

Writing Business Letters Across Languages

Writing Business Letters Across Languages:

*A Guide to Writing Clear
and Concise Business Letters
for Translation Purposes*

By

Said M. Shiyab and Sonia Halimi

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To our families and students, we dedicate this book

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface	ix
Chapter One.....	1
The Process of Writing	
1.1 Writing as a Process	
1.2 Writing as an Art	
1.3 Qualities of Good Writing	
1.4 Concerns About Writing	
1.5 Checklist and Exercises	
Chapter Two	19
The Nature and Significance of Business Correspondence	
2.1 Business Communication	
2.2 Business Correspondence	
2.3 Importance of Business Correspondence	
2.4 Good Characteristics of Business Letters	
2.5 Inner and Outer Qualities of Business Letters	
2.6 Business Letters across Languages	
2.7 Checklist and Exercises	
Chapter Three	33
Types of Business Letter Format	
3.1 Letter Formats	
3.2 Checklist and Exercises	
Chapter Four	47
Components of Business Letters	
4.1. Letter Components	
4.2 Letter Spacing	
4.3 Letter Fonts	
4.4 Layout in Arabic	
4.5 Checklist and Exercises	

Chapter Five	59
How to Write Business Letters	
5.1 Pre-Writing Stage	
5.2 Checklist and Exercises	
Chapter Six	73
Types of Business Letters	
6.1 Writing Stage	
6.2 Types of Letters	
6.3 Checklist and Exercises	
Chapter Seven.....	113
Promotional Material	
7.1 What is Promotional Material?	
7.2 Use of Advertisement in Promotion	
7.3 Language of Advertisement	
7.4 Figures of Speech	
7.5 Decoding Abbreviations	
7.6 Direct Solicitation	
7.7 Transfer and Public Failure	
7.8 Borrowing and Calques	
7.9 Use of Business to Business Self-Promotion	
7.10 Self Promotion	
Glossary.....	141
References	157

PREFACE

This book came as a result of a discussion during a department meeting about the need to assign textbooks for all of our translation, English and linguistics students. One of those suggested textbooks was a textbook on writing business letters across languages in which the aim is to help students of English, translation and linguistics write business letters effectively. In fact, the more I thought about the content, the more I realized that this book is suitable not only for the three categories of students listed above, but for all university students and professors around the world.

Taking the very few textbooks available in this area that deal, not only with English but also with foreign languages, this book is regarded as a useful handbook or a practical guide to students and English teachers and its aim is to help them write business letters more effectively across languages. The languages this book deals with will be English and Arabic. Dealing with these two languages does not mean that the book is not suitable for teachers and students of other languages; on the contrary, it is helpful to them in the sense that it demonstrates how writing business letters differs across languages. So this book is designed to be an aid to students, university teachers, administrators, secretaries, and business people interested in mastering the art of writing business letters. It is also suitable to anyone else who writes business-related correspondence.

The book provides comprehensive guidance on various topics dealing with business correspondence. It is intended to help writers master the art of writing and achieve succinct, clear and effective communication through the letters they write. Samples of business letters and various formats are presented in different languages. The book is divided into 7 chapters; each of the above chapters examines in details areas significant to understanding business correspondence. Each chapter has its own outline listing the various topics included in it. Cross references are provided on every page to help readers follow the subjects examined. A glossary is also provided at the end of the book that includes all significant terms relevant to business correspondence.

The overall organization of the book is to take the reader from learning and understanding the basic skills of writing to the actual method of writing an effective business letter. This means that the book starts with the process of writing in general and then moves into the more complicated issues of writing a business letter, such as tone, style, language, etc. Chapter (1) introduces the process of writing. It also discusses the art of writing, qualities of good writing, along with some concerns about writing. A checklist and set of exercises are provided at the end of the chapter to ensure that readers understand the topics examined.

Chapter (2) examines the nature and significance of business correspondence. It looks at the meaning of business correspondence and its importance in everyday life. This chapter also includes a section on the characteristics of business letters, highlighting their inner and outer qualities along with examples from a variety of languages. As for Chapter (3), it presents the format types of business letters, along with their templates. It demonstrates the differences between full block, modified block, modified indented and a hanging paragraph, and the circumstances in which these types of letters are used. This chapter includes drawings and illustrations which supplements and enhances the understanding of the topics examined.

Chapter (4) introduces the components of business letters. It deals with issues which have to do with modern gender related problems associated with heading, date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary close, signature block, enclosures and copies. Some further points relevant to the topics are discussed such as letter spacing and fonts, layout in Arabic, followed by a checklist and exercises illustrating the issues involved in the individual parts of business letters.

Chapter (5) introduces compositional aspects of writing business letters. It provides information about the pre-writing stage in which collecting information, using the right approach, clarity of the goal, care for culture, simplicity and conciseness and completeness are all studied. Chapter (6) examines the writing stage which introduces opening, main body, and ending. Types of letters are also introduced, and this includes job application letters, request and thank you letters, congratulatory and acknowledgement letters, among other types of letters. This chapter also introduces the meaning of memoranda, and exemplifications are provided to illustrate the textual, structural and compositional aspects of these types of business letters.

Chapter (7) introduces an area in writing business letters which has not been undertaken by scholars, and that is promotional material. It defines promotional material and examines the use of advertisement for promotional purposes and examines the language of advertisement such as argumentative, declarative and incentive. This chapter also discusses the figures of speech such as metathesis, alliteration and allusion. This is followed by an illustration of what is meant by decoding abbreviation, direct solicitation, transfer and public failure, borrowing and calques, and the use of business to business self-promotion. The final section of this chapter examines the elements of brochures, advertisements, resumes, biographies and tenders, along with their definitions, types and functions. Examples are given to demonstrate the importance of form and function and exercises are given to ensure the understanding of terms and concepts.

The last section of this book is a glossary. It consists of definitions of specialized terms and concepts in the field of business correspondence, along with explanatory notes. It also contains working vocabulary and frequently used idioms or metaphors pertinent to each subject area.

CHAPTER ONE

PROCESS OF WRITING

1.1 Writing as a Process

Writing is a process that requires knowledge and resourcefulness. It requires knowledge of the subject matter and the skills of writing. It also requires resourcefulness in the sense that it necessitates creativity and imagination. Arranging words into sentences and sentences into paragraphs and paragraphs into texts can be considered an artistic form of creating a complete piece of writing appreciated by its form and style. Writing a business letter or any other type of letter is considered a writing exercise. It all boils down to our ability to express ourselves persuasively and elegantly.

In everyday work, students as well as teachers may or may not be required to write lengthy compositions on a variety of subjects. However, practicing the art of writing will definitely help students, as well as teachers, develop their ability of expression, which will definitely be an extremely important tool in writing business letters.

The essential elements of writing effectively and clearly normally include good use of the mechanics of writing, spelling, grammatical structures, etc.. Such elements are no more than helping tools to perform the function for which they exist. The use of good English in writing business letters goes far beyond the writers' ability to come to grips with the technical forms of the language. It is their lucid and cogent transfer of ideas and thoughts that counts most. Here is a representation of what is involved in writing a business letter:

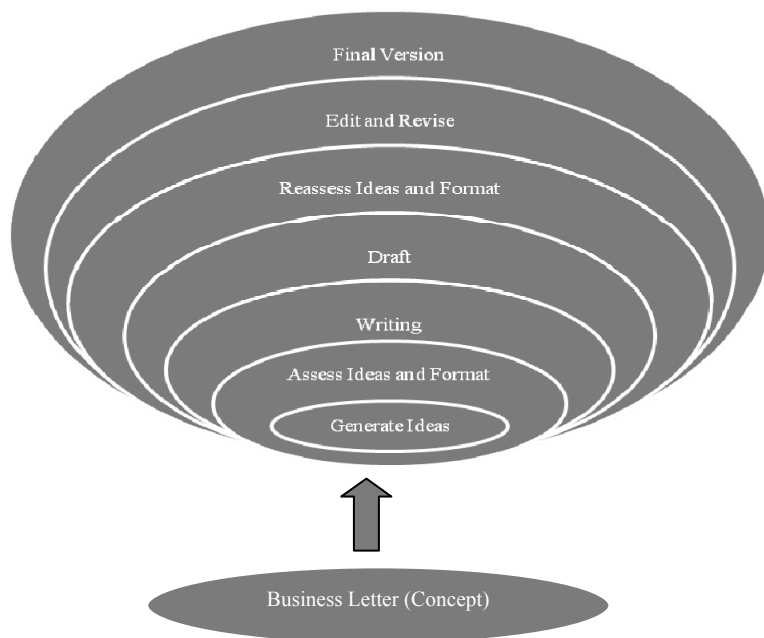


Diagram (1) above clearly shows the stages through which a business letter goes through. It involves generating ideas before writers make their first draft, followed by assessing the generated ideas and the format. Then the first draft is written to be followed by reassessment of the ideas and the format. Once the draft and its ideas and format are examined, the letter is linguistically edited and revised, followed by a second stage of editing and revising to finally produce the final draft.

Just like any piece of writing, it is obvious here that writing a business letter is a rigorous and arduous process. It requires linguistic and non-linguistic knowledge and excellent use of the language. To this effect, writing becomes significant in the sense that it is an expression of the self and what goes inside it. It is extremely significant that writers express themselves clearly and logically and in a way where the intended message is understood in an orderly manner. In what follows, an attempt will be made to provide tips on writing. The objective is to help writers, whether they are students or teachers, understand the fundamental issues involved in the writing process before they embark on the task of writing. These tips

include monotony, redundancy, clarity, cohesion, coherence, straightforwardness, knowledge and objectivity.

1.1.1 Monotony

One of the negative aspects of effective writing is lack of variation within the text. Choice of appropriate words and word variations can make the writers' job easy and at the same time can make reading enjoyable. Biber (2006) condemns lack of word variation by stating that young writers should not use the same word twice within a sentence simply because it makes the text awkward. Schonig (2011) gives the following example to demonstrate his point:

The Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth century had both negative and positive consequences. The Industrial Revolution caused child labor and poor working conditions. The Industrial Revolution then led to reforms that amended these injustices.

Schonig writes these three sentences only to spare the reader's agony of reading further. He clearly states that this short paragraph is not written well (i.e. repetition on the phrase "Industrial Revolution"). Despite the fact that the three sentences above are grammatical, the information is factual, the writing is clear, and the vocabulary is appropriate, the problem remains with lack of word or sentence variation. While repetition may be tolerated in some languages (i.e. Arabic), it violates the writing convention of English and some other languages. Unless writers are writing to a person whom they have some acquaintances, they should pay special attention to their readership. There is no need to write about something that is not of value to readers or of interest to them. Readers always look for useful and interesting information. As Elmore Leonard states in his story *Get Shorty* (2011) that he tries to leave out the parts that people skip. Here Leonard believes that writers should provide readers with useful information, and it is only through this strategy that writers can maintain readers' interest or attention.

1.1.2 Redundancy

Redundancy involves the unnecessary provision of information. It also involves the repetition of meanings, using different or similar words. Redundancy should be avoided in academic writing, particularly in writing business letters because it leads to boredom and monotony. Examples such as *really*, *extremely*, *indeed*, *very much*, and *actually*, can be disturbing

and even annoying if they are used frequently within a letter or text. Some believe that using such expressions may make the letter more convincing, but the fact of the matter is that such expressions can seriously get in the way and affect meaning.

Although redundancy is a form of repetition, there is a fine line between repetition and redundancy. If repetition is used well, it can be a good tool to use in writing. Repetition can also be regarded as a form of emphasis as to what writers are trying to say. Redundancy, on the other hand, is regarded as a bad thing. It involves the use of the same word over and over again without adding anything new to the previous usage. In other words, redundancy involves writers restating what has already been said; it takes space and gets in the way without adding meaning (Jobe and Sophia 2009).

In a report on “Writing Readable Sentences”, the FAO Organization (2006: 4) published a report about writing effective reports, indicating that clarity in writing is not enough. Business men and women who make the decisions want economy in writing. The report indicates that writers should say the same thing in fewer words without making their writing too dense. Emphasis should be placed on unnecessary descriptive words, colloquialism and bureaucratic jargon. The following example, taken from Jobe and Sophia (2009: 16), demonstrates the problem of redundancy:

If we are going to see the movie on opening night, we will have to get there early. We have to get to the movie early, because it's opening night.

As Jobe and Sophia indicate, both sentences articulate the meaning by using different words. This is only one form of redundancy, and like repetition, there are different types of redundancy such as rhetorical tautology (i.e. repeating the meaning using different words, a variety of different phrases, added bonus, unconfirmed rumor, etc). The second type of redundancy is called RAS syndrome, which stands for Redundant Acronym Syndrome. RAS involves acronyms or initials that are followed by a word that uses a word within the acronym. For example, the word *Machine* and *Number* are redundant in the following two examples:

Automated Teller Machine (ATM Machine)
Personal Identification Number (PIN Number)

The examples demonstrate that the final word, be it *machine* or *number*, is redundant simply because it was used within the acronym itself. Jobe and

Sophia argue that there are many types of redundancy, but the ones illustrated above are the most common.

1.1.3 Clarity

According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, clarity is regarded as the quality or condition of being clear so readers find the sentence or text easy to follow and understand. Any successful communication must be based on clarity of message and clarity of purpose. La Roque (2013) wonders why young writers have a tendency to use pretentious mumbo jumbo in which the communicated message is seriously ambiguated. She states that one of the attributes of good writers is their ability to write clearly and effectively. She argues that effective and clear writing is neither using long and complicated words nor using the most complicated-sounding synonyms for the simplest words. La Roque wonders why writers use “utilized” for the word “used” or “ambulate” or “locomote” for the word “walk”. In this connection, La Roque (2013: 6) states:

I’ve always wondered *what* is so attractive about using gargantuan words. Why is it that we writers often feel the urge to use “fuzzy but important-sounding language”? Why are we often tempted “to impress rather than to communicate clearly”?

Based on the above, one may point out that one of the cornerstones of clear writing remains in clarity of purpose, clarity of organization and clarity of well construed sentences. Therefore, skillful writers use various forms of sentences to make their writing lively, clear and more effective. It is also important that in order for writers to be successful communicators, they should have the ability to craft sentences and write stories with clarity, efficiency and focus. This applies not only to teachers and students, but also to business men, women, secretaries and administrators.

1.1.4 Cohesion

Linguistically speaking, cohesion is the unity that exists or created in a written text; it is how the text or parts of the text are put together. According to Halliday and Hasan (1976), cohesion is seen as a non-structural semantic relation between a pronoun and its antecedent in a preceding sentence, expressing at each stage in the discourse the point of context with what has gone before. A cohesive device is the interpretive link between a pronoun and its antecedent, or two lexically linked NPs. A

series of such ties (having the same referent) is referred to as a ‘cohesive chain’.

In clarifying the notion of ‘cohesion’ and ‘cohesive device’, Halliday & Hasan (1976: 1) present the following example:

Wash and core six cooking apples.
Put them into the fireproof dish.

According to Halliday & Hasan, it is clear that *them* in the second sentence refers back to the *six cooking apples* in the first sentence. This anaphoric function of *them* establishes a cohesive link between the first sentence and the second one and as a result gives cohesion to the text. Therefore, we can interpret these two sentences as a unified whole. The two sentences may constitute a text, or they may form part of a text, and there may be more of that text to follow. However, the cohesive tie between *them* and *six cooking apples* lies in the fact that they refer to the same thing. Thus, the two items are identified through ‘reference’; they are co-referential. Halliday & Hasan believe that language must be approached as a unified and systematized whole; it cannot be looked at in terms of scattered words or sentences. A text is any piece of language, spoken or written, that forms a unified whole.

In writing, cohesion is the quality in writing which makes a text connected. Each part of the text is connected with another and therefore creates unity among the parts of the text. When sentences relate to one another, it is because of the unity that exists among them. In *Contrastive Rhetoric: Cross-Cultural Aspects of Second-Language Writing*, Connor (1996) defines cohesion as the use of explicit linguistic devices to signal relations between sentences and parts of texts. These cohesive devices are phrases or words that help the reader associate previous statements with subsequent ones.

1.1.5 Coherence

For the purpose of writing, there is a difference between cohesion and coherence. While cohesion is about the unity of the text created by the use of linguistic devices, coherence is about whether or not such unity makes sense. For example, the sentence “pigs fly” is a cohesive sentence as it is a grammatical sentence, but it is not coherent as it makes no sense. When sentences or texts make sense to the reader, they do so because of their coherence. Therefore, coherence is a semantic property, created by the

interpretation of each part of a sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences. According to Conner (1996), a text may be cohesive without necessarily being coherent. Therefore, cohesion does not give rise to coherence. Conner argues that cohesion is determined by lexically and grammatically overt inter-sentential relationships, whereas coherence is based on semantic relationships.

1.1.6 Straightforwardness and Simplicity

One of the characteristics of good writing is straightforwardness and simplicity. At the spoken level, straightforwardness and simplicity can help listeners follow the speaker. At the writing level, it can lead to effective communication, which does not come from vagueness and ambiguity, confusing words and phrases or technical jargon, but it often results from the use of simple words.

In her book *The Art of Non-fiction: A Guide for Writers and Readers* (2001), Rand believes that one can add clarity to his thoughts by focusing on general forwardness in expressing his or her ideas. Good writers should always read over their sentences to make sure they have communicated their ideas clearly and straightforwardly. Readers come from all walks of life and we cannot assume therefore that only educated individuals are the ones who are interested in our writing. One must remember that while readers may have the ability to understand what is written, it is the writers' responsibility to ensure that the reader does not struggle with the concepts or ideas.

1.1.7 Common Knowledge

Common knowledge can be defined as the information assumed by the community. This may include information about one's university or institution, family, city, country, and other countries' values and traditions as well. It is erroneous to assume that readers share the same kind of information with the writer. Therefore, when writing about a particular subject, writers should assume that readers may or may not have knowledge of what they are writing about. It is the responsibility of writers to write clearly, assuming no prior knowledge on the part of the reader. This does not mean the text should be written in a way where it sounds boring or childish. On the contrary, being informative and thorough can make a whole world of difference when it comes to the reader.

I should note here that what is common to one person may not be common to another. For example, in the legal profession, the language used by lawyers is not easily understood by the ordinary man or layman. It can only be understood by those who practice the legal profession such as judges, lawyers, etc. While the legal profession may be an exception, writers should always provide whatever information helpful to the readers, without assuming that readers are familiar with that sort of language. Good writers are those who know when to be more informative or be less informative for their readers.

1.1.8 Objectivity vs. Subjectivity

Objectivity is when writers look at a specific topic from an objective viewpoint. Objectivity does not involve writers' feelings about a topic. Instead, writers state the facts or report on what they see, without injecting their personal opinion on the topic. Subjectivity, on the other hand, is when writers comment on what they say. Many emotive expressions are attributed to their writing such as "poor John", "this is amazing", "she was pretty", etc. These are all expressions used to express a subjective point of view.

While both subjectivity and objectivity are useful ways of expressing what we see or think, writers should be very selective when using them. There is nothing right or wrong with being objective or subjective, but the determining factor would be the situation. In most professions, however, it is very difficult for writers to be objective, simply because they want to express their feelings about what they think or see (i.e. journalism). Therefore, competent writers are those who know when to exclude their personal opinion or when to inject their emotions or feelings into their writing.

1.2 Writing as an Art

Writing can be regarded as a form of communication. It is an open-ended means of expression, aimed at creating a lasting impression on the reader. It is the art of creating an effect, and a way of expressing ideas and feelings. In order for writing to be effective, a writer has to be motivated to write about someone or something. It is an intelligent way of making the invisible to others visible. It is the art of conviction, which makes people believe in the unbelievable. Such an art makes writing powerful in a sense that it creates an interest among readers. One cannot imagine writing a

complaint letter without incorporating an element of conviction, such as careful planning, choice of words, knowledge of the subject matter, style, and ability in using words. Even when a complaint is presented indisputably, it may not get the favored results, simply because it lacks one, a few, or all the elements listed above. To this effect, writing is an art and at the same time therapy. It is an art in the sense that it requires a lucid arrangement of words, thoughts and facts in an orderly manner. It is therapy as the writer finds refuge in it from everyday headaches and problems. For example, in the medical profession certain types of patients are often asked to keep a journal to record their feelings from day to day which enables them to vent their anger or frustrations.

Morphologically speaking, writing is about mastering the skills of using words and thoughts effectively. It is about the process of arranging, not only words, but also thoughts, artistically to create a lingering effect. In addition to possessing the faculty of words, a writer has to possess the ability to creatively and imaginatively play with words. Writers should also have the ability to add spice to the letter just like a master chef preparing a sumptuous meal.

Furthermore, recognizing that writing is not easy, writers' interests and their love for it can make their job easy. Writers have to love writing in order to excel and do wonders through it. They should also have the skill of convincing in the sense it avoids any sort of contradiction and allows the reader to connect to the ideas clearly.

1.3 Qualities of Good Writing

Writing can be classified into poor, good, weak, unclear, vague, etc. In order for writing to be effective, it should have the ingredients of good writing. This includes style, language, content, and organization.

1.3.1 Style

The study of style has been an object of interest for many years. In ancient times, Aristotle and his much-defamed Sophist rivals studied the relationship of grammar and rhetoric to style. Recently, style has again become an object of interest for literary and linguistic studies, but there is no general consensus on what constitutes it or how it should be defined. From an academic perspective, style displays awareness, and even incorporates the fact that previous pronouncements entail many different

meanings of the word. It is the writer's personal manner of expressing him or herself. It is the way in which something is articulated, expressed, or even performed by an individual. It is the image of the author, or in short, 'style is the individual' (Gibbon, 2013). An English historian noted for his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, Gibbon argues that style is just the outside of content, and content is the inside of style. Style is like the outside and the inside of the human body-both go together; they cannot be separated.

The confusion of contradictory definitions is not clarified if we look at *The Read Me First* (2003) book, which, discussing style from a writing perspective, states that style is fundamental to literary writing and understanding it is essential. If *content* is *what* we communicate, then *style* is *how* we communicate that content. Writing style is determined by all the decisions one makes while creating a document, such as the type and tone of information being presented, choice of words, language and format consistency, use of technical terms, and so forth. Style is part of the unique value that writers add to the product. In the literary world, style is judged in part on artistic grounds, which may be highly subjective. In the field of technical documentation, however, experience and practice have provided practical criteria for evaluating style. So, commercially, good style is synonymous with effective communication, which is not some abstract academic goal to be achieved for its own sake. From a business letter perspective, documents that communicate effectively reduce a company's cost and increase customer satisfaction, both effects resulting in increased profits. Customer satisfaction increases when accurate and functional documentation enables the customer to use a product quickly and efficiently. A document written in a style responding to the requirements of its readers also results in fewer revisions, fewer calls to customer support, reduced training needs, and easier to translate into other languages, if required. Style involves the writer's choice of language, organization of a story, classification, tense, perspective, and myriad of other considerations.

While style constitutes a significant factor in writing, it entails some problems. Style differs from one person to another. For example, some instructors may focus on word choice, while others may focus on tense. Still others may think that style has to do with passives vs. active voice. While differences among writers exist, they are all in agreement that writers should express their ideas or thoughts convincingly, straightforwardly, and elegantly.

1.3.2 Language

Of all the forms of writing, writing a letter requires a good command of language. Good writers use language clearly and effectively. In business letters, writers must learn how to be brief in expressing their thoughts or ideas. This requires writers to have knowledge of grammar, excellent command of the vocabulary, and good knowledge and understanding of the importance of form and style. Put differently, writers should have the ability to write grammatically, clearly and accurately.

When writers write poorly, it says much about who they are. This will definitely leave a bad impression about them and can affect their reputation. With the advent of text messaging, people are getting lazy. While sentences are used ungrammatically, the use of abbreviations and lack of capitalization do not translate well in a business letter setting.

1.3.3 Content

Within the context of writing a business letter, writers should say exactly what needs to be said clearly and precisely. No matter how good one's writing is, readers always look for new and valuable information. While style and good command of the language are extremely fundamental, skillful writers always have the ability to say something interesting to the reader. Just like any profession, writing requires raw materials, and writers' raw materials are their thoughts, the ideas they have, and the information they collect from the outside community such as books, brochures, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, etc.

1.3.4 Organization

Organization is defined as the logical progression and completeness of the writers' ideas and thoughts in a particular text. It is the structural framework in which writing is manifested. Organization in writing is significant simply because it helps readers to follow the writers' patterns of thinking. It also helps fulfill readers' expectations. Organization centers around two areas: structure of the text, focusing on words, sentences, phrases and paragraphs, and cohesive devices, which connect sentences, clauses and paragraphs together.

Within the context of writing a business letter, organization requires knowledge of how to collect information from outside sources. Writers use

such information to make an outline, which enables them to think about what they want to write. Ideas have to be jotted down on a piece of paper as they come without focusing on the order in which they occur. Ideas should be grouped in a way where one group naturally leads to another. Ideas are communicated through different methods. Sometimes, writers discuss the cause of something without examining its effect. Other times, they discuss a general idea about a specific topic without going into the particulars. Still other times, writers present the particulars according to their worth.

Writers should seriously think about the organizational pattern they might use, and consider the reason for their writing, and the kind of readership they are writing to. They should also think of the best way to present information. The amount of new terms or concepts and the factual information presented in any text can sometimes be daunting. Therefore, organizational patterns can easily and usefully present a number of ideas that fit together to make sense. Following are some common organizational patterns that writers may find useful:

- Chronological pattern
- General-specific order
- Cause and effect
- Comparison and contrast
- Reason and result

While there are other organizational patterns that could be used by writers, the above list is most commonly used in academic writing. Through the use of signaling words, writers can communicate their ideas to the reader clearly and more effectively and understand the intricacies and the subtle details within the text.

1.4 Concerns about Writing

Just like any other profession, writing has some common pitfalls writers should avoid. In order for writers to improve their academic writing or their writing of business letters, the following issues should be avoided as much as possible:

1.4.1 The Use of the Pronoun “I”

Unless writers relate personal experiences, any composition should avoid using the pronoun “I” as much as people. In business letters, writers may use the pronoun “I” as they are personally writing to conduct business. However, if writers are writing to entertain, convince, inform, or persuade their readers, they should avoid using the pronoun “I” simply because readers may not be interested in the writers themselves as much as they are interested in the ideas and thoughts behind their writing. Therefore, in such contexts, skillful writers keep themselves in the background and allow their thoughts and ideas to speak on their behalf.

1.4.2 Repetitiveness

As indicated in section 1.1.1, lack of variations can create a problem in academic writing. Selecting the right word can make a world of difference. The monotony created by using the same word can have a chilling effect on readers and may well diminish their interest. Skillful writers can avoid monotony by varying the length of sentences and creating a different form of sentences. Monotony can also be avoided if writers can mix simple sentences with compound ones and alternate the normal order of a sentence. The style in which the writer chooses to communicate with his audience can also have a good or bad effect on the reader. Therefore, the style of writers can say something about their disposition and individuality. It can also show the way in which they feel about their audience. To this effect, changing the words or introducing various syntactic structures along with proper use of the mechanics of writing can achieve an optimal effect on the reader.

From a different angle, writers have to understand that different purposes and different situations require different styles. Two people may write to one reader about the same subject but use two different styles. This depends on whether the letter is a thank you letter, an apology letter, etc. If it is not a letter, then the purpose of writing to the reader may be to entertain, convince, instruct, etc.

1.4.3 Tenses

One of the significant aspects of writing is consistency in which regularity or uniformity among the use of verbs is maintained. If writers switch between past and present within the same paragraph, their style of writing

will be considered weak, unless they are relating a past experience. In this regard, Asker (2006: 29) states:

A sacred language is the one that embodies religious beliefs that elevate it to the status of “truth giving”. In my use of semi-sacred, I am thinking of “colonial languages” like English and French that are given particular status in authority and (initially at least) have a restricted membership.

In the above excerpt, all the verbs used are expressed in the present form. One cannot imagine the above excerpt would have been as strong had the verbs been expressed in the past and present tenses. Therefore, writers need to be consistent when using tenses.

1.4.4 Exaggeration

Exaggeration involves overstating the obvious for the purpose of amplification or embellishment. Although exaggeration can sometimes give taste and color to novels or stories, writers need to be careful not to exaggerate. The example, “*I will strangle you if you do this*”, is a form of exaggeration, which weakens the effect of the statement if used frequently. In literature, exaggeration is called “hyperbole”, and it is regarded as a figure of speech. Hyperbole can be good or bad, and it simply consists of representing things to be either greater or less, better or worse than they really are. Its object is to make the thought more effective by overstating it. Hyperbole depends on the context and frequency in which it is used. The following examples demonstrate how exaggeration can be presented:

Sentence	Exaggerated Form	Regular Use
I will kill you if you fail the exam.	Kill you	Punish
I saw a gigantic bug.	Gigantic bug	A huge or big
I have a terrible feeling about this man.	Terrible feeling	Bad feeling
My colleague is intolerable these days.	Intolerable	Disturbing or annoying
Loosing this football game is a disaster.	Disaster	Loss
Her face was glowing.	Glowing	Bright, ...
I told you hundreds of times.	Hundreds of times	Several times

While exaggeration or hyperbole can be useful in certain situations, overusing it, particularly in business correspondence or promotional material and using it unnecessarily, can be perceived negatively by readers.

1.4.5 Inflated Language

Inflated language refers to a bloated, oversized, and overblown statement. According to Merriam Webster (2001), inflated language or style is defined as a statement elaborated or heightened by empty means. Such a statement is expanded to an abnormal or unjustifiable level. Writing naturally, therefore, can be perceived as one of the good traits of successful writers. An ornately or artificially expanded statement can give false impressions and weaken the effect of the statement on the reader. Careless writers can fall into a trap when using high-inflated phrases that often litter business letters or promotional materials. They can also be trapped when using difficult words which have a tendency to ambiguate or mislead rather than clarify. Skillful writers use simple words and adverbs sparingly; they also use adjectives only when they want to make their message exact and lucid. There is no need to litter statements or sentences with words or phrases that would throw us into abstraction.

1.4.6 Slang and Awkwardness

Slang and awkwardness involve the use of jargon, clichés and quotations. In any form of writing, slang and awkwardness affects the writing style negatively. Using slang and awkward words can make readers uncomfortable and difficult to follow. In a paper entitled “Writing Style”, Peter Lipton (2014: 2) states that “style is the feather in the arrow, not the feather in the cap”. On awkwardness, he points out:

Awkward writing makes the reader uncomfortable. It is ungrammatical, unclear, choppy, or just too difficult to follow. One cause of awkward writing is not using your own words. Instead, you rely on the phrases and the constructions of the author you are discussing. The resulting mixture of your author's style and your own is almost always awkward. Even if you are describing someone else's views, use your words. The most general and important cause of awkwardness, however, is simply the failure to revise. Most writers produce awkward sentences the first time around.

According to Lipton, good writers take the time to revise their writing and identify ways on how to recognize slang and awkwardness and how to do

away with them. They should also assume that the first draft of each sentence text or letter will have to be edited and revised. It is only through constant revision and editing that a letter or text can be as effective as it should be.

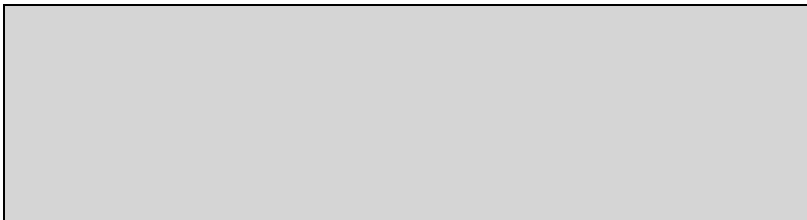
1.4.7 Beating Around the Bush

One of the problems of academic writing is the tendency for writers to be circumlocuted. Not only do they waste their time beating around the bush, but they also express their thoughts and ideas indirectly. As indicated earlier (see section 1.1.6), one of the characteristics of good writing is to be straightforward. It can help readers follow the writer and lead to effective communication. It should be noted that readers come from all walks of life, and writers cannot assume that their writing will only be read by the knowledgeable and the learned. It is the writers' responsibility to ensure that everyone understands what is written and that there is no difficulty following their logic and patterns of thinking.

1.5 Checklist and Exercises

Read the following questions very carefully and then answer them in the spaces provided. Make sure you write an eight line paragraph, taking into account the issues discussed in the chapter.

1. In a short paragraph, explain how people maintain fitness.



2. Describe a successful teacher.

3. Explain how technology is important in everyday life.

4. Explain why people learn English.

