the reply should make it clear.

Clarity-oriented paragraphing—  
one idea, one paragraph—  
makes quick understanding easy.

If we want the information  
to be kept confidential by the reader,  
let us say so ; let us not leave it to him to guess.

Even among inquiry letters,  
there are special situations,  
e.g., an inquiry about one's credit standing.  
These call for special care and tact.

#### WHEN WE PLACE ORDERS

When we place an order for goods,  
we generally use a purchase order form.

The form itself has space for special instructions.  
Even so, we may state in the covering letter  
*the points of emphasis* in clear terms.

If the order is placed by letter,  
we should spell out clearly the following:

- a) what item of what specification
- b) what quality
- c) at what price
- d) by what date
- e) by what mode of transport
- f) delivery at what address
- g) any additional special instructions, e.g., to send  
whatever is available, if entire quality is not  
available.

We take the listing cookbook-approach  
as against the essay-approach.  
If there are enclosures, we list them.  
We point it out if we enclose payment.

#### FOLLOW-UP LETTERS.

Sometimes we have to *follow up the orders*.  
The tendency will be to adopt a complaining tone.

It is well to avoid this.  
We want the job done ;  
we want the goods.  
Let us bear with someone's seeming inefficiency.  
Let us restate our requirements and request action.

#### WHEN WE RECEIVE ORDERS

It is in good taste to acknowledge all orders.  
Even if we use a routine form,  
there is space for a thoughtful note.

To create a favourable impression,  
acknowledgements should be *prompt*.

If there is likely to be some delay,  
we can say so and  
seek the other party's understanding support.

If a follow-up on an order comes in,  
especially in a disagreeable tone,  
we can be tactful.  
We can send a fact-filled letter.  
We can give the boss the date and manner of despatch  
and give the reason for the delay.

#### A MINI CASE HISTORY

A large shoe manufacturing company received a small  
initial order from a moffussil shop.

The following letter was typed and came for signature :

Dear Sir :

In response to your kind favour of March 21, we  
beg to advise that a credit account has been opened  
in your name and we are handling your order  
under our number 7643, which please note for  
future reference.

Hoping to receive your future orders and assuring you of our best services, we remain,

Yours faithfully

.....

The sales manager who had just returned from a foreign tour thought this letter can be improved. So he dictated the following one:

Dear Mr. Mody,

We thank you very much for your order of March 21. We are sending the material to you by lorry on 24. We are despatching this order to you on our most favourable credit terms.

We will be glad to cooperate with you in your efforts to gain larger profits through quicker sales.

To help you display our goods, we are packing with your order window display material. A member of our Business Promotion Department will call on you shortly. Please feel free to use his services, without charge or obligation.

We welcome you as a customer and we are sure the association will be a long and happy one.

Very truly yours

.....

## 50. SPECIAL LETTERS : SALES LETTER\*

Business begins with a sale.  
One of the most important types of letters,  
therefore, is the sales letter.

A sales letter should sell.  
And what is selling ?  
Selling is our presentation of the virtues  
of our goods, services or ideas  
in such a way as to persuade prospective customers  
to buy them.

To succeed in selling,  
our letter must do these:  
get attention, arouse interest,  
create desire and evoke action.

### WRITE AUTHORITATIVELY

To prepare a successful sales letter,  
the more effective people commend these steps:  
Determine *the* prospect's needs ;  
Describe goods or services to meet those needs ;  
Pass along the conviction that our goods  
are superior to those of the competitors!

The chances of the prospect  
buying our goods are high  
if our letter shows logically, clearly and fairly  
that the goods we offer  
will satisfy important purposes  
in the prospect's work or life,  
and if it argues convincingly  
about the economy of purchase.

\* Adapted from the Royal Bank of Canada Monthly Letter:  
*On Writing a Sales Letter* (March 1962).



Our goods should give the prospect satisfaction ;  
then only will he decide to exchange  
cash for cash's worth.

What would give him satisfaction ?  
What wants can the goods meet ?  
People want some things for survival ;  
they also want things for comfort and enjoyment.

We should find out what primary and secondary wants  
our goods will satisfy.

We should connect our product  
with some specific want or  
buying interest of the reader.

We should personalize.  
The key to the heart of the selling letter  
is the question :

*Why should he do what I am asking him do ?*

To answer this question satisfactorily  
we need to know about three things:  
human instincts, the individual's needs,  
and our product.

We need to know about human instincts because  
persuasion is based largely on knowing  
what makes men tick.

We need to know about the individual's needs  
because it is to him we are selling.

We need to know about the product  
because we have to relate the product to his needs.

There are volumes on sales psychology  
and more will be written.

Very briefly, the drive for self-preservation seems to make people buy things—goods, services and ideas.

The branches of this basic drive are: food, clothes, housing, transportation, police, army, health (recreation and enjoyment), medicine, money, savings and investments, cleanliness, protection of the family, avoidance of trouble, reputation, comfort, avoidance of criticism, developing popularity, keeping pace with improvements, safety, staying in style, escape from physical injury, safety, curiosity, avoidance of unnecessary effort, taking advantage of opportunity, emulation, praise, accumulating and preserving valuable possessions.

Whether we are associated with manufacturing, shipping, retailing or teaching, if we want to sell things or ideas, we must appeal to one or more of these branches of the desire for self-preservation.

#### WRITE APPEALINGLY

To relate what we have to what the customer needs, we should know about the product.

The questions that cry for answer therefore are:

Do I know enough about my product?  
How is the product used? Where is it used?  
When is it used? Why is it used?  
Why is it not used more than it is?  
Has it any new uses?  
What are the competing goods?  
How do they compare in quality, performance and cost?

Of these, which are relevant to the prospect?  
What are *his* wants and interests?  
This is the next area for study.

All these steps are by way of preparing ourselves to write authoritatively.

Now we should consider how to write the letter appealingly.

The sales appeal should be centred on the product ; but language and style help us do it effectively.

Language and style enable us to appeal to rational motives like financial gain, economy, security and saving time ; and to emotional motives like pride, emulation and social prestige.

**Selling is done by using appealing ideas, not by arguing or disputing. And that means imagination.**

Imagination enables us to think up illustrations that will appeal to our readers, illustrations which permit them to convince themselves of the truth of what we say. General ideas about the quality, use and merit of our product are important, but an example of its performance or an instance of user satisfaction speaks persuasively to the interested prospect. Case histories and experimental analyses provide powerful sales material. Comparing something unknown with something already known makes it possible for us to talk about the unknown. In fact, convincing by analogy is one of the most effective tools of selling.

#### WRITE APPROPRIATELY

To appeal to the reader our letter must be appropriate, accurate, clear, concise and complete.

We should be appropriate  
in our use of language,  
in our perception of the reader's needs,  
and in our appreciation of his position in life.

We should be accurate in the sense that  
our information should be correct ;  
and there must be no over-statement.

We should be clear ;  
the reader should be able  
to readily understand our message.

We should be concise ;  
we should cover the subject effectively  
in as short a space as we can.

We should be complete ;  
we should give the reader all the information  
he may need about the product  
to enable him to decide.  
We should be thorough.

And finally, we may  
look over our letters seeking "yes"  
for questions like these:  
Have I made my points clearly ?  
Have I given all the information needed ?  
Is my letter so worded  
as to place the emphasis properly ?  
Have I avoided withered phrases and dead words ?  
Have I eliminated excess verbiage ?  
Has my letter a friendly feeling in it ?  
Does it carry conviction of my firm's sincerity  
and the worthwhileness of what it offers ?

#### GENERAL PREPARATION

Writing good sales letters is not easy.  
It takes study, enthusiasm and experience.  
Those who have acquired the skill commend  
the following general steps:

Read widely, not only in business  
and technical literature,  
*but* in cultural subjects—  
philosophy, economics, biography  
and travel, for example.

It pays to be well primed on topics of  
general significance, because the more you have  
in your mind, and the better the things you have  
in your mind, the more likely you are to bring  
worthwhile fusions of ideas out of your mind.

See and think beyond your own desk.  
Set up for yourself a code of behaviour.  
The average customer is not an expert  
in the things he is buying.  
He doesn't know  
nearly as much about them as you do.

This lays upon you an obligation  
to protect the customer,  
and to give him, if possible,  
something better than he would,  
according to the strict letter of his contract,  
expect to receive.

November 6, 1967

Mr. N H Atthreya  
Director  
MMC School of Management  
Shakar Bhavan  
Bombay 77, India.

Enclosed, Mr. Atthreya . . .  
is your free copy of Editor's Choice, a 64-page  
collection of best direct mail techniques.

Editor's Choice is an annual compilation of the  
best direct mail articles that have appeared during  
the year in Reporter of Direct Mail Advertising  
magazine. Each and every monthly issue of  
DIRECT MAIL explores the day-in, day-out prob-  
lems of mailers—large and small—showing  
through case histories and how-to articles what  
others have done to make their direct mail more  
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years for just \$ 15 (that's like getting one year  
free). Return the enclosed postage paid reply  
card, and I'll see that your subscription starts at  
once.

Cordially,

Al Scott\*  
Promotion Manager

\* Reproduced with permission.

14 September 1967.

Gentlemen:

Here is a gift idea—an “intellectual” gift idea.

Your doctor clients should welcome it. They may also welcome additional units for their own young mother clients.

The author is an outstanding pediatrician now in the USA. Yes, the idea is a book.

The theme is: *Nutrition of Infants in the First year of Life.*

The approach is the novel, modern, effective, programmed text approach.

The proposal is this. You may decide to gift half a dozen copies to your doctor clients and say you will be glad to give them more copies for a nominal amount in case they need more copies.

Of course, it will be on an exclusive basis. This facility will be extended to only one pharmaceutical marketing company.

Whatever is the production cost plus 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ % will be the cost to you.

I look forward to hearing from you.

With regards

Sincerely yours

PS: *The enclosed preview of the book will give you an idea of what and how: it does not pretend to be impressive or learned but it makes a point and well.*

## 51. COMPLAINT AND ADJUSTMENT LETTERS

We all make mistakes though we do not mean to.

If an organisation makes a mistake and we are thereby inconvenienced or put to a loss, we have a right to complain and ask for a reasonable adjustment.

By the same token, if somebody has to suffer because of a mistake on our part, he has a right to complain too and ask for a reasonable adjustment.

How we make a complaint by letter, and how we express the adjustment by letter: this plays an important part in effective correspondence.

The right to complain is justified, but this right need not become a right to fly into a temper. Just as we may have a reason for any failure, *he* may have a reason too. It is well, therefore, not to attribute his error to ill-intention or mere negligence.

By the same token, when we receive a complaint letter, let us not run to the extreme of showing irritation, or to the other extreme of making a rash commitment: "This will never happen again."

The "you" attitude plays an indispensable part when we write or answer complaints. This is the occasion when we have to see the matter from the other fellow's viewpoint in addition to our own.



## 52. ADJUSTMENT LETTERS

We don't like complaints from others.

When complaint letters come to us, our tendency is to resent them as criticism, and take an offensive or defensive approach, or both.

This approach, we find, only makes matters worse.

Effective correspondents tell themselves:

We will take every effort to prevent mistakes.\*\*

Some mistakes will occur despite our best efforts.

Letters of complaints

we should be prepared to receive.

Let us gracefully accept them

and effect the necessary corrections or adjustments and inform the party accordingly through a well-worded letter.

In fact, complaints give us an opportunity to improve our products and services, and retain customer goodwill.

It has been noticed that many do not complain; they just walk away from our "shop".

When people complain, it means

they are interested in continuing as our customers.

They therefore tell all concerned:

1. Reply to a complaint promptly.  
If it takes time to make the adjustment, acknowledge the letter first—  
send an interim reply.

---

\*\* The mistake prevention measures would include following instructions, proper packing, checking on despatch and despatch instructions, proper billing and promptness.

2. If you can make an adjustment, do it gracefully and say it pleasantly. Don't do it grudgingly or condescendingly. (Avoid expressions like:  
It is a mistake at your end . . .  
all the same . . . this time.)
3. If you are wrong, admit it at once. Do not try to argue. Don't use scapegoats. (Don't put the blame on a clerk or secretary.) Say "sorry" if you are at fault. (Everybody makes mistakes sometimes.)
4. Don't use a combative tone. Don't show a sarcastic attitude. Avoid loaded, irritating expressions like: "your claim", "you allege", "according to your contention."
5. At the same time, don't overdo this. Don't apologise too profusely. (Don't disparage your organisation. If others can make mistakes, you too can make mistakes, sometimes.)
6. If you are not at fault but a third party is (e.g., a transport company), explain it with understanding and, where possible, offer a hand of help.

Here is a sample pair of before-and-after adjustment letters.

*Before*

In your letter of June 9, you claim that we despatched 4 dozen . . . instead of the 2 dozen ordered. Investigations of our records show that you are correct in your

claim. However, we cannot give you credit for the item until we receive the . . . Kindly return them to us at once and we will have a credit note issued for the amount in question.

*After*

We are glad to cancel the charge for the extra two dozen . . . we despatched to you by mistake. Credit note for the amount is enclosed.

Will you please keep the two dozen extra . . . until our representative calls? He may be able to supply it to a nearby customer. We are informing him today.

Please accept our thanks for calling our attention to this mistake.

### 53. THE COMPLAINT LETTER

An effective complaint letter is clear, concise, courteous and reasonable.

It makes *clear* what is wrong and how we want it adjusted.

It makes sure of the facts and is precise about dates, quantities, etc. It is specific in explaining the nature and extent of the loss or inconvenience suffered and the adjustment we consider ought to be made. This enables the other party to verify our claims and to make a prompt adjustment.

The complaint is *concise*—this is one way to keep off superfluous words and resentful tones.

A courteous tone helps <sup>in</sup> many ways. It is much more convincing. It puts the reader in a receptive and compliant mood. When anger is restrained, the letter becomes more convincing.

It is not easy to be courteous. Many use courtesy words but the injured tone is obvious. It takes the form of subtle digs or barbs of sarcasm.

The idea is not that we should not complain ; it is no discourtesy to ask for what is due to us. We should make it known that we have suffered loss or inconvenience. We can do so firmly and yet remain friendly.

And finally it is *reasonable* to demand an adjustment.

Here is a simple example:

Just a friendly reminder that your loan repayment due on 10 July has not yet reached us. The August payment is also due.

Everyone is apt to overlook things now and then, and if it has slipped your attention, please let us have your instalment soon.

If payment has been mailed, please accept our thanks and disregard this notice.

Sincerely, etc.

#### A CASE HISTORY\*

A customer wrote G . . . . 's firm sizzling letter demanding an explanation as to why it had taken ten days to fill his last order whereas orders sent previously had been filled in three days. The delay, it developed, was due to the fact that at the time the order arrived the factory was oversold. Thus, someone should have so informed the customer. But, as often happens in the best regulated (?) offices, someone didn't.

Now, it is likely that the "average" letter writer would have undertaken to soothe the angry customer and let it go at that. G . . . . , however, scenting an order, went a step further and wrote the customer the following letter. The result was a \$ 300 order.

Your letter of . . . . , for which we thank you, came this morning.

Certain it is we're sorry that there was a delay in shipping the . . . . you ordered on May 26. It

\* From an article by Charles A Emley in *The Mailbag*.

really couldn't be helped. The demand for . . . . . has been so big lately that we've found it utterly impossible to fill all orders as promptly as formerly.

As the demand is increasing and as it will take some little time for us to increase our manufacturing facilities, we wonder if you'd like to cooperate with us by anticipating your needs.

If you can see your way clear to send your orders about two weeks before you need . . . . . it will help us lay out our plans so as to get the . . . . . to you by the time you need them.

Perhaps you'll find it convenient to mail us an order now to be filled in two weeks or so. We'd appreciate it if you would do this, for we certainly want to give you the kind of service that will please and satisfy you.

A customer wrote for a price on an item. G . . . . . quoted. The customer came back with the information that a commission house in N . . . . . was selling the same article at a price lower than the one G . . . . . had quoted. "Moreover", wrote the peeved customer, "I can buy the Jones brand, just as good as yours, for . . . . . a gross less than you charge for yours." He left-handedly accused G . . . . . 's firm of maintaining a two-price policy and wound up with this ominous threat. "You may ship the 25 gross at the price I specify on the attached order" (10% lower than the price G . . . . . had quoted), "or cancel the order."

G . . . . . lighted a cigar, wheeled around to his typewriter and wrote this letter which brought a courteous answer from the customer and instructions to ship the twenty-five gross at the price originally quoted:

Inasmuch as we appreciate your order of June 10, we cannot fill it at the special price you mention

because our best price is the one quoted in our letter of June 2.

You realise, of course, Mr. . . . . that if we were to give you the benefit of a special price we would do an injustice to our many other customers. Moreover, you wouldn't have much confidence in us if we were to quote you a price, asserting it to be our best, and then, upon your insistence, give you a better price. You would look upon us as a two-price house and for ever regard our quotations with suspicion.

Obviously, we want you and all our other friends to think of us as a one-price house—as a house that puts out quality products and sells them at a price consistent with quality.

True, you may be able to buy the A brand at a lower price than we charge for ours. The A brand may be as good as ours. We don't know. We do know that you can buy (name of product) at a lower price than that charged for the A brand; but we doubt very much if you'd want to offer it to your customers.

The one thing you are sure of when you buy our . . . . . is that you're getting a strictly quality product, the kind that will satisfy the folks upon whom you and your customers are dependent for your progress. That's worth thinking about, isn't it?

Whichever of the N . . . . . commission houses is selling our . . . . . at the ridiculously low price you mention is not making any profit, for our rock bottom price to everybody is . . . . . You will agree Mr. . . . . that no firm could long exist by making a practice of selling on such a narrow margin.

Anyway, you may rest assured that we are not giving this house, or any other, the benefit of a special discount.

So, all things considered, we're confident that you will instruct us to ship the . . . . . on your order of June 10, at the price we quoted in our letter of June 2.

Increases in the cost of material and labour made it necessary for G . . . . .'s firm to increase the prices on small quantities of one of its products. A letter explaining the why and the wherefore of the advance in prices and a new list were sent to each customer, or supposedly so. One morning shortly after the new prices had gone into effect the following letter came to G . . . . .'s desk.

We have received your invoice of August 5 and note that you charge us . . . . . for . . . . . This is a mistake. The price should be . . . . . Send us corrected invoice at once and tell your billing department not to make such mistakes, for they cause us a lot of trouble and extra work.

Evidently one of two things had happened: either the letter and price list had gone astray or someone had neglected to send them. So G . . . . . wrote the customer this letter:

Thank you for your letter of August 9 in which you question the price of the . . . . . on our invoice of August 5.

That price is correct, Mr. Jones. Owing to recent increases in the costs of materials and labour it is necessary for us to charge a little more for our . . . . . in small quantities.

At the time the new prices went into effect we sent to each of our customers a letter explaining why the increase was necessary and a new price list.



Evidently we may have neglected to send a letter and a list to you, or if we did send them, they've gone astray. We're sorry.

You'll observe from the attached price list that there is an extra discount of 10% on shipments of 25 gross. Now if you'll send along an order for 13 more gross we will gladly combine it with your order of August 1, bringing the total up to 25 gross and give you the benefit of the extra 10%.

As . . . . is a brisk seller with you, we're confident you'll welcome the opportunity to take advantage of this offer.

Here is the customer's answer:

We thank you very much for your courteous letter of . . . You may ship us 13 additional gross at once and give us the benefit of the extra 10% discount on the entire 25 gross.

We assure you that we appreciate your kindness in telling us about the additional discount.

It isn't wise, of course, to try to turn all complaints into orders. It is better in some cases, depending on the nature of the complaint and how mad the customer is, simply to "pour oil on troubled waters." Nevertheless, hundreds of complaints that are adjusted in the old familiar way could be turned into orders with the aid of the right kind of letter.

G . . . . . has given us a few hints on how to write this kind of a letter.

#### 54. SPECIAL LETTERS : COLLECTION LETTERS

Most persons pay when payment is due.

A few don't and they create a problem.  
In a large organisation  
they can create such a problem  
that a collection department may have to be set up.

Most people want to pay in time.  
If they do not, they should have a good reason.  
Maybe an oversight or shortage of funds or  
disappointment with the product or service.

A few do try to extend the given credit  
to the extent *they* want!

A handful would rather not pay at all!!

It is necessary we distinguish  
between one type and another.  
One may need a polite reminder  
and another a threat of court action.

It is also necessary to realise  
that even in the case of deliberate cheats,  
we cannot do as we like.  
The laws of libel may be in their favour!

Finally, with a good system of credit and collection,  
we can reduce this awkward job of collecting money  
from the unwilling or unable to pay.

Some of the obtaining practices are:

Creditworthiness is checked  
before credit is extended.

Credit is extended on a limited basis to assess the payment-behaviour of the customer.

Reminder- circulars are sent to customers a few days before the payment is due.

Impersonal notes are sent to say non-payment could be an oversight.

Personal letters are sent: first a letter of courtesy discussing the problem; then a personal appeal for payment; and finally the showdown letter.

Those who have studied effective collection letters provide the following guidelines:

1. Use the you-attitude.
2. State the credit plan clearly.
3. Be tactful and considerate.
4. Be sincere and convincing.
5. Be conversational.
6. Read all letters carefully before signing them.

They also suggest three stages, namely, the courtesy stage, the appeal stage and the showdown stage:

## STAGE I: THE LETTER OF COURTESY

*Identification of the letter as an account discussion rather than another dun.*

*Justification for this inquiry on the basis of pleasant association in the past. (The letter of courtesy counts two dangers: It may cause further stalling by a delinquent; it may be resented as probing by a sensitive debtor. Generally, such letters are appreciated).*

*Appeal for information which will let you know where you stand.*

*Specific call for a response.*

---

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Dear Mr. Smith:

This is not a letter asking for payment of your past-due account. We are writing to you as an old friend and a valued customer to see what is wrong and how we can help you.

For five years we have enjoyed your patronage and have tried to express our appreciation in the quality of our merchandise and service. Upto now you have always met your obligations promptly. In view of this long and pleasant association, we would like to give every co-operation we can in coming to a better understanding of your account.

Won't you please confide in us and give us this opportunity of assisting you? If you have suffered any kind of sickness, financial loss, or other setback, please write and tell us about it. We assure you that we will do anything we can to get you through this period of difficulty.

Please write to us. Remember, we are not pressing you for payment in this letter. We just want to hear from you and help you if we can.

Cordially,

---

by Lawrence D. Brennein, Prentice Hall, 1965.

## STAGE II: THE PERSONAL APPEAL

*Contact which sets up the store's side of the situation, reviewing the association and pointing out specifically many of the special services accorded to the past-due charge account customer.*

*Appeal for payment as a matter of fair play.*

*Call for action.*

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*Attention caught by reference to credit ratings with implications that customer has a high one.*

Dear Mrs. James:

When you requested that a charge account be opened in your name, we were certainly delighted to welcome you among our inner family of charge account customers.

During the past two years we have tried to show you every possible courtesy, giving you the very choicest merchandise and helping you in your shopping with advance notification of special sales, extending our shoppers' consultation service to you, and sending you wide approval selections whenever you requested for them. We have valued your patronage, Mrs. James, and have tried to please you in every way possible.

May we therefore ask that in fair play you give your prompt attention to your account for April which is now four months past due? We have sent you a number of notifications and are quite disappointed in hearing nothing from you in response.

Kindly send us your cheque for \$ 152.65 so that we may bring your account up to date.

Yours very truly,

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Dear Mrs. James:

We know how highly you regard your credit standing in this community. Yet, we find no replies to our many notifications about your account which is now five months past due.

*Suggestion of danger to something of value she possesses.*

*Danger spelled out in terms that have meaning to her.*

*Call for action.*

**STAGE III : SHOWDOWN**



We wonder whether you are fully aware of the effect this continued indebtedness has upon your valuable credit standing. Therefore, we are writing this letter to emphasize the seriousness of this situation.

As you know, our accounts are subject to periodic review by our credit association. They will certainly regard an account five months past due as a matter of concern.

May we therefore ask that you send your cheque for \$ 152.65 and safeguard this credit rating which we know you esteem.

Yours very truly,

Dear Mrs. James:

If we do not receive payment for your account, which is now eight months overdue, we shall have to refer this matter to our attorneys for collection.

Please send us your cheque for \$ 152.65 by Monday, October 15, so that legal action will not be necessary.

Yours very truly,

## 55. SPECIAL LETTERS: "NO" LETTERS

Many times we have to write to people about things that are going to make them unhappy.

For example,

*Loans cannot be granted,  
Claims cannot be accepted.*

We cannot usually do anything about these decisions in themselves.

No one of us *personally* grants or *personally* denies the benefits and services which we administer; each of us acts as the agent carrying out the law<sup>1</sup> dictates. / k

**And nothing we can say will make people happy about being turned down.**

**But, just how unhappy they will be is in our control, to a great extent.**

Even when our letter tells the reader that a benefit or request has been granted, it can make him unhappy, angry, or irritated, if, for example,

- \* It does so in a manner which leaves him puzzled,
- \* It does so in a grudging manner, or
- \* It sounds indifferent to his problems.

It all depends on what kind of 'hand' we write.

Is our hand—

like a fist with brass knuckles—  
unfriendly and threatening . . .

like the smooth gestures  
of a sleight-of-hand artist

with a now-you-see-it and now-you-don't motion . . .  
or is it like a sincere, friendly handclasp? . . .

This last type of hand might be called  
**THE HUMAN TOUCH**

This doesn't mean beings overtly sentimental.  
It doesn't mean being falsely sympathetic  
or apologetic for what we do.

It's just a matter of applying  
the most practical of all teachings,  
the golden rule, by adopting the motto—  
**write unto others**  
**as you would have them write unto you.**

## YOU CAN HANDLE DIFFICULT SITUATIONS

It is often necessary to refuse credit to a new business. Yet that business may grow, so that you will want and need the account within a short time. Then you will gladly extend credit.

How can you refuse a man, yet keep his goodwill and hope to do business with him? A difficult situation indeed.

The usual thing is: to shut the door firm, thus:

Dear Sir,

I am sorry to tell you that we are unable to grant your request for credit at this time.

We are sorry but before we can despatch your order we must have your cheque.

And with that a possible business ends.

This is how one large supplier did it:

Dear Sir:

Congrats on the opening of your new business. We are wishing you every success and will do all we can to help.

Long-established Company policy prevents our filling your order on an open account until certain formalities are completed. So I'd like to make a suggestion.

Instead of ordering 6 croquet sets, 6 badminton sets etc. order one of each for display and send us your cheque for these.

Meantime, please fill out the enclosed credit card and return it to us. We will speed the formalities rapidly.

## 56. SPECIAL LETTERS : LEGAL ONES

Either because it is required by the procedure, or because it gives us a feeling of security, on occasions we have to resort to legal language.

Lawyers have found "by experience" that it is best to specify everything, even though doing so requires a great deal of qualification and much longer sentences. The actual loss of efficiency is not much either. The people concerned are all so used to the jargon regarding purchases, patents and taxation that they can read whole clauses at a glance.

**The main point to remember is that such occasions are few and far between.**

When we think of it, we find that even legal writing need not be as involved and difficult as it normally is. The substance of law can be given in a language the concerned reader can read and understand, yes, without the help of a lawyer.

In fact there is a case for all laws (certainly laws relating to day-to-day operations) to be rewritten in plain words.\* This should enable better observance of the law and less correspondence on this account. At least, at organisational levels, this can be done.

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\* Professor C. M. Shukla and the author made such an attempt and came out with a book: *Law for Factory Executives: A Manual of Dos & Don'ts in non-legal style.*

## 57. PERSONAL LETTERS

The most welcome public official is the postman—  
when he delivers a letter to us.

We are all pleased to receive a letter  
even if we are undeserving,  
undeserving because  
we don't write or reply to a letter.

The nearest and the dearest expect a letter from us  
and this is a legitimate expectation.

In fact, once we get into the habit of writing,  
we find it a genuine pleasure:  
it blesses him that gives and him that takes.

We may give news or share thoughts.  
We can express ourselves as we please.  
What is important is that we write.  
We then become eligible for a call from the postman.  
Besides, our skill in clear thinking  
and self-expression improves.

All that we learn from those  
who have made a fine art of personal letters  
is that we should be ourselves ;  
we should write as we speak ;  
we should be relaxed and self-confident.  
We should write with an open heart.

## 58. BUSINESS LETTERS AND PERSONAL LETTERS

This book deals mainly with business letters. This does not mean that personal letters have no place in business; they do have a place.

Only, there are differences in objectives between the conventional personal letter and the conventional business letter.

Personal letters are unlimited in their aims. Often they do not have tangible aims. They often express an emotion; they are more in the form of a chat.

Business letters, on the other hand, have a definite objective. They aim to influence the reader to take some action desired by the writer—  
to buy the writer's goods,  
to effect payment of an over-due bill,  
to refuse a claim upon him, or  
to obtain a new job.

The second difference is in the attitude. Because persuasion is the means, business letters adopt the "you" attitude.

In personal letters, however, both the "I" attitude *and* the "you" attitude occur. The reader is interested in what the writer thinks and feels; the reader expects the writer to talk as much about himself as possible.

## 59. A FEW HUMAN RELATIONS GUIDELINES

Throughout this book the human relations aspect has been emphasised for the obvious reason that we write letters to human beings.

In this section,  
a few practical steps are underscored.

1. **Answer all business letters promptly.**  
A letter long delayed is in disfavour even before it arrives.
2. **Remember relationships are reciprocal.**  
Even the regular business relationship. It is a give-and-take relationship and it is good to make it obvious by adopting the "you" attitude.
3. **Be pleasant.**  
It will not hurt business ;  
it will not hurt relationships.  
You can be purposeful and still be pleasant.
4. **If you wish to get your harsh feelings off your chest, try something else, not a letter.**  
If you are critical or sarcastic, you may not get the results you want. Instead, you may win an enemy.

You may not need him now.  
Who knows, you may need him later ;  
life, short as it is, is not that short.

An offensive letter  
sounds doubly offensive on paper.  
You may repent for what you have written.



If you wish to have nothing more to do with the fellow,  
you may go ahead  
but make sure you will have  
nothing more to do with him/her.  
In life, you cannot be as certain as that.

You know that an angry, impatient, sarcastic letter  
will not get you the results you want.  
Perhaps you don't want any results.  
You've to think of the consequences, though.  
You may not want results but  
you don't want adverse consequences either.

5. **Write those letters you need not write.**

If you feel good towards someone  
don't let him read your mind,  
let him read your hand.  
Take time off to write those letters.  
Life is not all business:  
You *can* write for pleasure.  
And it is giving that gives pleasure.

## XIII

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### ACTION PLANS

My advice would be to write—never to stop writing, to keep it up all the time, to be tremendously painstaking about it, to write until you begin to write.

*Gabriel Fielding*

Word-worship is one thing; Word-workmanship is another.

*Hall Stebbins*

## 60. WRITING IS AN ART, A SKILL

Effective writing is an art, a skill,  
a skill that can be cultivated.

It is a skill  
that will increase our value,  
endear us to the reader  
and save our time.

*The first step to acquire this skill  
is a sense of urgency,  
the desire to cultivate the skill.*

The second is *to understand the basic principles.*  
An analysis of effective writing  
(and, of course, the not-so-effective)  
has provided us with a few principles.

The third is *to apply the new knowledge.*  
There is no substitute for application, for practice.  
It takes time to develop mastery over the techniques  
and apply them with judgement.  
Once it is developed, it is ours for a life-time.

The fourth is *to constantly up-grade one's skill.*  
The art element demands  
that we don't turn complacent.

To acquire this skill,  
what one individual can do  
and what an organisation can do  
are outlined in the following sections.

## 61. CORRESPONDENCE IMPROVEMENT : AN ACTION PLAN FOR ORGANISATIONS

Ideally, Top Management should initiate and support a continuing Better Letters Programme, and set a personal example.

They should have a policy statement on correspondence.

They should provide a planned and persistent publicity for this policy.

They should organise systematic training for all their personnel on the principles and practices of clear and persuasive letter writing.

If it is felt that it is not yet time for a formal programme, one or more of the following steps to encourage the development of the skill may be considered.

*Organisations can help their personnel with books on the subjects of communication readability, customer relations, writing skill, English usage and composition.*

*They can extend the locally available facilities for training to those who have newly joined as "dictators", "composers" or transcribers.*

They can arrange a *yearly refresher* on modern correspondence

for all those that dictate, compose or transcribe in an organisation.

They can arrange to prepare a *correspondence manual*.

The manual will deal with topics like

- a) what are up-to-standard letters ?
- b) why should such letters be written ? and
- c) how should such letters be written ?

## 62. CORRESPONDENCE SKILL DEVELOPMENT : AN ACTION PLAN FOR INDIVIDUALS

Allocate about half an hour a day for the purpose.

Create for yourself opportunities to write letters—  
on the job and off the job.

Form the habit of writing little notes, for example,  
a friendly note of encouragement to someone  
entering a college or starting a business,  
a few words of cheer to the worried or the sick,  
a letter of congratulation to one  
who has just had a promotion.

To them your "paper visit" can mean much.  
To you it means a skill developed.

Use all opportunities to write official letters.

Do not hesitate to take competent help  
if grammar or composition is your problem.

Collect copies of letters and other written material  
that you receive and work on them.

Rewrite them to your satisfaction.  
Since you are in fact at the receiving end,  
you can improve a letter  
from the reader-response point of view.

Take some of the letters and reports and memos  
that you have written.

Make copies of them.  
And try your hand at refinement.

A fourth step you may consider is this.  
Of the writings you send out  
some are particularly important.

You may give them special attention—  
you may draft and redraft and redraft again.  
The nature of the item may warrant  
this extra effort and extra thought.

Another step is to look for effective letters—  
and collect them\*—copies of them, to be exact.  
The idea is not to imitate them but  
to examine them and absorb a point or two.

One more step is to organise a Letter Clinic.  
Some of your colleagues  
may go through a book like this first,  
so that they may also think along the same lines.  
Once a week, say, you will meet  
to examine samples of writings of the participants.  
You will look at them from the reader's viewpoint,  
from the end-result point of view.

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\* The author will be glad to receive copies of such letters.

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## MODERN CORRESPONDENCE

Why are effective letters important to us and to our organisation? Firstly, they inform the reader and get him to do what is necessary for the organisation's progress. Secondly, they make a good impression on the reader, and thereby create a favourable climate. Thirdly, letters are a major expense item for an office and we do not want to waste any part of it. A good letter costs no more than a poor one and usually costs less. Fourthly, effective letters help us advance professionally.

These are good enough reasons for learning to do our letter-writing "a little better". This book should enable us to do the job a lot better. This book should enable us to write more clearly, more forcefully, and more acceptably.

This is a "think with me" book. It aims to build in the beginner the necessary attitude and knowledge on the one hand and the enthusiasm and approach to the development of a skill on the other. To the advanced student it seeks to provide a "checklist" to review his present attitudes, knowledge and skills in letter-writing; it also provides a framework for augmenting his effectiveness in this key area.

The approach in this book is **unconventional**. The printing is unconventional—the purpose is to make it easy for the reader to get the point. The presentation is unconventional—the points are made as in a book of mathematics. (The author, incidentally, is also a mathematician by training). The invitation to the reader is unconventional—the reader is invited to think. The author wants to add to or confirm what the reader already knows. **The author knows the reader knows.** What he can add is the theoretical basis or the conceptual framework or "that little extra."

The emphasis of the book is not upon "correct writing" for its own sake (essential as that is), but upon writing judged according to its success in meeting the situation which called it forth. Thus, throughout, writing for a purpose, composition toward a predetermined end—in short, adaptation to the reader—is stressed.