



Business Email: Language, Structure and Style

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Opening and Referencing

Introduction

The aim of the opening paragraph in a formal business email is generally to:

- make reference to previous correspondence/communication
- say how you found the recipient's name/address
- say why you are writing to the recipient.

The opening paragraph is important. A good opening should make clear the purpose of your email.

Here, we'll present you with a number of common functional phrases for referencing different situations.

Model Email

Here are a number of short business emails showing the use of functional language for referencing in different situations.

From: Darren Traube
To: Hayden Horowitz
Subject: Order Ref. No. 856

Dear Mr Horowitz

With reference to our telephone conversation today, I am writing to confirm your order for: 120 Cheddar Deluxe, Order Ref. No. 856.

We will deliver the order to your premises on 14 August.

If you have any questions regarding the order, please call us.

Best regards

Darren Traube



From: Jason Klein
To: Pauline Yates
Subject: Request for Catalogue

Dear Ms Yates

I am writing in reference to your advertisement in yesterday's New York Times.

Could you please send me a copy of your latest catalogue? I would also like to know if it is possible to make purchases online.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Jason Klein

From: Jessica Best
To: Howard Chung
Subject: Discount Query

Dear Ms Tam

Following our telephone conversation this morning, I would just like to ask whether you would be willing to offer us a further discount if we ordered over 10,000 units from you each month.

I look forward to hearing your reply.

Regards

Jessica Best

From: Moses Wu
To: Helen Jiang
Subject: Brochure Request

Dear Ms Jiang

Thank you for your fax of 22 September enquiring about our services.

Further to this, I have attached our latest brochure and price list.

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me.

Best regards

Moses Wu



From: Rudolph Wagner
To: Peter Berger
Subject: Draft Contract

Dear Mr Berger

With regard to the questions you raise about the draft contract in your fax of 1 July, I think it best if I meet you to clarify everything.

Are you free on Thursday afternoon around 2 pm?

I hope to see you then.

Regards

Rudolph Wagner

From: Drew Carpenter
To: Gregory Siegel
Subject: Request for Brochure

Dear Ms Chiang

I have received your email of 26 November requesting a copy of our corporate brochure.

As you requested, I have attached our brochure, together with our current price list.

If you would like any further information, please contact us.

Regards

Drew Carpenter

From: Hugo Prince
To: All Staff
Subject: New Sales Manager

Dear Ms Renoir

As you may already have heard, Roger Chan is to become the new Sales Manager effective from 12 August.

If you have any queries regarding this appointment, please call Ruby To on 2617 3782.

Regards

Hugo Prince



From: Suzanne Wiener
 To: Kathy Metcalfe
 Subject: Administrative Assistant Vacancy

Dear Ms Metcalfe

Further to your advertisement for the position of Administrative Assistant advertised in The South China Morning Herald on 14 December, I am interested in applying for this position.

I have attached my job application covering letter and resume.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards

Suzanne Wiener

Functional Language

Referring to Previous Correspondence

I have received your fax of 15 April concerning.....
 I refer to your letter of 1 March regarding.....
 In reply to your email of 8 May, I would like to inform you that....
 With reference to your email of 12 December, I.....
 In response to your email, I am happy to confirm...
 With regard to your email, I.....

Referring to Your Own Previous Correspondence

I refer to my email to you on 14 June concerning.....
 We/I recently wrote to you about ...
 On 5 May, I emailed you about.....
 Further to my fax on 2 September regarding, I.....

Referring to Previous Verbal Communication



I refer to the conversation we had on Tuesday about.....
 Following our phone conversation this morning, I.....
 Further to our meeting last week, I.....
 Regarding the discussion we had on the phone last week, I....
 Further to our telephone conversation this morning, I would like to assure you that....

Reference by Thanking

Thank you for your email of 14 June.
 Thank you for your email regarding ...
 Thank you for your e-mail about ...
 Thank you for your email requesting...
 Thank you for your fax enquiring about....
 Thank you for your email enquiry about.....
 Thank you for meeting me on Monday.
 Thank you for showing me around your premises last week.

Saying Why You're Writing

I am writing with reference to your enquiry of 6 November.
 I am writing in connection with your email of 1 May enquiring/requesting...

Referring to Questions

In response to the questions in your email, I am writing with further information.
 With regard to the questions you raise in your fax, I would like to clarify certain issues.
 In answer to your question about....., I.....

Referring to Someone's Request

As you requested, I am enclosing a brochure about our company.
 As you suggested, I am sending you my CV.
 In answer to your enquiry, I have attached material which I hope will be useful to you.
 As promised, I have attached...
 Regarding your request for information on....., I.....

Referring to Something your Reader Knows

As we discussed, I am going to propose a merger of the sales and marketing departments.
 As you may already know / have heard, the Director of the company is going to step down at the end of the year.
 As previously agreed, the construction can proceed on 1 November.

Referring to Something You've Seen

I refer to your advertisement for the position of.....in.....on.....
 After having seen your advertisement in ..., I would like ...
 Further to your advertisement in on 1 February, I.....
 I would like to apply for the position of advertised in..... on.....



Making Enquiries

Structure and Organisation

Here, we'll look at how to write email of enquiry. These email describe what the writer wants and why. Such email are generally quite short, generally ranging from between 1 and 3 paragraphs. They may also include a request for information.

First of all, here's an example of a typical email whose purpose is to enquire.

Subject: Stationery Supplies (Ref: 58784M)

Hi Susan

I refer to our stationery order we put in last week. I would just like to know when our stationery order will be delivered. We are running low on printer paper and will need new supplies before the end of the week.

If the delivery won't arrive until next week, could you please let me know which department has a surplus supply of paper?

Please would you confirm this as soon as possible?

Regards

Kate

Enquiry email will vary greatly in length and complexity. Most are usually very short though. Below we outline a structure to cater for most possibilities.

Subject Heading

Include a subject heading which makes clear what the enquiry is about. For example:

Model AN126
Catalogue item number HK383
Invoice number 3482392
Annual Leave
Query about Website
Question about Accounting Software



Opening Paragraph

Because these are initial communications, you do not need to thank the reader for a previous email, but you do need to establish a point of reference – an explanation of why you are writing to that company rather than to any other, or an indication that you think the company can help you.

a) This can be very general:

I am writing to enquire/ask if + clause

I am writing to enquire if you can supply these items.

b) It can be more precise:

We understand that + clause

We understand that you are the agent for this type of product.

We have been informed that + clause

We have been informed that you are able to provide Blue Ocean strategy training.

c) It can be very precise:

We are writing with reference to + noun phrase

We are writing with reference to your advertisement ...

According to + noun phrase + clause

According to your brochure,

This point of reference will be followed by the enquiry, which can be expressed from two points of view:

1. the writer can ask, enquire, like to know.
2. the reader can tell, inform, let (you) know, confirm.

Most of these verbs can be followed by a noun or a clause:

We are writing to ask the lead time required.

We are writing to ask if the statistics are already available.

I would like to know further details.

I'd like to know where we can obtain further information.

Please could you confirm the deadline?

Please would you confirm when your manager will contact me?

Second Paragraph

The second paragraph gives further details of the enquiry. This may include a further enquiry related to the original enquiry, or it may include a new enquiry. The second paragraph may also include a request.

a) Further related enquiry



Try to link the related enquiry with the original enquiry using phrases like 'Further to this,' 'In the same connection,' etc.

Further to this, I would like to know if...
 On the same subject, could you tell me if...
 In the same connection, I'd like to know whether....

b) New enquiry

You may want to make more than one enquiry, and the link expressions 'also', 'in addition' are useful:

I would also like to know if/whether...
 Could you also tell me if/whether...
 In addition/Furthermore, please would you let us know

c) Request for further details

Sometimes you may already know some information and want further details; when you have made the first enquiry, you can become more direct.

Please would you let us have further details of ...
 Please can you give us full particulars of...
 Would you please email me further information about...

d) Reason for your enquiry

This is not necessary unless it helps your reader to give you the information you require.

Please could you let us know the date of delivery as we need the equipment urgently?
 We'd appreciate it if you could let us have this information soon as we need to make a purchase decision by the end of the month.

Closing Paragraph

This will be quite short in this sort of text.

Thanks. (For a very informal and normal enquiry or request)
 I look forward to hearing from you.
 I am looking forward to hearing from you.
 Thank you for your assistance.
 We would appreciate it if you could let us have this information as soon as possible.
 Please could you confirm this by xxxx.

If you think the reader might have further questions, you can suggest that he or she contact you; e.g.



Please call me if you have any questions/queries.

Please feel free to email me if you have any question/queries.

The emails below follow the model structure and organisation that we outlined earlier. The simplest are typically two paragraphs including a courteous closing paragraph. There are many different ways to enquire about something and the language you use will depend on who you are writing to and the context of the document. The language ranges from informal to formal.



Model Email

Subject: Call with Andrea and Charlie

Hi John,

Further to today's phone call with Andrea and Charlie, they now want to set up another call with you on 18 October at 11.30 am. The call should last about an hour. Would you please let me know if the timing fits in with your schedule?

If the schedule is OK, which number shall I ask them to call you on?

Could you let me know today as I said I'd get back to them before 5?

Regards

David

Subject: Quality Control Workshop

Dear Helen

I am writing to enquire whether your company could offer a workshop on Quality Control for our managers.

The Quality Control training workshop (Ref.: QC 104) detailed in your corporate brochure might be suitable for us. I would like to know if it is possible for you to offer a 3-day training workshop starting before October 20xx, for a group of 10.

In addition, could you send us some background information about the trainer you would use to conduct the workshop?

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Best regards

Samantha Rogers



Subject: Lunch on Wednesday

Jack

I just wanted to ask if you were free to join Kevin McCloud and myself for lunch this coming Wednesday. It might be a good opportunity for you to bring up that proposal you mentioned to me last week.

If you can make it, can you let me know?

Thanks

George

Subject: Function Room Availability

Dear Ms Jones

I am writing to enquire about the availability of function rooms at your hotel from 19 to 23 December this year.

As Chairman of the Christmas Party Committee, I am trying to find a suitable hotel for our function. Your information would be extremely valuable and much appreciated.

I would appreciate it if you could provide me with the following information:

- The availability of function rooms between the above dates with a capacity to hold 60 people.
- The services available such as food, drinks and entertainment.

I would be grateful if you could email me the relevant information in the near future.

If you have any queries, please call me on 26464638.

I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely



Subject: Vacancies

Dear Mr Turner

I am writing to ask if you have any vacancies in your sales department.

I have just graduated from Hong Kong University with a degree in marketing and would like to gain some experience in an entry level position.

I have attached my CV for your reference.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards

Thomas Lambert

Subject: Flash Software

Naomi

Could you tell me if you have anyone in your department who is familiar with Flash software? We'd like to make some minor changes to a file.

I hope to hear from you soon.

Regards

John

Subject: Invoice #64783

Dear Jenny

I am writing in connection with the invoice (#64783) which you emailed me yesterday. I'd just like to know if the client is aware of the 'extra charges' you have applied to his account.

Could you also tell me if the client is entitled to a 15% discount? I believe this size of discount only applied to customers who had been with us for more than three years.

Please would you confirm these issues as soon as possible?

Regards

John



Functional Language

Opening Reference (general)

I am writing to enquire if you can supply these items.

Opening Reference (more precise)

We understand that you are the agent for this type of product.

We have been informed that you are able to provide Blue Ocean strategy training.

Opening Reference (very precise)

We are writing with reference to your advertisement ...

According to your brochure,

Enquiring (would like to know)

We are writing to ask the lead time required.

We are writing to ask if the statistics are already available.

I would like to know further details.

I'd like to know where we can obtain further information.

Enquiring (tell, let (you) know, confirm)

Please could you confirm the deadline?

Please would you confirm when your manager will contact me?

Could you tell me if you have xxxx in stock?

Could you let me know you weekday opening times?

Further Enquiring (same subject)

Further to this, I would like to know if...

On the same subject, could you tell me if...

In the same connection, I'd like to know whether....

Further Enquiring (new enquiry)

Also, could you confirm whether.....

I would also like to know if/whether...

One more thing, could you tell me if/whether...

In addition/Furthermore, please would you let me know

Requesting Further Details

Please would you let us have further details of ...

Please can you give us full particulars of...

Would you please let us have further information about...



Giving Reasons for an Enquiry

Please could you let us know the date of delivery as we need the equipment urgently?

We'd appreciate it if you could let us have this information soon because we need to make a purchase decision by the end of the month.

We need these details now due to a problem with...

Closing

I look forward to hearing from you.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Thank you for your assistance.

We would appreciate it if you could let us have this information as soon as possible.

Please could you confirm this by xxxx.

Suggesting Further Contact

Please call me if you have any questions/queries.

Please feel free to email me if you have any questions/queries.



Informing and Notifying

Structure and Organisation

When informing or notifying customers, clients or colleagues, it is common to place the new information as the purpose statement, with supporting information following in separate paragraphs.

A typical structure might be:

- Inform the reader(s) of the necessary information (purpose statement)
- Add supporting information (if required)
- Action the reader should take (if required)
- Close on a positive/courteous note (optional but expected)

Here's a typical short email whose function is to inform:

Subject: Stationery Supplies

Hi Susan

I'd just like to let you know that the stationery supplies you ordered last week have arrived.

Your order details are as follows:

- A4 paper: 20 reams
- DVD RW: 10 cases
- Lever arch files: 25
- Staples: 10 packs
- Correction fluid: 15 bottles

Please could you collect your order from the supplies room on the 2/F?

If anything is missing from your order, please let me know as soon as possible.

Regards

Kate

Opening Paragraph

In the first paragraph, you should state the purpose of your email. In the above email the purpose statement is:



I'd just like to let you know that the stationery supplies you ordered last week have arrived.

It may also be necessary to refer to a previous communication so that your reader has a clear reference. Here's an example:

Thank you for sending me your proposal for the English language training courses. I'm pleased to inform you that we accept your quotation and terms.

In this paragraph, it was necessary for the writer to make reference to the reader's proposal before informing the reader of his/her company's decision. This helped to clarify the purpose statement.

Second Paragraph (+ additional paragraphs if required)

The next part of the email should provide further details of the main topic, if necessary. This part of the email is usually the longest. You need to give details of the issue or topic and, if the topic requires, you may need to explain a bit more as to why a certain action is being taken.

To make the task of writing this section easier, ask yourself what information the reader would like to know and what questions the reader is likely to ask. Then make sure you include this information in a logical order.

Don't use long paragraphs in this section or in any other section of the email. If the information you provide is complex, divide it up into short paragraphs with no more than one point in each paragraph. And DON'T BE AFRAID OF WRITING A ONE SENTENCE PARAGRAPH!

In the model email above, the writer simply gave the details of the stationery order in the second paragraph:

Your order details are as follows:

- A4 paper: 20 reams
- DVD RW: 10 cases
- Lever arch files: 25
- Stapes: 10 packs
- Correction fluid: 15 bottles

Using bulleted or numbered lists is often the best way of communicating more complex information.

Action Paragraph (if required)

It may or may not be necessary to include this paragraph. What is important, however, is that if any action is expected of the reader, it should be placed in its own paragraph immediately before the closing paragraph. In the model email above, the writer makes a simple request:

Please could you collect your order from the supplies room on the 2/F?



Closing Paragraph (optional)

A polite closing paragraph is optional but expected these days. In this paragraph, you could request the reader contacts you in case of a question/query, thank the reader for his/her cooperation, etc. There are many ways to close an email and what you write here will depend on the context of the document.

In the model email above the writer asks the reader to contact him/her in case anything from the order is missing.

If anything is missing from your order, please let me know as soon as possible.

This closing paragraph relates directly to the email subject. In other email, a general close may be acceptable.

If you don't include a closing paragraph, you should at the very least include a polite close such as 'Regards,' or 'Best regards.'

Model Email

The emails below follow the model structure and organisation that we outlined earlier. The simplest are typically three paragraphs including a purpose statement, further details and a courteous close. There are many different ways to inform and notify and the language you use will depend on who you are writing to and the context of the document. The language ranges from informal to formal.

Subject: Annual Leave Dates

Dear Kim

I would just like to let you know that I'll be on annual leave from 12 to 24 July.

During my absence, Paula Yu will be handling my duties. If you have any queries regarding any of the accounts I handle, please contact Paula during this period.

In case of an emergency, you can reach me on 947858938.

Regards

Jessie

Notes:

What's the difference between: 'I would like to inform you' and 'I would just like to inform you'?

We add the word 'just' to indicate that we're giving just one small piece of information.

This is a typical 3-paragraph email with a purpose statement, further details and a polite but informative close.



Subject: Business Writing Skills Courses

All Staff

Please note that we will be conducting a number of business writing skills courses in-house over the next year.

The details of the first round of courses are as follows:

- Course Title: Business Writing Skills
- Levels: 1, 2 and 3
- Date: 5 August to 17 September
- Time: Monday and Thursday Evenings, 7 to 9 p.m.

If you would like to enrol on a course, you will first need to take an assessment test to determine your English level with regards to writing. We will hold a testing session on 12 July at 6 pm in Conference Room 2. The test will take no longer than 60 minutes to complete.

If you would like to enrol on a course, please complete the attached form and return it to me by 3 July.

I hope that many of you will take this opportunity to brush up on your writing skills.

Regards

Jane Hampton
TRAINING MANAGER

Notes:

'Please note' is a neutral expression which is often used with circulars addressed to groups of people.

This email is a little more complex. It includes a purpose statement, a second paragraph giving information in the form of a bulleted list, a third paragraph providing further information, a fourth paragraph making a request, and a positive closing paragraph related to the subject.



Subject: Office Renovation

Dear Roger

Thank you for meeting me yesterday to discuss our requirements for the office renovation. I would just like to inform you that the work schedule will need to be postponed by one week due to internal reasons.

Please also note that all your workers will need to be issued with security passes before they can enter our premises. Could you contact me on 2647 4783 to arrange this?

If you have any queries, please let me know.

Regards

Sam Davis

Notes:

In this email, the writer makes a clear reference to the main topic by referring to a recent meeting. He says: "Thank you for meeting me yesterday to discuss our requirements for the office renovation." This is followed by the purpose statement. The reference helps to clarify the purpose statement.

There is no need to expand on the purpose statement. Instead, the writer provides new information. He indicates this by adding the word 'also': "Please also note that". He could also have said: "In addition, please note that..." or "Furthermore, please note that..."

The email uses a standard closing paragraph.



Subject: Benson Trading Ltd

David

I am pleased to inform you that Bill Granger of Benson Trading Ltd has chosen us as their main supplier in Singapore.

In order to secure their business, however, I had to agree to a 10% discount on our normal prices.

After talking to Bill this morning, I estimate that orders from Benson should be in the region of \$1.3 million per quarter. This volume of business will ensure that we still make a substantial profit.

I'll see you at the meeting this afternoon.

Regards

John

Notes:

In this email, the purpose statement gives good news. We use phrases such as "I am pleased/happy to inform you that..." and "You'll be happy to hear that..." to indicate that good news will follow.

The second and third paragraphs provide further details about the main point.

The writer includes a polite closing paragraph.



Subject: Application for Sales Manager

Dear Robert

I regret to inform you that your internal application for the position of Sales Manager has not been successful.

We felt that although you have performed exceptional well over the past year, you still lack experience in handling larger, more complex accounts.

In view of this, we have decided to recruit someone externally.

With immediate effect, however, we would like to offer you a 10% rise in your basic salary and increase your commission rate to 2.7%.

We hope this will encourage you to remain with the company.

Best regards

Julie Simpson

Notes:

In this email, the purpose statement gives bad news. We use phrases such as "I regret to inform you that..." and "I'm sorry to let you know that..." to indicate that bad news will follow.

The second and third paragraphs provide further details about the main point.

The fourth paragraph includes an offer, which is indirectly related to the main point.

The closing paragraph is positive and courteous.



Subject: Supplier in Hong Kong

Jim

Following our meeting last week, I am sorry to let you know that we've decided to use another supplier.

Although the other supplier was slightly more costly, they were able to guarantee us shorter and more reliable delivery times. As you know, this was the main concern we had with your proposal.

If, however, you are able to resolve the problems you have with shipping from your China factory, we would be willing to consider you again in the future.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards

Jonathan Balick

Notes:

The opening paragraph includes a reference, "Following our meeting last week," and a purpose statement.

The purpose statement begins with the functional phrase, "I am sorry to let you know that.." This is a common phrase for introducing bad news.

The second paragraph details the reason for using another supplier.

The third paragraph indicates that the door is still open to this supplier. This helps to soften the tone of the email and promotes goodwill.

The closing paragraph is positive and courteous.

Functional Language

General Informing

I would (just) like to let you know that

Please note that

I would like to inform you that.....

This is to inform you that.....

You are informed that

Please be informed that

Please be advised that ...



Informing (good news)

I am glad to let you know that....

You'll be glad/happy to know/hear/learn that

We are pleased/happy/glad to inform you that....

We are able to....

Informing (bad news)

I'm sorry to let you know that

Unfortunately, we are unable to...

Regrettably,... / Unfortunately,...

We regret to inform you that....

Providing Additional Information

I would also like to inform you....

In addition, please note that...

Furthermore, I would just like to let you know that ...

Moreover, we are able to



Replies to Requests

Introduction

Replies to email of request are a means of creating goodwill with clients as well as your colleagues. Such email should be responded to as quickly as possible.

It is also important that the replies are written in the correct tone. The personal approach, with plenty of references to I, we, you, me, etc., is ideal for this kind of e-mail. Your reply should be polite and positive, and should give the impression that it is a pleasure for you to be able to respond to the reader and to carry out the request made.

Before you write a reply to a request, read through the text received and take note of all the requests (requests for information and requests for action) made by the client. Then, decide on the information that you need to give to the client. If you have complied with the request already, tell the client so. If you have not been able to comply with the request or are unable to respond to the enquiry, tell the client what he or she can do. Be helpful.

Structure and Organisation

Most replies to requests have a similar organization. They usually consist of 3-4 paragraphs, although the length of these paragraphs may vary a lot.

Here is the recommended structure for such email. We also suggest some useful functional language.

The First Paragraph: Acknowledge Request

All replies to requests start with a paragraph acknowledging the request. Your acknowledgement should mention the date of the request, and should summarise what information has been asked for or what action has been requested. Below are some expressions that may be used:

Thank you for your email of 29 February regarding the above request.

I have received your email of 8 May requesting information about

I refer to your email of 3 June enquiring about

Further to your email of 12 October asking for information on xxxx, I would like to inform you that.....

I refer to our telephone conversation of last Monday concerning.....

The Second Paragraph: Details of Response to Request

The second paragraph gives details of whether you can grant their request for information or action. If the request has been granted, the customer will need to know the full details of how the request has been carried out. If the request is denied, you need to tell the reader why it has been turned down and what the reader can do.

If you receive a request for something, you can either agree to it or refuse it. Below are some expressions that you may use:



Agreeing to a Request

The following expressions can be used to start an email in which you agree to a request:

We would be pleased to carry out your instructions to...
 As requested, we have carried out your instructions to ...
 We are pleased to inform you that ...
 We are pleased to let you know that...
 We would like to inform you that....
 I am glad/happy to tell you that...
 We are able to ...

Refusing a Request

This has to be done tactfully and requires an explanation if you don't want to appear unhelpful or rude. Conventional phrases that can be used are:

We regret that we are unable to ...
 We regret to inform you that we cannot ...
 Regrettably, we are unable to ...
 I'm afraid we are unable to...
 I'm sorry to let you know that
 I'm sorry but we are unable to....
 In the best interests of our customers, we do not normally...
 Unfortunately, data is required to ...

In most cases, however, the requests will be straightforward and you can use a range of language depending on the type of request as follows:

Replies to Requests for Services

Would it be convenient for our technician to visit your office on 13 July at 10.00 a.m.?
 We can arrange for our service engineer to visit you within two days of receiving your confirmation.

Replies to Requests for Advice

Use conditional statements for explanation of a problem:

In order to avoid this, store your paper in a dry place. Ensure that the paper is dry so as to avoid this problem.

Use modal verbs to speculate on the cause of a problem:



Your copier may be jamming because of damp paper.
Damp paper could be causing your copier to jam.

Replies to Requests for Documentation

State that you have attached the requested documentation:

I have attached....
As you requested, you will find attached.....
Attached you will find.....
I am pleased to attach....

Replies to Requests for Quotations

Give full details of the quotation:

The above prices include all packing and shipping costs.
Prices quoted are inclusive of shipping costs.

State terms of the quotation and when goods will be delivered:

This quotation is valid until the end of August 20xx.
Shipment will be within 10 days of receiving your order.
Please allow three weeks for delivery.

Optional Further Paragraphs

Depending on the complexity of the request and how detailed your reply is, you may require further paragraphs. Remember that you should place only one point in each paragraph. To indicate that you are answering a second or third request, you can use the following expressions:

We would also like to inform you ...
Regarding your other request for...
In answer to your question/enquiry about ...
Concerning your other request to/for....

The Final Paragraph

In this paragraph, we need to express the hope that the arrangements made are satisfactory and we will hear from the reader again (if applicable). The following expressions are useful:



I hope that these arrangements will prove acceptable to you.

I hope that these arrangements meet your approval.

Please contact me on 2234 4533 if you need any further information.

Please contact me if you have any questions on this or any other matters.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance to you.

If you require any further information, please feel free to contact our Customer Service Hotline on 2830 6685.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Please let us know if we can offer you any more help.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

We look forward to receiving your order.

We look forward to welcoming you as our client.

Model Email

The emails below follow the model structure and organisation that we outlined earlier. When you read through the documents, focus on the language in bold. This is what we call 'functional language.'



From: Jillian Robinson
To: Lionel Chan
Subject: 20xx Catalogue

Dear Mr Chan

Thank you for your email of 12 September requesting the latest edition of our catalogue. We are pleased to inform you that we have mailed our brochure to the address you provided us with.

We would also like to inform you that it is possible to make purchases online at www.jacksonbros.com. Furthermore, you will receive a discount of 10% for any purchases made online.

We look forward to welcoming you as our customer.

Best regards

Jillian Robinson

From: Miguel Cortez
To: Ken Bates
Subject: Information on our Product Range

Dear Mr Bates

Thank you for your enquiry of 10 January 20xx regarding our range of soft drinks. International Beverages produces a wide range of soft drinks, well-known throughout the world.

Our better known drinks include Rick's Cola and Sunkist Surprise. In total we produce 11 different soft drink flavours.

I have attached our standard price list for your reference. Our minimum order requirement is 5,000 bottles. We grant a 5% discount on orders of 10,000 bottles or more.

All our orders are dispatched direct from our London Factory. Shipments to Hong Kong transit via Rotterdam.

Please feel free to call me if you need any further information on our range of bottled drinks.
Best wishes



From: Dative Wong
To: Candy Tam
Subject: English Plus Magazine

Dear Ms Tam

Thank you for your email of 17 August requesting a complimentary copy of English Plus Magazine.

I am pleased to let you know that we mailed our most recent issue to you this morning.

If you would like to subscribe to English Plus Magazine, please complete the form on page 22 of the current issue. Alternatively, you can subscribe online by visiting our website.

We hope you enjoy reading the magazine and look forward to receiving your order.

Regards

Dative Wong

From: Paul Burrows
To: Diana Spencer
Subject: Faulty Prontoprint Typewriters

Dear Ms Spencer

Further to your email of 30 July 20xx requesting advice about the problems you are having with the Prontoprint typewriters, I was sorry to hear that you have been experiencing problems.

In your email you mention that there are three main problems. First, the keys keep sticking. Second, the machines are overheating, and third, the print is of poor quality. In order to solve the above problems, I would like to make the following recommendations:

1. Store the machines in a dry room to prevent the keys from becoming sticky.
2. Try not to run more than one machine from a single electric socket to avoid overheating.
3. Replace the daisy wheels. The wheels will have become ruined if you had not removed the protective film before using them. This may have been the cause of the poor print quality.

I hope this advice helps you to overcome the problems you have been facing with the machines.

Please call me on 2718 4387 if you require further help.



From: Jeremy Clarkton
To: Frederick Seymoor
Subject: Request for Financial Aid

Dear Mr Seymoor

I have received your email of 3 September requesting financial aid from our organisation for your continuing education.

I regret to inform you that we have a policy of not providing financial assistance to anyone who is not an employee of this organisation.

I hope you are successful at finding funding elsewhere.

Best regards

Jeremy Clarkton

From: Nancy Suzuki
To: Moon Chiang
Subject: Request for Advice

Dear Ms Chiang

I refer to your email of 12 November requesting technical advice for the operation of your new laptop.

I'm afraid that we are unable to provide you with any advice since you did not take out our insurance policy when you purchased the laptop.

You can, however, receive advice by calling our technical help hotline on 2674 3845. Calls are charged at a premium rate of \$1.50 per minute.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

Regards

Nancy Suzuki



From: Keith Jackson
To: Ruby Pollard
Subject: HTML Convertable Software Version 3

Dear Ms Pollard

I have received your email of 1 December requesting an upgrade to the above software.

I have checked your record and see that you purchased Version 2 of the software on 12 August 20xx. Since we provide free upgrades for up to six months after a purchase has been made, I am sorry to inform you that we are unable to provide you with an upgrade. If you would like Version 3, you can purchase it from our website.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance to you.

Regards

Keith Jackson

From: Angelina Chu
To: Maria Schumaker
Subject: Translation Request

Hi Maria

I refer to your email of 14 July requesting us to translate the document entitled "Business Success in Japan" into Chinese.

We would be pleased to translate the document at our normal rates and according to the terms and conditions of our agreement we have with your organisation.

Could you clarify whether you would like the translation in simplified or traditional Chinese?

Once we have this information, we will be able to email the translation to you by 20 July.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Maria



Functional Language

Opening Statement / Reference

Thank you for your email of 29 February regarding

I have received your email of 8 May requesting information about

I refer to your email of 3 June enquiring about

Further to your email of 12 October asking for information on xxxx, I would like to inform you that.....

I refer to our telephone conversation of last Monday concerning.....

Agreeing to a Request

We would be pleased to carry out your instructions to...

As requested, we have carried out your instructions to ...

We are pleased to inform you that ...

We are pleased to let you know that...

We would like to inform you that....

I am glad/happy to tell you that....

We are able to ...

Refusing a Request

We regret that we are unable to ...

We regret to inform you that we cannot ...

Regrettably, we are unable to ...

I'm afraid we are unable to...

I'm sorry to let you know that

I'm sorry but we are unable to....

In the best interests of our customers, we do not normally...

Unfortunately, data is required to ...

Replies to Requests for Documentation

I have attached....

As you requested, you will find attached.....

Attached you will find.....

I am pleased to attach....

Answering Additional Requests

We would also like to inform you ...

Regarding your question about ...

In answer to your question/enquiry about ...

Concerning your other request to/for....



Closing

I hope that these arrangements will prove acceptable to you.

I hope that these arrangements meet your approval.

Please contact me on 2234 4533, if you need any further information.

Please contact me if you have any questions on this or any other matters.

Please contact me if I can be of further assistance to you.

If you require any further information, please feel free to contact our Customer Service Hotline on 2830 6685.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.

Please let us know if we can offer you any more help.

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

We look forward to receiving your order.

We look forward to welcoming you as our client.



Clarifying and Confirming

Structure and Organisation

In business, it is very important to clarify anything which you are not certain about. This helps you avoid making mistakes. Once you are sure you understand clearly, it's good business practice to confirm this, especially if you have asked for any clarification.

In cases where clarification is not necessary, it is still good practice to confirm. This assures your reader everything is in hand.

An email whose main purpose is to clarify or confirm information will generally be quite simple in structure.

Asking for Clarification

If the purpose of the email is to clarify, use this model structure:

- Refer to the issue you want to clarify
- Clarify the main issue
- Clarify further issues (if any) (use numbered points if there are more than two)
- Thank the reader in advance for their help
- Polite close

Here's a typical initial email:

Subject: AS Software Installation

Tim

I've received your instructions for the installation of the AS software on our server. However, I'd like you to clarify a couple of issues.

I'm a little confused about the name of the new directory we have to set up on our server. Can you clarify if the directory has to be called AS1 or if we can use any name?

Also, I'm not sure where to extract the license file to. Can you clarify which is the correct folder?

I would be grateful if you could clarify these two issues.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

John



Note: If there are more than two clarifications needed, use bulleted or numbered points.

Responding to a Request for Clarification

If the purpose of the email is to confirm, use this model structure:

- Refer to the issue you want to confirm
- Clarify/confirm the main issue
- Clarify/confirm further issues (if any) (use numbered points if there are more than two)
- Polite close

Here's a typical email: (a reply to the above email)

Subject: AS Software Installation

John

You asked me for some clarification on the AS software installation on your server.

First, you can use any name for the new set-up directory. You don't have to use AS_1.

Second, I can confirm that 'IT_license' is the folder that the license file must be extracted to.

If you have any other queries regarding the installation, please feel free to ask.

Regards

Tim

Note:

1. If there are more than two clarifications needed, use bulleted or numbered points.
2. Alternatively, highlight each question in bold or a different colour and place your answer below each one.

Confirming Details/Arrangements

In cases where you've made verbal arrangements by phone, it's a good idea to email confirmation in writing. Use this model structure:

- Refer to the arrangement
- Confirm details of the arrangement
- Polite close



Here's a typical email:

Subject: Meeting on 12 September

Dear Janice

I would just like to confirm the details of the meeting that we arranged today.

My colleague, Ruth Palmer, will meet you at your office on 12 September at 3.30 pm.

In case you need to contact Ruth, you can reach her on 947858493.

Best regards

Susan

Model Email

The emails below follow the model structure and organisation that we outlined earlier.



Subject: Meeting on 12 September

Dear Janice

I would just like to confirm the details of the meeting that we arranged today.

My colleague, Ruth Palmer, will meet you at your office on 12 September at 3.30 pm.

In case you need to contact Ruth, you can reach her on 947858493.

Best regards

Susan

Subject: Corporate Function, 6 November

Jason

I would just like to confirm the arrangements for your corporate function on 6 November at the Elizabeth Hotel.

The details are as follows:

- Large function room booked from 6 to 12 pm.
- Catering provided for 120 guests – 3-course dinner
- Jazz band to perform from 9.30 to 11.30 pm.
- Cost per head: \$85

If you have any queries about these arrangements, please let me know.

Regards

William



Subject: Order for Computer Equipment

Dear Mr Jeffries

This is to confirm your order for computer equipment placed by phone on 22 October.

The details of your order are as follows:

- 6 x 19" LCD Sony Monitor @ \$192 each
- 4 x JCX9 Laser Printers @ \$150 each
- Total cost: \$1,772

We will invoice you separately for this order.

I'd like to confirm that we will deliver these items to you on 26 October between 1 and 5 pm.

If you have any questions regarding your order, please call us on 2516 3823.

Best regards

Jack

Subject: Accounting for Non-Financial Managers Presentation

James

I'd just like to clarify a few points about the presentation you'd like me to give on "Accounting for Non-Financial Managers" on 1 November.

First, can you clarify whether the attendees have any financial management experience?

Second, can you confirm that the maximum number of attendees will be 10?

And finally, can you clarify how long the presentation should last and whether we should include a question and answer session?

As time is short, I'd appreciate it if you could get back to me on these points as soon as possible.

Best regards

Nancy



Subject: Accounting for Non-Financial Managers Presentation

Peter

Regarding the presentation “Accounting for Non-Financial Managers” you will give on 1 November, I’d like to make the following clarifications:

1. I can confirm that none of the attendees has any financial management experience.
2. I’d also like to confirm that there will be no more than 10 attendees.

The presentation should last for 1 hour. We’ve scheduled 20 minutes for questions and answers at the end of the presentation.

Please call me on 2746 4893 if you have any further issues.

Regards

Ben

Functional Language

Saying You Are Unclear

- I’m a little confused about
- I’m not totally clear about/on....
- I’m not sure what you mean when you say....
- I don’t understand how/why/what/which
- I have a query/question about....
- I have a number of queries concerning.....

Asking for Clarification

- Could you just clarify a few things/points?
- Could you clarify/explain what you mean by?
- I need you to clarify a few things for me.
- Would you mind clarifying if/whether...?
- I’d like you to clarify some issues.

Querying Points

- Should I say my name before the name of the company?
- Do I need to push the hold button twice?
- Is it a good idea to call someone after hours?
- Do I have to register every customer query?
- Are you saying that I need to call you before...?
- What do you mean by “comparative standards”?
- Do you mean that?
- What do you mean when you say.....?
- What does BSG stand for?



Asking for Confirmation

Please could you confirm that?
Would you mind confirming the details of?
Could I ask you to confirm if/whether?
! would be grateful if you could confirm....?
I would appreciate it if you could confirm....?
Please confirm what/which/how many
Can you (just) confirm.....?

Giving Confirmation

This is to confirm that....
I'd (just) like to confirm
This confirms.....
I would like to confirm.....

Polite Close

I look forward to hearing from you.
I look forward to your response.
I hope to hear from you soon.
If you have any further queries, please contact us?
Please feel free to call me if you have any more questions?
Please ask if you need any further help.



Giving Advice and Making Suggestions

Introduction

When replying to an email asking for advice, we often discuss what we think might be the cause of the problem which the person enquiring is experiencing. When we do this, we usually use modal verbs such as can, could, might or would, for example:

Excessive overuse can seriously affect the operation of our equipment.

The cause of your problem could be excessive overuse.

It might be that excessive overuse is behind your problems.

Excessive overuse would create the effects that you described.

It is then logical to follow this explanation with advice or suggestions about what can be done to avoid the problem. When you do this it is common to use a statement using the modal verbs should or ought to, such as in the following example:

In order to avoid this problem, you should/ought to ensure that the equipment is installed in a dry place.

Model Email (External)



To: Catherine Jenkins
From: Peter Toshack
Subject: CTX7000 Laptop Computers

Dear Ms Kwan

I refer to your fax of 3 March 20xx, regarding the problems you were having with the laptop computers we supplied you.

Since the machines are now out of guarantee, I can only offer the following advice which may help correct the problems:

1. Sticky keys may be the result of storing the laptops in a humid room. If this is the case, I would advise you to use a dehumidifier in the room. This would also give greater protection to your other equipment.
2. If you are running a number of laptops or other computer equipment from the same electrical socket, this might cause the overheating you described in your letter. For safety's sake, no more than two appliances should be run off a single electrical socket.
3. As far as the loud fan noise is concerned, this could be because the ventilation panels on the laptop are being blocked. In this case, you ought to ensure that there is plenty of space around the laptop when it is in use.

I hope that these measures will help correct the problems you have been experiencing. If not, please bring the laptops to our repair depot in the Lippo Centre.

Best regards
Peter Toshack
Technical Support
The PC Shack Ltd



To: Kenneth Wong
From: Bill Havers
Subject: Sound System Installation at JHT Ltd

Dear Mr Wong

I refer to your email of 27 March 20xx describing the problems you have been having with the sound and public address system we installed in your factory last month.

From your letter it seems that there are two basic problems. First, the sound is not very clear. Second, you state the public address feature has not functioned since it was installed.

1. The cause of the first of these problems could be obstructions to the speakers which might create the effect you describe. In order to avoid this problem, you should ensure that all speakers are clear of obstructions. Note that obstructions can lead to overheating as well, and this is not good for your equipment.
2. As far as the public address system is concerned, there might be something heavy standing on the wiring, cutting the signal. When we installed the system, we recommended that the wiring should be hidden in order to avoid this problem.
3. Checking the wiring for this might cause the public address feature to start to work.

I hope that the enclosed advice will help you to solve the problems you have been having with the equipment. If this advice does not fix the problems, please feel free to contact me again, and I shall arrange for one of our engineers to visit you in the near future.

Yours sincerely
Bill Havers
Head Engineer
Product Support Department

Model Email (Internal)

Read the following internal company email. For each email consider the direction of communication and the choice of language and formality.



From: Colleague to Colleague
Subject: Follow up to Monday's Demonstration at JVT PowerTools

Can we get together sometime later this week to discuss what we saw at JVT Powertools on Monday? We really ought to think about buying a batch of their K5 drills. What about Wednesday at 10?

Also, as JVT were so hospitable to us when we visited them, perhaps it would be a good idea if we sent them a quick thank you letter, expressing our appreciation.

Could you give me a call me if you can't make the Wednesday meeting?

From: Subordinate to Superior
Subject: Complaint from Jenson Ltd

I have just checked our records and I have found that Jenson Ltd's complaint is justified. I am afraid I was responsible for confusing his invoice with another one.

I would advise you to apologise to him and tell him to ignore the invoice we sent him. I don't think that we should tell him that we are supplying another shop.

I shall make sure that he gets a replacement invoice in the very near future.

From: Subordinate to Superior
Subject: Complaint from Kutex Ltd

I have checked my records concerning Kutex's account and have found that they are still waiting for order no. 38928 as they mentioned.

As you know we have been experiencing a number of problems with the new transport company. The main problem is their unreliability.

May I suggest that we accept responsibility and assure Mr Chan of better delivery dates in future. We could also promise him a discount on any future deliveries which arrive late.

From: Subordinate to Superior
Subject: Lunchtime Aerobics Classes for Employees

A number of staff have mentioned that they would like to take some form of exercise during their lunch breaks.

I would suggest that we offer an employee aerobics class two or three lunchtimes a week in the large conference room. Employees could be charged a nominal fee to cover the cost of hiring an instructor. We could encourage employees to sign up for the class by pointing out the health benefits and the convenience of having the classes at work.



If this idea appeals to you, I would be happy to discuss it further at your convenience.

Functional Language

Below are some useful expressions which are used when giving advice and suggestions. The expressions are divided according to their level of formality, from informal to formal.

Informal expressions may be used in correspondence between colleagues, while neutral and more formal expressions may be used in any internal correspondence between staff at different levels within the company and in business letters. Neutral language also tends to be used when corresponding with customers.

The expressions also vary in their level of certainty. You should try to select expressions that reflect the level of formality and the level of certainty that you feel.

Suggesting (informal)

What about Friday at 6 p.m.?
Let's meet at 1 outside Puccini's.
How about rescheduling the meeting?

Suggesting (neutral)

I suggest you get a few more quotes.
You could ask Jim for some help.

Suggesting (more formal)

May I suggest that ...
I would suggest that
I would like to suggest that
It is suggested that
It seems to me that we should ...
I would suggest purchasing

Advising (informal)

If I were you I would accept their offer.
You'd better give her the salary rise she's asked for.

Advising (neutral)

We ought to think about ways to reduce our costs.
You really ought to get professional advice before making a decision.
Perhaps it would be a good idea if you were to ...
I think that we should raise our bid.

Advising (more formal)

I would advise you to ...
You are advised to



Making Arrangements

Initial Email: Structure and Organisation

Business arrangements are usually made by telephone, but quite often they are made in writing by email. If your company is selling a product or service to another company or individual client, it may be necessary for you to pitch your service or demonstrate your product in person. You will need to arrange a meeting for this to happen.

A series of email back and forth may be required before an agreement is made on the time and place of a meeting.

The first email you write to initiate discussions will usually be in response to some interest from the customer regarding your product or service. In this email you will need to refer to this interest and then suggest a meeting in which you can explain the advantages of your product or service, or give a demonstration of your product.

The typical structure of an initial email might be:

- Refer to the customer's interest in your product.
- State your purpose, i.e. that you would like to meet in order to explain, demonstrate, etc. your product/service
- Ask about customer's availability
- Close on a positive/courteous note

Here's a typical initial email:

Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Angela

Thank you for your interest in iTutor E-Learning Software. From your enquiry email, you asked if iTutor is suitable for creating interactive simulations of complex processes. The short answer is 'Yes.'

iTutor is a powerful authoring program which has a number of very interesting features which we'd like to show you in person. Could we arrange a time for one of our representatives to demonstrate and explain the advantages of using iTutor over other similar software programs?

I would be grateful if you could let me have your availability over the coming weeks. The demonstration will take up no more than 30 minutes of your time.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards



Opening Paragraph (Reference)

In the first paragraph, you should refer to the customer's interest in your product or service:

Thank you for contacting us about

Thank you for your interest in

We have received your request for a demonstration of....

My colleague has informed me you're interested in.....

The customer may have already called your company and spoken to you or someone else about their interest. Refer to this initial contact:

Further to our telephone conversation with my colleague yesterday, I have attached further information on the features of the iTutor authoring program.

Second Paragraph (State your Purpose)

In the second paragraph, you should state your main purpose. Clearly, your purpose is to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the customer to demonstrate your product, or to present your company and its services. Don't be too direct here. Don't demand a meeting. Suggest that it would be advantageous to the customer if you or one of the company representatives were able to meet the customer in person so that you can explain the benefits of your product, or demonstrate how your products works and its features.

I'd like to give you a personal demonstration of

Could we arrange a time for one of our representatives to....?

Could we meet you to explain the benefits of....?

It would probably be a good idea if we met you to explain.....

We'd like to explain the many benefits of using.....

We'd like an opportunity to show you how your company can benefit from.....

Using bulleted or numbered lists is often the best way of communicating more complex information.

Third Paragraph (Ask about Availability)

In this paragraph, you should ask when or if the customer is available to meet you. You could also suggest a time, in the not too distant future, when you or one of your company representatives could visit the customer. Don't get too specific with times at this point; keep everything general. You can suggest specific times once the customer has agreed to meet you:

One of our representatives could come to your office anytime next week.

I would be happy to present our services to you at a convenient time for you.

I'd be happy to explain the benefits of using our company's service anytime you are available.

I would be grateful if you could let me have your availability over the coming weeks.



Closing Paragraph

You need to include a closing paragraph. Make sure this is brief, yet courteous. The best and simplest thing to say at the point is:

I look forward to hearing from you.

Customer Email Responses: Structure and Organisation

A customer's response to your request for a meeting can go two or possibly three ways. They can reject or accept your request, or they can show interest yet postpone the possibility of the meeting until some future date. We'll look at the model structure of the three possible responses and then at the functional language.

Reject a Request

A customer may be interested in your product or service but may not require a meeting. They may have already made up their mind to make a purchase, or they may just want to spend further time evaluating the product or service by studying the literature that you've already provided them.

Model structure:

- Thank the company for replying to you
- Explain what your current interest is in the product/service; politely reject meeting
- Polite close

Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Kevin

Thank you for following up on our request for more information on the iTutor authoring software.

Our IT team is currently evaluating the software through the free trial version you have provided us with. I don't think we require a demonstration of the software at this stage.

If the software meets our requirements, we will place an order.

Regards

Angela

Delay a Request

A customer may be interested in your product or service but may need more time to conduct their own evaluation into the product through the literature you've provided them. Purchasing the product or service may not be an immediate priority for the customer, so they may want to postpone any meeting until later.



Model structure:

- Thank the company for replying to you
- Explain what your current interest is in the product/service; politely delay meeting
- Polite close

Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Kevin

Thank you for providing us with more information on the iTutor authoring software.

This year we will be evaluating iTutor and a number of other similar products on the market. I appreciate your offer to demonstrate the product to us. If we are interested in purchasing iTutor, we'll get in contact with you later in the year.

In the meantime, if we have any questions about iTutor, we will let you know.

Regards

Angela

Accept a Request

If a company accepts a request for a meeting, the response email will be a little longer than the two emails above. This is because you will need to provide details of your availability and perhaps suggest a suitable time and place for the meeting.

Model structure:

- Thank the company for replying to you
- Explain what your current interest is in the product/service; politely accept meeting
- State your availability / Suggest a time and place to meet
- Polite close



Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Kevin

Thank you for providing us with more information on the iTutor authoring software and for offering to demonstrate the software to us.

Our IT team have evaluated the online demo version of iTutor but have a number of queries regarding some of the advanced features of the software. They would welcome a face-to-face demonstration.

Next week, several key members of the team will be away at a conference, so could you come to our office some time during the following week?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Angela

Agreeing on a Time and Place

Once a customer has agreed to meet you, there might be a number of short email going back and forth to agree on a suitable time and place for the meeting, and a final email from you confirming the details of the meeting. In some cases, the complete arrangement may be made in a single email and confirmed by you in the next.

Model Email

We'll now look at a longer series of email exchanges:

Email 1 (to the Customer)

Here, you are following up on the customer's availability. They may have suggested a general time frame in which to meet you.

Model structure (focus on the functional language in bold):

- Thank the customer for replying to you / Say you're happy they've agreed to the meeting
- Suggest a specific date and time for the meeting
- Polite close



Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Kevin

Thank you for your continued interest in iTutor. We are happy that you would like us to demonstrate some of the advanced features of the software. And we are confident the software will meet your e-learning requirements.

You mentioned that a good time to meet your team would be the week after next. I've checked with Peter Tong, our representative in Singapore, and he is available to meet you on Wednesday, 13 September. Would 10am be a convenient time for him to see you?

I look forward to hearing from you.

Regards

Angela

Email 2 (from the customer)

In this email, the customer either agrees to the suggested date and time for the meeting, or rejects it politely. It is optional to give an excuse. If the date and time are not convenient, the customer will suggest an alternative and state the meeting place.

Model structure (focus on the functional language in bold):

- Thank the company for replying to you
- Accept/Reject the suggested meeting time/date / Suggest an alternative / State the meeting place
- Polite close



Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Kevin

Thank you for getting back to us on a time for the demonstration.

I've checked with the IT team and 13 September is not convenient as the team will be conducting the monthly check on our IT systems. How about Thursday, 14 September at 10am? Could you come to the reception on the fourth floor?

Please let me know if this arrangement is convenient for you.

Regards

Angela

Email 3 (to the customer)

This should be the final email in the series if the alternative meeting date and time is convenient for you. In this email you will confirm all the details of the meeting.

Model structure:

- Thank the company for replying to you
- Agree to alternative meeting date/time / confirm meeting date/time/place
- Polite close

Subject: iTutor E-Learning Software

Dear Kevin

Thank you for your reply.

I've checked with Peter Tong and he's been able to reschedule another meeting in order to meet you. He's now free to meet you on Thursday, 14 September at 10am. He will come to your office on the fourth floor and wait in reception for you.

In the meantime, if you need to contact Peter directly, you can reach him on 94678549.

Regards

Angela



Functional Language

Opening Statement/Reference

Thank you for contacting us about

We have received your request for a demonstration of....

I'm writing to you in connection with

Further to our telephone conversation yesterday,

Following your email enquiry,

Thank you for expressing an interest in.....

My colleague has informed me you're interested in.....

I would just like to follow up your interest in

Stating Your Purpose

I'd like to give you a personal demonstration of

I'd like to arrange a time to present

Could we arrange a time for one of our representatives to....?

Could we meet you to explain the benefits of....?

It would probably be a good idea if we met you to explain.....

Could we arrange a demonstration of....?

We'd like to explain the many benefits of using.....

We'd like an opportunity to show you how your company can benefit from....

Request a Convenient Meeting Time

When would be a convenient time for me to

When would be a good time for us to....?

Could you let me know when you would like us to

When would be a suitable time for us to meet you?

Suggesting a Suitable Meeting Time

One of our representatives could come to your office anytime next week.

I could demonstrate our product sometime next week.

I would be happy to present our services to you at a convenient time for you.

I'd be happy to explain the benefits of using our company's service anytime you are available.

Please let me know when you are available to meet me.

I would be grateful if you could let me have your availability over the coming weeks.

Declining an Request Meet

Thank you for your offer to meet us but.....

Thank you for offering to demonstrate.....

I'm afraid we're not able to meet you at the moment.

We're not current in a position to

We're not ready to make any decisions at the moment.

I'm sorry but we're not interested at the moment.

I don't think we require a meeting at this stage.

We don't require a meeting at present.



Accepting a Request to Meet

Thank you for offering to meet us.
 I appreciate your offer to demonstrate....
 I'd be happy to meet you.
 We would appreciate a demonstration of...
 We'd be happy for you to present.....
 We would welcome a demonstration from you.
 We'd like you to meet us and explain....
 We'd like you to demonstrate....

Delaying a Request to Meet

I appreciate your offer to demonstrate the product to us.
 Please get back to us in a few months.
 If we are interested, we'll get in touch with you later in the year.
 We might be interested in this later in the year.
 I've put your company details on file and will contact you if....

Suggesting Specific Meeting Times

Could you meet us on....?
 What about next Thursday afternoon?
 How about sometime towards the end of the week?
 Are you available on Monday at 10.30 a.m.?
 How does Wednesday afternoon, around 4 o'clock suit you?
 Could you possibly make Thursday at around 10?

Saying a Date/Time isn't Convenient

I'm afraid I'll be in a meeting on Monday morning.
 I'm sorry but I'm tied up all week.
 Sorry, that time doesn't suit me.
 I'm afraid I can't make it on Tuesday.

Saying a Date/Time is Convenient

Friday, 16 June at 10am suits me fine.
 I can meet you on Friday, 16 June at 10am.
 I am available to meet you anytime on 16 June.

Discussing Where to Meet

Where shall I meet you?
 Where shall we meet?
 Where do you suggest we meet?
 Can you suggest a place to meet?
 I'll meet you in our reception at 10am.
 Please come to the third floor reception at 11.30am.
 I'll meet you in the Sheraton Hotel lobby at midday.



Confirming Arrangements

OK, I'll meet you at 10am on 5 October at....

So, you'll meet us in the lobby of your office at 3pm on 15 September.

I look forward to meeting you on 3 November.

Just to confirm, I'll see you in the foyer of the Grand Hotel at 1pm on 11 December.

Closing

I look forward to meeting you.

I look forward to explaining....

I look forward to presenting...

I look forward to demonstrating...

I look forward to showing you...

I look forward to hearing from you.

If you have any queries, please let me know.

In the meantime, please let me know if you have any further questions.



Addressing Problems and Mistakes

Here we'll focus on email that address problems and mistakes that you, your staff or your company have made. These email will be in response to a complaint, either an internal one or from one of your clients or customers. The complaint could range from something very simple such as pointing out an error in some figures, to something more complex such as a delay to the construction of a building project.

Whatever the situation, however, you can follow the same basic structure when responding. You will need to reference the problem, say what action you are taking or have taken, apologise, and give your assurances that the problem will be rectified.

Model Structure:

- Reference the mistake or problem
- Say what action you are taking or have taken / Identify the cause
- Apologise for the mistake or problem
- Give assurances that the mistake or problem will be rectified/resolved
- Polite close (perhaps repeat the apology / show sympathy)

Language

We'll now look at a sample of the language you could use in each paragraph.

Reference the mistake or problem

In this paragraph you will need to clearly reference the problem that your reader has pointed out. You can thank him or her for letting you know about it. For example, you could say:

We appreciate your informing us about the errors in the quotation relating to the price of the building materials. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

Say what action you are taking or have taken / Identify the cause

You will then need to let your reader know that you are looking into the problem, or that you have already investigated and found the cause.

I have spoken to the building materials supplier and the manager has informed me that his assistant typed in the wrong prices for the materials. His assistant was referring to their old price list which didn't include the new discounts.

Apologise for the mistake or problem

Next, you need to apologise for the mistake or problem. There are many different ways that you can say sorry, from informal to informal, and from soft to strong. How you apologise will be based on the seriousness of the mistake and the relationship you have with your reader.



I would like to apologise for the error and would like to assure you that it was an honest mistake.

Give assurances that the mistake or problem will be rectified/resolved

In the next paragraph, you should assure your reader that the mistake will be rectified and here it's also important to give a time frame for this. Tell your reader when you hope to rectify it and try to be as specific as possible.

The building materials supplier manager is now revising the quotation and will fax it to you this afternoon.

Polite close (perhaps repeat the apology / show sympathy)

In the final paragraph, it's a good idea to either thank the reader again for letting you know about the problem or repeating your apology. You can also show a little sympathy for your reader here by saying that you hope the problem didn't inconvenience them or cause them too much trouble.

Thank you once again for bringing this to our attention. We hope that you have not been too inconvenienced.

Let's now look at the completed email:



From: Steven Morrison
To: Tom Daly
Subject: Quotation

Dear Tom

We appreciate your informing us about the errors in the quotation relating to the price of the building materials. Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.

I have spoken to the building materials supplier and the manager has informed me that his assistant typed in the wrong prices for the materials. His assistant was referring to their old price list which didn't include the new discounts.

I would like to apologise for the error and would like to assure you that it was an honest mistake.

The building materials supplier manager is now revising the quotation and will fax it to you this afternoon.

Thank you once again for bringing this to our attention. We hope that you have not been too inconvenienced.

Best regards

Steven Morrison

Model Email

Here are a three model business emails showing the use of functional language for addressing problems and mistakes.



From: Paula Yates
To: Tim Jennings
Subject: New Software

Dear Tim

Thank you for informing me about the problems you've been experiencing with the software we created for you last month.

I've spoken with the chief programmer and he's informed me that a number of bugs have been discovered.

I really must apologise for not spotting the problems before we gave you the software. The chief programmer has assured me that all bugs will have been fixed by the end of this week. He will then create a new download link for you.

Once again please accept my apologies for any inconvenience caused.

Best regards

Paul

From: Susan Yu
To: Jenny Tam
Subject: IT Project

Dear Jenny

Thank you for letting me know about the delay to your IT project.

This morning I spoke to Jason, head of the IT team, and he told me that they had underestimated the amount of time it would take to complete your project. He mentioned that you changed the specs slightly last month and this is the main cause of the delay.

Please accept my apologies for this.

Jason assures me that his team are putting in overtime all this week to complete your project by Friday, 10 February.

I hope you haven't been too inconvenienced.

Best regards

Susan Yu



From: Ross Cheong
 To: John Lee
 Subject: Late Delivery of Order No. 39587

Dear Mr Lee

Thank you for your fax of 16 July regarding the delay in delivery of your order for electronic components. I appreciate your bringing this matter to my attention.

I have checked the matter with our distribution officer who informed me that we have been experiencing a number of problems with the new transport company. I am afraid that the delay in delivery was due to their unreliability.

I really must apologize for the inconvenience you have been caused. I assure you of a more reliable delivery service in the future.

Meanwhile, I can arrange for the overdue order to be delivered to your factory by messenger within two days.

If this arrangement is acceptable to you, please contact me as soon as possible.

Best regards

Ross Cheong

Functional Language

Referencing the Problem / Mistake

Thank you for bringing this matter to our attention.
 Thank you for informing us about
 Thank you for letting us know about
 I/We appreciate you informing us about
 We have received your of regarding

Taking Action

We are now/currently looking into
 We are investigating the incident.....
 We have contacted/spoken to....
 We have investigated and found that....



Apologising (informal)

Sorry for + something

Sorry for/about (not) + verb+ing....

We're/I'm sorry for/about (not)

Apologies for (not) + verb+ing...



Apologising (more formal)

I would like to apologise for + something
 I would like to apologise for (not) + verb+ing.....
 I must apologise for (not) +verb+ing....
 I do apologise for (not) +verb+ing....
 Please accept my/our apologies for + something.
 Please accept my/our apologies for (not) + verb+ing...

Apologising (strong)

I really must apologise for (not) +verb+ing....
 I'm very sorry for (not)...
 I'm terribly sorry for/about (not).....
 I really am sorry about + something.
 I really am terribly sorry for (not) + verb+ing....

Giving Reasons

..... was due to.....
 happened because

..... was the result of....
 was because of

.... was caused by....

Showing Sympathy

We hope you haven't been inconvenienced by ...
 We hope this hasn't inconvenienced you too much.
 We hope this hasn't caused you too much trouble.

Giving Assurances

I assure you that...
 I would like to assure you that...
 I promise/guarantee you that...
 I can give you my/our assurances that....
 I will do my best to....

Rectifying Problems / Mistakes

We are doing our best to resolve/rectify....
 We are taking the necessary steps to...
 We are doing everything we can to...
 We have resolved the problem...
 We have rectified the situation...
 We will correct the problem....

Closing

Thank you once again for informing about

Once again, we apologise for



Confirming Orders and Prices

Introduction

We're going to present to you a range of documents concerning the ordering process.

We'll look at the following functions and present model email for each function:

- order confirmation
- price confirmation
- order
- shipping confirmation
- order status / back order
- order status / delay
- order cancellation
- pre-payment request
- refund

We'll also look briefly at the structure of these documents and at a range of functional language that we can use for each.

Structure

The above documents generally have a basic 3-paragraph structure as outlined below:

- Reference statement (order number, date of order, etc.)
- Give details/confirmation of the order, cancellation, delay, refund, etc.
- Polite closing statement (relating to the order, cancellation, refund, etc. if possible)

Certain documents such as ones describing a delay may include an additional one or two paragraphs to explain the delay and to give an apology.

Always remember the important rule when writing business correspondence: one point per paragraph. Do not be afraid of the one sentence paragraph. This is perfectly acceptable. If your points are clearly separated, your documents will become much easier to read.

If you refer to the 10 model documents later in this lesson, you'll notice that all paragraphs except one have only one sentence, and the longest paragraph has only two sentences. This is normal for documents of the above type.

Language

Below, we present a wide range of functional language to help you write the above documents. Of course, not all 'order' or 'cancellation' email will be exactly the same, so we give you a number of choices on how to reference your order, detail your order, make your cancellation and give a polite closing statement.



Model Email

- Example 1: order confirmation
- Example 2: price confirmation
- Example 3: order
- Example 4: shipping confirmation
- Example 5: order status / back order
- Example 6: order status / delay
- Example 7: order cancellation
- Example 8: order cancellation
- Example 9: pre-payment request
- Example 10: refund

In the following emails, focus in particular on the functional language. This is the language you need to become familiar with.

Example 1: order confirmation

From: Keith Jolsen
To: Jake Adams
Subject: Order Confirmation

Dear Mr Adams

Following our telephone conversation this morning, I am happy to confirm my order.

The details are as follows:

- 1500 x Unit 05 @ US\$ 10.00
- 1000 x Unit 09 @ US\$ 5.00

I look forward to receiving your invoice, which I understand will be subject to a 5% discount.

Best regards

Keith Jolsen



Example 2: price confirmation

From: Roxanne Siegel
To: Jeff Finch
Subject: Request for Prices

Dear Jeff

Thank you for your recent request for next year's price increases.

I can confirm that with the exception of children's books, all locally published titles will be increased by 5%. The prices of children's titles remain unchanged.

Imported titles will increase in price by between 2 and 4%. We are waiting for confirmation from our overseas suppliers regarding these price increases and we will inform you once we have heard from them.

I look forward to our continued business next year.

Regards

Roxanne Siegel

Example 3: order

From: Ken Smith
To: Jackson Lay
Subject: Your Order

Dear Mr Lay

Thank you for sending me your catalogue.

I would like to order the following items:

- 2 Ladies Mountain Bikes (Item no: LL0129) £500
- 2 Child Safety Seats (Item no: LJ 9825) £80
- Total: £580

I have enclosed a cheque for £600 which includes the packaging and postal costs.

Best regards

Ken Smith



Example 4: shipping confirmation

From: Sarah Danes
To: Matt Dolman
Subject: Shipping Confirmation

Dear Mr Dolman

I am writing to confirm that your order was shipped on 26 July.

We expect it to arrive within a week. If, however, you experience any delays, please feel free to call me.

Best regards

Sarah Danes
Customer Services Manager

Example 5: order status / back order

From: Pauline George
To: Rene De Guzman
Subject: Order No. 75893

Dear Mr De Guzman

Thank you for your order for 6 copies of *Riding the Storm* (ISBN 9138-881390).

This item is back-ordered and we expect delivery within a month.

Please accept our apologies for the delay.

If you have any questions regarding your order, please contact me.

Best regards

Pauline George



Example 6: order status / delay

From: Peter Svenson
To: Nina Jacobson
Subject: Purchase order 641P

Dear Ms Jacobson

Thank you for your order of 10 March.

Due to the enormous response we received after our summer promotion, we are experiencing a delay in filling some orders.

We will be able to ship your order within one month.

We apologise for the delay.

If you have any queries about the delay, please call me on 2644 8593.

Best regards

Peter Svenson
Customer Services Department

Example 7: order cancellation

From: Pedro Nadal
To: Roger Murray
Subject: Order Cancellation

Dear Mr Murray

Thank you for your email informing me of a three week delay in the fulfilment of my order, ref JK / 209.

Unfortunately, I am unable to wait any longer for the arrival of the goods. Please cancel my order.

Please could you send me confirmation that you have cancelled my order?

Regards

Pedro Nadal



Example 8: order cancellation

From: Miguel Renaldo
To: Gayle Johnston
Subject: Order Reference 74589G

Dear Mr Johnston

I am writing to you regarding the order we placed on 1 February.

We have received some of the items we ordered from you, but notice that some items are out of stock.

Please cancel our order for the out-of-stock goods and adjust our invoice accordingly for the goods received.

I look forward to receiving the revised invoice.

Yours sincerely

Miguel Renaldo

Example 9: pre-payment request



From: David Jenas
To: Louis Leclerc
Subject: Payment Request

Dear Mr Leclerc

Thank you for your order of June 6.

Unfortunately we are unable to process this order as we require full payment in advance as well as shipping costs for overseas customers.

I would be extremely grateful if you would arrange for a bankers draft for the sum of USD\$950. (Details attached.)

I look forward to being able to help you in the near future.

Best regards

David Jenas
Accounts Manager

Example 10: refund

From: Karen Wong
To: Jessica Lau
Subject: Refund Request

Dear Ms Lau

Thank you for your email requesting a refund for the overshipment of order ref 12/06/04.

We would like to inform you that your account has been credited to the amount of \$350.

We apologise for any inconvenience we have caused you.

We look forward to serving you soon.

Best regards

Karen Wong
Accounts Department



Functional Language

Referencing

Thank you for your request for our price list and catalogue.
 Thank you for sending me your price list and catalogue.
 Thank you for your order of
 Thank you for your order for ...
 Thank you for your email of 10 June informing me of the delay...
 Thank you for your email requesting a refund for....
 We have received your order of 1 May for

I refer to your order (reference no. 128748) placed on

Following our telephone conversation this morning,
 I am happy to confirm my order.
 I am writing to confirm that your order...
 I am writing to you regarding the order we placed on 1 February.

Ordering

I would like to order the following items:
 I would like to order:
 The details of our order are as follows:
 The details are as follows:
 My order is as follows:

Confirming

I am happy to confirm my order.
 I can confirm that....
 I would like to confirm my order.
 I would like to confirm that....
 I am writing to confirm that....
 I am writing to confirm that your order was shipped on

I am writing to confirm your order.
 We are waiting for confirmation from

Please could you send me confirmation that you have cancelled my order?

Payment

I have enclosed a cheque for \$1,200.
 You can pay by cheque or online using PayPal or MoneyBookers.
 I would like to pay by company credit card.
 What are your payment terms?
 What payment methods do you accept?
 Our payment terms are....
 Unfortunately we are unable to process this order as we require full payment in advance...
 Payments should be sent together with your order confirmation.



Delays / Apologies

The items are back-ordered and we expect delivery....
We will be able to ship your order within three weeks.
Your items have been delayed due to....
We are experiencing a delay in filling some orders due to....
Unfortunately, your order has been delayed.
We are sorry to inform you that your order has been delayed.
Please accept our apologies for the delay.
We are sorry for the delay in shipping your order.
We apologise for the delay to your order.
We apologise for any inconvenience caused.
We hope you haven't been too inconvenienced by the delay.

Cancellations

I'm afraid we are unable to wait for our order.
Unfortunately, we have to cancel our order.
I'm sorry but we must cancel our order due to the delay.
Please cancel our order.
Please would you cancel our order for?

Closing

I look forward to receiving your invoice.
I look forward to receiving your order.
I look forward to our continued business.
I look forward to being able to help you in the near future.
I look forward to receiving the revised invoice.
We look forward to serving you soon.
If you have any questions regarding your order, please contact me.
If you experience any delays with your shipment, please feel free to call me.
If you have any queries about the delay, please call me on 2644 8593.
Please call me if you have any questions regarding your order.
Please could you send me confirmation that you have cancelled my order?



Closing

In email, clear beginnings and endings are very important. These are the first and last things that are read, and are therefore likely to leave the greatest impression on the reader. We covered “Opening and Referencing” in the first chapter. Here we will show you how to close an email in the right way.

Finishing Well

Endings should do what they signify, i.e. end the document. They should echo the main idea of your email, give your final thought, and build goodwill.

Some email endings just finish the business at hand:

The attached charts will answer your questions about the ratings. Please retain for your files.
If you wish to change your reservations, please call 2738 2893.

Other closings show thanks:

Your generous sharing of time at the company picnic made our annual get-together enjoyable for all.
We sincerely appreciate your care and concern during this time of transition. Thank you for your patience.

Many closings seek future gain and focus on tomorrow:

We look forward to serving you again.
I look forward to receiving your application soon.
Our representative will stop by within the month to discuss your current office needs.

Still others entice or persuade. Well written and strong, such closings can summarise your message creating greater overall clarity. They should be relevant and friendly:

Investing in this new software will further your options as your business continues to expand.
Improving the English language skills of your customer service staff will enhance your international reputation.

So whether you wish to just finish the business at hand, show appreciation, seek future gain, or persuade, your closing should sum up your message. Here are a few tips to help you with your closings:

Keep your closing positive

Reinforce the good news or confirm the agreement. Show your continued interest in the common enterprise:

Serving you is our top priority and we await your next request.



Avoid apologising for bad news

If the news is bad and you have struggled to build a satisfactory compromise, don't ruin it with an ending apology that reminds the reader of the cause. Writing:

Again, let me apologise for the late arrival of your special order
 cancels your previous careful explanation.

Don't invite further conversation unless you want such continued involvement

If, however, you have added facts that might be useful and you welcome an expanded conversation, then write:

If you would like further information, please call.

Be wary of the word "hope"

I hope this is satisfactory

might imply that it is not. You've just suggested that perhaps you should have done better. Try something more positive like:

I know you will appreciate the new document when it arrives. We have enjoyed working with you on this project and look forward to more collaboration.

Be wary of the phrase "I regret"

If you do regret, try to find a more positive way to say it. And if you don't regret having to fire the accounts clerk or demand a refund for faulty goods, why say you do? Here's an example sentence to avoid:

I hope you will understand our position and I regret that we cannot help any further.

Close with a complete sentence

Email should close with a complete sentence. Examples include "I remain," "Hoping to hear from you," and "Wishing you the best," and many other such phrases. Rewrite these phrases to make them complete sentences.

Avoid clichéd endings

These closing are now so over-used they have become boring:

If you have any questions, please feel free to call me.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to call me.

Write instead:



If you have any questions, please call me.

Functional Language

Thanking

Thank you for your interest in the company.

Thank you for your help.

Thank you in advance for your advice / understanding / co-operation.

May we take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support. (Using May we... is formal.)

Offering Help

Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of further assistance.

If you would like any more information, please do not hesitate to contact me on (tel number)

Please feel free to contact me again if I can be of further assistance.

Should you have any further questions, we would be delighted to hear from you. (Using should you... is formal.)

Making Promises

We will send the contracts as soon as we receive them. In the meantime, do not hesitate to contact us if you require further

I assure you that I will discuss this with and call you back later today.

Referring to a Meeting

I look forward to seeing you on January 12.

I look forward to meeting you on July 28, when these issues can be discussed in further detail.

If you would like further information, I would be delighted to arrange a meeting with you.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss my application with you in further detail. (asking for an interview).

Asking for Action

I would be grateful if this matter could be settled immediately.

I would appreciate further information on this subject.

I would be grateful for further advice.

I would be grateful if you could invoice us before the end of this month.

Asking for the Return of Documents

Please sign the enclosed and return to us before September 15.

If the enclosed contract meets your approval, please sign it and return it to us ...



Referring to Enclosures

I hope you find the enclosed useful. If you would like further information,

The enclosed brochures describe in more detail our range of....

Please let me know if you would like further information....

Apologising and Rectifying a Problem

Please accept our apologies for this misunderstanding.

We apologise for our mistake and we would like to take this opportunity to assure you that it will not happen again.

We hope that this misunderstanding has not caused you too much inconvenience.

We apologise for this oversight and would like to assure you that

Thank you for drawing this matter to our attention. We have now updated our records accordingly and would like to assure you that such a mistake will not reoccur.

We deeply regret any inconvenience / distress that this misunderstanding has caused you.

Expressing Urgency

As this matter is now urgent, we would appreciate a prompt reply.

As we hope you will appreciate, this matter is now urgent. We would therefore be grateful if you could reply to us within (three days).

We look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Due to the urgency of the situation, I would appreciate receiving your advice as soon as possible.

Giving Recommendations or Suggestions

We strongly recommend that you follow these instructions. (Strong recommendation)

It is recommended that you read the instructions carefully. (Impersonal recommendation)

May we recommend that you notify the manufacturers. (Polite recommendation)

You might like to consider taking legal advice. (Neutral recommendation)

We would suggest a neutral colour scheme. (Polite suggestion)

We suggest that you invest in real estate. (Neutral suggestion)

General Endings

We look forward to hearing from you soon.

I look forward to your reply.



Using the Right Tone

Introduction

The first question we need to ask ourselves is what do we mean by tone. Tone refers to the emotional context of your email, the level of formality and informality you adopt in communicating and your attitude towards your topic. Tone lets your readers know that you are communicating specifically with them and not with just anyone.

Create Reader-Based Messages

Whenever possible, maintain a personal touch and emphasise 'you' over 'me' in your email. Instead of writing to your workers:

I want to emphasise the importance of following safety procedures.

Why not say:

Your safety is important to this company. Please follow all safety procedures carefully so as to avoid accidents.

We create the 'you' attitude by highlighting the reader's benefits and concentrating on the reader's needs instead of your own. In other words, we have to be more 'reader-centred' and put ourselves in the reader's position. However, we cannot create the 'you' attitude by simply using 'you' instead of 'we' or 'I' all the time.

Compare these two examples:

Inappropriate tone

Since we have to update our training records, please fill in the attached form and return it to us by 31 May 20xx.

Appropriate tone

We would like to update our training records so that we can arrange appropriate training programmes for your career development. Would you please complete the attached form and return it to us by 31 May 20xx.

We believe that we can get the response we want more easily by adopting the 'you' attitude.

Emphasise the Positive

In general, you want to keep your tone positive and to avoid negativity. Even when writing to tell someone they've done something wrong, or to point out a problem, your tone should be firm but even-handed. Remember your purpose is to change behaviour or to find a solution, not to cause offence or put another person down. Instead of writing this to your subordinate:



You failed to send your expense claim form before the deadline, so you will not be compensated until the end of June.

You could write:

As we did not receive your expense claim form before 31 April, we are afraid that we cannot compensate you until the end of June

Your reader will feel much more comfortable dealing with the second, more positive approach, where the emphasis/blame has clearly been removed from the reader and directed towards the writer.

To get a clearer idea of this, compare the two examples that follow:

Inappropriate tone

It is quite obvious that somebody in your department cannot read. This is the second time this month I've had to return the overtime records because the client job numbers were not filled in.

Give the job to someone else this time, okay? Or, at least tell them the facts – no overtime records, no overtime pay.

Appropriate tone

I am returning your overtime records because the client job numbers were not filled in. This oversight has occurred twice in one month.

Please let your staff know that unless we have complete records, we cannot issue overtime cheques.

I would appreciate your help in clearing up this problem.

If you find yourself in a negative mood when you sit down to write, try to change your attitude. Or, write a negative email but don't send it. Making someone else feel bad may make you feel good, but think how it would feel to be on the receiving end of it. Short-term satisfaction is a poor exchange for creating long-term problems for yourself.

Keep Your Tone Natural

With the exception of highly technical messages, email are informal communications. Yet many writers feel that when they put their thoughts on paper, they must change their language into something more official sounding as in this example:

Inappropriate tone

Herewith are the files for the Technoview audit.



Please make an estimate of your requirements for the length of time you will need these files. Note this time on the enclosed slip and return the slip to me at your earliest convenience.

The writer obviously believes that a more official tone is likely to ensure that the reader will comply. However, it is more likely to ensure the reader's confusion. The writer only needs to say:

Appropriate tone

Here are the files for the Technoview audit.

Please let me know how long you will need them. Write your time estimate on the attached slip and return the slip to me.

Over-official language prevents clear communication. Hear yourself telling the reader what you want him or her to know before you write it. Read your message aloud. Try and attain a clear, straightforward style that lets your true "voice" come through.

Avoid Mixed Tone Messages

Make sure that your tone is appropriate for your reader's position. You would use a more formal tone with superiors and a more relaxed, information tone with colleagues and subordinates. An email to someone above you in the company should not be too familiar or assume too much about your relationship. In general, avoid using mixed tones, as in this example:

Inappropriate tone

To: Ruby Leung, Head of Department
From: William Tang, Administration Manager
Subject: Hiring Part-Time Clerical Help

Because of the recent loss of two full-time employees, I've found myself shorthanded – and you know how hectic that can be!

Last time this happened we didn't catch up for 3 weeks!

So, I would like approval to hire two temporary clerical workers for the month of March. We're always busiest then – it must be the spring weather.

Please let me know as soon as possible if we can take on the extra help. By the way, I love your new hairstyle.

The mixed tone and inappropriate personal comments of this email are not likely to impress your reader. Mr Tang should have focused on his request and saved the personal comments for conversation.



Appropriate tone

To: Ruby Leung, Head of Department
From: William Tang, Administration Manager
Subject: Hiring Part-Time Clerical Help

Two clerical workers in our department resigned last week, leaving us shorthanded for the workload in March.

I would like your approval to hire two temporary clerical workers to cover that month.

Because you will be on a business trip next week, I would be willing to make all arrangements to hire and train the part-time workers.

Please let me know as soon as possible if we can take on the extra help.

The revised email not only states a problem and what decision is needed but lets the Department Head know what the manager is willing to do to help. The tone is business-like without being too familiar or too official.

Summary

When writing email, consider the following points:

- Focus on what you can do for your reader
- Adopt a 'reader-centred' approach
- Use positive language throughout
- Adopt a more natural, conversational tone
- Maintain the same tone throughout



Developing a Good Writing Style 1

Introduction

Once you have learned to rid your writing of errors in grammar, punctuation and sentence structure, you can continue to improve your writing by considering the problems with style. Start by taking these five steps to a better writing style.

1. Choose an Appropriate Tone

The level of formality depends on the type of business document, the reader, and the purpose of the document. You should bear all these factors in mind before you write and choose an appropriate tone for your document.

INFORMAL TONE is personal, simple, and direct.

- Prefer the active voice to the passive voice
- Use shorter sentences
- Use personal pronouns (I, we, they, etc.)
- Use elements of conversation

Remember, however, that writing informally does not necessarily mean you should use slang, colloquial words and expressions, and short form (I'm, She'd, etc.).

FORMAL TONE is impersonal and objective.

- Use passive voice to achieve a more objective focus
- Avoid using personal references (I, you, we, etc.) unless they are necessary
- Focus on what is done rather than who did it
- Use precise words and expressions

The pairs of texts below demonstrate the main differences between formal and informal tone.

FORMAL:

Research has shown an interesting connection between vitamin A and cancer, but the exact nature of the connection has not been conclusively determined.

INFORMAL:

Researchers believe there may be a link between vitamin A and cancer, but they do not know exactly what it is yet.

FORMAL:

Your participation is requested this Thursday at 3 p.m. in the conference room to discuss future voluntary activities. We will talk about getting more involved as a company with the local community. Everyone's ideas will be appreciated.



INFORMAL:

Please join us on Thursday at 3 p.m. in the conference room. We will be talking about future voluntary activities that we can do in the local area.

All ideas are welcome!

FORMAL:

Your attendance is required at the company-wide staff meeting this afternoon at 3.30 p.m. Our board of directors will be expecting everyone to be present.

To make certain everyone is notified, we will leave voice-mail messages and make personal visits.

Your attendance is important for the well-being of our organisation!

INFORMAL:

We will be having an urgent meeting at 3.30 p.m. today. Our board of directors is in town and your attendance is expected. Please don't let us down.

We will also leave voice mails and make personal visits to everyone concerned.

We look forward to seeing you there.

Whatever tone you use, always be clear and concise.

2. Use the Passive Voice only when Necessary

In a sentence written in the active voice, an actor acts upon a receiver:

Ms Chan called me.

In a sentence written in the passive voice, the receiver is being acted upon by an actor:

I was called by Ms Chan.

Use the wordier passive structure only when the identity of the "actor" is unknown or is less important than the receiver or the act itself.

PASSIVE: (if products is the most important idea)

All products have been discounted by the supplier.

ACTIVE: (if the supplier is the most important idea)

The supplier has discounted all products.

PASSIVE: (actor is unidentified – interviewed by whom?)



The interview was conducted in ten minutes.

ACTIVE: (actor is identified – Paul Lui)

Paul Lui conducted the interview in ten minutes.

POOR PASSIVE USE: (recommended by whom? tested by whom?)

Therefore, it is recommended that this experiment be tested for its effectiveness.

BETTER (STILL PASSIVE): (but tested by whom?)

Therefore, the effectiveness of this experiment should be tested.

BETTER (ACTIVE):

Therefore, we should test the effectiveness of this experiment.

3. Be Simple and Concise in your Writing

Your writing will be easier to understand – and much more reader- friendly – if it's in plain, everyday language.

Of course, plain English isn't just a matter of replacing jargon or uncommon words with plain language. But it's a good start to write in the same kind of language you would use if you were talking directly to the reader.

- Choose clear, common words and expressions
- Avoid jargon unless it is familiar to your reader
- Omit unnecessary words and expressions
- Get to the point quickly

Here are some examples of expressions commonly used in business letters and other written communications with some clearer alternatives:

Instead of	Use
I refer to your letter of 7 May...	Thank you for your letter of 7 May.
You wrote to me in relation to...	You wrote to me about...
Should you require further assistance...	If you need more help...
at such time as	when
prior to and following	before and after
Please find enclosed...	We have enclosed...
As per your instruction...	As you instructed...
due to the fact that	because
Please acknowledge receipt of...	Please confirm that you have received...

Now, bearing in mind the guidelines above, compare the following pairs of extracts from business documents.

WORDY AND COMPLEX:



Poor living accommodations give promise of incrementing the negative side of the morale balance so far as new personnel are concerned.

CLEARER AND MORE CONCISE:

Poor living accommodations lower the morale of new staff.

WORDY:

It is expected by management that great progress will be made by personnel in providing a solution to these problems in the near future.

CLEARER AND MORE CONCISE:

Management expects that staff will soon solve these problems.

WORDY:

It is important that you shall read the notes, advice and information detailed opposite then complete the form overleaf (all sections) prior to its immediate return to our department by way of the envelope provided.

CLEARER AND MORE CONCISE:

Please read the notes opposite before you fill in the form. Then send it back to us as soon as possible in the envelope provided.

4. Avoid Using 'There is/are' to Begin a Sentence

The phrases There is and There are add nothing to the meaning of a sentence - they are empty phrases. Instead of using them to begin a clause or sentence, rewrite the sentence as in the examples below:

POOR STYLE:

After you complete these programmes, there are many options available to you.

BETTER:

After you complete these programmes, many options are available to you.

BETTER:

After you complete these programmes, you have many options.

5. Verbs are Clearer than Nouns

Verbs are clearer and more direct than nouns when expressing action. Avoid nominalising verbs (changing verbs to nouns, e.g. decide to decision, and refer to reference, etc.).



The board of directors made a decision to cut staff salaries by 10%.

BETTER

The board of directors decided to cut staff salaries by 10%.

In your email, you made reference to the staff changes in our department.

BETTER

In your email, you referred to the staff changes in our department.

We will give consideration to your application when we have received all the necessary documents.

BETTER

We will consider your application when we have received all the necessary documents.



Developing a Good Writing Style 2

Introduction

Here we'll be briefly looking at some of the main differences between formal and informal business writing. Specifically, we'll cover the following topics:

- The use of short phrases and contractions for less-formal business documents, and the relationship between length and formality;
- The choice of words and expressions; and
- The factors affecting levels of formality, and the consequences of 'getting the formality right'.

Vocabulary

The language we use in informal business documents, such as an email to a co-worker or a fax to an old client, is much closer to spoken English than the language used in formal letters, minutes and reports. For example, when we speak we often use contractions (short form), as follows:

'I'll send you the report next week.'
 'We'd like to implement a new proposal.'
 'We'll call you if we don't hear from them soon.'

In the same way, contractions are often used in informal business letters, faxes, memos, and email.

'It's a pity we couldn't meet.'
 'I'm enclosing details of the schedule.'
 'I've looked into this and found that...'

A very simple rule, which is usually (but not always) true, is that longer phrases are more formal than shorter phrases. For example:

I would be grateful if you could submit your report by Friday.

is more formal than:

Please could you submit your report by Friday?

and that is more formal than:

Please submit your report by Friday.

As a general rule, when you are writing business documents that don't need to be formal, you should aim for a style that is as close to your natural spoken style as possible. However, consider your readers' expectations, too, and adjust the style accordingly.

Note: Informal does not mean casual! Casual infers note form, abbreviations, incomplete sentences, etc. This style of writing should be strictly avoided in all business documents as it is considered lazy and unprofessional. Casual writing is fine for email and text messages between friends and family only!



Short Phrases and Contractions

Some words are considered more formal than others. For example, 'I regret' is more formal than 'I am sorry'; 'advise' is more formal than 'tell'; 'increase' is more formal than 'go up'; and 'receive' is more formal than 'get'.

For example:

FORMAL:

I am writing to enquire about your Report Writing workshop.

INFORMAL:

I'm writing to ask about your Report Writing workshop.

FORMAL:

This is due to the fact that one of our staff was sick.

INFORMAL:

This is because one of our staff was sick.

FORMAL:

If you require any further information, please contact me.

INFORMAL:

If you need any more information, please call me.

FORMAL:

I regret to advise you that there have been some problems.

INFORMAL:

I'm sorry to say there have been some problems.

FORMAL:

Unfortunately, I have to inform you that I will not be able to attend the workshop.

INFORMAL:

Unfortunately, I have to let you know I won't be able to go to the workshop.

FORMAL:



I am sending a copy of the report under separate cover.

INFORMAL:

I'm sending a copy of the report separately.

FORMAL:

Please find enclosed our proposal.

INFORMAL:

I've enclosed our proposal.

FORMAL:

We have been forced to postpone the project.

INFORMAL:

We must postpone the project.

FORMAL:

Here is a cheque in your favour.

INFORMAL:

Here's a cheque for you.

Culture note:

There are historical and cultural reasons for this. English has been influenced by many other languages, most notably French, which was for centuries the language of the educated and wealthiest classes. French enjoys a high status and, until recently, was a compulsory subject at British secondary schools.

So, while we have (at least) two words for everything, in daily speech we tend to use the older, shorter German words and phrases, reserving the words and phrases of French/Latin origin for when we want to be more formal.

Factors Affecting the Choice of Language

There are three factors affecting our choice of language:

1. The message itself;
2. The type of business document; and
3. The sender-receiver relationship.

The Message:



How we say something depends a lot on what we are talking about. For example, if you wanted to borrow \$10 to pay for a taxi from a friend, you would probably be very direct - after all, you're not asking for much. However, if the sum were \$500 you would probably be less direct and more formal.

The Type of Business Document:

How formal we are also depends on how we communicate. E-mails and memos are generally less formal than reports, proposals and minutes, and conversations are generally less formal than presentations. However, written communication does not have to be more formal than our spoken communication. The most important factor is the sender-receiver relationship.

The Sender-Receiver Relationship:

What is most important in how we express our ideas is our relationship with the message-receiver or, in this case, the reader. If we know somebody well we tend to be more direct and less formal, but when writing to a stranger we might be a little more formal - but not as formal as you might think.

The danger of using formal language is that we can often alienate people by being more formal than is required. Our ideas, too, can get lost when they are surrounded by unnecessary words. It is very unlikely that you would offend someone by being too informal.

It is important to remember that our written style should not differ much from the way we speak. As a rule, if you wouldn't say it, don't write it. This doesn't mean being careless with our writing or using slang: write to a CEO as you would talk to a CEO; write to a colleague as you would talk to a colleague.

Model Email (informal style)

The business documents below are informal yet professional!

All staff

We're happy to announce that Sophie Lau has been promoted to Sales Manager.

Sophie is a great asset to our company and has been a loyal colleague for over four years. She's shown that she can improve our business and we're excited and proud to give her the promotion she deserves. The promotion is effective today.

Congratulations, Sophie!

Bob

I heard that your Computer Science group has just finished a study on the application of artificial intelligence to forecasting.

We've been looking at this idea for some time and we'd like to see a copy of your report. Could you send us one C.O.D?



Benny

I'd just like to let you know that we're running out of the Guarantee Fund leaflets.

Could you deliver 1000 Guarantee Fund leaflets to us by this coming Friday?

If you have any problems arranging the delivery, please let me know.

Dear Ms Tong

Thank you for your email of 17 July requesting a free copy of 'The Language Link' magazine. We mailed our most recent issue to you this morning.

Studying the magazine from month to month will help you improve your English, particularly your business writing skills. You can also improve your listening skills by listening to articles on the CD-ROM.

If you'd like to subscribe to the magazine, please complete the subscription form attached. You're also welcome to subscribe online at our website.

If you have any questions about subscribing, please call us.

Informal Style, NOT Casual Style!

Read through the following short business email and see how many things you can find wrong with the style.

EMAIL 1 - ORIGINAL

FROM : David
TO : Billy
RE : Hi!

hey billy!

got your message about the property meeting with richardson and co's board of directors and it's been noted.

Yeah, no probs – I can make it – and sure, I'll send you a quick list of things I think should be discussed.

C ya,

david



Well, there are many things wrong with it. Read through our comments below. But first have a look at the revision.

EMAIL 2 - REVISED

FROM : David Wong
TO : Siu-Mei Chow
RE : Wong & Co Property Meeting

Dear Siu Mei

Thanks very much for your email of 25 February, asking about my attendance at the property meeting next week with Richardson & Co.

I can confirm that I'll be there. Furthermore, as you requested, I'll email you later today a list of my suggestions that I believe we ought to raise at the meeting.

If you'd like any more information, please feel free to contact me directly on 2143 3576.

Best regards

David Wong

Comments

SUBJECT HEADING

A brief, meaningful subject heading allows the recipient to identify easily the nature of your message. The reader of Email 1 would have no idea what the email was about! Capitalise the main words.

STYLE

Email 1 is too informal (casual), while Email 2 is more formal and business-like. Note the opening and closing of each. It is important to consider your reader. If you know the person you are writing to, you may feel you can use their first name – if in doubt address them with Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms • When writing official company email, avoid writing in note form, e.g. 'got your email' (write instead: Thanks for/I've received your email of 24 February).

Avoid the passive voice (...been noted / should be discussed). You can achieve a more personal and friendly style by using the active voice throughout your email. The active voice forces you to include personal references, such as 'I', 'you', 'we', etc.

Use simple sentences and clear words and phrases. Say what you need to say in the fewest possible words, avoiding redundancy (words that don't add to the meaning of the sentence).

TONE

Email 1's tone is too casual and less respectful than Email 2. Over familiarity is not appropriate for most business email. You should be friendly, of course, but also maintain a certain distance

ABBREVIATIONS





Avoid using abbreviations. 'c ya' is not acceptable for closing a letter. 'probs' should be written as 'problems'. Write out all words in full!

CONTRACTIONS

Contractions are acceptable in modern business email, e.g. we'd, I'll, etc. but don't have too many! They help to create a more conversational style - overuse can make your email appear too informal.



Developing a Good Writing Style 3

Introduction

Business writers are often confused about writing style, and in particular, the level of formality which needs to be applied to different business documents. In general, most writers have only one style of writing and they tend to apply this to every business document they write, whether they are writing to a customer, a subordinate, a superior or a colleague.

Here, we'll show you how to vary your writing style to suit your reader. Each style has a number of elements which help define that particular style. By incorporating these elements into your writing, you'll be able to adopt a consistent, yet variable style.

Considering your Reader - The Customer

Writing in an officious, formal style is not the way to gain the trust and respect of your customers!

When you write to a customer, you must consider two factors: the 'tone' of your writing and the 'level of formality'.

Naturally, you will want to adopt a polite, respectful and considerate tone. In terms of 'the level of formality' you will want to write in a way which reduces the gap between yourself and the customer. In other words you should try to get close to the customer but not too close. Relationships are not built by keeping a distance, but a certain professional distance should be maintained.

The main point is that by reducing the writer-reader gap, the reader can relate more comfortably to what the writer is saying.

Customers respond best to a style of writing that is close to conversation - warm, friendly, personal and natural.

Choosing the Right Level of Formality

One way of achieving a more personal approach is to write in the active voice and try to avoid using the passive. When we write in the active voice, we usually mention the 'Doer' of the action, i.e. a person (I, we, you, etc.). However, in the passive we tend to focus on the action itself and avoid mentioning a person.

Using a lot of passive voice in your writing makes your documents sound cold and impersonal. This is not the style of writing we should use when writing to customers whose trust and respect we want to gain.

When using the active voice, we are forced to include people in our writing. An active voice document includes plenty of references to people, i.e. I, you, me, us, your, etc. This personal style is the preferred style when writing to customers.

Here's an example:

The location for the new factory will be discussed by the board at Wednesday's meeting.

Changing from the passive to the active voice and using a more descriptive verb will improve the sentence.



The board will debate the location for the new factory at Wednesday's meeting.

The passive voice does have its uses. It can be used to:

- Soften a statement;
- Shift the emphasis from the writer to the reader; and
- Be more objective or formal in a sensitive situation.

In the sentence below, the active voice is perhaps not the best choice:

We have reviewed your application and find that we cannot extend credit to your account at this time.

Here's the sentence rewritten using passive structures:

Your credit application has been reviewed carefully. Unfortunately, it did not meet the criteria established by our company for first-time credit amounts. For this reason, a charge account cannot be opened for you at this time.

In this example, emphasis has shifted from the writer's action to the reader's application. The writer has put the company in the background and highlighted the information most important to the reader. The passive voice also softens the refusal by avoiding a "we versus you" tone. The reason for the refusal is stated first, followed by the decision.

In the great majority of cases, however, the active voice should be used. Here are some more examples of cold, passive sentences rewritten in the active voice:



The report was written.
Mr Chui wrote the report.

Nancy was invited to the stockholders' meeting.
The Board of Directors invited Nancy to the stockholders' meeting.

It was suggested that the work be done by external consultants.
Nancy suggested that external consultants do the work.

Enrolment Forms must be sent in by 31 August.
All students must send in their Enrolment Forms by 31 August.

The package was delivered to the wrong address.
The courier delivered the package to the wrong address.

The presentation will be given in conference room 2.
Ms Tong will give the presentation in conference room 2.

The staff are constantly being monitored.
The management are constantly monitoring the staff.

The training course is expected to begin in September.
John Ho expects the training course to begin in September.

In addition to being more personal, active voice sentences are clearer because the writer actually tells you who does what!

Guidelines for Writing in a Personal Style

- Use the active voice throughout.
- Use the passive voice only when necessary.
- Use plenty of personal references (I, you, we, etc.)
- Avoid using short form, e.g. I'll, you're, he's, etc. Use the full form.
- Use a natural, conversational style but avoid using very informal language, such as idioms, uncommon phrasal verbs, clichés, etc.
- Avoid using abbreviations e.g. Jan. = January. Use the full form.



Model Email (personal style)

Subject: Proposal for Network Set-up

Dear Ms Wang

Thank you for your email of 10 November 20xx. We find your proposal to be mostly acceptable.

There are still a few points which we need to discuss with you and we suggest that we have a further meeting within the next few days to clarify them.

Please could you inform our secretary, Ms Iris Yip, as soon as possible about when you are available?

Yours sincerely

Subject: Reference for Ms. June Tsui

Dear Mr. Takahashi

I am happy to recommend Ms June Tsui, who has applied for a sales position in your department store.

Ms Tsui has worked under me for three years as a receptionist and account secretary with our agency. She has maintained our files, handled billings, and has been keeping records for several hundred accounts. I have always found her to be efficient, accurate, and honest.

Although she has not had experience with retail sales in our company, we have found her to be pleasant and helpful when working with our customers. She has shown herself to be a quick learner who works well independently.

I will be sorry to lose Ms Tsui, but I understand that she would like to find a position closer to her home that can offer her more flexible hours. I think that you would be quite fortunate to have her on your staff, and I am pleased to recommend her.

Yours sincerely



Subject: Request for Financial Aid

Dear Mr Leung

Thank you for your email of 21 October 20xx. We are now processing your request for financial aid.

However, in order for us to complete the request, we require the document labelled UB30. If you do not have this document, you can obtain it from our Wanchai office. Furthermore, we expect that you type your details on the form. We would advise you to mail the completed form to us by registered post to avoid any chance of losing it.

After we receive the document, we hope to be able to reach a decision regarding your case within two weeks. We will inform you as soon as we decide.

Please feel free to contact us if you have any queries.

Yours sincerely

Developing a More Formal Style for Internal Communication

When writing to someone in the same company, the aim is not to write in a style which will help you to develop a relationship with your reader, but simply to get your message across clearly and accurately.

The language you use will depend on who, in particular, you are writing to. However, the reader's position within the company in relation to you, the writer, should be taken into account. This will have an effect on the tone of your writing, i.e. how polite, respectful, direct, indirect, commanding etc. your writing is, and the style - how formal or informal the writing is.

Writing to a Superior or Subordinate

When writing in a downwards direction to a subordinate, or upwards to a superior, it is important to recognise that there is a difference between your positions in the company.

The language you use does not need to be warm and personal as it should be when writing to a customer.

You may sometimes use the passive voice to help avoid the continual use of personal references. This will also help you to focus more on the message itself. So, a more impersonal style is preferred for this direction of communication.

Writing to a Colleague on the Same Level

When writing to a colleague on the same level as you but who works in a different department, it is likely that you do not know this person well. Perhaps you have never even seen this person.

In this case your writing should be personal, and polite. The personal style that we discussed earlier in this topic is ideal for this direction of communication.



When you write to a colleague on the same level as you that you also know well, the style of your writing should reflect this. A warm, friendly, and personal style is suitable for this direction of communication. Many of the guidelines for developing a personal style can be relaxed in this case - you can use the short form, abbreviations, and conversational expressions. Your language should be similar to the way you talk. We call this an informal style of writing.

Guidelines for Writing in a More Formal Style

- Focus more on the Action, Event, Situation, etc., you are describing than on the Person(s) involved
- Use the Passive Voice to Achieve this more Objective Focus (but don't overuse it!)
- Use more Precise, Specific, Business-like Language
- Avoid Casual / Conversational Language

Model Email (more formal style)

(writing to a superior)

Subject: Contract with Jobsen Ltd

Many complaints have been made to the Manager of Jobsen Ltd and he has had enough opportunity to explain the worsening in the quality of their services.

He has, however, failed to reply to our letters (copies of these are attached). In addition, whenever one of our representatives attempts to contact him, either personally or by telephone, he is always unavailable.

In view of this, it is recommended that the contract with Jobsen be examined and that the legal department be asked what action can be taken against them.

(writing to subordinates)



Subject: Staff Punctuality

It has been noted that a considerable number of employees are consistently late for duty. Furthermore, it is known that many of them arrive improperly dressed.

As a result, further time is lost while they are changing.

This practice can no longer be tolerated!

Employees are warned, therefore, that company regulations on punctuality, including being properly dressed at the start of the working day, must be observed.

It is hoped that this initial warning will be sufficient to ensure correct procedures are followed in the future; however, in case of further infringements, individual cautions will be issued.



Writing in Plain English

What is Plain English?

Plain English is good, clear writing which communicates as simply and effectively as possible. But it is not a childish or simplistic form of English.

Plain English focuses on the message. It uses only as many words as necessary and avoids jargon, unnecessary technical expressions and complex language.

Plain English documents are always written for the people who will be reading and using them, using words they will know. This means that a document can use technical or specialised terms and still be plain English. For example, an article in a medical journal may use specialised language that doctors will understand. But an article on the same topic written for a popular magazine will use terms familiar to the general public.

Even complex concepts can be explained in plain English. Many legal documents, such as contracts and legislation, have been rewritten in plain English and are still legally accurate.

Plain English:

- presents information customers and clients can
- easily understand provides the kind of information that clients and customers need
- saves time and frustration in having to ask for help
- makes it easier to fill in forms
- saves misunderstanding gives a positive image of an organisation

Put the Reader First

Use singular nouns or pronouns (“you” and “we”) whenever possible to avoid confusion about whether a requirement applies to readers individually or in groups. It is friendlier than “the department/bank/council” and “the client/customer/ratepayer”. It also helps to personalise the message and adds directness and clarity.

POOR

Small Disadvantaged Business applications must be filed in a timely manner.

GOOD

You must file your Small Disadvantaged Business application on time.
Each applicant must file the Small Disadvantaged Business application on time.

Use Headings that Inform

Headings help separate text into manageable segments. They also help readers find what they need quickly. Take the opportunity to highlight key points in the heading. Don't just use general, one-word headings. To show you're thinking about a reader, ask the questions a reader would ask:



POOR

Fees

GOOD

What fees must I pay?

POOR

Records

GOOD

What records must I keep?

POOR

Licence

GOOD

Do I need a license?

POOR

Application

GOOD

How will the agency handle my application?

Use Words Your Reader Will Understand

Few non-native speakers of English can cope with a level of writing as complex as found in an English language newspaper. So if your documents are aimed at the general public, you will need to pitch your writing below this level.

Don't use technical or specialised terms unless you know that your readers will understand them. If it's important that readers understand a specific term, explain it.

Avoid out-of-date words like "heretofore", "herein", "as per" and "aforementioned".

Your writing will be easier to understand — and much more reader friendly — if it's in plain, everyday language.

Of course, plain English isn't just a matter of replacing big words with plain ones. But it's a good start to write in the same kind of language you would use if you were talking directly to the reader.

Use Short Sentences and Brief Paragraphs



Write in fairly short sentences. Have only one or two ideas in each sentence. If you need to explain a term or qualify a point, use a separate sentence.

However, just because a sentence is short doesn't necessarily mean it is clear. You may need to use more, rather than fewer, words to get your message across. Don't follow any rule which says a sentence should only contain a certain number of words. A better guideline is to use only as many words as necessary.

Organise your thoughts into brief paragraphs, with one central topic in each. This makes your writing much easier to read and understand.

Use Active Rather Than Passive Voice

Write at least 85% of your sentences in the active voice to communicate clearly and identify who is responsible for what action. Hong Kong writers tend to overuse the passive voice. For example:

POOR

Applications will be processed within two weeks.

In this sentence, it is not clear who will be carrying out the action. The reader may also be uncertain about what "processed" means. But writing the same sentence in the active voice is far more direct:

GOOD

We will reply to your application within two weeks.

The reader now knows who will be carrying out the action and what to expect – a reply within two weeks. Active sentences are clearer and more precise.

Here are some more examples:

POOR

The loan applications will be reviewed by SBA so that eligibility can be determined.

GOOD

SBA will review the loan applications and issue a decision on eligibility.

Plain Versus Confused Language

Here's a real life example of the small print of a credit card agreement. Try to read through the text (you'll find it difficult and confusing!). Then read our comments on it.



Credit Card Agreement

The section in your Agreement entitled “Change in the Agreement” is being reworded slightly to make it clear that we can, at any time, add or delete provisions relating to your Account and to the nature, extent, and enforcement of the rights and obligations you or we may have relating to this Agreement, and that we will notify you of any change, addition or deletion to the Agreement and the effective date of the change, addition, or deletion. Whenever we exercise our rights under this provision, as we are doing with this notice, the notice we send you may state that you may notify us in writing that you do not wish to accept certain of the changes, additions, or deletions we are making. You will be deemed to accept all the changes, additions, and deletions accompanying the notice and to ratify and confirm all the provisions of your Cardmember Agreement and your acceptance of all the changes, additions, and deletions described in other notices previously sent to if (1) you do not send us such a notification in a timely manner, or (2) you use the Card or Account after the conclusion of the specified time period.

Comments:

- Sentences are very long and wordy, containing more than two ideas in each sentence
- Sentence structure is too complex
- Several phrases are repeated unnecessarily.
- The message is unclear as the main points are lost in the extra volume of words.
- A number of words are not in common usage and may therefore be unclear, e.g. provisions, enforcement, deemed, ratify, timely.

Now read the text rewritten in plain English. This time you’ll probably have little trouble understanding the message.

We are changing the section in our agreement called “Change in the Agreement”. If we want to change our agreement, we’ll send you a notice about the change and tell you its effective date.

You’ll have until the effective date to write and cancel your account, if you want to do that. If you don’t cancel on or before the effective date, you’ll be bound by the change we made.

Whether you cancel or not, you’ll be bound by the change if you use your credit card after the effective date.

The next example is from a letter from a customer to his/her mortgage lender:

I request that Lender waive its requirement that an escrow/ impound account be established for the payment of hazard insurance premiums in connection with my mortgage loan and I agree to assume full responsibility for the timely and full payment of all hazard insurance premiums in connection with the property I am pledging as security for the mortgage loan and to furnish satisfactory proof of such payments upon Lender’s request. I understand that if I fail to make any such payments within 30 days of their respective due dates, Lender may, in its sole discretion, revoke its waiver and establish a hazard insurance premium escrow/ impound account. If this occurs, my monthly mortgage loan payments will increase by an amount to be calculated by Lender.



Comments:

- Sentences are very long and wordy, containing more than two points in each sentence
- Unnecessarily complex sentence structure
- Unnecessary use of the passive voice, e.g. be established, to be calculated
- Many words not in common usage, e.g. waive, in connection with, pledging, furnish, sole discretion, revoke, waiver.

Rewrite:

I request that you ignore your requirement for the escrow account to pay for the hazard insurance premiums on my property.

I promise to pay the insurance premiums in full and on time.

I will give you proof that I paid them, if you ask for it.

I understand that if I fail to make these payments within 30 days of their due dates, you may change your mind and require an escrow account for the insurance premiums. If you do this, my monthly home loan payments will increase by an amount you will calculate.





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