

# **HOW TO WRITE BUSINESS LETTERS**

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How to Write Business Letters by Walter K. Smart

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**WALTER K. SMART**

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# CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. THE TONE OF A BUSINESS LETTER . . . . .	7
II. THE MAKE-UP OF A BUSINESS LETTER . . . . .	12
III. INQUIRY, CONTRACT, AND ROUTINE LETTERS . . . . .	19
IV. ADJUSTING COMPLAINTS BY LETTER . . . . .	22
V. COLLECTING BY MAIL . . . . .	43
VI. WHAT A SALES LETTER MUST DO . . . . .	60
VII. GETTING ATTENTION AND AROUSING INTEREST . . . . .	68
VIII. EXPLANATION—DESCRIBING THE PRODUCT . . . . .	81
IX. PROVING YOUR CLAIMS . . . . .	88
X. PERSUADING THE PROSPECT TO BUY . . . . .	95
XI. WHAT INDUCEMENTS TO OFFER . . . . .	103
XII. SUMMARY AND CLIMAX—CLINCHING THE SALE . . . . .	109
XIII. DEVELOPING A FOLLOW-UP SERIES . . . . .	118

XIV. NEWS VALUE . . . . .	185
XV. GIVING YOUR LETTERS PERSONALITY . . . . .	190
XVI. THE "YOU" INTEREST . . . . .	149
INDEX . . . . .	157

### EXHIBIT OF ACTUAL LETTERS REPRODUCED

COMMON ERRORS IN ARRANGEMENT . . . . .	14
WELL-BALANCED ARRANGEMENT . . . . .	15
HOW ONE COMPANY WRITES A REFERENCE LETTER . . . . .	23
A COMPLAINT LETTER AND AN UNTACTFUL REPLY . . . . .	36
TACTFUL REPLY TO THE SAME COMPLAINT . . . . .	37
COLLECTION LETTER SERIES . . . . .	54-56
WELL-BUILT SALES LETTER . . . . .	62
A POOR LETTER, WITHOUT SALES VALUE . . . . .	64
THE SAME PROPOSITION IN WINNING FORM . . . . .	65
A GOOD LETTER SHOWING HOW ATTENTION MAY BE WON . . . . .	71
LETTER THAT HOLDS INTEREST TO THE END . . . . .	75
LETTER CORRECTLY USING EXPLANATION AND PROOF . . . . .	90, 91
A REPLY TO AN INQUIRY, FURTHER STIMULATING INTEREST . . . . .	98
THE KIND OF REPLY TO AVOID . . . . .	99
A LETTER CLEVERLY EMBODYING INDUCEMENT . . . . .	105
SALES FOLLOW-UP THAT BROUGHT RESULTS . . . . .	106
A SALES FOLLOW-UP SHOWING TYPICAL FAULTS . . . . .	112
THE SAME PROPOSITION, REWRITTEN AND CORRECTED . . . . .	113
A GOOD LETTER LEADING THE READER TO THE BUYING POINT . . . . .	115
SALES FOLLOW-UP SERIES . . . . .	121-125
PUTTING NEWS VALUE TO WORK IN THE SALES LETTER . . . . .	137
A POOR LETTER, LACKING IN PERSONALITY AND APPEAL . . . . .	142
THE SAME ARTICLE SOLD IN REAL MAN-TO-MAN TALK . . . . .	143
GOOD EXAMPLE OF STRONG PERSONALITY IN A SALES LETTER . . . . .	145
HOW AN ADVERTISING MAN SOLD A BOAT BY MAIL . . . . .	146, 147
HOW THE SELLER'S INTEREST CROWDS OUT THE "YOU" ELEMENT . . . . .	152
THE SAME LETTER REWRITTEN FROM THE BUYER'S POINT OF VIEW . . . . .	153

## ANNOUNCEMENT

**T**O give those who are interested in the study of business correspondence a discussion of the subject at once brief, logical, specific and practical is the purpose of this volume. In producing it, the demand every concern feels for more efficient letter writers has been a controlling factor. Not only the many specimen letters and paragraphs reproduced, but also the principles and rules have come out of the hard-earned experience of enterprising concerns. No effort has been spared to arrange this specific material so that it can most readily be grasped and applied.

Beginning with the simplest correspondence matters and letter forms, the discussion leads up to the writing of the successful sales letter, which is perhaps the most difficult as well as the most important form of business correspondence. In style and mechanical form the aim has been to make the book in a measure an illustration of the same arts of persuasion upon which advertisements and business letters depend for their vitality.

As each type of business letter is taken up, the reader or student is shown how to construct it paragraph by paragraph; securing attention; delivering a concise selling description, stating a collection arrangement or putting an adjustment into persuasive terms; proving a claim; proposing a contract, and closing the letter in a way which urges to action. As he works out these paragraphs, the correspondent can compare them with actual models which have sold goods, adjusted difficult complaints, collected slow accounts and handled efficiently the various problems of a business.



Only the free access to the confidential data of business houses which the publishers have for many years enjoyed has made this work possible. In many cases the source and history of these actual business letters cannot be made public. Among the firms which may be mentioned as having contributed valuable matter are: Portland Silo Company, The Regina Company, Franklin Automobile Company, Frank E. Davis Company, Horton Manufacturing Company, Geo. Stuhler's Sons Company, Peoples Gas Light and Coke Company of Chicago, Story & Story, Gray & Graham Company, Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, Old Town Canoe Company, A. B. Farquhar Company, Link-Belt Company, Holeproof Hosiery Company, Superior Underwear Company, and LaSalle and Koch Company.

In the earlier editions of the book, issued under the title, "How to Write Letters That Win," of which many printings were demanded, twelve hundred business letters were studied, classified, and discussed. In the present completely reconstructed and much enlarged volume more than nineteen hundred letters have been considered. The correspondence files of many concerns have also been studied, and SYSTEM's editors and letter writers, especially Mr. Dennis, Mr. Murphy and Mr. Sumner, have contributed freely of their experience with letter work.

For the present edition, credit is especially due to Professor Smart, head of the English department of Armour Institute of Technology and lecturer on business correspondence in the School of Commerce of Northwestern University, who has contributed much new material, and has thoroughly revised and rearranged the book. Grateful acknowledgment is made also to the hundreds of business men and teachers whose corrections and suggestions bearing upon the former editions have, we hope, made the present volume accurately reflect the best correspondence practice.

THE PUBLISHERS.

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## CHAPTER I

# THE TONE OF A BUSINESS LETTER

**I**F THERE has been one development in the last generation that has contributed more than any other to business growth, it has been the development of the business letter. Letters—right letters—are no longer the mere stereotyped paper mediums of solicitation and acknowledgment. They are living, breathing personalities, with all the capabilities and characteristics of the men behind them.

*Giving letters a personal tone*

Forty years ago the only letters that showed symptoms of red-blooded authorship were impassioned love missives and the controversial letters of statesmen. Then someone, somewhere, conceived the idea that human interest could be woven into a business letter as well as into a personal message; that a business letter, after all, was but a personal message; and that it was possible to talk to a man a thousand miles away in the same words that you would use if he sat beside your desk.

That discovery, developed, has of itself dissolved distance and placed the inter-relationship of business men upon a basis of courtesy and intimacy that no other could accomplish. And more important, it has made possible the transaction of an enormous bulk of business at an insignificant fraction of what the personal handling of

*Business-getting power of the personal letter*

it would have cost. Over one hundred million dollars in sales made by one house last year entirely by mail—that is a specific example of results.

*Personal tone means showing interest in the customer*

Getting this personal tone in a business letter is largely a matter of showing a personal interest in the customer and his affairs. If you are writing a sales letter, emphasize the benefit he will derive from owning the article you are offering. If it is a collection letter, make him feel that you are fair, and considerate of his difficulties—until, of course, he has shown that he deserves no consideration. In a letter answering a complaint, not only adjust the difficulty, but show your desire to satisfy him in full, and make him realize that you really value his patronage. If it is an acknowledgment of an order, put a little warmth into your thanks. In other words, show that you are interested in the matter about which you are writing, and that you do not consider it merely as a part of the day's routine work.

*How the personal tone can be secured*

In the simpler forms of letters, such as the acknowledgment of orders, it is not difficult to show this personal interest, for there it is only a matter of dropping a few cordial words here and there in the letter. In the more complex forms, however, such as the sales letter, getting the right tone will require a special effort.

*Regard each customer as an individual*

In the first place you must learn to look upon each of your customers as an individual, not as an abstract being—one of a thousand men all of whom have the same characteristics. The latter is the attitude of the old-school correspondent. He says the same thing in the same way every time he writes about a certain matter. He makes no attempt to adapt his letters to the different classes of readers. He sees men in the mass, not as individuals; and seeing them thus he cannot help making his letters formal and impersonal.

We are not arguing here that you—the correspondent—must know all your customers personally, for