

This is a brief extract of *some* pages from our letter writing workbook. There are more explanations and examples in the workbook than shown here.

The table of contents (below) is shown in full to enable you to see what the contents of the course.

## Letter Writing Training Course Workbook

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## **1 Introduction**

You may have an excellent idea or proposal, but unless you can effectively communicate it in a letter, you will not get the desired outcome.

It is essential to understand your reader's needs and then clearly write what you need to say. Every letter should be clear, human, helpful and as friendly as the topic allows. The best letters have a conversational tone and read as if you were talking to your reader.

Through a combination of theory and exercises, you will develop writing skills to enable appropriate structure and present letters that are easy to read and understand.

### **1.1 Course objective:**

To produce clear, concise and effective letters by adopting a systematic approach.

## **2 Advantages and disadvantages of writing**

What is the purpose of letter writing? Why must we do it?

A written document can provide more than a visit or phone call. It not only gets your message across clearly but it provides a permanent record. With well-written letters there should be no misunderstanding, unlike the possibility on the telephone or in conversation.

Letters also serve as a record. They are long-lasting, tangible evidence of information you communicate to others.

Writing has its advantages and disadvantages.

### **2.1 Advantages**

- You can choose your words carefully
- You can send the same message to several people
- The risk of misunderstanding is less than speech
- It is a permanent record, which you can copy and refer to later.

### **2.2 Disadvantages**

- It takes time
- It does not have the advantages of body language, which can emphasise points and motivate
- You cannot be certain people have read the document
- You get no immediate feedback, hence you cannot modify the message if readers misunderstand it.

### 2.3 As a general rule

- If all you want to do is communicate factual information – writing is best
- If you want to persuade, motivate and involve – verbal communication is better.

When considering whether to write or speak to someone, ask yourself these questions:

1. 'Would it be best to put this in writing?'
2. 'Should I use writing to back up my words?'
3. 'Will I save a lot more time and trouble later, if I take the time and trouble to put it into writing now?'

#### Exercise 1 - Attributes of effective letter writing

##### Instructions

Working in pairs make a note of what you consider the most important attributes of effective writing.

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

As a group, we will then complete the chart below.



## Exercise 2 - Setting objectives for writing assignments

### Instructions

Before writing a business letter we need to ask some important questions. Because these questions begin with the letters W and H they are known as W H questions.

Working in pairs, finish writing the list of the questions that you will need answering before starting the assignment:

**Who** .....

**Why** .....

**What** .....

**When** .....

**How** .....

With the answers to these questions you will be able to establish the objectives of the letter.

### 3 What is the purpose of the letter?

When you write a business letter, you must try not to waste your reader's time. The first step in any writing task is to set down your aim. Ask yourself, Why am I writing? and What do I want to achieve? The clearer you are in your own mind about what you want to achieve, the better your letter.

You need to make a clear decision about the purpose of the document before you start to write. Are you writing to:

- provide information?
- get some action?
- give instructions?
- change opinions, persuade or sell an idea?
- confirm an agreement made face-to-face or over the telephone?

What do you want the writing to achieve? How you organise your ideas will depend on this.

These questions help you focus on the information that supports your central aim, and to cut information that is irrelevant. By doing this, you'll find you keep to the subject and perhaps write a document that is a third shorter than you would otherwise draft.

## 6 Lists and bullet points

Lists are also good for breaking up or emphasising information. There are many different ways of setting out bullet points. Here are some rules and examples for you to consider. Select which you or your company prefers and be consistent when using it.

Bullets should:

- contain comparable material
- consist of one or two lines only per bullet
- contain correct punctuation.

Notice how each bullet point (in the example above) is a continuation of the sentence, so each point should start with a lower-case letter. The final bullet point ends with a full stop.

- Another acceptable method is to end each bullet with a semicolon, but still end the bullet list with a full stop
- If each bullet is a stand-alone sentence (like these), start each bullet with a capital letter. You can either end each bullet point with a full stop or leave blank. For consistency with my previous bullet list, I have left them blank but finished with a full stop.

### Exercise 4 - What makes writing hard to read?

Your business writing should be easy to read and understand. So what makes writing hard to read?

#### Instructions

Working in pairs, note five points which you feel cause difficulties for the reader:

1. ....
2. ....
3. ....
4. ....
5. ....

## 10.4 Sentences that confuse

There are several ways of avoiding long sequence of prepositional phrases:

- Delete words that do not effect the meaning
- Rewrite the sentence as two or more sentences.

### Exercise 6 – Sentences that confuse

#### Instructions

Rewrite this sentence so that it does not confuse.

‘The book under the table in the corner of the office near the stairway is the one you need.’

.....

## 11 Grammar

We have choices about grammar. The order of our ideas in a sentence is an aspect of grammar called syntax.

### Exercise 7 - Grammar

#### Instructions

Correct the grammar in these sentences.

- ‘Wheres them letters what I wrote?’ .....
- ‘Would it be possible for you and I to go to the meeting?’

.....

### Exercise 8 - Passive sentences

#### Instructions

Working in your pairs make these passive sentences into active sentences.

1. “Your complaint has been investigated”

.....

2. “Job application advice can be obtained”

.....

3. "Enquiries have been made by us"

.....

4. "It will be signed by the manager"

.....

## 11.2 Tautology

You almost certainly know what tautology is. However, the word itself might be new to you.

### Exercise 9 - Tautology

#### Instructions

The following phrases all say the same thing twice or add unnecessary information. Underline the repeated or unnecessary information.

1. Safety is absolutely essential on the production line.
2. Advanced planning always reduces errors.
3. A definite decision is needed on which supplier to choose.
4. Staff may possibly be required to work overtime.

### Exercise 10 – Unnecessary words

#### Instructions

Here are a few examples that might contain unnecessary words. Underline those you believe are unnecessary.

1. "During the course of investigations"
2. "Also, it should be mentioned that many people ..."
3. "Allow a few days to elapse before speaking with ..."
4. "You should contact..."
5. "...which is done for each and every incident..."

## Exercise 12 – Clearer sentences

### Instructions

Here are some more examples of sentences containing long-winded phrases you can replace with clearer ones. Jot down what you think would be a better word to use in each of these sentences instead of the group of words highlighted.

1. **Despite the fact that** deliveries of raw materials were late, the order was met on time.
2. This **in many cases** proved to be so.
3. I should like to **draw your attention to the fact** that I haven't been paid.

## Exercise 15 – Phrases to Use or Avoid

### Instructions

Inappropriate phrases can create the wrong impression. Read these phrases and decide whether they are useful or should be avoided. If they should be avoided write a suggested phrase.

Phrase	Use or avoid? Suggestion if 'avoid'
"I would like you to accept my apologies for the delay in my response. I assure you that no discourtesy was intended"	
"I assure you that this is an isolated incident and does not reflect the high level of service we offer to all our customers."	

## Exercise 16 – Knowledge Check

### Instructions

Let us see if you can put into practice the learning so far.

Read the passages below and:

- remove (any) tautology
- use active not passive verbs
- reduce sentence length
- use more familiar words.

*“Many people are fearful of travelling by air as opposed to travelling by sea or land even though statistical research has been carried out and the research reveals air travel to be the safest one out of the three.”*

**Your improved version:**

.....  
.....

*“We trust the foregoing report is satisfactory, but should you require to discuss this further you may wish to contact the writer direct or our Administration Officer, who will be available at the telephone number shown below.*

*Your contribution to the Children In Need appeal is appreciated.”*

**Your improved version:**

.....  
.....  
.....

**Exercise 18 – Apostrophe**

**Instructions**

Add an apostrophe where appropriate:

1. I am going round to Micks house. My videos broken and hes taped Match of the Day for me.
2. I need two Drs to sign this form.
3. Sarah thinks Trevors mates house looks terrific.
4. Rolling a dice ten times, I got three twos and two fours.
5. Lettuces only 50p!

**15 Stages of letter writing**

Here are the seven stages:

1. The Heading

The heading of a letter should include the name of your company, the address, telephone number, facsimile number and e-mail address.

It is not necessary to type the return address if you are using stationery with the return address already imprinted.

## 2. The Inside Address

This is the address you are sending your letter to (also called the addressee). Make it as complete as possible. Include titles and names if you know them.

This is always on the left margin. If an A4 paper is folded in thirds to fit in a standard business envelope, the inside address can appear through the window in the envelope.

An inside address also helps the recipient route the letter properly and can help should the envelope be damaged and the address become unreadable.

Display the town/ city in capitals (or country if abroad), this assists the post office.

The inside address goes one blank line after the heading (this may be different if you use envelopes with a window, to ensure their address fits in the window).

## 3. Date Line

The date line should be typed one blank line after the inside address. Type it in full, for example: 22 March 2004. If you use 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>. etc make sure you use this style throughout the whole letter. It is best practice not to use the st, nd, rd, th, etc in letters.

## 4. The Greeting (also called the salutation)

The greeting in a business letter is always formal. It normally begins with the word "Dear" and either includes the person's first or last name.

If your policy is to match the customer's style and the customer signs of as Sarah, respond with Dear Sarah. Use a first name only if the title is unclear - for example, you are writing to someone named "Chris" but do not know whether the person is male or female.

It is best practice not to include a comma at the end of the greeting, eg use "Dear Mr Smith" not "Dear Mr Smith,".

If you do not know the addressee's name, use "Dear Sir or Madam".

## 5. The Body

The body of the letter is where you discuss the purpose of the letter. It is usual to start with these phrases

- "Thank you for your letter dated 21 June 2004."
- "Thank you for your letter dated 21 June 2004, addressed to [Y]. He/ she asked me to reply on his/ her behalf."
- When the letter is not dated: "Thank you for your recent letter." Or "Thank you for your letter received on [Z]."

**I hope this has given you an idea of the format of the course and how delegates will benefit by attending our enjoyable course.**

*"An excellent presentation, very interesting exercises; I would recommend this course. The material is superb and will act as my bible."* B. Johnson - AirMiles