

*Sum. Seminar
IX B*



MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

THESIS

"AN INVESTIGATION OF THE FUNCTIONS
OF THE BUSINESS LETTER"

by: -

Signature redacted

COURSE IX-B

May 26, 1924



Cambridge, Massachusetts
May 26, 1924.

Professor A. L. Merrill
Secretary of Faculty,
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

Dear Sir:-

In accordance with the requirements for graduation, we herewith submit a thesis entitled "An Investigation of the Functions of the Business Letter".

We wish to express our thanks to Mr. C. F. Lyman for his help and co-operation in furnishing us with books and other data used in the compilation of this thesis.

Yours respectfully,

Signature redacted

Course IX-B.

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I. INTRODUCTION

As an introduction to this investigation of the functions of the modern business letter, it is advisable to give an outline of the history and development of this branch of present day business.

A. LETTERS OF YESTERDAY AND TODAY

1. Letters of Yesterday It is only comparatively recently that any great attention has been paid to the proper tone and form of the business letter. Until a few years ago, the letter was looked upon merely as a means of communication, a method of conveying information, "a necessary evil." There was no thought given to the sales-value of a letter, its important influence in building good-will by means of personal appeal, no thought given to its general tone, and general form. The business letter of yesterday was filled with trite, meaningless, "stock phrases" such as "Yours of 15th inst. to hand and in reply would state," or "Am in receipt of your valued letter of the 12th," or "Yours of recent date received and contents carefully noted," a slight advance perhaps from "I take my pen in hand." Nearly all letters began with some stereo-

typed, hackneyed expression and ended generally in a stiff and formal manner using often such expressions as, "Thanking you in advance, we beg to remain," or "Hoping to hear from you at an early date," etc. Such letters had the awkward brevity of telegrams, the impersonal atmosphere of a form letter, and almost invariably created in the reader a feeling of lack of interest on the part of the writer. There was no attempt made to "visualize" the reader or to appeal to him as an individual, nor was any particular effort made to use tact or courtesy.

2. Letters of Today

The business letter of today is filled with living, meaningful, appropriate terminology, and the following pages will be devoted to an exposition of the spirit of modern business relations epitomized by the splendid business friendliness of the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs. This transition, or change from the old to the present idea of business intercommunication has been brought about by reform, by a decided and definite change in methods, vehicles of expression, and points of contact -- truly a literary renaissance applied to business usage.

B. CAUSES OF REFORM

1. Increase in the numbers and importance of business letters

The enormous increase in the number of routine let-

ters has made it necessary for every business man to become familiar with the proper methods of writing business letters. The growth of commerce and the improvement of postal systems and of communication by railroad, air, telephone and telegraph, have made it possible for business firms widely separated from each other to do business successfully. Letters make much of this possible.

2. Value as records

Even where the distance is not great,

and the telephone might serve, the letter has preference because it provides a record of the transaction. The carbon copy is filed by the sender and the original by the receiver. This provides an easy and safe way of insuring that each detail of the transaction is available for immediate reference by either party.

3. Improvement in sales letters.

Another cause for the reform in business

correspondence is the increase, improvement and importance of strictly "sales" letters. For the cost

of a single visit by a salesman, several hundred letters may be sent out, and each may be nearly as effective as a personal visit. Every merchant has seen the power of a message that can be sent cheaply and surely, straight to the hand of the prospective customer; and as a result sellers of every type have employed the postage stamp as their salesman. No pains are now spared to make these letters conform to the highest standards of attractiveness and effective writing, so that they may perform their work better. The improved sales letter has also had an influence on the routine letter. At the present time every routine letter is regarded as a sales letter to some extent, is regarded as the personal representative of the sender, and is written with the purpose of creating a feeling of interest and good-will on the part of the reader. This idea was primarily the outgrowth of competition and of the demand that each unit of the business mechanism possess the greatest effectiveness. It was an expression of the fact that Americans live in their business and strive to make it as pleasant as possible.

4. Need for system and classification

Owing to the large increase in the number of letters and in the number of different kinds of letters necessitated by the

intricacies of modern business, a crying need for systematization and classification in business correspondence has arisen. Such types of letters include letters of acknowledgment, collection letters, sales letters, credit letters and letters of adjustment or explanation. Each of these types must be classified and assigned to separate departments for handling.

II. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

A. THE COURTESIES OF BUSINESS

1. Reply promptly

A business man who writes a letter is expecting an immediate reply, and any delay holds him back from the next move he is planning to make. Since he does not want to be held up in his own plans, he is careful not to hinder others by failing to answer their letters promptly. This is living up to the "Golden Rule" in business, and is a mark of courtesy as well. Even when not in a position to answer a letter immediately, it is business courtesy as well as good business to write a note of acknowledgment so that the other man will know what to expect.

2. Give information that will enable the other man to locate his files

Most business men nowadays are too busy to carry all the details of their business in-their heads. Instead, when they receive a letter they get out the files containing the previous correspondence of the person from whom the letter is sent. They do not wish to waste time in trying to recall what the previous correspondence has been about. Business courtesy demands, therefore, that the writer should help the person whom he is addressing to locate the back correspondence quickly and easily. To do this, the date of the letter be-

ing answered, its file number, if any, and the subject under discussion should be given. In mentioning the subject under discussion, care should be taken not to give unnecessary details.

3. Answer all letters and with the endeavor to oblige All letters received should have courteous acknowledgment and reply, whether they be direct business communications or requests for information which have no direct bearing on the business. If the information requested can be given, or if the inquirer can be referred to some other source of information, this should be done. Courtesy pays dividends, first, in good-will, and ultimately in money.

B. A FORCEFUL BEGINNING

1. Never waste the first sentence in merely "acknowledging receipt" The first sentence is the most important part of a business letter, because it usually makes the strongest impression on the reader. For this reason the first sentence should make a definite, important statement having a direct bearing on the purpose of the letter.

2. What the first sentence should do The first sentence may do one of the following three things;

it may begin the reply at once, it may express thanks or appreciation, or it may express regret. The quicker the reader learns what the writer has to say the better; no introduction is necessary. If there is really something to thank a man for, such as an order or a check, it is a good thing to begin with thanks. However, the old insincere custom of expressing thanks for every letter received is now felt to be unnecessary. Although it is usually inadvisable to start a letter with an expression of regret, if the occasion demands such an expression, it should precede the message of the letter, and should be given the prominence of the first sentence. The date, file number and subject of the other man's letter should also be included in the first sentence of reply. Some examples of effective, forceful openings, embodying these principles follow:

- a. We appreciate very much the information you have so kindly furnished us in your letter of the 21st.
- b. We find the electros referred to in yours of the 10th just what we have been looking for.
- c. The two cars of Blue Valley which you refer to in your inquiry of the 11th have been on the way to you for the past six days, and they

should certainly have arrived by the time you get this letter.

- d. When Mr. Jenkins came in yesterday, he explained fully the situation concerning which you wrote us on the 3rd.
- e. In spite of all we could do, it was impossible to get sufficient help for our enormous holiday rush, and that is why your order of the 20th, about which you have just written us, was not given our customary immediate service.

C. A FORCEFUL ENDING

1. End with a direct statement

The old form of ending,
 "Hoping to hear from you,
 we are," "Awaiting your

further favors, I am," "Thanking you in advance," etc. is a remnant of old time methods, and is rapidly becoming obsolete. The correspondent who desires to be forceful and to secure maximum efficiency in his letters should never use this method of ending. The end of the letter is next to the beginning in prominence, and should, therefore, be used to obtain emphasis. The last sentence should be a direct statement. This method may seem at first rather abrupt. However, a little practice with this kind of ending will soon make it seem natural, and will also reveal its force. Examples of forceful endings follow:

- a. If this information is not just what you need, please be sure to write us again
- b. Let us know how we may be of service.
- c. We will be able to advise you in a few days just what can be done and hope this necessary delay will in no way inconvenience you.
- d. The enclosed stamped envelope is for your convenience.

D. "RUBBER-STAMP" EXPRESSIONS

Avoid the use of hackneyed and stereotyped phrases at all times. Such relics of out-of-date phraseology are no longer tolerated in correct modern business letter writing. These trite expressions and time-worn words have become meaningless through constant use. They make it impossible for a writer to put his own personality into a letter, and tend to make all letters sound alike and as though written by some machine. The use of such "rubber-stamp" expressions immediately labels the writer as old-fashioned and unprogressive. For these reasons all expressions that belong to this class should be carefully avoided by the man who wants to get maximum effectiveness from his letters.

"Rubber-Stamp" expressions resulting in mechanical, impersonal, characterless effect:

Dear Sir:

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your favor of the 25th ult. in reference to one No.9084S dark gold sweater, size 48.

In reply would say same would have to be made special, as largest size we manufacture is 46.

Regretting our inability to fill your order at once, and waiting your further advice, we are

Yours truly,

The same letter in natural, conversational style:

Dear Sir:

We are glad to have your order of October 25 for a No. 9084S dark gold sweater, size 48.

It is too bad, however, that we cannot ship you this sweater at once, but the largest size we regularly manufacture is 46 and consequently a 48 would have to be especially made.

Since to put this order through the factory would take a week or ten days we are first asking your permission before going ahead. If your customer can wait this short time, please wire us at once and we will do the best we can to get the sweater out promptly.

Very truly yours,

E. "TELEGRAPHIC" STYLE

With the almost universal use of the typewriter, the cause for abbreviating words, and even sentences as much as possible, is past. A "telegraphic" style intimates a lack of interest on the part of the writer and suggests that he is not willing to devote to a customer sufficient time to write sentences out in full. This, in addition to being poor salesmanship and poor English form, also shows a lack of courtesy. One should be careful, therefore, to avoid the omission of words or expressions which are essential to a complete sentence.

F. SHORT PARAGRAPHS

1. Use short paragraphs to secure quick comprehension A long paragraph is likely to contain long involved sentences, and to be hard to understand. Business letters are read hastily, often merely glanced at. For this reason each paragraph should be short, and should embody one, and only one, thought, stated in concise terms. By breaking the message into small units and giving each a separate short paragraph, the reader can readily grasp the meaning at a glance. The paragraphs must, however, be logically divided.

The attractive look of short paragraphs is well illustrated by this letter, but the paragraphs are too short; they produce a jerky effect. The paragraph division is also in many cases illogical:

Mr. D. L. Service, President
Sanford Construction Company
810 Michigan Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Sir:

Suppose you had an important piece of work to be done.

And needed ten good workmen -- all at the same time, the same place.

What would you do if some of them promised to come, and didn't; and if others couldn't arrive till the work was over?

So that you had to put the job through with makeshift help? How would you feel?

Now just consider a parallel case

You are starting a new business undertaking, or a new plan in your organization. You require certain facts.

Can you get them when you need them -- at the right time and place?

Or will some of them be late? Will others not come at all -- until they're too late to help?

The Business Data Service is your safeguard against such a situation. It brings you the facts you need, at the time when you need them.

If you are convinced of this, you can't afford to wait any longer for the service. Order it today, simply by signing and mailing the enclosed card.

Very truly yours,

Bollinger-Rice

2. Use short paragraph to
make the letter easy to
read

Long paragraphs look hard to understand, simply because we know by experience that to get the thought from them will be something of a task. A letter in which they are used will consequently give the reader at the first glance an unfavorable impression. On the contrary, a letter composed of short paragraphs looks easy to read from the start and is much more readily attacked by the average reader. Short paragraphs, therefore, add greatly to attractive appearance. Although short paragraphs are best, care should be taken to vary them somewhat in length in order to avoid monotony. This is not of prime importance in routine letters, but it should be given attention in sales letters where every item which would tend to make such letters more forceful and effective is considered.

III. SELLING APPEAL

A. VISUALIZE THE READER

Every letter should be a sales letter. Whether it be a credit letter, a collection letter, or some other form of routine letter, or whether it be a pure sales letter, some element of salesmanship may be introduced by calling attention in it to the desire and ability to render service. No matter what its chief message may be, no matter on what subject it is written, some effort should be made to increase the firm's good-will by calling the reader's attention to some feature of service.

Although a letter can never equal the personal interview in effectiveness, it can be made to approach it by visualizing, as one dictates the letter, the person who is going to read it. There are various ways of doing this. If you have met the reader, imagine you are speaking to him as you write, and adapt the tone of the letter to the personality of the man to whom it is written. If you have not met him, make some sort of a mental image of him. Make this mental picture as accurate as possible. Some idea of his age can be gotten from his rank or position, while his methods of business and personal characteristics can be guessed to some extent by the tone of his letters, his line of business and its size and location. This personal relationship has been so emphasized that many firms now keep

files of personal information about each customer, which enable them to write letters which are intimate in tone and material, even though they are not acquainted with the person addressed.

B. ADAPT THE LANGUAGE TO THE READER

When you are talking to a man, you unconsciously attempt to adapt your conversation to him. In order to "put your idea across," you observe the man on the other side of the desk closely, try to adjust yourself to his point of view, and make every effort to couch your proposition in terms which he will be able to understand easily and quickly. So it should be in writing a letter. Although the element of personal contact is lacking, it is possible to make up for this to a large extent by adopting the same tone, and using the same language in the letter that you would use if you were actually talking to the man to whom the letter is addressed. A business man should write just as he would talk, directly frankly, and, above all, in a friendly and cordial manner. The following cautions will help the writer to attain this aim:

1. Do not be "superior." There is a great temptation, when writing to a smaller company, or to persons in inferior positions, to assume an attitude of superiority. This should be

avoided at all times. The writer should remember constantly to keep the reader's point of view in mind, and to address him as an equal and a friend.

2. Do not be subservient On the other hand, do not give the impression of servility by your letters. Adopt a man-to-man tone, and show the man you are writing to that you consider yourself just as good as he is, and expect to be treated as such.

3. Do not use "book talk" except in special cases. In writing a letter, there is frequently a tendency to change from the ordinary, conversational manner of speech to the language of books. You give more thought to a letter than you ordinarily do to speaking, and as a result, your letter is apt to become unnatural and to lose a great deal of that intimate touch which is so essential. Such "elevated diction," as it is called, should only be used in special cases, such as formal announcements, or in letters of financial institutions desiring to emphasize their dignity, conservatism, and solidity. It has very little place in ordinary business usage.

4. Try to get the most appropriate "tone" The tone of your letter is very important

and the writer of business communications should endeavor at all times to adapt his letter to the particular person to whom he is writing, and to the particular occasion. He should familiarize himself with the classes of people to whom he is writing, their peculiarities and idiosyncracies, in order that he may know the proper tone to use when writing them. For instance, he should know that when writing to a progressive, up-to-date business man, he should use the conversational tone, which is simply conversation put in writing. As a general rule, this is the safest and very best tone to adopt. When writing to small retailers, the colloquial tone may be used; the letter can be more familiar and personal. This should not be carried to an extreme, however, as it must be remembered that the small retailer is often quite as shrewd in his way as the big business man in his, and requires just as forceful a presentation of fact and just as clear a proof that real service is being rendered. Professional men require a different treatment from either of the two classes above mentioned. As this class is composed chiefly of men of considerable general, as well as, special education, the language of the letter may be more dignified and the thought more complex. But clearness and conciseness should not be sacrificed in an attempt to secure the formal or dignified tone. In

writing to farmers, especial care should be taken in adapting the tone to the class. Many farmers nowadays are as well educated as members of any other class, and are quick to notice and resent the condescending attitude which business men have been inclined to adopt toward them. With this class, the letter may be longer than is usual for a business missive, for a farmer is more apt to have the time and the willingness to read long letters than a man in a busy office. The writer must be careful to deal only with those things which farmers know about and are interested in, and must deal with them in a simple and direct manner, but without giving the impression of "talking down" to the reader. Letters to women also require particular attention. In this case the language should be a little more formal, since women are accustomed to a rather elevated and even literary tone in their social correspondence. The letter should be tasteful and attractive in appearance. There should be no suggestion of intimacy, for women expect deference from strangers at all times.

C. USE THE POWER OF FAVORABLE SUGGESTION

The art and science of salesmanship is largely based upon the psychology of suggestion. The following paragraphs present a few of the outstanding ways in which the power of suggestion is used in modern business letter-writing.

1. Talk only about the things you want the reader to think about Salesmanship is primarily the art of controlling another man's thoughts and feelings. In letter-writing, this can best be accomplished by avoiding, as much as possible, the use of words or ideas which will produce an unfavorable reaction on the part of the reader. Great care should be taken to suggest only favorable thoughts, and to refrain from making any statements which will have a tendency to start a contrary train of ideas.
2. Be optimistic and cheerful There is no better way of producing an unfavorable reaction on the part of the reader than a letter showing an attitude of grouchiness and irritability on the part of the sender. On the other hand, a letter radiating an atmosphere of optimism and cheerfulness is almost sure to produce a similar response on the part of the reader.
3. Show good-will, fairness and reasonableness Every business letter should emphasize the firm's willingness and desire to do what is right, and its feeling of goodwill toward the reader. An expression of friendliness and an indication that a reciprocal feeling is expected will go far to insure close co-operation.

4. Never make implications of carelessness, ignorance or dishonesty

It is surprisingly easy, by an unfortunate choice of a word or phrase, to make a man think that a reflection is being cast upon his honesty or business integrity, even though the writer had no such intention. Since one of the cardinal principles of modern business is that "the customer is always right," it is highly important that any statement which could possibly be construed as casting an aspersion on a man's character should be carefully avoided.

D. OBSERVE THE PRINCIPLES OF MODERN BUSINESS ETHICS

The business man of today endeavors to deserve the same respect that is accorded to doctors, lawyers, and other professional men, by adhering closely to a code of business ethics, and by subordinating the element of personal gain to the element of service. He tries to deserve his profit, and to make this profit a just and adequate reward for service rendered.

1. Don't misrepresent

He does not attempt to misrepresent his product, or to play upon his customer's ignorance by making false assertions. To the best of his ability, the modern salesman strives to adhere strictly to the truth in putting forth the merits and advantages of his product.

2. Don't "oversell" One of the slogans of modern business is, "No article is sold until it is in the hands of a satisfied user." The old-time methods of getting orders by tricks are passing out. Today business men are showing an increasing willingness to accept returned goods, on the principle that they will not force a man to keep goods that are not satisfactory. Some concerns will not even sell goods to a man if, in their opinion, he does not need those goods. Such a practice inevitably makes for mutual good-will and friendship in business.

3. Don't "knock" competitors A good salesman will never knock a competitor or his product. He will admit at all times the good qualities of his competitor's goods, and will win business by showing the superior value of his own product, rather than by disparaging his competitor's. To hear a man knock a competitor almost invariably arouses a feeling of antagonism, for most men feel that it is unfair to say anything against a man when he is not present to defend himself.

E. USE THE PRINCIPLES OF MAXIMUM FORCE

Although a salesman should not misrepresent his goods, he is perfectly justified in pushing his line

2. Conciseness

Conciseness saves the reader's time, and in addition, makes the letter clearer and more forceful. To secure conciseness, every unnecessary word or phrase should be omitted. However, this should not be carried to such an extreme that the letter becomes "telegraphic" in style, obscuring the meaning, nor should words which are essential to grammatical completeness be left out. Care should be taken not to carry conciseness to the point of making the letter inadequate. Clearness and force will sometimes demand that a certain idea or statement be repeated at some length for emphasis. Where this situation arises, it is not inconsistent with conciseness to discuss the matter at length.

3. Courtesy

The primary purpose of courtesy is to secure goodwill and co-operation. The element of courtesy should pervade every letter sent out, for it is one of the most important, if not the most important, factors in the promotion of friendly relations in present day business. It is very easy to fail in courtesy, because the writer of a letter does not have the other man before him. This disadvantage may be offset to a large extent by visualizing the reader and by keeping an image of him

continually in mind. A person who is habitually courteous is apt to write consistently courteous letters.

4. Correctness

Correct and effective English is taken up in detail in another section of this thesis. Consequently, we will touch here only upon its relation to salesmanship. A business letter should produce the impression of capability. Any error in form, grammar, or spelling detracts from this impression and in addition is likely to cause unfavorable comment, and to distract the reader's attention from the message. Therefore, every letter should be carefully checked before being sent out in order to be sure that no errors have crept in.

5. Character

Character in a letter consists of putting one's personality into the letter. This may be done by giving a direct and intimate tone to the letter, by putting the personal touch of your own life and experience into your letters, and by showing sincerity and enthusiasm. Your letters should be living, breathing things, reflecting your own personality and your own character. A dull, lifeless, impersonal letter will inevitably make the reader think you are not interested in him, while a genuinely sincere, and intimate letter, expressing your own individuality, is almost sure to get a quick response from him.

IV. FUNCTIONAL LETTERS

A. THE SALES LETTER

1. Basic principles

There are certain basic principles upon which every successful sales letter must be built. The sales letter is designed to take the place of a personal interview, and must follow a definite line of procedure, just as a salesman follows a certain outline in making his selling talk. It must gain the attention and arouse the interest of the prospective customer, leading him gradually through certain definite stages up to the actual signing of the order, exactly as the salesman does when talking face to face with the customer.

2. Selection and arrangement of ideas

Therefore, the material which goes into a sales letter must be carefully chosen and arranged. The letter must be direct and to the point, without superfluous words or sentences. The sole aim of a sales letter is to get action, and unessential details detract from its sales value and greatly lessen its chances of success. The letter should be as carefully planned as a salesman's talk. Only those things which are vital should be included, and every effort should be made to drive these vital points home.

3. The elements of a sales letter

The good sales letter contains the following elements, which are based upon

the logical principles of salesmanship:

- a. The opening, which wins the reader's attention and interest, and prompts him to go farther into the letter.
- b. Description and explanation, which increase his interest by picturing the proposition in his mind.
- c. Proof, which convinces the reader of the quality of the article you have to sell, and shows him how others have profited by its use.
- d. Persuasion, which draws the reader to your way of thinking by showing him how the article may be adapted to his needs.
- e. Inducement, which gives him a particular reason for buying now.
- f. The climax, or clincher, which urges him to act at once.

These elements are all based on salesmen's talks, and should be embodied in every sales letter. First, you must get the reader's attention by an introductory sentence or paragraph which arouses his curiosity, or which makes some statement that directly concerns him, his problems, or his desires. Then give him specific description of what you have to offer. Make this des-

cription so vivid that he will have a clear and definite mental picture of the article you have to sell, its use, and its advantages. Follow this by giving him conclusive proof that your statements are true. Tell him of other people who have found your product eminently satisfactory, or give him some novel demonstration of the quality of your goods. Having proved that your statements are true, show him how the article is particularly adapted to his own personal needs, and try to persuade him to buy the article by indicating the benefits to be derived from its use. Make him some special offer, such as a discount, or quick delivery, or some other special inducement. Finally, make it easy for him to order by enclosing a return postal card or a coupon, something which will bring clearly before him the desirability of acting at once. Try to make your climax so direct, so strong that the reader cannot resist the temptation to reply.

When in doubt as to what to say in a sales letter, use more facts. Facts are always safe, and are quite apt to prove to be the best kind of inducements to offer. Adopt the "you" attitude, not the "we", and avoid negative suggestions. In choosing which facts to emphasize, always bear in mind that the customer's point of view, his interests, and his needs are more important than your own. Study your goods, and your

customers, and stick to facts, and you can soon learn to write sales letters which will produce the desired results.

B. ORDER LETTERS

The important thing in an order letter is to make it clear and complete, so that there may be no possibility of misunderstanding. Accordingly, the utmost pains should be taken to include all information necessary. The writer of an order letter too often thinks that, because he is conferring a benefit, he is under no obligation to make his letter clear and specific. This is a great mistake, and is frequently the cause of considerable losses.

1. What an order should contain

A complete order should contain the following items: (a) a complete statement of the goods ordered; (b) reference to catalog; (c) method of shipment; (d) destination; (e) shipping date; (f) number of order, if any.

(a) The goods ordered should be presented separately from the rest of the letter, each item on a line by itself, with a statement of quantity, catalog number, size, color or other specifications, the price of each item singly, and the total price of the number ordered of that article, when such prices are known or can be

ascertained. The series of items should be arranged in a column, with the initial letter of each article capitalized, and the total price of the order added. This enables all the figures of the transaction to be checked by both parties.

(b) If the goods are selected from a catalog or price list, the date and number of the catalog should be mentioned, since different issues make many changes.

(c) The method of shipment should be specified, whether by freight, express, or post; also the route, if this is important. If these things are specified, and the shipper disobeys these instructions, he is responsible for any loss, but if the writer does not specify, the shipper may choose his own route and method of shipment without incurring any liability.

(d) The destination should be given, if different from the writer's address; otherwise, it is not necessary.

(e) If the goods are to be held for later delivery, date on which shipment is desired should be given. If they are needed by a definite date, this fact should be stated, since otherwise the shipper will not be liable for loss caused by delay. If goods are needed in special haste, specify the reasons in order to impress the importance of prompt shipment upon the shipper.

(f) If the firm sending the order gives it a number, this number should be stated in the letter. The firm receiving the order may also give it a number, in which case both numbers should be mentioned.

Order blanks are often prepared to save the labor of writing a letter, and providing suitable spaces for all necessary information. Such an order blank usually provides also a space for special remarks, thereby obviating the necessity for writing any letter at all. In preparing an order blank for printing, it is a good idea to label the spaces, indicating what information each should contain, so that any incompleteness can be easily detected.

C. LETTERS OF ACKNOWLEDGMENT

In general, it is considered a mark of courtesy to acknowledge, and acknowledge at once, all letters received, in order that the sender may check his order file and be sure that the order was received. This completes the contract, letting the customer know that his order has been accepted, assures him that no mistake has been made in the order, and announces the shipping date. Where goods are mailed or expressed at once, and may be expected to arrive as soon as a letter, the acknowledgment is not actually needed, but it should be used nevertheless as a sales letter.

1. What an acknowledgment should contain

An acknowledgment should contain the following items: (a) thanks for the order; (b) reference to order number and date; (c) proposed time of shipment; (d) a courteous ending, expressing confidence of giving satisfaction, and the desire to serve.

For ordinary routine orders, printed post cards may be used for acknowledgments. But such cards should not be used if the order is of a private nature, or if it is a large or important one, or if it is to a new customer. In the case of a new customer, the acknowledgment furnishes an excellent opportunity to "sell" the service of the firm to him and to welcome him and his account.

If an order cannot be filled as desired, and if you cannot supply any adequate substitute, thank the customer heartily for the order, express regret that you cannot fill it, and suggest where the desired goods can be secured, if he is not likely to know. In closing the letter, emphasize your own service and goods, reiterate your regret at being unable to fill the order, and express the hope that you may be remembered the next time he is in the market. If you send a substitute, make it clear that you are doing so as a service

to him, and that he is at liberty to return the goods at any time if they do not prove to be perfectly satisfactory.

D. CREDIT LETTERS

The handling of the credit side of any business requires an intimate knowledge of the conditions and policies of the firm, skill in estimating the trend of business conditions, a keen insight into human nature, and a great deal of tact in handling delicate situations. Hence the writing of credit and collection letters requires more careful handling than almost any other kind of business letter. The "credit man" must know as accurately as possible the financial standing of every customer, in order to decide how large a line of credit the firm may extend, and what terms can be offered. He must investigate each customer by every means known to him, and must find out all he can about him, his personal ability and character, and his credit rating. The credit man can usually find the net worth of his customer stated in the reports of the commercial agencies, Dun's or Bradstreet's, or from the general credit-rating books regularly issued by various trade or local credit associations. From banks, or from reputable business men in the customer's locality, he can obtain information concerning the customer's reputation for character,

honesty, and ability, and he can often get valuable data from his own traveling salesmen. Many firms prefer, however, to write directly to the customer himself for references or for information regarding his financial standing.

1. Letters asking for references and other credit information Such a letter should first of all express thanks for the order, if there was one, and the firm's gratification at the opening of business relations. The tone of the letter should be one of cordiality and friendliness. It should be so worded as to convey the impression that the inquiry is largely a matter of form, calling attention to the fact that the exchange of such data as a basis of credit arrangements is an almost universal custom. The writer should be careful not to apologize for asking for this information, as to do so is bound to make an awkward suggestion.

2. Granting credit In granting credit, it is customary to use a slightly formal tone, in order to emphasize the importance of the transaction. The letter should state clearly the amount of credit to be allowed, and the expected terms of payment. It is well to dwell upon terms at some length, so that the customer will

understand definitely what will be expected of him. Every opportunity for "credit education" should be utilized. Explicitly or incidentally, the credit manager should emphasize the importance of credit arrangements, and the need of regularity in taking care of credit obligations. He should point out the fact that the financing of every business venture and the whole scheme of production and distribution depends upon meeting bills with clocklike regularity. If he does this, collections will present a very small problem. He should show the importance of careful buying and the folly and needlessness of overstocking. He should urge the consistent discounting of bills, and should make every effort to show that the interests of buyer and seller in the matter of maintaining sound credits are identical, and should try to make the distributor understand that, by financial reliability and promptness, he enables the maker to produce goods at a low price and this low price in turn enables the distributor to get more business and a greater profit. Finally, he should emphasize the desire on the part of the house to give any help it can to the customer. It is well to indicate some of the ways in which a firm can be of service to its customers, such as showing what is

a right proportion between assets and liabilities, showing what amount of buying will fit this proportion, giving advice about market conditions, and giving help in financial difficulties. If the credit man will incorporate these points in his letters in such a way as to bring them home, he will find that the burden of his job is lightened considerably.

3. Refusing or limiting credit

"To refuse credit and still make a friend" is one of the most diffi-

cult things in business. Hence letters of this kind require extreme care and skill in their composition. The refusal of credit is always likely to be taken as a reflection upon the applicant's character, and the writer of such a letter must reckon with the reaction of disappointment and anger which may occur. A frank and cordial tone is the best possible means of keeping the reader from taking offense. It is never good policy to refuse credit flatly or abruptly. Instead, be courteous and tactful. Begin by mentioning the good things you have heard about the applicant for credit. It is generally upon one point that the credit man is forced to refuse, and he, therefore, can mention all the favorable conditions first. Show that you are favorably disposed toward the applicant, and

would grant the request if you could. Then give a frank analysis of the situation, explaining clearly why it is necessary to refuse. This part of the letter is most important, for if the customer can be made to understand the situation, the house will keep his friendship; if he cannot, the house will lose it. After having made your explanation, state definitely but diplomatically the action you are forced to take. Bring out the fact that even though you cannot extend credit, you still desire to be of service. Try to get the customer's business on a cash basis if possible. Ask permission to send all or part of the goods for cash. Remember that a man who is a credit liability now may be an acceptable credit customer later on, and in asking for business for cash, it is well to mention that you will be glad to extend credit a little later on, when the applicant's financial condition is more secure, thereby making a bid for his future business.

E. COLLECTION LETTERS

The close relation between credits and collections cannot be overemphasized. In many ways they are two phases of the same thing, and the same man or the same office should handle both. At least half the task of

collections will be accomplished if credit has been intelligently granted, and the house is in close touch with the financial situation of each customer. However, collections can be effectively handled even though credits have not been ideally managed.

1. Principles in collections The secret of effective collections lies in two principles: (1) promptness and regularity, and (2) flexibility in the plan adopted. In order that these two principles may be successfully applied, there must be some system of collections adopted which will provide some way of coping with any unusual situations which may arise. The effect of promptness on the mind of the customer is to keep the debt fresh in his mind, so that he is not so liable to let other things interfere with his meeting his obligation at the proper time. If a considerable time elapses after his purchase before he is reminded of the bill, he does not attach as much importance to prompt payment as he would if he were reminded of his obligation at certain regular dates after the purchase of the goods. Regularity in a collection system demands that some form of collection effort should be made on each of the dates provided for in the system. Its effect on the customer's mind is to bring to the creditor's assistance the force of habit. Precisely so

many days after the purchase or the receipt of goods he has become accustomed to drawing a check; the action becomes automatic, not requiring any special mental effort. If, because he cannot make payment promptly, he must lay aside the habitual action, at any rate he will feel its absence, and as a result he will be more likely to write for a reasonable extension of time rather than to let the account go without attention. Flexibility enables the plan adopted to be changed to meet the logical demands of different cases. The following paragraphs will be chiefly taken up with a discussion of this second principle, since it relates more closely to the actual writing of the letters than the others.

In addition to these specific effects, promptness and regularity in collections make the debtor feel respect for a house which pays business-like attention to its financial dealings, and also help to keep him in a healthy financial condition by making him pay his bills as they fall due. There is very little danger of losing the customer's good-will by using systematic methods of collection, for experience has shown that no customer objects to being reminded of his obligations, if the reminder is prompt, regular, and courteous. Therefore, it is wise to keep the

"credit conscience" of your customers tender by frequent reminders at regular intervals.

2. Giving reasons

It is a good idea in writing a collection letter to cite the reasons why prompt payment is desirable and essential. Explain that long extensions cause your money to lie idle, necessitating the payment of interest on it, and hence making it necessary to charge higher prices. Show that the money is due you for value rendered; that it is an obligation which the customer has willingly assumed; and that its payment is necessary if the customer is to obtain further credit. These reasons can be presented in detail, and provide the collector with material for his letters which is logical and intelligent, and which need not give offense. Be careful, however, to give real reasons, and not merely offer excuses. Such a practice weakens your position, and has a bad effect on the customer; for any implication on your part that you are in need of money will immediately lessen his respect for your standing, and will make him feel, subconsciously at any rate, that he can be slipshod in his financial dealings with you.

3. The proper assumptions

The first natural assumption to make when payment is not

received on the date due, is that the account has slipped the attention of the customer. Accordingly he should be sent courteous reminders, which ask him at the same time to make sure that the account has been properly stated. If these reminders secure no response, the supposition is that he is in financial difficulties, and the next letter should offer any help possible, and at the same time ask tactfully and courteously for an explanation. If he is still delinquent, more drastic measures should be taken. Do not use harsh methods, however, until all others have failed. Maintain friendly relations as long as possible, and when it finally becomes necessary to break off friendly relations, express regret at the necessity of doing so. Never adopt a threatening tone except as a last resort. Every letter should confidently assume that a favorable reply will be made at once. So long as friendly relations continue, the implication is that the delinquent will pay; after friendly relations have been broken off, the implication is that he must pay.

Within the limits laid down by these assumptions, there is room for the widest variety of letters. But no collection system should violate them by reversing their order. Having once resorted to harsh methods, it

is too late to use more courteous ones, or to offer friendly advice or assistance. Such an illogical "change of tone" is a common fault, and is extremely detrimental to that feeling of friendliness and mutual good-will which should be carefully nurtured in all business relations.

4. Special cautions

The language in which a collection letter is couched is of prime importance. Be careful to avoid the least suggestion that the other man is careless, discourteous, or evading payment, for most people are extremely sensitive about unpaid bills, and are, therefore, prone to take offense at the slightest word which might be construed as a reflection upon their character. Do not use sharp language until it becomes absolutely necessary, and even then great care should be taken in its use, for it is very easy to produce a sharp effect without meaning to. One or two sharp phrases can easily creep into a letter intended to be entirely courteous unless they are carefully guarded against. Insulting language should never be used, because it arouses justifiable anger, and destroys the emotion of pride to which every appeal should in part be addressed. The use of satire, or the appearance of satire, too, is likely to produce the same reaction, and should also be avoided.

The following outline, taken from "Modern Business Writing" by Mr. C. H. Raymond, shows in brief form the proper methods of handling collection letters and "follow-up" letters in collections, and is added as a summary of the section on collection letters:

- (1) The collection correspondent should:
 - (a) Adhere strictly to the policy of prompt collection of all money owed the firm.
 - (b) And at the same time, make every effort to retain the good-will of the customer.
- (2) Before legal, or other drastic, action is taken, the following four letters ordinarily are sent out in the collection series:
 - (a) First letter: courteously reminding the customer that the bill is overdue.
 - (b) Second letter: opening the way to the customer for his explanation of non-payment.
 - (c) Third letter: appealing to the customer's sense of fair play, to his pride, or to his fear of losing in business or social standing.
 - (d) Fourth letter: increasing the urgency of the appeal made in the third letter, and then notifying the customer that, unless the account is settled by a definite date, drastic action will be taken.

F. CLAIM AND ADJUSTMENT LETTERS

In every business, trouble is bound to occur which will require adjustment. Any merchant, no matter how carefully he has systematized his buying and his management, will need to return goods and cancel orders, or will check an invoice wrongly, or will commit some of a number of errors possible when sending orders and receiving goods. These errors make necessary the writing of claim and adjustment letters.

The primary object of any adjustment letter is to satisfy the customer, for no legitimate business transaction is really complete until the customer is satisfied with his purchase. For this reason, try to look upon every claim letter from the point of view of the other party as much as possible, and try at all times to be fair, just, and reasonable in your attitude. If you give your customers a square deal, they will stand by you, but a reputation for unreasonableness or unfairness in the matter of adjustments will never stop driving away business. The adjustment letter furnishes an excellent opportunity for salesmanship, and the writer of such letters can do much toward increasing sales, and cementing the bonds of friendship and good-will between his house and its customers, by keeping the tone of his letter courteous and friendly, and by introducing such sales material as will be likely to be of interest.

In writing claim or adjustment letters, avoid the use of the word "complaint." Most firms have come to recognize that this word has an ugly sound and have done away with the old "complaint department," classing all letters of this kind as "adjustment letters."

1. Classes of adjustment letters

Most adjustments fall into four general classes:

(1) house at fault, claim granted; (2) house not at fault, claim refused; (3) house not at fault, claim granted in full or in part; (4) fault undetermined, further investigation needed. It is necessary to determine under which one of these four classes each claim comes, and to adapt the tone and attitude of the adjustment letter to the nature of the claim.

2. First class: house at fault, claim granted

In the first class, the question of attitude is not difficult. You simply acknowledge the mistake frankly, explain how it occurred, and minimize it. Then you rectify it. Finally, you express your regrets, and tell the customer that a similar mistake will not occur again, laying emphasis on regrets and greater care in handling future orders.

3. Second class: house not at fault, claim refused

The second class is probably the most difficult of any to handle, for it is a

very delicate matter to refuse a claim which the customer no doubt believes to be a just one, and still satisfy him and retain his good-will. It is necessary to make him see that his claim is unjust, and that you are not treating him unfairly by refusing it. In order to do this, you must put yourself in his place, and look at the matter from his point of view. Show that you understand his attitude, and sympathize with him. Then explain why you cannot grant his request, and show him tactfully where he is wrong. Make him see that your position is a fair one, and close with an expression of regret at your inability to grant his claim.

4. Third class: house not at fault, claim granted

In the third class, the chief problem is to grant the claim in such a way as not to leave any feeling of resentment in the mind of the customer by giving him the impression that he is being treated as an object of charity. If you grant the claim, do it cheerfully, not grudgingly. Make him understand that you realize that the fault does not lie with you, but that you are willing and glad to do more than your share to save him trouble. Such an attitude will make him feel that he is under an obligation to you, will increase his feeling

of good-will toward you, and will go far toward getting his future orders.

5. Fourth class: fault undertermined, investigation needed

The proper attitude toward claims of the fourth class is one of open-minded fairness. Tell the customer that you concede the justice of his complaint, and that you will do all that you can to find out where the fault lies and to correct it. Do not give him the idea that you think the fault is his, but on the other hand, if you do not know where the fault lies, do not take the blame yourself. Emphasize the fact that you wish to avoid putting him to any inconvenience, and that you intend to do all in your power to put matters right at the earliest possible moment.

6. Elements of an adjustment letter

The typical adjustment letter contains three elements. The first tells where and how the mistake was made. There may have been an oversight in filling the order, a delayed or lost shipment, a mistake in addressing the shipment, or any of a number of possible mistakes. The first part of the letter explains the mistake, and traces it to its source. The second element tells what is to be done. It may offer to replace goods, to exchange goods, or to take back goods;

it may promise to send out a tracer for a lost shipment; or it may refuse to do any of these things. The third element is an expression of the feeling of the house on the matter. It may express regret at the occurrence, it may assure the customer that special care will be taken in the future to avoid a recurrence of the mistake, or it may be merely a more general expression of good-will. The purpose of all these elements is to satisfy the customer, and in all of them the proper attitude, as outlined above, should be maintained.

7. "Don'ts" for adjustment letters

Don't delay in answering a claim letter. An immediate reply goes a long way toward impressing a man with your sincere desire to see him satisfied. Even though he may not be specific enough in his claim, or if it will take you several days to investigate the matter, answer immediately anyway and tell him what you are doing. Don't be too suspicious, or give the impression that the customer is trying to cheat you. Give him the benefit of the doubt, and remember that most people are honest, and that a majority of the claims made are probably well-founded. Don't be flippant. Answer all complaints seriously, even though they may appear to be ridiculous. Your aim is

to satisfy the customer, and this can never be done if you ridicule him or his judgment. Above all, don't get angry or lose your temper. Your customer will usually only laugh at you, and you will immediately drop in his estimation; or he will get angry in return, and the grievance will be farther from adjustment than ever. Never give an unreasonable kicker the satisfaction of knowing that he has aroused your anger.

G. LETTERS OF APPLICATION

The last type of functional letter to be taken up in this thesis is the letter of application. This type has been left until the end in order to emphasize its importance. In most cases a letter of application is the first kind of letter that a person going into business is called upon to write. He must first get his job before he finds it necessary to write very many business letters of any kind. Therefore, too much attention cannot be given to the form and contents of this type of letter, for the preliminary negotiations for a position are usually made by this means.

The letter of application is essentially a sales letter. In it you are attempting to sell your most valuable commodity, namely, yourself, and the good letter of application should, therefore, embody all the requirements of a good sales letter, paying special at-

tention to the matter of visualizing the reader, and to the general tone of the letter.

1. What a letter of application should contain The contents of a letter of this kind should be complete, and specific, and should be adapted to the case in hand. The writer should make application for the position in the very first sentence, telling how he came to know about the opening, if he knows that one exists. Otherwise, he should inquire at once whether there is an opening or not. Having stated the purpose of the letter, he should next state clearly and specifically his qualifications for the position in question, telling what experience he has had, (or, in the case of a person of very little previous experience, telling what education he has had) where he has been previously employed and for how long, and giving any other data which might have a bearing on the position in question. He should also give two or three references, selecting those whose names will have the most weight with the particular employer, and giving the initials, the mail address, and the position or business connection of each. Then he should close the letter with a request for an interview, and a statement of where he can be located. He should not mention the salary expected unless it is specifically asked for. The question of

Appendix A
MECHANICAL FORMS

I. Stationery

The salesman representing a business takes great pains to indicate by his appearance the character of the firm he represents. In like manner, the appearance of a letter, which often takes the place of a representative, should be such as to enlist the confidence of the receiver. Richly finished letter paper, or paper of unusual weight, makes the receiver feel unconsciously that he is dealing with a firm which has a personality. His confidence is increased immediately, and he feels that he is doing business with a reputable concern. Even though in some cases high-grade stationery would not be appreciated, it is always safe to use a little better paper than is necessary.

The cost of stationery is a very small part of the total cost of sending a letter. The total cost ranges from six or seven cents on processed letters sent out by the thousand, to a dollar or more for letters dictated by high executives. An additional cent added to this for high grade paper would be insignificant compared to the increase in good-will.

The accepted standard size of paper for business use is $8\frac{1}{2}$ by 11 inches, although the tendency is to shorten the sheets, and make them slightly narrower. However, most conservative concerns continue to use the standard size. Occasionally odd sizes or colors are used, but merely for distinctiveness, or to attract attention.

II. Letterheads

The matter of choosing appropriate and effective letterheads requires considerable artistic knowledge and is generally left to the printers. A letterhead, in general, should represent the personality of the firm rather than sell its goods. Again, if we treat the letter as the salesman of the house we find that a letterhead should convey the general standing and character of the house just as does the salesman's appearance. The name, address, a line stating the kind of business, and perhaps a trade-mark, is all that is essential or even permissible in a good letterhead.

It must be remembered in the design of letterheads that the letter should be about in the center of the page so that the heading should not cover more than two and one half inches. The heading should be the width of the letter so as to maintain an unbroken margin on either side, this distance being generally

four inches. The usual and safest design for the letterhead is the balanced layout with necessary items centered one beneath the other. Names of officers or other information, though now usually omitted, may be placed in balanced groups on either side. A trade-mark or monogram can also be worked into this centered arrangement, but must generally be placed on the left side.

Whether or not there should be art work on the letterhead depends primarily upon the line of business. If colors are used, be careful that they are not such as will distract the reader's attention from the more important part of the letter. For special sales letters, novelties, such as pictures, borders, margin strips, etc., are useful in gaining attention, though they always tend to misrepresent the character of the house using them. Engraved letterheads are used to give the impression of dignity, reliability and success.

III. Typing

The matter of appearance of the letter depends somewhat on typing. This is rather a minor detail, since most concerns will not allow a letter to leave their offices with erasures or corrections on it. In some cases a firm mailing a sales letter will purposely make an error, have it cancelled and corrected so as,

partly, to attract attention and partly, to give it a personal touch. This is the exception rather than the rule, however.

IV. Miscellaneous rules

- a. The file number which was brought out previously as being important should be so placed as not to distract from the symmetry of the sheet.
- b. The inside address may be put in the lower left hand corner to make a personal letter more personal or to make a formal letter more formal.
- c. It is always courteous to address the individual or firm in the same manner as they sign themselves.
- d. If the letter is directed to any specific individual it helps to secure personal contact. This may be done by addressing him personally or by placing in the center, "Attention Purchasing Agent," or some such expression.
- e. The customary salutations are:
Very formal: Sir:
Quite formal: My dear Sir:
Slightly formal: My dear Mr. Smith:

Usual: Dear Sir:

Personal: Dear Mr. Smith:

Plural: Gentlemen:

- f. The customary forms for the close are:

Formal: Respectfully,

Usual: Yours truly,

Friendly: Very truly yours,

Personal: Sincerely,

Warm: Cordially,

- g. The signature should always be made in ink, in cases where the name is first typewritten. The ink signature verifies the other and adds a personal touch. Avoid rubber stamp signatures. If a letter is worth sending at all it is worth a personal signature.
- h. Such special data as the initials of the dictator and the stenographer are generally placed in the left lower corner.
- i. In the matter of envelopes, everyone connected with the dispatching of mail should be familiar with the booklet of United States Postal Regulations, which is furnished on request.

Appendix BCHOICE OF ENGLISH

Business letters have for centuries been loaded with stock phrases which are now obsolete or rapidly becoming so. Their disadvantage, besides the fact that they are not now in use in the English language anywhere else than in business letters, is that they are often wordy and clumsy, and trip the writer into saying what he does not mean. The modern effort to make the letter personal and effective has discarded them, and the next generation will probably wonder that they ever were used.

List of stock phrases

The following is a list of the chief of these expressions. Among them the business man will recognize many that he uses daily and may think are impossible to discard. The trend of the best examples, however, especially in letters addressed to persons not in business, is steadily away from them:

advise - of legal origin and overworked. Confine it

as much as possible to the actual giving of ad-

vice. Use "inform us" or "tell us."

as per - of legal origin. Say "according to."

at all times, or at this time - meaningless as usually found. "We are sending you at this time a catalog ..."

beg - as in the phrases "beg to state," or "beg to remain." Relic of early formal courtesy, sounding unpleasantly servile today.

complaint - a word with a disagreeable sound. If you never use it you will never make the mistake of telling a customer that he has written a "complaint." Say simply "your letter of August 2," with or without reference to the subject of that letter.

contents carefully noted - intended to have a courteous sound. Meaningless, and occupies valuable space.

esteemed - as "Your esteemed favor." The word is obsolete in this use.

favor - wrongly used to mean "letter." A favor is a kindness rendered; a letter may do an act of kindness, but it is not itself a kindness. "I shall thank you for any favors you can show me," and "It will be a great favor if you can let me know at once," are correct uses of the word.

hand you - obsolete. Say "send you."

herewith - in the phrase "I enclose herewith." This word, when used in reference to letters, means "in this envelope," an idea already contained in the word "enclose."

inst., ult., prox. - abbreviations of the Latin words instant, ultimo, proximo, used in legal documents

to mean the present, the last, or the next month. Designate the month by its name.

kind - often misused, as "your kind favor," "your kind order." Another relic of servile courtesy. A superior might write a "kind" letter, gently rebuking a thoughtless girl in his office, or thanking an employee for a service, or the like. The word should be reserved for such acts of personal consideration; not used to describe ordinary letters or orders.

kindly - as in the phrase "May I kindly ask you to fill out the enclosed blank?" It is correct to say "May I ask you kindly to fill out," etc. but "kindly" describes the act of filling, and not the act of asking. Do not call your own act a kind one. Kindly, when used with the imperative, does not greatly lessen the brusqueness of the command. "Kindly send in the monthly report of your local Bayport Alumni Club by October 10," gave much offense to the recipients, though intended by the inexperienced writer to be a courteous request.

oblige - in the last sentence of a letter, "and oblige, Yours very truly." This makes a weak ending, like the participial conclusion, and belongs to the

same ancient date as "Your obliged and most obedient humble servant."

our Mr. Jones - an inelegant expression in referring to a salesman, which is gradually giving place to "Mr. Jones, our representative," or merely the man's name, his capacity being understood.

passive construction - instead of the active, when its use produces clumsiness, as, "There was a misunderstanding on our part," or "The goods have been selected by us," for "We have misunderstood," or "We have selected the goods." This arises from a mistaken reluctance to use the first personal pronoun. In delicate situations, it is true, to speak impersonally is more courteous than to speak personally, but awkwardness can always be avoided.

proposition - a word that has become business slang, and is used to mean almost anything. It really means a proposal, or an undertaking.

pronouns or articles omitted - as in the phrase "Order received and will forward goods at once," for "Your order has been received. We will forward the goods at once." Omissions of this kind have no other excuse than laziness. They make a bad impression on the reader.

recent date - as in the phrase "Your letter of recent

date." The words are useless. Either give the date or refer to the subject of the letter, as "Your letter about bathroom fixtures," or say merely, "Your letter." In some cases the last is not objectionable, as in a reply to an inquiry from a person not in business, where there is no chance that the reference to "Your letter" will be misunderstood.

same - wrong when used as a pronoun, as "We will give your account credit for same," "We regret the delay, and hope same has not caused you inconvenience," instead of "We will give your account credit for it," "We hope it has not caused you inconvenience." Same is used as a pronoun in legal documents to give precise reference, but it is antiquated. In business letters it is the most persistent among the condemned stock phrases. It is always easy to avoid by the substitution of it, they or them.

state - overworked and formal. Say is usually better.

valued - see esteemed.

"we" or "I" - often confused in use. When speaking of the action of the firm, we is proper; when speaking of the writer's action, I is proper. Unless the whole business force consists of one man, we

can be used properly in a letter from any firm. writer - wrong when used in the mistaken belief that it is improper to use the first person, as in the sentence "Your letter has been referred to the writer," instead of "to me." Where there is cause for telling your share in an action, the first person is correct and graceful. Would say, or wish to say - as in the sentence. "Replying to your letter, would say" An antiquated and wordy construction. Give your answer directly.

The first sentence

The first sentence of any letter, being the first that catches the reader's eye, is in the most emphatic position and should be used to contain important matter that needs emphasis. If your first sentence is stuffed with needless words you have lost a great chance. The following is a classified list of inferior and wrong first sentences, correctly rewritten:

a. Yours received

Wrong: Yours with reference to the shortage made in your last shipment received.

Right: We regret to learn from your letter of January 10 that there was a shortage in your last shipment.

Wrong: Your letter addressed to the writer relative to the return of desk received and contents carefully noted. Our wagon will call at your bank.

Right: We are glad to allow the return of the desk you do not wish to keep. Our wagon will call at your bank.

- b. Replying to your letter, we would say, or we wish to say.....

Awkward and Wordy: Replying to your letter of April 4, we wish to say that we do not stock the goods you order.

Right: We regret that we do not any longer stock the goods you order in your letter of April fourth.

Awkward and Wordy: Replying to your request of June 9, we would say that we shall not purchase any more cotton goods this season.

Right: We have already completed our buying of cotton goods for this season, and so are not able to do as you request in your letter of June 9.

- c. We have your letter, and in reply will say

Awkward and Wordy: We have your letter of January 4 in reference to your mail order, and in reply will say that we wrote you January 2.

Right: We regret to learn from your letter of January 4 that you have not received your mail order. We wrote you in regard to it on January 2.

Awkward and Wordy: Answering yours of the 19th we take pleasure in advising that your several orders have already been shipped.

Right: We are glad to find that your several orders, about which you inquire in your letter of September 19, have already been shipped.

- d. Replying to, or referring to, or answering your letter - followed by some other verb than one of speaking or writing. (You can "reply," etc., only by speaking or writing; and to use one of these verbs, even, in this construction, has just been shown to be clumsy. Avoid the difficulty in one of the ways shown below.)

Wrong: Replying to your favor of June 27th, we have thought it best to forward an itemized statement of your account.

Right: In response to your letter of June 27, we have thought it best to forward an itemized statement

Wrong: Answering yours of the 28th, invoices now past due in your account are those of April 19th, 22nd,

Right: The invoices in your account now past due, which you asked about in your letter of June 28, are those of April 19, 22, . . .

e. I write in regard to (This phrase, like "I take my pen in hand," is made unnecessary by the fact that the reader can see that you are writing.)

Awkward: I write in regard to the engine (type H-6HP) which I ordered of you January 10 and which I have not received.

Right: I have not received the engine (type H-6HP) which I ordered of you January 10.

Awkward: We are writing you with reference to a new and especially attractive policy which has just been issued by the Millboro Life Insurance Company, which we believe will be of particular interest to you.

Right: You will have particular interest in the new and attractive policy just issued by the Millboro Life Insurance Company. A word or two will set the plan before you.

Internal reference to previous letter

Like reference in the first sentence, any reference within the letter to a previous letter should

be direct and avoid awkwardness.

Awkward: You state in your letter that the pamphlet describing the arithmetics by the same author was not enclosed. We are sending it today.

Right: We are sending today the pamphlet describing the arithmetics by the same author, which was omitted from our last letter.

Awkward: Referring to your second paragraph, we wish to say that we are unable to allow claims which are not presented within ten days after the goods are delivered.

Right: We regret that we are unable to allow claims which are not presented within ten days after the goods are received.

(Effective Business Letters,
Edward H. Gardner.
Pages 57-71.)

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