Contents

General Guidelines for Business Correspondence

Following the Eight Cs of Effective Communication and Culture (Nine Cs)

In many business situations, time is money. The purpose of communication is to get the messages across, so normally the writing should be short and simple. It should focus on attracting readers' attention, arousing their interest, eliciting their desired states, and finally, activating their action. In other words, it should follow the nine Cs of effective communication which is detailed below.

1. Clearness	When writing to someone, be clear about the goal or message. What is your purpose in communicating with this person? If you're not sure, then your audience won't be sure, either. To be clear, try to minimize the number of ideas in each sentence. Make sure that it's easy for your reader to understand what you're trying to say.
2. Conciseness	When you're concise in your communication, you stick to the point and keep it brief. Your audience doesn't want to read six sentences when you could communicate your message in three. ➡ Are there any adjectives or "filler words" that you can delete? You can often eliminate words like "for instance," "you see," "definitely," "kind of," "literally," "in one's opinion," or "I mean." ➡ Are there any unnecessary sentences? ➡ Have you repeated the point several times in different ways? Be as concise as possible—wordiness is considered bad style in English business correspondence.

3.

Concreteness

When your message is concrete, your audience has a clear picture of what you're telling them. There are details (but not too many!) and vivid facts, and there's a sharp focus. Your message is solid.

4.

Correctness

When your communication is correct, it fits your audience. And correct communication is also error-free communication.

➥ Do the technical terms you use fit your audience's level of education or knowledge?

➥ Have you checked your writing for grammatical errors? Remember, spell checkers won't catch everything.

➥ Are all the names and titles spelled correctly?

5.

Coherence

When your communication is coherent, it's logical. All points are connected and relevant to the main topic, and the tone and flow of the text is consistent.

6.

Completeness

In a complete message, the audience has everything they need to be informed of and, if applicable, what action needs to be taken.

➥ Does your message include a "call to action," so that your audience clearly knows what you want them to do?

➥ Have you included all relevant information—contact names, dates, times, locations, and so on?

7.

Courteousness

Courteous communication is friendly, open, and honest. There are no hidden insults or passive-aggressive tones. You should keep your reader's viewpoint in mind and be empathetic to their needs.

8.

Considerateness

When you are considerate, you take your reader's needs, wishes, or feelings into account.

9.

Culture

Culture is the collective term used to identify the customs, social behavior, and ideas of a particular people or society. These things are created over a long time. When you are culturally aware, you understand the differences between yourself and people from other countries or other backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values. You are able to communicate with people more effectively, beyond words and grammar, by understanding their culture.

Based on the nine Cs of communication, is the following email good? Why do you think so?

Email

Traci,

I am writing to you about the project you finished last week. I gave it to Michael to proof, and he wanted to make sure you knew about the department meeting we're having this coming Friday. We'll be discussing the new approaches to recruiting better employees.

Thanks,
Jodi

🔍 ♡ 🔔 🗑 ⬇ ☆ ⚙ 🖼   Send

In this email the given information is incomplete. The writer mentioned two things, one concerning the project, the other the department meeting. It is suggested to divide them into two emails or at least two paragraphs and provide complete information about the project. Of course, this depends on how much information needs to be given about the project. The phrase "I am writing to you about the project" is just too vague. Why is the writer sending the message? Is it only to let the reader know that it has been given to Michael or is there other information that needs to be mentioned? In this email contractions are OK, as the writer obviously has a reasonably close relationship with the reader. The suggested answer might be:

Email

Traci,

I am writing to you about the project you finished last week. I gave it to Michael to proof. He said he would give you the comments and suggestions by April 5.

He would also like to remind you of the department meeting we're having this coming Friday, April 7. (It will take place at 9:00 in Conference Room II.) We'll be discussing your project.

Thanks,
Jodi

🔍 ♡ 🔔 🗑 ⬇ ☆ ⚙ 🖼   Send

Obviously, the suggested email is much better. It clearly mentions why the writer is mentioning the project. Also, information about the meeting is in another paragraph. Perhaps the writer could mention the time and place of the meeting though. It would only take a short time to do so.

Knowing Your Audience

Since most business writing is essentially persuasive in nature, you should know who your audience is. You must convince the reader that what you are writing is true, even at the most basic level. It is therefore necessary to understand your audience's expectations and their relationship with you and to organize your information to satisfy their needs. Think about these questions when you prepare your message:

✦ **How interested or involved in the topic is my reader?**

➥ *This helps the writer decide how to present the information.*

✦ **How much does the reader know about the topic?**

➥ *This helps to decide how many technical terms the writer can use.*

✦ **Why is this person reading the message? To make a decision? To be better informed?**

➥ *This helps to decide what to present in detail.*

✦ **Does the reader have strong views on the topic? What are they?**

➥ *This helps to decide what kind of tone can be used.*

✦ **How does the reader regard me, professionally or personally?**

✦ **What is my reader's business style? Casual or formal?**

In business correspondence, and email writing in particular, there are two types of readers: skimmers and skeptics. **Skimmers** are readers that are typically very busy and may receive hundreds of emails every day. Because they do not have much time, they often skim documents in a rather short period of time. The email you write for skimmers should:

✦ State the main point clearly and upfront

✦ Organize information into paragraphs

✦ Place the most important information at the beginning or the end of a paragraph

✦ Highlight key dates or figures

✦ Organize information in bulleted or numbered lists

A skeptic is a reader that is cautious and doubtful. Skeptical readers will tend to read a document carefully, questioning whether the writer's claims are true or not. In order to meet the needs of the skeptical reader:

✦ Support your statements with sufficient details and evidence

✦ Provide specific examples, number, dates, names and percentages

Your email should always satisfy the needs of both skimmers and skeptics. Your email should be able to be read easily and critically. The core message should be clear and easily accessible. The reader should not have to search the document to get the meaning of the message. In addition, your email should contain facts, figures and supporting arguments.

Composing a Business Letter or Email

A The Processes of Writing

✦ Research and brainstorm

✦ Write a first draft

✦ Correct mistakes

✦ Write a final draft

Consider these steps for revision:

1 **Proofread for meaning and style**

✦ Check that the information is clear, relevant, necessary . . . i.e., the nine Cs.

✦ Check that the tone matches the audience. Does the language match the formality of the document?

✦ Is my email or my reply on target?

2 **Proofread for grammar**

✦ Correct grammar: look for common mistakes; check verb tenses, countable and uncountable nouns, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, etc.

✦ Correct punctuation and spelling. (*Follow either USA or UK standards and do **not** use Taiwanese / Mandarin formatting.*)

✦ Awkward statements, such as those resulting from direct translations.

3   **Conduct final overall proofread**

4   **Checklist: check if your letters/emails are effective**
- ✦ Who am I writing to?
- ✦ What does the recipient want?
- ✦ Do I have the correct name and title of the recipient?
- ✦ Is the company address correct?

B Writing Tips

1. **Start from the end.**

   Decide what the result of your letter ought to be. List things you'd like to say and review them. Remove those not supporting the main idea. Good letters have a strong sense of purpose.

2. **Use an appropriate salutation.**

   This shows your respectfulness and can ensure that the message goes to the right person. For example: *Dear Mr. / Ms. + last name* or *Dear Sir or Madam*

3. **Get to the point early**.

   When giving good news, don't delay. You should state your main purpose in the first paragraph. However, this is not strictly true in bad-news messages. More detailed information about giving negative messages is dealt with in Unit 12.

4. **Put yourself in your reader's place.**

   If the letter came to you, how would you respond? Be pleasant; try to turn negative statements into positive ones.

5. **Say it plainly.**

   Write as you talk—naturally. Include just one idea in an email. Sentences longer than two typed lines are suspect.

6. **Clear the deadwood.**

   Cut words, sentences, and even paragraphs that don't contribute. Work hard to simplify your reader's job. Be especially careful with adjectives, which can sap strength from your words.

7. **Be natural.**

   Your letter should read like a conversation. Address your reader by name: "Dear Ms. Hartman." And if you can fit it in naturally, use Ms. Hartman's name in the body. You want her to know the letter is personal. Whenever you can, use pronouns like *I, we,* and *you.*

8. **Always try to be consistent whether you are using British or American English, such as word usage, spelling, dates, layout, etc.**

9. **Always try to use the active voice.**

   The passive voice can be weak and confusing. "A decision has been reached by the school board" is inferior to "The school board has reached a decision." Also, readers can sense your evasiveness if you write: "Your order has been misplaced" instead of "I misplaced your order." However, when giving bad news or making accusations that cannot be proven, the passive voice is often employed.

10. **Always choose your words carefully** (e.g., *expect* vs. *hope*) **and pay attention to the tone of your letter.**

    Simply translating words from one language to another can cause cultural misunderstandings. In the above case, "expect" is more duty, but "hope" is something desired, but there is no duty on the other party's behalf.

11. **Never write in anger.**

    Anger will evaporate, but printed words won't. Devise a way to handle problems in an upbeat manner. Your chances of success will multiply tenfold.

12. **Never use contractions in business letters** (*don't, can't, won't, shouldn't,* etc.)**.**

    Traditionally, contractions were never used in business correspondence. Although this is changing as emails become more prevalent, there are still people who are not happy seeing contractions come from people they do not know. It is recommended you take a "safety first" approach and avoid using them.

13. **Do not use very informal language unless you know the person very well.**

    Being too informal can make some people feel offended. E.g., *Hi!* or *Hey Girl!* or *Ciao, Jane.*

14. **Do not make accusations that cannot be proven.**

    Not: Our representative called at your home last week, but you were not at home.

    But: *Our representative called at your home last week, but, unfortunately, was unable to get an answer.*

15. **When giving a lot of detailed information, consider using bulleted or numbered lists.**

    Below are some guidelines to consider when making lists:

    - The content of the list should always be introduced beforehand.

    - Make use of space by leaving a gap between each point (unless space is an issue).

    - Ensure everything on the list is parallel.

    - If an item on the list goes onto a second line, the writer may have to manually indent the second line to align with the first line.

16. **Be as concise as possible**—wordiness is considered bad style in English.

17. **End with an action step.**

    The end of a letter or email should suggest the reader's next move, or your own. Write the closings like: "Thank you for your attention and we look forward to receiving your reply soon." or "We will have the perfect samples available soon. As soon as they are ready, we will send you some for your evaluation." Finally, close with a simple "Sincerely," and your signature; it may be a perfect ending.

18. **Have a good presentation.**

    The most well-written letters or emails can't survive bad presentation. Use a clean, logical format for your letter or email. A crowded or over-designed page distracts readers from your message. A letter or email with good presentation might help them grab the information they need right away. Presentations include font and size, punctuation, spelling, layout, etc. More detailed information is explained in Part **C** on page 21.

19. **Be conscious of punctuation and spelling.** More detailed information is explained in Part **D** on page 22.
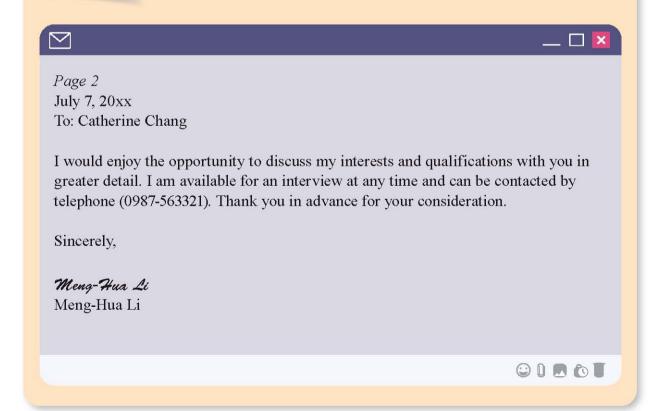
C Presentations

Here are some tips concerning good presentations:

- ✦ The **font** should be *Times New Roman;* **size 12** (although 11 may be used if space is an issue). *Arial* is sometimes used also.
- ✦ Use **full block** formatting (align everything to the left margin).
- ✦ Leave **one space** after the punctuation.
- ✦ **Always** write with single-line space, leaving a double line space between each paragraph.
- ✦ **Do not** use text message abbreviations.
- ✦ **Do not** use slang or "emoticons." Emoticons are symbols which people often use in internet chat or Line.
- ✦ **Try** to fit business letters onto one page. If this cannot be done, there should be at least one paragraph on the second page.

Example

Page 2
July 7, 20xx
To: Catherine Chang

I would enjoy the opportunity to discuss my interests and qualifications with you in greater detail. I am available for an interview at any time and can be contacted by telephone (0987-563321). Thank you in advance for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Meng-Hua Li
Meng-Hua Li

D Punctuation

.	A **full stop** or **period** is used at the end of a sentence.
?	A **question mark** is used to show that it is a question.
!	An **exclamation mark** is written immediately after an exclamation.
,	A **comma** is used to separate parts of a sentence or various single items.
:	A **colon** is used to introduce items in a list.
;	A **semi-colon** is used to separate long items in a list, particularly if there are commas inside some items. It is also used to join two sentences with a related meaning.
'	An **apostrophe** is used before a possessive to show ownership or the relationship between people.
—	A **dash** can be used to separate parts of a sentence.
-	A **hyphen** joins two words together, or shows that a word has been divided into two parts at the end of one line and the beginning of the next.
" "	**Quotation marks** are put around a word or phrase to show that someone else has written or said it.

E Spelling

Capital letters (also called "upper case" letters) are used:
- to begin a sentence.
- for names of people, places, events and organizations.
- for job titles.
- for nationalities and languages.
- for calendar information like days, months, etc.

A The following letter has a number of errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation, or email writing rules. Find all the errors and correct them in the box below.

> Dear Mr. Newman
>
> Thank you for your letter date 14 August 20xx concerning the temporary workers you have recently received from us. We appreciate you bringing this matter to our attention.
>
> We are sorry that the staff sent to you over the last two months have not met your expectations. We do thoroughly brief all employees on what is required of them and also check references very careful. However, with the job market being very buoyant at the moment, employees have a number of options open to them. This, I feel, is a major reason why employees has become more unreliable.
>
> We have very carefully checked the applications of customers this weak and have selected seventeen people who have been told to arrive on your gates on 7:30 a.m. on 24 September. Please see the enclosed list of names for your reference. We will be checking on these people later this week to ensure they still intend to go to work. Hopefully you will be satisfied with there performances.
>
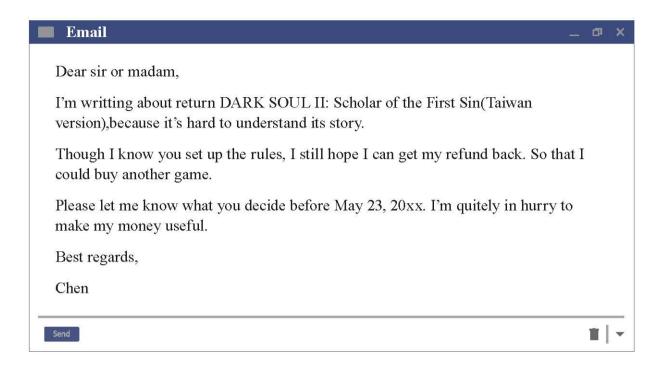> Thank you again for contacting us and please let me know if we can help further?
>
> Yours Sincerely,
>
> John Legg
> Personnel Officer

Error type	Errors → Corrections
Grammar	
Spelling	
Punctuation	
Email rules	

B **There are several errors in the following email. Identify all the errors and write them in the box below.**

Email   _ ⟐ ✕

Dear sir or madam,

I'm writting about return DARK SOUL II: Scholar of the First Sin(Taiwan version),because it's hard to understand its story.

Though I know you set up the rules, I still hope I can get my refund back. So that I could buy another game.

Please let me know what you decide before May 23, 20xx. I'm quitely in hurry to make my money useful.

Best regards,

Chen

Send   🗑 | ▾

Error type	Errors → Corrections
Grammar	
Punctuation	
Spelling	
Content	
Email rules	