

Learning Objectives

After you finish learning this chapter, you are requested to grasp:

- (1) The guidelines in business letter writing.
- (2) The letter format and layout of emails and business letters.
- (3) The essentials of business letter writing.



第 1 章背景知识介绍

Lead-in Case

In 2021, an attorney in Philadelphia, USA, wanted to send an email to one of her colleagues. In the email, she suggested settling a lawsuit against the pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly and Company. The attorney typed her colleague's name as the addressee of the email, but didn't notice that the email system had automatically filled in another name at that point.

Who received the email last? A reporter for the *New York Times*. A few days later, the *New York Times* published a front-page story about the \$1 billion settlement. While it was not clear to what extent the mistake helped the *Times* get exclusive coverage of the settlement, it didn't stop people from talking about it with gusto and ranking it as one of the biggest email wrecks of all time.

With the unparalleled dominance of email in business communications, we all have had embarrassing stories about accidentally sending the wrong email — luckily we probably didn't make the multi-billion-dollar mistake. Email as a communication tool also creates another problem: reading and responding to new emails in your inbox can often wear you out.

1.1 Brief Introduction

A business letter is a type of letter which serves as a means of communication written for various commercial purposes. These purposes can include a business deal, complaint, warning, notice, invitation, declaration, information, apology and various other corporate matters.

1.2 Requirements for Business Letter and Email Writers

As a business letter or email writer, you need to master how to do good business writing.

First, understand the reader. It is necessary to consider who will read these documents, what position they are in, why they are reading these documents, and what they will know about these documents to read.

Second, consider the questions the reader will ask. Good functional documents anticipate what questions the reader will have, and usually these questions will be related to the reader's job.

Third, answer the reader's questions. Imagine the reader's various questions and answer them. This is a good way to organize the content of the document, to answer these questions clearly in the document, and to focus on the main issues.

Fourth, it allows the reader to find information in the document quickly. Important information needs to be highlighted in an eye-catching format so that the reader can find the information quickly.

Finally, the content should be clear and direct. Sentences should be simple and clear so that the reader can understand them at a glance.

1.3 Seven Guidelines in Business Letter Writing

Business letter writing is associated with formality, norms, rules, challenges, as well as certain opportunities. Overall, there are people who find it easier to write informal letters as there's more room for creativity, and there are those who prefer formal writing as it is more standardized and straightforward. Whether you like it or not, you should understand what effective business writing is, follow the rules, and understand how to compose a letter that conveys your message just right.

(1) Clarity

Be clear when conveying your messages. Avoid using complex sentences — go straight to the point of your message, and let your reader know what you are writing about. Nobody wants to spend minutes of their time on a message that is unclear or hard to comprehend. If your letter lacks clarity, your reader will either ignore it or have a hard time comprehending what you are talking about. You are going to waste people's time and maybe even cost their money. This is why you should always write with laser precision. Clarity is the key factor in giving your audience the right meaning and conveying your intentions in a comprehensive manner.

(2) Simplicity

Use simple language and short sentences. Of course, it mustn't sound like you are writing to a first-grader, but you should also avoid complicated structures, flamboyant wording, and emotional expressions. "Your goal here is to get your message across to your audience, not to

showcase your unique style. There is nothing difficult in business letters and you will often come across them in a working atmosphere,” says one of the chief managers at Papers Owl, “Without the ability to introduce business correspondence, you will be less in demand in the labor market.”

(3) Tone

Choosing the right tone of voice is one of the key tips for writing professional business messages. Forget about exclamation points, passive voice, and idioms — your writing has to be informative and plain. You are here to provide a valuable piece of information in a written form, not to entertain the readers. The words you use have to be straightforward and bear no secondary meanings. You have to make sure your readers get your meaning, having no room for misinterpretation.

(4) Goal

Know the goal of your messages and make sure the reader comprehends that goal too. State it at the beginning of your letter and use the right words to convey your meaning. One of the main tips here is to provide a short and precise statement of goal at the beginning of your letter. Say something like: “This letter is to inform you about...” And with that short and concise statement of purpose, you can move on to expanding the content of your letter. In business communication, messages have to bear meaning and purpose.

(5) Formality

If you are having a business correspondence with a co-worker you consider a friend or confidant, you should not forget about formalities. You can say any swear words you want in personal communication, but you should never allow any swear words into your official communication. There have been numerous cases of scandals in the large corporations where senior company executives use profane language in official communication, thinking nobody would ever read that. Such profanities might lead to serious outcomes, so you should not let that into your official written communication, even with people you trust.

(6) Candor

Be candid with your audience. Of course, some diplomacy might be due when delivering bad news, though you should give things their names. Make sure you are saying things politely but frankly. The goal of official communication is delivering the right meaning without having to read between the lines. Being polite and a bit diplomatic is a good thing to do, especially when delivering not-so-good news within your company, but you must be sure you are saying things as they are when creating your piece of business communication.

(7) Expertise

You want to sound like you know what you are talking about, and to achieve that, you have to use technical terms relevant to your topic. You should also know who you are writing to and

be sure they comprehend the letter. Be active when explaining your meaning to the addressee and try to craft a piece of reading they would get. For instance, if your messages are going to be delivered to a broader audience via social media, you have to apply all of your skills to create a comprehensive note anyone would get.

1.4 The Layout of Emails

Your email message should be formatted like a typical business letter, with spaces between paragraphs and no spelling or grammatical errors.

- Don't mistake length for quality — keep your email brief and to the point.
- Avoid overly complicated or long sentences.
- Make it easy for email recipients to quickly scan through your email and know why you're emailing.
- Proofread it, just like you would do in any other correspondence.
- Check spelling carefully. If you're really concerned about spelling errors, consider printing out the email draft. Often, it's easier to catch spelling and grammatical errors on a hard copy than reviewing on a screen.

(1) Subject Line

Don't forget to include a subject line in your email. If you forget to include one, your message probably isn't even going to get opened. Use the subject line to summarize why you're emailing.

(2) Salutation / Greeting

If you have a contact person, address your email to Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name.

(3) The Body of the Message

When you write your message, include a few short paragraphs:

- Introduction (who you are) (first paragraph)
- The reason you're writing (second and optional third paragraphs)
- Thanks for the consideration

(4) Closing

Include a formal closing, such as Sincerely or Regards, when you end your message.

(5) Email Signature

It's important to create an email signature and to include your signature in every letter you send. Include your full name, your email address, and your phone number in your email signature.

(6) Attachments

Make sure to double check that you have attached all the files mentioned in your email

before hitting the "send" button.

1.5 The Layout of Business Letters

The layout of business letters should include:

Letterhead: A letterhead is topmost heading printed on the letter. The heading consists of name and address, generally accompanied by a logo of the organization. Most professional firms have their own pre-designed letterhead. Preprinted Letterheads showcase the reputability of a company. However, smaller firms may not have it. They use their name and address in place of the letterhead.

Example:

Ms. Jane Doe

543 Washington St

Marquette, MI 49855

Tel:

Fax:

Email:

Date: The date has to be written exactly below the letterhead. The date is an important part of a letter and is used for reference. The date is supposed to be written in full with day, month and year. Example: 31st May 2021 or May 31st, 2022.

Recipient's address: Recipient's or receiver's name and address is the next part of a business letter. This part includes the name of the receiver, his designation and full address inclusive of phone and email. Be sure to skip a line after the heading and before the recipient's address, then skip another line after the inside address before the greeting.

Salutation: Salutation is the word of greeting used to begin a letter. It is a courteous gesture and shows respect to the receiver. The salutation (or greeting) in a business letter is always formal. It often begins with "Dear (Person's name)". Once again, be sure to include the person's title if you know it, such as Ms., Mrs., Mr., or Dr. If you're unsure about the person's title or gender, then just use their first name. For example, you would use only the person's first name if the person you are writing to is "Jordan" but you do not know whether he is male, female, or non-binary.

Body: It is the main part of the letter. The message of the letter is to be clearly mentioned in the first line. The body has the relevant subject matter which is to be divided into several paragraphs, as need be. If there are instructions or the like, these are to be in a bulleted list or numerically listed in separate lines. The last paragraph should sum up the whole letter and offer any assistance or take a course of action as required or instructed. For full-block and semi-block

letter formats, use single space and left justify each paragraph. Be sure to leave a blank line between each paragraph, however, no matter the format. Be sure to also skip a line between the salutation and the body, as well as the body and the close.

Complimentary close: The complimentary close is a short and polite remark that ends your letter. The close begins at the same justification as your date and one line after the last body paragraph. Capitalize the first word of your closing (such as Thank you) and leave four lines for a signature between the close and the sender's name. A comma should follow the closing.

Signature: Skip at least four lines after the close for your signature, and then type out the name to be signed. If you are printing this letter out and sending it by mail, you will sign your name in pen. This line includes your first and last name, and often includes a middle initial, although it is not required. You may put your title beforehand to show how you wish to be addressed.

Sender's name, title and contact information: If these have not been incorporated in the letterhead, one can include Name, Title, Address, Phone, Email, etc. in separate lines.

Enclosure: If some documents have been attached, the word "Enclosures" should be typed/written a few lines after the signature of the sender. Thereafter, the number and type of documents attached are to be mentioned, e.g., "Enclosures (2): brochure, resume".

1.6 Addressing Envelopes

When sending a business letter to a person at a company, you'll need to maintain professional etiquette throughout the entire process. Follow the basic guidelines outlined below and then add a couple more pieces of information (See the Figure 1.1).

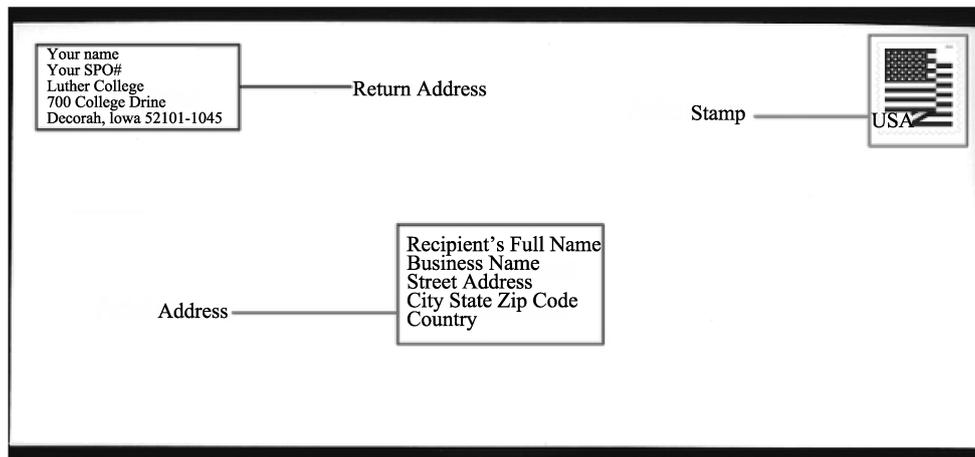


Figure 1.1 Envelope Example

- Place your name and address in the upper left corner of the envelope.
- Put the recipient’s information in the center of the envelope.
- After the recipient’s full name and on the same line if possible, add their position, such as “Director of Marketing”. If the title does not fit on the same line, place it directly on the line underneath the name.
- Underneath the person’s name and title, add the full name of the company.
- Add the company’s street address on the line below the company’s name.
- Add the company’s town, state, and zip code on the line below the street address.
- The stamp goes on the upper right corner of the envelope.

1.7 The Format of Business Letter

A business letter should achieve effective communication by both crafting appropriate sentences and paragraphs and utilizing suitable and effective letter formats. There are three commonly used formats for English business letters: full-block format, semi-block format, and indented format.

- **Full-Block Format**

<Sample>

Letterhead
Date
Inside address
Salutation
Body of letter
<hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/> <hr style="border: 0; border-top: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;"/>
Complimentary close
Signature

In the full-block format, all lines begin at the left margin. There is no indentation in the letter at all. This format is simple, easy to type, and is often used in business letters.



- **Semi-Block Format**

<Sample>

	Letterhead	Date
Inside address		
Salutation	Body of Letter	
<hr/>		
		Complimentary close Signature

The semi-block format is a format that falls between the full block format and the indented format. In comparison to the full block format, the date, complimentary close and signature are positioned to the right, while the rest is the same as the full-block format.

- **Indented Format**

<Sample>

	Letterhead	Date
Inside address		
Salutation	Body of Letter	
<hr/>		
		Complimentary close Signature

The difference between this format and semi-block format is that it takes four or five spaces

in the first line of each paragraph of the letter. The positions of other elements are quite similar to those in the semi-block format.

1.8 Case Study

Business Letter Example

Linda Lau

123 Main Street, Anytown, CA 12345-555-55555, linda.lau@email.com

March 5, 2020

Oscar Lee

Managing Editor

Acme Graphic & Design

123 Business Rd.

Business City, CA 54321

Dear Mr. Lee,

I would like to invite you to attend our upcoming Liberal Arts department job networking event. The event will be held on the afternoon of May 1, 2022. We wish to provide our graduating seniors with an opportunity to meet business leaders in the area who may be looking for new hires who hold degrees in the Liberal Arts.

The event will be held at the Cox Student Center at Northern State University and will last about two to three hours. If you have an interest in attending or sending a company representative to meet with our students, please let me know at your earliest convenience and I can reserve a table for you.

Thank for your time and I hope to hear from you soon.

Respectfully,

Linda Lau(signature hard copy letter)

Liberal Arts Department Chair

Analysis this business letter, review how to write a good business letter.

1.9 Business Ethics

Letter writing is an important part of China's traditional culture. Starting from physical

letters like “knot records” dating back to the Western Zhou Dynasty, China’s letter writing culture has a history of more than 2,000 years. In 1975, a wooden tablet letter (written in 225 BC) was unearthed from a Qin Dynasty tomb in Shuihudi in the western suburb of Chengguan Town, Yunmeng County, Hubei Province, which is the earliest written letter found in China to date. In Chinese idioms and allusions, letter writing culture has also left a deep impression, such as “bluebird delivers letters” “fish passing on a message” “wild geese deliver letters” “sending Mei Hua by post station” and many more. There are also facilities related to letter writing culture such as post stations, postal offices, and modern postal services. In ancient times, the importance of letter writing in emotional communication and business activities can be seen in famous poems such as Du Fu’s “Beacon fires have lasted for three months, and a letter from home is worth ten thousand gold”, Zhang Ji’s “Desire to write a letter with endless meaning”, and Li Qingzhao’s “Who would send a brocade letter from the clouds? When the wild geese return, the moon is full over the west tower”. The letter writing etiquette in China also has a long history, and we can appreciate the standardized letter format and etiquette in works such as Li Si’s “Advice for Expelling Guests” and Sima Qian’s “Letter to Ren An”. These works condense people’s memories of history and preserve the “original” flavor of China’s traditional culture. Letters are carriers of the splendid and spiritual Chinese culture, and witnesses to the long history of Chinese civilization.

Discussion: The development history and functions of ancient Chinese letters.

Exercises

(1) Address the envelope using the name and address provided.

Sender: Hangzhou Copying Equipment Co.

Address: No.8 Xihu Longwu Industrial Park

Hangzhou, Zhejiang, China

Receiver: Berg Manufacturing Corp.

Address: 818 Harrison Street, Suite 206

Oak Park, Illinois, USA 60304

(2) Write down a letter with semi-block format.

1. Sender’s Name: China National Garment Corp.
2. Sender’s Address: 260 Zhujiang Road, Nanjing 210018, P. R. China
3. Sender’s Telephone Number: 025-3838388
4. Date: March 13, 2022
5. Receiver’s Name: Walkman Co.
6. Receiver’s Address: 2561 California Avenue, Seattle, WA 889, U.S.A.

7. Subject: Gent's Shirt
8. Salutation: Gentlemen
9. The Message...
10. Complimentary Close: Yours faithfully
11. Signature: Dong Gang (Manager)
12. Enclosure: Catalogue

(3) Skill training

Situation:

In Guangzhou Trade Fair, a German company was interested in the tool gun demonstrated by a Chinese toy company.

Task:

Supposing you are the purchasing manager of the German company, please write a business letter to express your intention of buying 2,000 tool guns at the end of this month.

Supplementary Reading

Effective business letter writing boils down to knowing why you are writing a business letter, understanding your customer's needs and then clearly writing what you need to say. Every letter should be clear, human, helpful and as friendly as the topic allows. The best business letters have a conversational tone and read as if you were talking to your customer.

We write letters to each other when we want to:

- Inform others (the readers) about something.
- Persuade others to take action/to promote an idea.
- Propose your ideas.

Business letters even function as advertisements at times. For example, your company has come up with a new product. You surely want your clients and your distributors to know about the product, so you send them a letter and enclose pamphlets, telling them about the product. Writing formal letters can be challenging because you have to catch the reader's attention and keep it long enough for him or her to read what you have wrote and seriously consider it. If you are writing to someone working in an office, bear in mind that the reader also has many other letters to read. The reader may also have limited time to read a large amount of mail.

You begin writing a business letter like any other document.

(a) First, you must analyze your audience. You do not write to everyone in the same way, and sometimes you need to use particular styles or words to make the letter appropriate for the situation and people. The format of the letter, for example, may have to be changed to suit your purpose.

(b) Second, you determine your purpose. Why have you decided to write the letter? What do you want to achieve through the letter? What do you want the reader to do after reading your letter? You need to consider all these questions.

(c) Third, you need to gather information you want to include in your letter. If you want to propose an idea to someone, you need to provide enough detail and explanation so that your reader will be interested. It is also important to get to your point as quickly as you can because beating around the bush will annoy your reader and waste his or her time. If you do this, your letter will probably be thrown out.

(d) Fourth, you create an outline. You do this to ensure that your letter reads smoothly and does not confuse the reader. You never want to confuse the reader because this is a sure way to make him or her throw your letter away. Always present your information as clearly as you can.

(e) Fifth, you may want to write a draft. With a draft you can have a clear idea about what your letter will look and sound like before you send it. You may want to improve your letter before you send it.

(f) Finally, you revise it. It is important that you only send out a letter when you are satisfied with it because your letter may be the reader's first contact with you or your organization. That first impression will be very important.

Show empathy for your reader. Always care about your reader's feelings or ideas. Try to convey to your reader the feeling that you care about the reader and you are genuinely interested in working with the reader in whatever the letter is about. Put yourself in the reader's place. Show that you are interested in the customer's circumstances. If he or she has mentioned something personal in the letter, refer to it in your reply. This builds a bridge between you and the customer. Read the original letter carefully and see if there is something you can put in your letter to show your interest. What do readers want from writing? They want relevant information, presented in a clear, easy-to-understand style. Therefore, getting a clear picture of your readers before you start to write helps to focus your writing to get your message across. The better picture of your readers you have, the better you can direct your writing.

Test

