

Write it Right! Business Correspondence in English

The 4 I's

Your writing must have a PURPOSE. All writings will need to achieve one of the four I's:-

Instruct : eg : new policy or procedures

Inform : eg : advise progress

Interpret : eg : summarise details

Influence : eg : persuade to buy

- Your purpose in writing should be clearly stated in your opening.
- Avoid the slow build-up. It frustrates busy people.

Avoid The 3 R's

Rush = Return = Re-write

Plan time to get it right first time based on your previous experience.

Don't underestimate the time needed for first drafts.

Allow up to **THREE TIMES** longer to plan than to write

The 5 W's and A "H"

WHO	Is it for? Keep the reader in mind
WHY	Are you writing? Make an early statement of Purpose
WHAT	Will you say? Keep it short and simple (KISS)
WHERE	Will your main points go? Have a logical flow
WHEN	Do they need it by? Write in time
HOW	Long will it take you?

BUDGET CONTINGENCY TIME!

KISS

K Keep

I It

S Short and

S Simple

4 Bad Writing Habits

Hedging

We hedge when we do not express exactly and directly what we mean

Using Too Many Words

We use too many words when we lack confidence in our writing skills

Using Big Words

We use big words when we feel the need to impress the reader

Faking Interest

When we overreact or overdo interest, we end up sounding insincere, especially when we use too many superlatives (e.g fastest, biggest, best, fantastic, wonderful etc.)

Example & Exercise

Hedging

Example

Hedging : In regard to your request for immediate payment, compliance is impeded by a temporary cash flow situation, which is hoped would be rectified in the near future.

What could be written: We cannot pay you right now but hope to be able to the next month.

Exercise

Hedging : Information concerning your billing rates for the month of February, March and April would be most helpful to us.

What could be written:

TIP

Hedging clouds your message. Be direct without being rude.

Example & Exercise

Using Too Many Words

Example

Wordy : The company has on its payroll a total of 5684 employees, of which 1793 are in the salaried and 3891 in the hourly rated group.

Concise : The company has 5684 employees, of which 1793 are salaried and 3891 are hourly rated.

Exercise

Wordy : In this package I am returning the new sweater that I purchased from your store. The invoice number of my order is 3761. I am returning this sweater because it is too small in size. This is size medium. I need a larger size. Please send me size large. Thank you.

Concise:

TIP

When you write, avoid saying the same thing twice. Look for the redundant words and cut them out. The faster your reader gets the message, the faster you will get the action you desire.

Example & Exercise

Using Big Words

Example

Big Words : Your epistle arrived at a most felicitous moment.

Plain : Your letter arrived at a good time.

Exercise

Big words : In composing a correspondence, it would be beneficial to ensure that the grammar employed remain simplified and abridge.

Plain:

TIP

Write to express, not to impress.

Example & Exercise

Faking Interest

Example

Fake : Your qualifications and experience are splendid, and we are sure that you will have no trouble finding a position equal to your outstanding talents, but we have hired another candidate who most closely matches our immediate needs to fill the position for which you applied. We sincerely appreciate your thinking of us and will keep your excellent resume in our files.

Genuine : Although your qualifications and experience are excellent, we have hired another person whose background more closely fits our needs. Thank you for applying, and good luck in your job search.

Exercise

Fake : It is with utmost sincerity that I extend to you felicitations on your recent, well deserved promotions.

Genuine:

TIP

Faking Interest clutters up your message and destroys the sense of sincerity. Cut out big words and wordy expressions. Use simple ones.

4 Good Writing Habits

Be Active

Write in the active voice, not the passive.

Be Brief

Avoid being wordy. It buries your message. Try to use shorter phrases.

Do not leave out necessary facts in your effort to be brief.

Be Clear

Use simple, everyday words. Avoid jargons.

Be Positive and Specific

Use positive words, avoid negative ones, even though and especially when your content is negative.

Example & Exercise

Be Active

Example

Passive : Your letter of May 8, 1986, was received yesterday.

Active : Your letter of May 8, 1986, arrived yesterday

Passive : Your work has been found to be unsatisfactory.

Active : I find your work unsatisfactory.

Exercise

Passive : The report was filed by the clerk.

Active :

TIP

The active voice uses fewer words than the passive voice. It is more direct and clear.

Example & Exercise

Be Positive and Specific

1. Example Of Being Positive

Negative : We do not deliver on weekends.

Positive : We deliver every weekdays.

Negative : You cannot charge above RM1,000.

Positive : You can charge up to RM1,000.

Exercise

Negative : We do not hold reservation after 10.00pm.

Positive :

2. Example Of Being Specific

Vague : Some parts remain in stock.

Specific : Twenty parts remain in stock.

Exercise

Vague : We will send the bill to you next week.

Specific :

TIP

The positive form is usually shorter and direct. Try to remove the word “not” in sentence. Vague words contain no information. Give details wherever possible.

NOTE: We shall have examples and exercise of “Being Brief” and “Be Clear” in the next module.

Redundant Phrases

Many of these phrases are used automatically. A single word is often more powerful.

No	Yes
Advance Planning	Planning
Revert Back	Revert
At All Times	Always
At The Present Time	Now
In The Event That	
At A Later Date	
Submit A Proposal	
Due To The Fact	_____

Be Brief!

Avoid Big Words

No	Yes
Cease	Stop
Remunerate	Pay
Jeopardise	Risk
Peruse	Read
Perceive	
Terminate	
Commence	
Converse	

Use Simple Words!

The 7 C's

Always Be :-

1. Courteous
 - In tone
 - Personalised to the reader

2. Comprehensive
 - Cover only that which the reader needs to know
 - Check for the five W's and a H

3. Clarity
 - Choose short, familiar, conversational words
 - Construct easy to read sentences and paragraphs
 - Include visuals where possible

4. Consideration
 - Write from the reader's view point
 - Address their needs and wants
 - Use A.S.K
 - A**ttitude - their values and expectations
 - S**tatus - their position and responsibility
 - K**nowledge - their ability to understand you

5. Concrete
 - Use specific facts and figures
 - Put action in your verbs

6. Correct
 - Use appropriate language for different audiences
 - Check accuracy of figures, facts and words

7. Consistent
 - In format and layout
 - In "house" style

Letters

IMAGE

Your letters represent your personal and your organisation's image to the world outside. Therefore, set high standards.

Keep your image consistent : where House Rules exist, follow them by applying the Seven C's

LETTER STRUCTURE

Always ensure that your letters follow a logical framework:

- Beginning : refer to situation and purpose
- Middle : detail facts supporting purpose
- Ending : summarise situation and next actions

Basic Elements of a Letter

1. Return Address / Letterhead
2. Date
3. Name of Recipient and Interior Address
4. Salutation
5. Subject Line
6. Complementary Close
7. Signature
8. Writer's name and title
9. Enclosure reference
10. Copies

NOTE

Few letters contain all of these elements. Business letters contain or use most of the elements depending on the letter and to the audience to whom the letter is written.

Types of Letters

Most business letters can be grouped into the following categories:

1. Good News Letters
Favorable response to a request.
2. Bad News Letters
Unfavorable response to a request.
3. Letters of Request
Letters seeking assistance.
4. Letters to Influence
Normally Sales Letters.
5. Cover Letters- to accompany submission of resume.

Principles of Good News Letters

1. Start off with the pleasant news
2. Details or Explanation
3. Closing Thought

EXAMPLE

Your request to establish a credit line has been approved.

The amount of credit granted is according to your request. Credit period will be from 2 May 2000 until 2 May 2001.

We look forward to a long term business relationship.

Pleasant News

Details or Explanation

Closing Thought

A.I.D.A

	1 September 1994	
	Mr. Rashid Hussein Director XYZ Berhad 23, Jalan Bangsar 80290, Kuala Lumpur	Sales Management Partners
	Dear Mr. Rashid	
	<u>COMPANY EXPANSION WITH NEW PRODUCTS</u>	
Attention	{ Your press release in The Times last week caught my eye. You announced that your new products will catapult you into market leadership within 2 years.	
Interest	{ I believe that you can achieve this earlier than forecast, and I would like to meet you to show how this may be accomplished.	
Desire	{ Other companies like your own have found my information has helped them achieve their strategic goals and increase market share. Tan Sri Lim Goh Tong of AB & Co. suggested I contacted you directly. I am not sure at this stage how helpful I can be to you and a brief meeting would establish this quickly.	
Action	{ Can we meet on Thursday 8 September, 8.30am at your office? Alternatively, should this be inconvenient, I could rearrange a more suitable time through your personal assistant.	
	I will call you on Monday to discuss further.	
	Yours sincerely	
	Zaher Al Idrus Proprietor	
	A 15 -1, Dataran Palma, Ampang , 50100, Selangor	

Principles of Bad News Letters

1. Begin with a neutral statement that leads to the reason for refusing the request.
2. Present the facts and reasons for refusal.
3. State the refusal.
4. Close with a related idea that shifts emphasis away from refusal.

EXAMPLE

We have received copies of your phone bill on 25 April 2000.

Our Investigation revealed that calls were indeed made to Johor for a period of 3 hours on 2 May 2000 from your phone.

We are unable to provide you with a refund as requested.

You may want to examine our new "Call Protection Scheme" to prevent future unauthorized calls from your phone.

Neutral Statement

Presents facts and reason for refusal.

State Refusal.

Close with a related idea that shifts the emphasis from refusal.

Principles of Request letters

1. Make the request in the first sentence.
2. Follow the request with details that will make the request clearer.
3. Close with a forward expectation to the reader's next step.

EXAMPLE

May I have a copy of your brochure for the TM Touch's promotional internet rates?

States request

Last night's advertisement on TV3 attracted my interest to possibly subscribe to TMN Touch Internet Program.

Presents details

I would appreciate you sending me any other brochures that may explain in greater detail TM Touch's internet program.

Express appreciation and state your expectation in terms of readers action

Checklist Sheet

The 7 C's		Yes	No	Remarks
1	COURTEOUS			
2	COMPREHENSIVE			
3	CLEAR			
4	CONSIDERATE			
5	CONCRETE			
6	CORRECT			
7	CONSISTENT			

4 Good Writing Habits		Yes	No	Remarks
Active				
Brief				
Clear				
Positive and Specific				

What is a Memorandum?

- Memos are similar to letters and similar guidelines will apply to both.
- The main differences are that memos are internal within organizations and are less formal.
- Less formality means memos can be shorter (ideally one page, but avoid being curt).

Parts of Memorandum

The standard parts of a memo are :

- To
- From
- Date
- Subject Line
- The Message Itself
- Copy Notations

Qualities of a Good Memorandum?

- Orderliness
- Logical organization
- Natural, informal writing style
- Action oriented, direct and brief.
- Takes less than one minute of reading time
- Graphic support when necessary

The Fog Factor

- Take a typical sample of about 200 words of your writing.
- Count the number of sentences. Count all word with 3 or more syllables (eg: cla-ri-ty has 3) excluding personal pronouns (names).
- Then apply the FOG FACTOR:
- Divide the number of long words by the number of sentences.
- Clear writing has a fog factor of between 2 & 3.
- Below 2 may be childishly simple.
- Above 3 may be DISTINCTLY FOGGY!

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What is a Report?

A report is :

- Prepared in response to a perceived need
- Requires research
- Contains a collection of facts organized and analysed to arrive at conclusions
- Is usually long (more than 2 pages)

NOTES

- Organization make important decision on the basis of reports
- Ineffective reports result in ineffective decisions.

Planning before writing a report

Writing a report needs planning

- **C**heck with the commissioner or receiver the deadline, purpose, scope, readership and resources available.
- **I**dentify what information exist and is needed, who can help and where to go.
- **D**rafts subjects and headings, logically, with the main point first. Facts and figures must support conclusion and recommendation.

- Allow more time to plan, revise and edit than actual time to write.
- Finish proof-reading by reading aloud – one sentence should not be more than one breath.
- Then sleep on it if it's sensitive and re-read.

Basic Layout of Reports

- **SUBJECT TITLE**
(up to 10 words) and author's name.
- **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**
Summarize on one page (preferable 3 – 4 paragraph only) what the report is all about and what it recommends.
- **INTRODUCTION**
Problem or Situation, Purpose, scope and background
- **RESEARCH METHOD**
How information was collected
- **FINDINGS**
 - Facts and figures in order of importance.
 - You may use a series of headings throughout the text, corresponding to the main topics discussed.
- **CONCLUSION**
 - Condenses the text discussion.
 - Evaluates facts discussed.
- **RECOMMENDATIONS**
Suggest a program of action based on conclusion
- **APPENDICES**
 - Supporting information with title headings cross referenced to contents page numbers.
 - Include a glossary for jargon and bibliography if appropriate. Then bind it in a visually attractive way.

Heading

- A good heading clearly indicates the subject matter below it.
- Headings should not be any longer than eight words.
- For the wording of heading, these are four types to choose from.

Topic Heading

- Topic heading consist of single words (nouns) or short phrases
Preparation or Preparation Before Writing

Complete Sentence Heading

- This type of heading includes a subject and a verb
Preparation Is Essential before Writing Reports; or
A Writer Should Prepare before Writing Reports

Imperative Sentence Heading

- Like commands, this heading begins with a verb and omits the subject which normally refers to the reader.
Prepare Efficiently or Prepare Before Writing Report

Variant Headings

- Usually the heading begins with a participle
Preparing or Preparing before Writing Reports

Itemizing Under Heading

There are a few ways to itemize the written message under each heading.

- One way would be to either number the points or use alphabets to itemize them
- The usual way is to combine them :
 - The Numerical-Letter Combination is popular in business.
 - The Decimal System is favored in scientific and technical report
 - The Letter-Numerical Combination is used by those who prefer letters over Roman numerals.

EXAMPLES OF ALPHA-NUMERICAL ITEMISING

Degree of Heading	Numerical-Letter Combination	Decimal System	Letter-Numerical Combination
1 st 2 nd	I. A. B. C.	1.0 1.1 1.2 1.3	A. 1. 2. 3.
1 st 2 nd 3 rd 4 th 5 th	II. A. 1. 2. 3. B. 1. 2. a. b. (1) (2)	2.0 2.1 2.11 2.12 2.13 2.2 2.21 2.22 2.221 2.222 2.2221 2.2222	B. 1. a. b. c. 2. a. b. (1) (2) (a) (b)
1 st 2 nd 3 rd 2 nd 3 rd	III. A. 1. 2. B. 1. 2. 3.	3.0 3.1 3.11 3.12 3.2 3.21 3.22 3.23	C. 1. a. b. 2. a. b. c.
1 st 2 nd 3 rd 2 nd 3 rd	IV. A. 1. 2. B. 1. 2.	4.0 4.1 4.11 4.12 4.2 4.21 4.22	D. 1. a. b. 2. a. b.
1 st 2 nd	V. A. B. C.	5.0 5.1 5.2 5.3	E. 1. 2. 3.

Optional Layouts

LESS FORMAL

For Letter and Memorandum Reports use only 3 stages :

- Purpose and scope
- Situation and Findings
- Conclusions and Recommendations

MORE FORMAL

For reports involving major issues, ADD 3 stages :

- Covering Letter
Confirming the theme and giving thanks
- Contents Table
 - Report title
 - Recipients' names
 - Author's name
 - Date
 - Heading and page numbers
 - Sub-headings
- Appendices
tables, graphs, charts, illustrations

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What is A Proposal?

- Basically a proposal is a report with persuasive intent.
- Some of the examples of the fundamental aims of a proposal are to:
 - solve a problem
 - alter a procedure
 - find answers to questions
 - conduct research on topics of mutual interest
 - persuade the reader to engage in the writer's

Rules for a Proposal

- Follow the solicitor's requirements of a proposal in detail, either in format, number of copies desired, deadlines and other demands.
- Do not use jargons.

Parts of a Proposal

The parts of a proposal are as follows :

Title page

As a minimum, the title page should include:-

- The title
- The name of the person or company to whom the proposal is submitted
- The name of the person submitting the proposal
- The date of submission

Abstract, Executive Summary, Synopsis

- Proposals should have an abstract. This is aim to help the reader have a quick overview of the proposal.
- The abstract should speak for the complete proposal, by summarizing how the objectives will be met and what procedure will be followed.
- In short proposals, the abstract section can be replaced with covering letter,
- The covering letter should follow the AIDA formula in ensuring that the persuasive tone is present from the beginning of the proposal.

Table of Contents

- Brief proposals usually do not require a table of content.
- Long proposals do require one, as well as a list of tables, figures and illustrations.

Introduction

- Purpose
State the purpose early in the proposal

- **Problem and Objective**
Show clearly that you understand the solicitor's problem and objectives
- **Scope**
Define the boundaries of your proposal

Background

- Do include the background information on current situations, problems as well as identifying the solicitor's concerns.

Requirements

- State the needs and priorities (e.g equipment, personnel, budget etc.) of the project in order to address the solicitor's problem.

Proposed Actions and Implications

- Illustrates the proposed actions and implications of such actions on the current situation.

Implementation Plan

- Detail the implementation plan with simple steps and which addresses the five W's and a H.

Benefits

- Assert clearly and in detail the benefits (e.g. cost benefits, return on investment etc) the solicitor stands to gain by accepting the proposal's proposed actions.

Appendices

- Visuals, graphs or other pertinent information that can be added to illustrate/strengthen the proposal should be added.

NOTES

- Not all proposal requires all of the parts stated earlier to be present.
- Long, comprehensive proposals require most of all the parts listed

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What is a Resume?

Resume is a self-promotional document that presents you in the best possible light, for the purpose of getting invited to a job interview. It's not an official personnel document. It's not a job application.

What should the resume content be about?

It's not just about past jobs! It's about YOU, and how you performed and what you accomplished in those past jobs--especially those accomplishments that are most relevant to the work you want to do next. A good resume predicts how you might perform in that desired future job.

Why your resume is important?

It's the first meeting between you and a prospective employer. First impressions are lasting ones. Well, your resume is the first meeting between you and a prospective employer more often now than ever. So, how do you want to be remembered? Wrinkled and unorganized or neat and structured. Long and boring or Precise and interesting.

Main purpose of resume writing

Your resume is a tool with one specific purpose: to win an interview. A resume is an advertisement, nothing more, nothing less. A great resume doesn't just tell them what you have done but makes the same assertion that all good ads do.

What resume writing isn't?

It is a mistake to think of your resume as a history of your past, as a personal statement or as some sort of self expression.

Focus on the employer's needs and not yours

Employer is not much interested in your needs but in company's. Ask yourself, what would make a perfect candidate for this job. What does the employer really want and need? What special abilities would this person have? What would set a truly exceptional candidate apart from a merely good one?

Great resumes has two sections

In the first, you make assertions about your abilities, qualities and achievements. You write powerful, but honest, advertising copy that makes the reader immediately perk up and realize that you are someone special.

The second section, the evidence section, is where you back up your assertions with evidence that you actually did what you said you did. This is where you list and describe the jobs you have held, your education, etc.

Objective of Resume Writing

Your resume should be pointed toward conveying why you are the perfect candidate for one specific objective or job title. Good advertising is directed toward a very specific objective.

Overview of tenses in English

The following table gives an overview of the tenses in English. It summarises the situation in which the tenses are used.

TENSES	SITUATIONS WHEN THE TENSE IS USED	EXAMPLES
Simple Present Tense	To show: 1. Habitual action 2. Factual information	a) Brian writes reports every day. b) He is a researcher.
Present Continuous Tense	To show: 1. An action which is happening now. 2. An action which is happening over a period of time.	a) Brian is writing a report now. b) At present, the members of the research team are working on a special project.
Present Perfect Tense	To show: 1. An action which began in the past and continues up to the present. 2. An action which has been completed recently. 3. An action done in an unspecified time in the past.	a) So far, Brian has written three books based on his research on capital investment. b) The typist has just typed the report. c) The workers have spoken to their supervisor regarding the lack of safety in their department.
Present Perfect Continuous Tense	To show: 1. The duration of an action which has been in progress up to now. 2. An action which is repeated over a period of time.	a) Brian has been writing the report for two days. b) They have been fixing computer chips since they joined this company.
Simple Past Tense	To show: 1. An action which took place at a specific time in the past.	a) Brian wrote a report yesterday. b) Brian explained the findings of the survey to his client. c) The client was very happy with the results.
Past Continuous Tense	To show: 1. Two or more actions happening at the same time in the past. 2. An action which was happening when another action took place.	a) While Brian was writing his report, his colleagues were conducting market surveys. b) As Brian was analysing the data, suddenly the lights went out.
Past Perfect Tense	To show: 1. Two actions in the past, one action completed before the other action.	a) As soon as Brian had written the report, he sent it to his client. b) The employees cleaned up the premises when they had finished their work.
Past Perfect Continuous Tense	To show: 1. An action which had been happening for a period of time before something else happened.	a) Brian had been writing his report for three hours when his client called him.
Simple Future Tense	To show: 1. An action which will happen in the future.	a) Brian will write a new report tomorrow.
Future Continuous Tense	To show: 1. An action which will be taking place during a particular time in the future.	a) Brian wants to finish his report. He will go to work early at 7.30am tomorrow. He will be writing his report at eight o'clock tomorrow morning.