

Letter Writing –About Routine and Pleasant

Dr. Vinod Sharma

Session Objectives:

- Understanding the audience
- Organize your message
- Business letters

Understanding the Audience

Understanding the audience is a challenging task. The writer needs to cultivate a "You" attitude or a reader-oriented attitude. Before writing the message, the writer must first understand the audience and have a mental picture of the audience while selecting the contents and framing the message.

Cultivating a "You" attitude

By adopting a "You" attitude, the person writing the letter indicates his concern for the reader's needs and interests. In order to write a reader-oriented letter, the writer has to focus on the following questions:

- Are the reader's major needs and concerns addressed by the message?
- Does the letter state the information as truthfully and as ethically as possible?
- Will the ideas expressed in the letter appear fair and logical to the reader?
- Are the ideas being expressed in a clear and concise manner?.
- Would the message appear reader-centered to the reader?
- Does the message help in developing positive business relationships?
- Does the message reflect high standards of professionalism on the part of the writer?

How can we understand the audience?

In order to understand the reader's point of view, it is essential to give a careful thought to factors such as the background, values, opinions and preferences of the reader. By knowing how the reader reacted to a particular situation in the past, the writer can estimate how he would react to a similar current situation. Factors that help in understanding the audience are:

- **Age:** Letters have to be drafted by keeping in consideration the age of the reader. A letter written to answer the query of a student differs from that written to an adult.
- **Economic level:** The style adopted by a banker while sending a reminder for repayment of a loan installment to a prompt customer is different from the style in which he writes to a regular defaulter of loan installments.
- **Educational/Occupational background:** The use of technical jargon in letters may not suit all readers. The style adopted by the writer while writing a letter differs according to the designation held by the reader.

Example: Technical terms used by doctors are not easily understood by people belonging to a non-medical background.

- **Culture:** The writing style differs according to the cultural background to which the person writing the letter belongs. The vast cultural differences that exist between people complicates

the communication process.

- **Rapport:** A letter written by one individual to another differs in its style and presentation, depending on the rapport that exists between the two individuals.

Example: A letter written to a longtime customer differs from that written to a prospective or new client.

- **Expectations:** Letters should be drafted with adequate care so that they are devoid of grammatical, factual or spelling errors. The presence of errors in the letter creates doubts in the mind of the reader about the credibility of the writer.
- **Needs of the reader:** Understanding the needs of the reader is important while drafting a letter. While writing a letter, it is essential to understand the context in which the reader would interpret the message or content of the letter.

For a letter to be effective, the person writing it should place himself/herself in the reader's position in order to understand the readers' views better. Empathy with the readers is essential to help the writer to estimate their response and reaction.

Organizing your message

People often find it difficult to express their thoughts, ideas and views in a sequential manner. The exercise of organizing a message helps to overcome this problem.

Why Organization is essential?

Usually, a letter is divided into various parts. One part consists of the central idea of the message, while the other consists of the minor ideas or the details of the message which support the central idea. The process of organizing a letter involves identifying these various parts and arranging them accordingly to form the right sequence. The process of organizing letters provides benefits both to the person writing the letter as well as to the reader.

Benefits to the writer: Before writing a letter, it is essential for a writer to organize the message because of the following reasons:

- It encourages brevity and accuracy while writing.
- It helps the writer to focus on one point at a time.
- It involves less time consumption of the writer.
- It facilitates emphasis and de-emphasis of various points in the letter.

Benefits to the reader: Well organized letters also benefit the readers in the following manner:

- In organized letters, the message is more concise and accurate than what it would have been if the points in the letter were not organized.
- Organized letters allow the reader to easily distinguish, relate and remember the ideas presented in the letter.
- A well-organized letter is more likely to elicit a positive response from the reader.

How to Organize letters?

To enhance the likelihood of obtaining a positive response, letters should be clear and should follow a logical flow of ideas. While writing a letter, it is important for the writer to ask himself the following questions:

What will be the central idea of the letter? Well written letters have a clearly stated central idea. Additionally, the writer should also try to assess the reaction of the readers, and suitably modify the sequence in which the ideas are presented. The reactions of the reader are likely to fall into one of the following categories: pleasure, displeasure, interest and 'no interest'.

After identifying the likely reaction of the reader, it needs to be decided whether to place the central idea at the beginning of the letter (deductive approach) or to place it towards the end of the letter (inductive approach).

A deductive style is more suitable when the readers are likely to be receptive, interested and neutral towards the message. An inductive style is more suitable when the audience is likely to be resistant and uninterested towards the message.

Routine claims

Letters that convey good news evoke a pleasant response from the reader. Routine letters, on the other hand, fail to evoke any emotional reaction from the reader. Both these types of letters follow a deductive sequence of ideas. A deductive approach of writing a letter has the following advantages:

- It is easy to frame the first sentence.
- The first sentence attracts more attention and hence the central idea gets the attention it deserves.
- Conveying the good news first puts the reader in a pleasant frame of mind and makes him more receptive to the details that follow in the later part.
- A well-thought out sequence reduces reading time.

Routine claims

A request made for an adjustment is known as a claim letter. In the opinion of the writer, he is entitled to receive a sum of money which may be in the form of a refund, replacement, exchange or payment for damages.

Example: Normally, electronic goods that are purchased are given a warranty for a certain period, say 1 to 2 years. In case of any problem during the warranty period, the customer can claim for free repair or replacement of the defective goods.

Claim letters may be routine or persuasive in nature. Persuasive claims require adequate evidence for substantiating the claims. Routine claims are claims that arise out of contractual agreements like warranties and guaranties. It is assumed that there is no need for persuasion in case of routine claims. The recommended outline that needs to be followed in case of routine claims is:

- Request action in the first sentence of the letter.
- Provide supporting details for requesting the action.
- Close with an expression of appreciation for the action taken.

Favorable response to a claim letter:

Businesses demonstrate integrity and build customer loyalty by responding favorably to routine claims. Favorable responses to routine claims are known as adjustments. The following sequence is recommended while giving a favorable response to a claim:

- Reveal the good news in the first sentence of the letter.
- Explain the various circumstances under which the action has been taken.

- End the letter on a pleasant note.

Routine letters about credit

Routine letters about credit may be to request information about credit or to request for credit.

Example: Associates is a reputed credit supplying company in Mumbai and it daily receives numerous requests for credit information as well as requests for credit.

Request for information: Developments in information technology has made it easy to obtain information about credit customers and for sharing of credit information among businesses.

The following outline is recommended for letters requesting credit information:

- Identify the request and name of the applicant at the beginning of the letter.
- Assure the reader of confidentiality.
- Present the detail of the information requested in a clear format. A tabulated format may be provided to allow the reader to easily reply to the request.
- End courteously, by offering to the reader any assistance required.

Request for credit: A deductive approach may be adopted while applying for credit. This approach, however, is recommended when there is an underlying assumption that credit will be willingly extended. A deductive approach for requesting credit will evoke a favorable response only when the supporting documents (financial statements, etc.) serve as sufficient evidence for assessing the credit worthiness of the applicant.

Favorable response to a request for credit:

- Begin the letter by stating that credit has been arranged/extended, as the case may be.
- Indicate the basis upon which credit has been extended.
- Inform and explain various credit terms.
- Include some resale or sales promotion material.
- End the letter on a confident note looking forward to future business.

The basis for extending credit is explained to prevent recovery and collection problems later. The letter acknowledges the prompt payment habit of the applicant thereby making it binding for the applicant to continue with the same habit in the future as well. Further, the letter conveys the terms of credit to convey their importance and prevent collection problems later. Further, this also serves to inform to the applicant about the exact discount terms that can be availed by him and to prevent him from seeking unauthorized discounts.

Routine letters about orders

Order letters are written to arrange for the fulfillment of a need by placing orders for goods. The recommended outline for these letters is as follows:

- Begin the letter by saying "please ship", "please send", "I order" and so on. It is recommended that statements like "I'm interested", "I'd like to", and so on be avoided.
- List the items ordered along with their details such as catalog number, size, color, etc.
- Specify the payment plan and shipping instructions.

- End the letter on a confident note expecting an early delivery of the goods.

A standardized format, known as the purchase order form, is generally used for placing orders. This contains all necessary details about the order.

Example: Manufacturing companies generally procure parts from other manufacturers and then assemble their products. In such cases, order letters may be sent to place orders with the suppliers.

Favorable response to an order letter

A favorable response to an order letter may be expressed by a prompt delivery of goods or services. For doing this, no letter is required. However, if immediate shipment of goods is not possible, then it is desirable to inform the same to the customer by means of a letter. In case of a routine acknowledgment, a sales order is sent accompanied by a note conveying the tentative date of delivery. For non-routine acknowledgments, individual letters are recommended. This not only creates customer goodwill but also helps generate additional orders.

Letters about routine requests

Business letters that make routine requests ask for information regarding people, price, products and services. The quality of writing helps the reader form an opinion about the writer. The following outline is recommended for such letters:

- The request should be communicated in the first sentence of the letter.
- The request must be clarified by giving necessary details.
- Close on a forward looking note.

Example: Before making a bulk purchase of products, a wholesaler would like to ascertain details about the product like its price, number of days required for delivering the product and so on. In such cases, it is adequate to send letters of routine request to the manufacturer.

Favorable response to a routine request: Many times, affirmative replies are given to routine requests without giving it a second thought. Very often, these responses reflect the disinterested approach of the reader. For business messages to be effective, they need to be reader-oriented.

Summary

Effective business correspondence involves effective letter writing. Before writing, the writer should have an understanding of the audience and thereby carefully select and organize the different parts of the message. By having a reader-oriented attitude, the writer can adopt either an inductive or a deductive approach while writing.

Routine letters are those that are unlikely to generate any emotional reaction from the reader. There are four types of routine letters and pertain to routine claims, requests related to credit, order letters, and routine requests. A deductive approach is appropriate for all these letters.