

Customer Service Through Written Means

From the Frontline Interview

1 Please describe your experiences in dealing with internal and external customers through various written means.

When I was a corporate human resources manager, my external customers were job applicants and my internal customers were company staff and managers. Written communications (mainly letters and memos) could be characterized by the term *responsiveness*. Applicants needed to know that we had received their résumés, “regrets” postcards for individuals who were not interviewed, and “regrets” letters for people who were interviewed but not selected. An extra “wrinkle” for us was that applicants were potential customers for our products. Hired or not, applicants were treated well so that they would continue to think well of the company and our products.

Company staff needed answers to questions. Responsiveness to their needs helped cement relationships so that we built and maintained a reputation for assisting and for being team players.

In my current business (human resources consultant and management trainer for small to midsize businesses, nonprofit organizations, and government agencies), written communication takes the form of marketing letters, proposals, documentation of consulting sessions, confirma-



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tion of training dates and details, and human resources documents and information. E-mail and fax communications have been added to the mix.

2 What are your general impressions of customer service in the United States? Why do you feel this way?

Good customer service in this country is the exception rather than the rule—it is so rare that, when I do encounter it, I am surprised. Companies talk a good line about the importance of good customer service (it is certainly one of my more popular training programs), but in the main, I think that companies fail to identify, and then teach their employees, the philosophy, techniques, and attitudes that will give customers a

positive, pleasant experience. Also, I believe that companies get wrapped up in policy and procedure, forgetting that it is they who serve the customer, not the other way around.

3 In your experience in working with customers, what are some of the most important things to remember related to proving quality service through written means? Please explain.

Written customer communications should be timely, readable, and simple. Customers want answers and informa-

“Learn to write well, or not at all.” John Dryden, 1631–1700 English poet
Essay on Satir

Chapter Learning Objectives

After completing this chapter, you will be able to:

- Recognize the importance of written messages in business.
- Correctly apply the basic rules of grammar when writing.
- Create professionally written documents.
- Apply a three-step approach to ensure effectiveness of written documents.
- Write in a way that enhances service.
- Set the right tone when you write.
- Deliver bad news and say no positively.
- Identify reference sources that will help improve your writing.

tion quickly. If they are to believe that the vendor is interested in them and concerned about them, that belief will stem, in large part, from how promptly their needs are addressed. Written communications must be expressed in language that a customer understands. Industry jargon and complex technical terms don't inspire a customer's faith in the vendor's competence; they make a customer wonder what the vendor is hiding. Directions and procedures must be easy to follow; forms should have clear, simple instructions.

4 What are some of the advantages in providing written information to customers?

Written information provides both the vendor and the customer with documentation to back up oral communication, eliminating the potential for disputes about what was actually said, what was actually meant.

5 What are some issues or pitfalls that service providers who correspond with customers should avoid?

At the top of my list is poor use of the basics of writing (grammar, spelling, punctuation, sentence structure, proof-reading). How we appear on paper is similar to how we appear in person. A sloppy, haphazard appearance sends customers several messages that damage the vendor's credibility: (1) The vendor doesn't think that details are important, (2) the vendor isn't competent, (3) the vendor doesn't respect the customer. Assumptions made on the basis of appearance may not be fair, but they are made.

6 How does the way you and other employees deliver service via written means affect your organization and your customers?

Technology makes it easier to communicate with customers. Instead of playing telephone tag, my customers and I can talk with each other via fax and e-mail, saving both of us time. Also, in my line of work, I constantly urge clients to document conversations and actions taken. I am a role model for that behavior when I provide information in writing to my clients.

7 What advice, related to correspondence in a customer service environment, would you give someone who is entering the customer service profession?

To be a successful customer service provider, whatever your job title, take the time to do two things: (1) Learn how to see an issue or problem from the customer's perspective, so that the focus of your writing is to meet the customer's needs. (2) Take a course or get a good book on business writing, so that your writing inspires the customer's confidence in your professionalism and competence.

Critical Thinking

What role do written communications play in customer? Do you agree with the advice given by Peggy Isaacson?

Quick Preview

Before reviewing the chapter content, respond to the following questions by placing a “T” for true or an “F” for false on the rules. Use any questions you miss as a checklist of material to which you will pay particular attention as you read through the chapter. For those you get right, congratulate yourself, but review the sections they address in order to learn additional details about the topic.

- _____ 1. Even if done professionally, written communication doesn’t necessarily send a more formal message than verbal communication does.
- _____ 2. It is important to show readers early in the written message why they should read on.
- _____ 3. Nouns can be substituted for pronouns.
- _____ 4. A pronoun names a person, place, or thing.
- _____ 5. A verb aids others verbs, shows or indicates action, or states a condition.
- _____ 6. Choosing the right words when writing can mean the difference between understanding and confusion.
- _____ 7. When writing any correspondence, you should plan, write a draft, and edit and proofread before sending it.
- _____ 8. Communicating in person or over the telephone is better than doing so through written means, if you want to help ensure correct understanding and allow for feedback.
- _____ 9. The four parts of a typical letter are the heading, opening, body, and closing.
- _____ 10. Memorandums are mainly for use within your organization (internal) and often act as a follow-up to verbal communications.
- _____ 11. Most people do not respond well to letters that are written using pronouns such as *you*, *your*, *we*, or *I*.
- _____ 12. When writing customers, you would be wise to follow the old saying, “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.”

Answers to Quick Review can be found at the end of the chapter.

1 Why Write to Customers?

Concept: Writing to customers is an important activity in several instances that you will study about in this section. What you say and how you say it can affect business relationships positively or negatively.

You may wonder why you should bother writing when it is so easy to meet with customers face-to-face or to pick up the telephone and call them. Speaking with someone, face-to-face or over the phone, probably is the best and most expedient way to share information. However, writing allows you a further outlet for exchanging ideas and thoughts. If done professionally, written communication can send a more formal message while making your message visual. People gather information differently. Giving people something in writing allows them to read and reread the message at their leisure. If customers are unsure of something they read, having it in hand allows them to review it and then call you for clarification

if necessary. In addition, you can use written documentation to summarize verbal discussions you have with a customer. This helps ensure that you both have the same interpretation of the discussion. Still another advantage is that you can plan your message and edit it before the customer receives it. You can also ask someone else to read it and provide input before you send it.

Of course, there is a downside to putting your thoughts in writing. Unless your customer acts or reacts to what you have written, you may never know how (or whether) the person received your message. You can deal with customers' reactions that are in the form of a telephone call or written response, a complaint, or an order. The ones you never know about are customers who do not respond at all. Did they get the letter, fax, or e-mail? Did they open it? Did they read part or all of it? Are they planning to respond later? These are all questions for which you have no answers. To help ensure your success of getting your message, and that of your organization, into the right person's hands, and having the person open, read, and respond to the message, you will need to communicate effectively.

2 The Importance of Business Writing

Concept: Whether you are writing a letter, a memorandum, a report, or an e-mail, you must understand and apply the principles of good business writing.

The reality is that no matter what business you are in, you need to master the basics of business writing and effective written communication in order to deal effectively with others. There is much to consider. From a legal standpoint, the cliché "If it isn't in writing, it didn't happen" is very important to remember. If you get nothing else from this chapter, remember: document, document, document. By putting your thoughts and important details in writing, you create a "paper trail" that will help you in the future. Whether the format is a letter, memorandum, report, e-mail, having on hand the key elements of a conversation or agreement along with background information can help successfully solve many problems in a customer service environment. Depending on the situation, you may send a brief reminder to someone or you may provide in-depth documentation. In either case, the way in which you express yourself can leave a lasting impression on how others view you and your organization. Remember the power of nonverbal communication. Writing is just another form of sending an image of yourself nonverbally.

An additional reason for taking time to express yourself effectively is that you are often competing with all the other people in your department for advancement, pay increases, and other employment opportunities. By communicating well, you set yourself above most of your peers, for many people cannot write effectively.

The importance of employee communication skills was highlighted in a 1994 study of employers conducted by the National Center on the Evaluation of Quality in the Workplace. The study asked employers to rate the job skills most critical to job performance. The results showed that employers list communication skills as the second most important job skill (attitude was No. 1)¹

This chapter will address some basic issues related to effectively dealing with customers in writing; however, one chapter cannot adequately answer all questions related to communicating in writing. Some sources are listed at the end of the chapter, and others are given in the Bibliography. You are also encouraged to take a course or attend a seminar dealing with grammar, usage, editing, proofreading, and communicating effectively in writing.

¹Lindsell-Roberts, p. 7

Like any other worthwhile project in life, writing requires conscious effort and preparation. This is especially important when you are writing to prospective or current customers, for your reputation and that of your company is at stake. For customers to react, they must receive your message. You have to reach out through your writing and grab their attention. In most cases, you have only a few seconds to accomplish this before the customer makes the “use or lose” decision. Whatever the decision, you may not hear from the customer immediately, or you may never hear, if your material is tossed into the trash.

The easiest way to get your customer’s attention when writing is to apply the **AVARFM principle (Added Value And Results For Me)** so that the customer can identify the rewards of reading your message. To do this, state your purpose for writing early in your correspondence. For example: “Thank you for your recent telephone call in which you shared your comments about our latest product line.” “I am writing to ask your assistance in improving our service to you.” “Please take a moment to read over the enclosed update to your product warranty for .”

Each of these examples is either an expression of appreciation or a reference to something that will help the customer or make his or her life better. Once you get the customer’s attention, you need to prompt him or her to take action. You should do this in the body of your correspondence. This action might be one of the following:

To respond (e.g., answer a survey, call for additional information, or share an opinion).

To use your products or services.

To tell others about your organization and its products and/or services.

To contact you in the future (e.g., with questions or to order additional products or services).

3 Back to Basics

Concept: Choosing the right words to communicate clearly is essential. To do that, you must know the basics of correct English usage.

Your image, and that of your organization, is at stake each time you pick up a pen or sit down at your computer to create some form of written communication. All the things you learned about grammar in high school English *are* important when you start to express your thoughts and ideas to customers and others. If your use of grammar is poor, it reflects negatively on your professionalism. In many cases, it can be the determining factor in whether you win, lose, retain, or regain a customer. People often form an opinion of your organization’s ability to perform and meet their needs based on the information they receive from you and others who represent the organization. Many computer software packages have grammar and syntax checkers as well as spell checkers. However, remember that they are only tools to assist you; they do not replace you. Human beings, who make mistakes, designed them. You cannot afford to have your reputation rest solely on such technology. Improve your skills related to grammar, spelling, and composition and/or ask someone else who has strong skills in those areas to proofread what you write. The following sections provide a brief overview of the rules of effective grammar and should be just a beginning for you. If you think that you need help in strengthening your skills, find out about classes at some of the local colleges and professional training organizations in your area.

Over time, the “rules” for sentence and word usage change. However what you learned in high school is still relevant. Mastery of written English cannot only help

you deal with customers but can often strongly influence your career opportunities. Remember the study on critical job skills mentioned earlier in this chapter? Refer to Figure 1 as you begin your review of the parts of speech.

Parts of Speech

Although you may be able to communicate well without knowing the roles of the various parts of speech, to communicate most effectively with your customers, you should be able to use all the tools available to you. In the case of written communication, your tools are the words in the English language. These words are divided into eight categories called **parts of speech**: nouns, pronouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions, and interjections (see Figure 1).

To help you better understand the way words are used, a brief description of each part of speech, along with some examples of how each is used, is given in the following sections. Keep in mind what you were taught in high school English classes, and remember that there are exceptions to most grammar rules. To help refresh your memory and prepare for writing professional-looking documents, you are encouraged to review the basic rules of grammar or attend a seminar on the topic. References are available at bookstores or libraries. Courses can be found on the Internet.

Nouns

The easiest way to remember what nouns do is to think of their function. Nouns *name* a person, place, thing, idea, ability, or quality. Nouns also have subcategories. Nouns are either *proper* (specific and capitalized) or *common* (neither specific nor capitalized), for example:

Proper nouns: Canterbury Avenue, Tallahassee, Howard University
Common nouns: street, capital, university, women, people, income, soccer

FIGURE 1
Parts of Speech

Part of Speech	Purpose	Example
Nouns	Name a person	Hamilton, Pat, Sui Ling
	Name a place	New Orleans, England
	Name a thing	Book, car, house
	Name an idea	Peace, love
	Name an ability	Walking, sitting
	Name a quality	Strength, intelligence
Pronouns	Take the place of nouns	She, it, them, his, her
Verbs	Aid or help other verbs,	Has been (helping)
	show or indicate action, state a condition	Has, receive, act, lift (action) Is, was (condition)
Adverbs	Modify (describe or explain) a verb, adjective, or another adverb	Extremely, very, particularly
Adjectives	Modify, describe, or limit a noun or pronoun	Big, bigger, biggest, all, every
Prepositions	Link words, phrases, or clauses	In, to, for, from, by
Conjunctions	Links words, phrases, or clauses together	And, but, however, although
Interjections	Express emotion or excitement	Yikes!, Wow!, Oh!

Nouns are categorized by *gender* (masculine or male, feminine or female, or neuter), for example:

Masculine: man, father, boy

Feminine: woman, mother, girl

Neuter: shirt, car, sofa

Nouns can be collective or individual:

Collective: family, tribe, class, team

Individual: person, employer, customer, student

Pronouns

Pronouns are words that can be used in place of nouns. Using pronouns reduces the need to repeat nouns several times and creates a smoother flow to your writing. Here are some tips for using pronouns:

Make sure that the pronoun matches (agrees with) the noun (antecedent) that it replaced in terms of gender, number, and person.

All of my *customers* have paid *their* invoices (*their* refers to the plural noun *customers*).

The *woman* who ordered the new *draperies* said that *she* would pick *them* up this week (the pronoun *she* refers to the singular noun *woman*; the pronoun *them* refers to the plural noun *draperies*).

Everyone, except Sylvia and Marvin, called *her* or *his* supplier this morning (*everyone* is a singular noun, as are *her* and *his*).

Demonstrative pronouns (e.g., *these*, *those*, *that*, *this*) should be used only when referring to a specific noun (e.g., *those* items, *that* blouse, *this* form, *these* books), not to an entire thought or sentence. Using demonstrative pronouns to refer to a sentence can confuse your reader and cause your intended message to be lost.

Unclear: Ten customers ordered the special luncheon salads at approximately the same time.

This is why we ran out of salads. (Did the shortage of salads result from ten customers ordering, or was it because they ordered at approximately the same time?)

Clear: Ten customers ordered the special prepared luncheon salads at approximately the same time.

Because of the large number of customers, we ran out of salads.

Verbs

Verbs are the drivers behind sentences because they tell the condition, action, or state of being related to the subject of the sentence (see Figure 2). For example: A customer *called* to request a copy of our catalog (*customer* is the subject and *called* is the action).

Adverb

An adverb modifies (describes, explains, or limits) another adverb, an adjective, or a verb. An adverb answers the questions When? Where? Why? How? How much? And to what degree? One clue to identifying adverbs is that they often end in *ly*—but not always. Be sure to place an adverb as close as possible to the word

FIGURE 2
Sample Verbs

be	cost	leave	rid	strive
become	deal	lend	say	take
begin	do	let	see	teach
break	feel	lie	sell	tell
bring	have	make	send	think
build	hold	mistake	sit	understand
buy	keep	pay	speak	wear
choose	know	put	spend	win
come	lead	read	split	write

it is modifying. Otherwise, you may inadvertently change the meaning of the sentence. For example, if you were writing a sentence in which you intended to say that your subject (John) explained a contract to someone and did nothing else, place the adverb appropriately.

Unclear: John explained the contract *only* to her. *Only* John explained the contract to her.

Clear: John explained *only* the contract to her.

Adjectives

Adjectives enliven your sentences by modifying, limiting, or describing a noun or pronoun. Adjectives can be modified only by an adverb. Adjectives may be single words, phrases, or clauses, for example,

The customer was perfectly *happy*.

A time of *great happiness*.

A service provider *who is very stressed*.

Prepositions

Prepositions connect a noun or pronoun with other words in a sentence. Prepositions also show direction or location. In the past, many educators taught students that a sentence should not end with a preposition. This rule has been relaxed in many cases. It is now permissible to use a preposition at the end of a sentence for emphasis or to avoid an awkward sentence construction, for example:

The customer asked *about* the sale merchandise shown *in the window* (the prepositional *about* makes a connection, and the prepositional phrase *in the window* gives a location).

We need the equipment to work *with* (preposition *with* answer the question what.).

Some common prepositions are listed in Figure 3.

Conjunctions

Conjunctions are words or phrases used to connect words, phrases, clauses, or sentences. Such words are also referred to as *transition words*, *transition phrases*, or *adverbial conjunctives* (see Figure 4), for example:

I returned the customer's call, *but* she was not in her office.

We do not have blue pillows; *however*, we do have green ones.

FIGURE 3
Common
Prepositions

about	below	from	on	toward
above	beneath	in	onto	under
across	between	inside	past	until
after	beside	into	pending	up
among	by	like	regarding	upon
around	down	near	since	with
at	during	of	through	within
before	except	off	to	without
behind	for			

FIGURE 4
Common
Conjunctions
or Transitions

in addition	but	furthermore	on the other hand	therefore
also	clearly	however	otherwise	toward
although	either	in comparison	possibly	whenever
and	eventually	instead	rather	whereas
at any rate	evidently	likewise	since	wherever
as	finally	meanwhile	similarly	while
as a result	for	nevertheless	so	whoever
at the same time	for example	next	still	yet
because				

Interjections

Interjections are words or phrases added to a sentence to express emotion or surprise, for example:

Oh, my gosh, I forgot to mail the information that a customer requested yesterday.

Wow, I never expected to get a bonus for helping that customer.

Word Choice

Use care in choosing the words to convey your meaning. Keep in mind that people outside your organization, industry, culture, or geographic area may not have heard the term(s) you are using. They may not have the same level of experience in the business world or the education that you have. Using **jargon**, buzzwords, or **slang** that people outside a particular group do not understand can cause a breakdown in communication and might signal your lack of interest in the reader's ability to comprehend your message (see Figure 5).

Selecting the wrong word can change the meaning of your sentence entirely and make you look foolish, careless, or uneducated. To prevent this from occurring, have someone who has a good command of the English language look over documents that you have written before you send them. Doing this is one way of preventing the appearance of carelessness or of being unprofessional.

Keep It Simple

In addition to choosing the correct words, apply the **KISS principle** (**K**ee**P** **I**t **S**hort and **S**weet) by using only the words you need to make your point. Using extra words usually does little to enhance the meaning of your message. In other words, be concise. Many people think that, by using more words, they appear to be better educated or more intelligent. Actually, they often confuse the reader and cloud the message by using unnecessary words (see Figure 6).

FIGURE 5
Common Jargon,
Buzzwords, and
Slang

Terms	Translation
annual premium	yearly payment
ballpark figure	estimate
brainstorm	generate ideas
carte blanche	unlimited power or freedom
ceiling	upper limit or highest level
CPU (central processing unit)	the brain of the computer
deep-six	discard
downsize	reduce workforce size
EEOC	Equal Employment Opportunity Commission
faked out	tricked or confused
gratis	free or no cost
hit a home run	succeed
iffy	doubtful
input	ideas, thoughts, or comments
jog your memory	prompt a thought or memory
kick around an idea	discuss something
laid back	casual or relaxed
mickey mouse	petty or trite
modus operandi	method of operating
nuts and bolts	basics or fundamentals
off the record	confidentially
out of whack	bad or defective
peripheral	equipment attached to a computer (e.g., printer or monitor)
power trip	arrogant display of personal power
quick fix	fast or hasty solution
run of the mill	common or ordinary
screwed up	made a mistake or confused
tab or check	bill or accounting of costs
ten-four	message was received
up the ante	raise or escalate a price or cost
uptight	anxious
vet	a veteran or to evaluate
whistle-blower	one who tells about or reveals wrongdoing
wild card	outside the rules or undefined
X-rated	obscene
zinger	a quick, caustic reply

There is an additional problem created by using too many words—people do not have time to read them, especially managers and executives. If you cannot make your point in a few words, you will likely lose your reader.

Look at the following two examples. The first sentence in each example has the same meaning as the second; however, the first sentence has too many words.

Wordy: As a point of fact, the customer who buys the advertised special will get the greatest value.

Concise: The advertised special offers the greatest customer value.

Wordy: A great many customers believe that we offer the best deals in the area a majority of the time.

Concise: Many customers believe that we typically offer the best deals in the area.

FIGURE 6
Avoid Wordiness

Instead of This	Use This
a majority of	most
absolutely essential	essential
advance warning	warning
along the line of	like
as a result of	because
at a later date	later
at this time	now
based on the fact that	because
by means of	by
completely unanimous	unanimous
cooperate together	cooperate
depreciate in value	depreciate
due to the fact that	because
each and every	every
enclosed herewith is	enclosed
fell down	fell
final conclusion	conclusion or end
for the purpose of	for or to
for the reason that	because
had occasion to be	was
in regard to	about
in the course of	during
in the first place	first
large in number	many
large in size	large
month of March	March
mutual agreement	agreement
new innovation	new or innovation
on the grounds that	because
owing to the fact that	because
perform an analysis of	analyze
prior to	before
relative to	concerning or about
repeat again	repeat
small in numbers	few
subsequent to	after
take into consideration	consider
the only difference being that	except
until such time as	until
with reference to	about
within the realm of possibility	possible or possibly
with this in mind	clearly, according, or therefore

4 The Three-Step Process in Preparing Written Material

Concept: When you start to create a communication of any kind, you must plan, write a draft, and edit and proofread the document carefully.

In most cases, the format and appearance of written materials sent to customers are dictated by tradition, organizational and industry preference, and established procedure. Many companies have standard formats for written customer materials



With your teammates, take about 5 minutes to determine a less wordy way to phrase the following statements:

a great many	I want to take this opportunity to thank you
a long period of time	in light of the fact that
add the point that	in the majority of instances
all of the	on the order of
another aspect of the situation to consider	some reason or another
at a later date	taking this factor into consideration
be of the opinion that	it is apparent that
during the course of	the question as to whether
except in a small number of cases	to summarize the above
exhibit a tendency to	with the exception of

(e.g., rejection letters, collection letters, and solicitations). These formats are often stored in a computer database. When the letter is needed, a customer's name, address, and so on, are added, an envelope is addressed, and the letter is ready to be sent.

Whenever you are going to write anything that will go to a customer, it is a good idea to think first. Whether you are creating a letter, a memorandum, or an e-mail, you should follow three simple steps: (1) plan, (2) write a draft, and (3) edit or proofread. Only after you have completed these phases are you ready to put your masterpiece into an envelope or click on "send."

Planning

The following are some specific points to consider in your planning phase.

Audience or Customer

Your format and tone typically depend on who will receive the correspondence. When deciding who will get the information, you need to consider a number of factors. To select your recipient(s), answer these questions before you start writing:

Who is the appropriate person to receive this information?

Is there anyone else who needs to receive this information? If so, why?

Purpose or Objective for Writing

In deciding your purpose, you should consider desired outcomes. Ask yourself some basic questions:

What do I want the recipient to think, know, or do differently?

What actions do I want the recipient to take?

What are the key points that I am trying to make?

What information does the recipient need?

Why does the recipient need this information?

What does the recipient already know about this topic?

What else does the recipient need to know about this topic?

How does he or she feel about this topic?

Format, Appearance, and Content

Numerous formats or styles can be used to create memorandums, business letters, proposals, reports, and all the other written documentation that you usually encounter in a customer service environment. In general, before you put ideas on paper, remember that you should write only what you would not mind seeing on the 6 o'clock news. If you keep this in mind when you are assembling information and selecting a style of writing, you are likely to end up with a professional-looking product. A key determinant in deciding on your style is your intended audience. For example, you would probably not use the same format and approach with your customers that you would with a coworker. With customers, you might use a formal letter, whereas with your coworkers, a memorandum may do.

Two approaches to writing your letters and memorandums—formal and informal—are available.

Formal formatting involves using a salutation that includes titles and last names of recipients. When writing an individual, use *Dear Mr., Mrs., or Ms. _____* if you know the person's last name. Other appropriate salutations use a title such as *Dear Dr. _____, Dear General _____, Dear Mayor _____, or Dear Professor _____*.

Address your correspondence to a specific individual when possible. However, if you do not know the name, it is appropriate to use *Dear Sir or Madam* or *Ladies and Gentlemen*. Do not use *Gentlemen*, for it is a gender-biased term, except when you are writing to a group composed of all men. Or, in the case of a group composed of all women, use *Ladies* as your salutation.

An alternative is to address an individual by his or her position title or to address a department. For example, *Dear Human Resources Director* or *Dear Accounting Department*.

Many larger dictionaries typically list the correct salutation for various public officials. Reference manuals such as *The Gregg Reference Manual* by William H. Sabin provide comprehensive guidelines on writing business correspondence.

You can use *informal formatting* when you know the recipient personally, or have spoken to the person on the telephone, or when the person has corresponded with you or left a voice mail message using his or her first name. In such cases, you may use a salutation such as, *Dear Pat*.

Many people with whom you will interact in the workplace are from different cultures. These people may have differing views on what is acceptable in the business environment. If you are writing to someone from another culture or country, it is typically better to err on the side of conservatism when addressing correspondence. Use the person's title and last name until you are given permission to do otherwise. Being careful in this regard can reduce the possibility of offense and avoid the perception that you are rude or arrogant.

Timing

The timing of correspondence can often have a major impact on how it is received. For example, suppose that you are mailing letters or flyers to customers to invite them to a private showing or exhibit for a new line of products to which the general public is not invited. Today is Wednesday. The exhibit will be held one week from today. You mail your letter or flyer on Friday, Monday is a holiday, and the letter or flyer arrives on Tuesday afternoon. How effective do you think such a mailing might be today, when people have tight schedules? The promotion would be far more effective if you allowed plenty of time for the flyer to be received so that the invitees could plan to attend.

As a rule of thumb, mail announcements early enough so that the invitees can make plans, and you do not look as though you forgot to allow adequate time. Depending on the situation, you may also want to send out a reminder notice.

Delivery Method

Keep in mind what you have read in other chapters about interpersonal communications. Usually, communicating in person or over the telephone is better than through written means if you want your message to be understood and you want to encourage feedback. Even so, you should follow up important telephone conversations with a written summary.

Based on the subject and the situation, however, you may decide that written communication is the best approach. If this is the case, you then have to decide on the best delivery method. Until recent years, the delivery options were limited—U.S. mail or couriers. That was then, and this is now. Today, in addition to the U.S. mail and couriers, the fax, priority and express mail through the U.S. Post Office, rapid delivery by various carriers (UPS, FedEx, RPS), e-mail, and interoffice mail are all available. Your choice will be affected by a number of factors:

- How fast you need the document delivered.

- The size and weight of the document.

- Time constraints.

- The image you wish to project.

- Content (e.g., legal documents requiring an original signature).

Drafting Your Masterpiece

By taking the time to write your ideas on paper in the form of a draft, you can later spot grammar and syntax errors, see possible “political time bombs” (e.g., sexist language, offensive tone, or inappropriate words), or faulty organization. The drafting phase is *not* the time for editing. That comes in the third phase of preparing your correspondence. Editing as you go slows you down and can cause you to lose your train of thought, so that you might forget to include some important information that you intended to use. As you draft your document, use your planned comments or thoughts and write quickly. Don’t get bogged down with grammar and spelling errors. Also, do not toil over getting the wording exactly right. You can correct these things when you edit. Your purpose in drafting is to capture the essence of your message.

Other options for drafting include taping your thoughts and later transcribing them, or jotting down key points on Post-It notes or index cards that you can reposition on a board or wall as you edit.

Editing Your Work

Try to catch your own errors, or have someone proofread your work, before sending your letter to a customer. This will help prevent a customer call arising from a misleading or incomplete letter. Also, keep in mind the image you want to send and make sure that your document supports that image.

- Check your work to be sure you covered the following:

- Did I include a date line?

- Is the addressee (and any other recipient) clearly and appropriately identified?

- Is my writing clear and concise?

Does each sentence and each paragraph contain only one thought or main idea?
 Have I followed the structural formats (shown later in this chapter) for letters and memorandums?
 Did I proofread each message carefully?
 For e-mail, did I observe the appropriate etiquette?
 Is there a call for action in the text of the document?
 Have I included a signature?
 If enclosures or attachments will be sent, did I indicate their existence on the document?

5 Writing Your Way to Better Service

Concept: Letters, memorandums, and e-mails have certain parts and are formatted in a particular style. The appearance of your written material often affects how the reader will respond.

In addition to the other tools that help you better serve your customers, a variety of written products can help you get your message across. These materials are probably familiar to you; however, when you are charged with using them, it sometimes helps to revisit some basic concepts and dos and don'ts, so that you present a professional image to customers. Many forms of written materials are used in businesses today (e.g., promotional materials, reports, proposals, policies, and other operational and informational documentation). The three types of written materials that a typical customer service representative, or someone dealing with customers, prospects (prospective customers), vendors, and others will use are letters, memorandums, and electronic mail (e-mail). Each has advantages when you are trying to communicate a specific type of message and image to someone.

Letters

Letters come in all types of formats and lengths. Your intended purpose, recipient, content, organizational style, and many other factors affect the final appearance of your letters. The key in all correspondence is to remain professional in tone and appearance. The way you word your letters, along with all the other factors you read about earlier in this chapter, will help determine the way in which the reader interprets what you have written. Before writing a business letter, find out whether your organization has a *style manual* that outlines the format to be used for outgoing letters. If there is no manual, use Figures 7 and 8 as guides.

Enhancing Appearance

Whether you are using preprinted letterhead with a logo at the top of the sheet, or you generate your own letterhead using a template available from your software, your letters might adhere to the following guidelines:

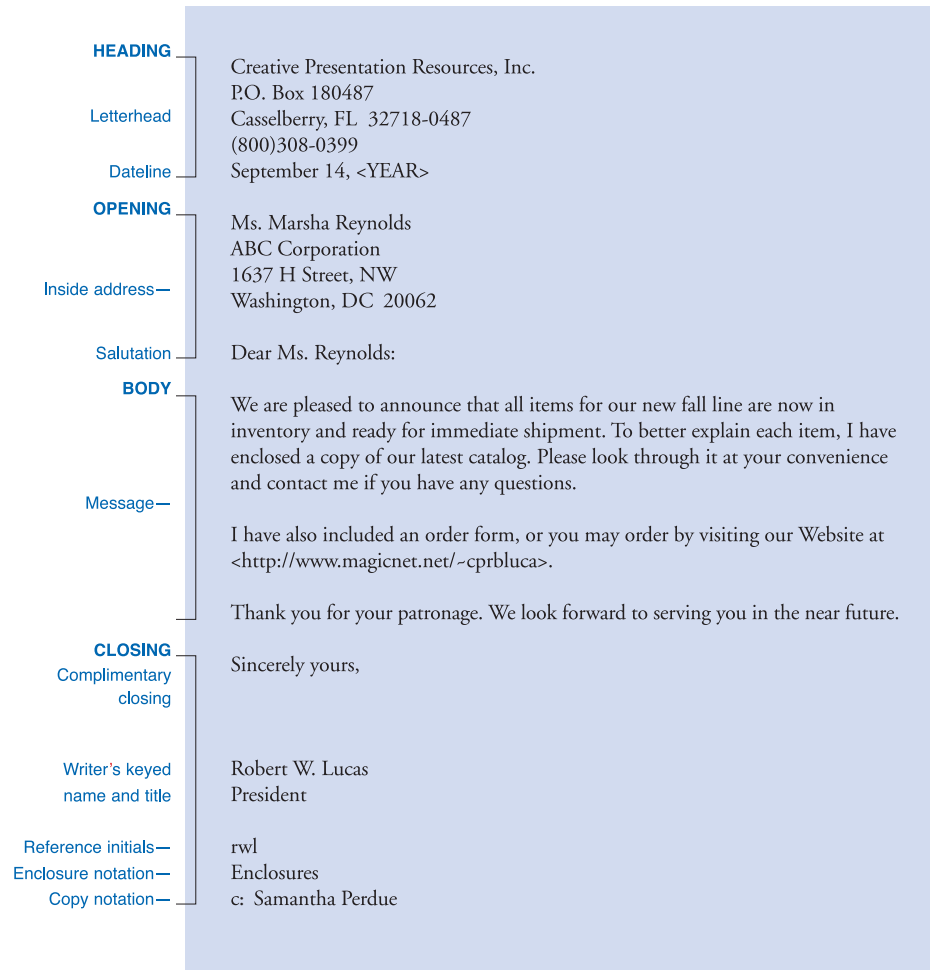
Use a margin of 1 inch on the sides and bottoms of the sheet.

Use a top margin of 2 inches, or use a ½-inch space between the letterhead and the first element in the letter.

Use a 12-point serif-style font such as Times New Roman or a sans serif font such as Arial.

Either *left-justify* (all lines align at the left margin) the text and leave the ends of the lines unjustified (ragged right) or *fully justify* all lines so that the text at the left and right margins is aligned.

FIGURE 7
Block Style Letter
with Mixed
Punctuation
Prepared
on Plain Paper



Parts of a Letter

The four main parts of a letter are the heading, the opening, the body, and the closing.

- *Heading.* An organization's logo, name, and address are normally included in a letterhead. If you are creating a letter on a blank sheet of paper, type this information either above the date or below the typed signature at the end of the letter. If you type the information, include the following items:

Organization name

Street address

City, state, and ZIP Code

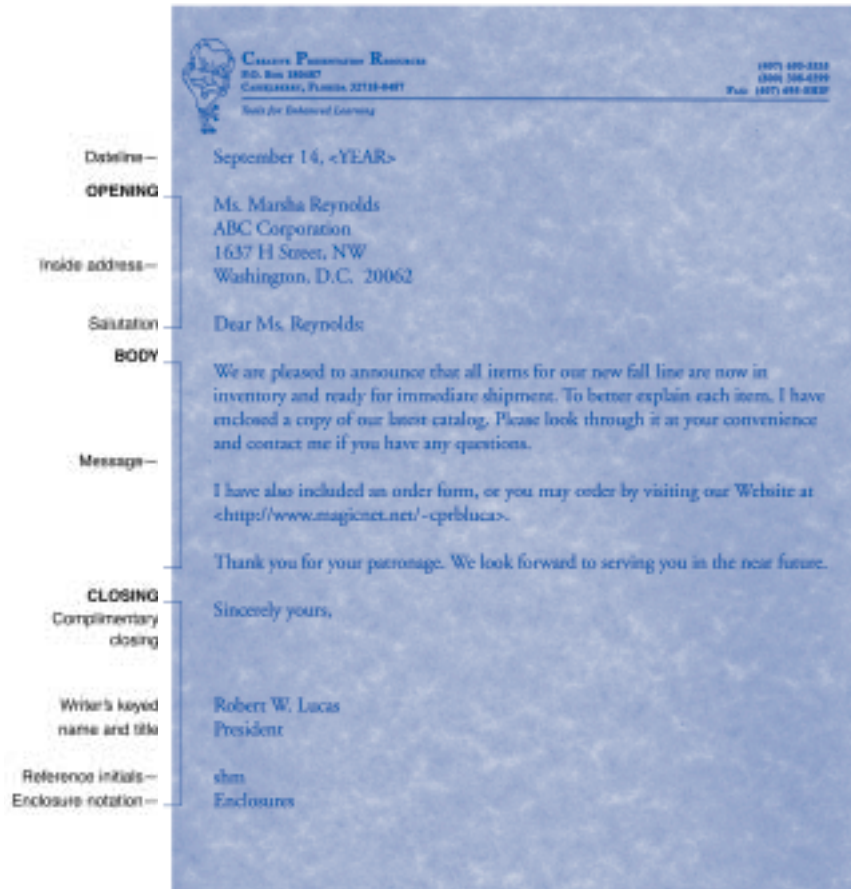
Country (if appropriate)

Telephone and fax numbers and e-mail and website addresses

The date is part of the heading section. Type the date in the form as *month, day, and year* (e.g., October 6, 2004). It may be necessary to use a different form for the date depending on your customer. For example, the military and European countries use the sequence *day, month, and year* (e.g., 6 October 2004). Note that, with this form, no comma is used after the month.

FIGURE 8

Block Style Letter
with Mixed
Punctuation
Prepared on
Letterhead



When typing your address or date line at the top of a blank sheet, start typing approximately 2 inches from the top of the sheet. Type the date on the next line (see Figures 7 and 8). If you are using letterhead stationery, type the date about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch below the letterhead.

- *Opening.* The opening of a letter contains the inside address and the salutation. Leave 3 blank lines under the date and begin typing the inside address, including the following information (see Figures 7 and 8):

Name of recipient

Job title of recipient (if applicable)

Name and address of the recipient's organization

Room, suite, or apartment number

Street address or post office box number

City, state abbreviation (see Figure 9), and ZIP Code Country (in all-capital letters), if applicable

Type the **salutation** on the second line under the inside address. The form of the salutation will be determined by the content, purpose of writing, whether you know the recipient, and the image you are trying to convey. When typing the title and name of your recipient:

FIGURE 9

Abbreviations of States and Territories of the United States

Source: Marilyn Satterwhite and Judy Olson-Sutton, *Business Communication at Work*, 2nd ed., McGraw-Hill/Irwin, Burr Ridge, IL 2003.

AL	Alabama	Ala.	KY	Kentucky	Ky.	OH	Ohio	...
AK	Alaska	...	LA	Louisiana	La.	OK	Oklahoma	Okla.
AS	American Samoa	...	ME	Maine	...	OR	Oregon	Oreg.
AZ	Arizona	Ariz.	MH	Marshall Islands	...	PW	Palau	...
AR	Arkansas	Ark.	MD	Maryland	Md.	PA	Pennsylvania	Pa.
CA	California	Calif.	MA	Massachusetts	Mass.	PR	Puerto Rico	P.R.
CO	Colorado	Colo.	MI	Michigan	Mich.	RI	Rhode Island	R.I.
CT	Connecticut	Conn.	MN	Minnesota	Minn.	SC	South Carolina	S.C.
DE	Delaware	Del.	MS	Mississippi	Miss.	SD	South Dakota	S.Dak.
DC	District of Columbia	D.C.	MO	Missouri	Mo.	TN	Tennessee	Tenn.
FM	Federated States of Micronesia	...	MT	Montana	Mont.	TX	Texas	Tex.
FL	Florida	Fla.	NE	Nebraska	Nebr.	UT	Utah	...
GA	Georgia	Ga.	NV	Nevada	Nev.	VT	Vermont	Vt.
GU	Guam	...	NH	New Hampshire	N.H.	VI	Virgin Islands	V.I.
HI	Hawaii	...	NJ	New Jersey	N.J.	VA	Virginia	Va.
ID	Idaho	...	NM	New Mexico	N.Mex.	WA	Washington	Wash.
IL	Illinois	Ill.	NY	New York	N.Y.	WV	West Virginia	W. Va.
IN	Indiana	Ind.	NC	North Carolina	N.C.	WI	Wisconsin	Wis.
IA	Iowa	...	ND	North Dakota	N.Dak.	WY	Wyoming	Wyo.
KS	Kansas	Kans.	MP	Northern Mariana Islands	...			

Use the two-letter abbreviation on the left when abbreviating state names in addresses. In any other situation that calls for abbreviations of state names, use the abbreviations on the right: if no abbreviation is given, spell the name out.

Start at the left margin.

Leave 1 space above and below the salutation.

Abbreviate titles as such *Mr.*, *Mrs.*, *Ms.*, and *Dr.*

Spell out titles of position or rank such as *Sheriff*, *General*, *Mayor*, *Pastor*, and *Chairperson*.

Follow the salutation with a colon for business letters (or a comma for informal correspondence).

Capitalize the first noun or title in a salutation:

Dear Ms. Harold

Dear Colonel Rushmore

Dear Mayor Linowski

My dear Mr. Freeman

Note: If you know the title or organization name only, but do not know the name of a recipient, or do not know the recipient's gender, you have some options:

Title only: Dear Human Resources Director

Organization only: Dear National Geographic Society, Ladies and Gentlemen, or Dear Sir or Madam

Unknown gender: Dear J. P. Murphy

- *Body.* The body of a letter consists of the message—what you want to say to your recipient. In composing the body of a letter, apply all the guidelines related to parts of speech that were covered earlier in this chapter. As you create your message, think about the key points you wish to make and include them in the first one or two paragraphs. Many people will not read beyond that point if they do not feel a need to know what you have said. To get and hold the attention of your reader, word your opening statement in a way that gives the reader a reason to continue. Think about the way a great novel, speech, or movie begins. Each of these communication vehicles makes a powerful statement or provides a strong image to pique your interest and make you want to continue. The same is true of great letters. You will read later about words that make a positive and negative impact. The key is to start strong and avoid overused introductions. Do you recognize any of the following tired, old introductions?

As per our conversation . . .

Per your request . . .

In accordance with . . .

It was a pleasure speaking (or meeting) . . .

How many of these statements make you want to know what's coming next? Too often, writers begin their correspondence with a trite statement and then go to the real message. Unfortunately, by the time they get to the "good stuff," the reader is no longer with them. Look again at the examples above. Do any of them really say anything? When you read the last one, do you really think someone would write a customer to say that it was *not* a pleasure to speak with him or her?

As you read earlier in this chapter, the key to successful correspondence is to plan, draft, and edit your message from your customer's perspective. Think of how you would feel if you received what you have written. Also, make sure that the document looks professional. As you develop your message, follow these guidelines:

Start with a strong opening statement.

Single-space each paragraph.

Leave 1 blank line between paragraphs.

Keep paragraphs short and concise. Limit the first and last paragraphs to four lines (not sentences). Limit other paragraphs to six to eight lines for maximum readability.

Indent the first sentence (about 1/2 inch) of each paragraph, if desired.

- *Closing.* A typical letter ends with a complimentary closing (e.g., *Respectfully yours*, *Sincerely yours*, or *Cordially*) followed by a comma. The writer's name and title are placed under the complimentary closing, and reference initials (the initials of the person who prepared the document) appear below the writer's name and title.

Enclosure and copy notations may also be added, along with a postscript. A typical closing might look as follows:

Respectfully yours,

Bob Lucas, President

Enclosure

Memorandums

To a great extent, memorandums (memos) have been replaced in many organizations by e-mail. Memorandums were originally designed to provide quick information in an informal format. They are intended mainly for use inside an organization (internal) and often serve as follow-up documentation to a conversation, meeting, or other encounter with a person.

Many people make the mistake of using memorandums when a more formal letter or approach would be appropriate (e.g., to a customer outside the organization or a vendor). Some people make their memorandums too complex, and some fail to follow some common formatting guidelines. A memorandum should normally address a *single* topic. If you need to cover other topics, have a meeting with the person, if possible, send separate memorandums for each topic, or write a detailed letter and attach enclosures.

When formatting your memorandums, decide who really needs a copy of the document. Many people get so much mail and e-mail these days, they do not have time to read all of it in detail. Make the lives of others easier by omitting from the address line the names of people who do not need to receive the information. Memos have two main parts, the heading and the body.

The *heading* includes the following:

The names of the intended receiver and the sender. There may be multiple recipients and senders. If this is the case, list their names from top to bottom based on rank (e.g., CEO first, followed by VPs, and so on). You can also list these names under the line Distribution after the sender's name at the bottom of the letter.

Names of people who will receive a courtesy copy.

The date that the memorandum was sent.

A short, concise subject line.

The *body* includes the following:

Plenty of white space to aid readability.

A purpose sentence (why you are writing).

Concise, short sentences that convey your primary message.

Paragraphs that are short, concise, and to the point.

Key points or ideas numbered or bulleted for easier reading, if appropriate.

A concluding sentence or paragraph that calls for action.

The initials of the originator of the message.

An enclosure notation, if appropriate.

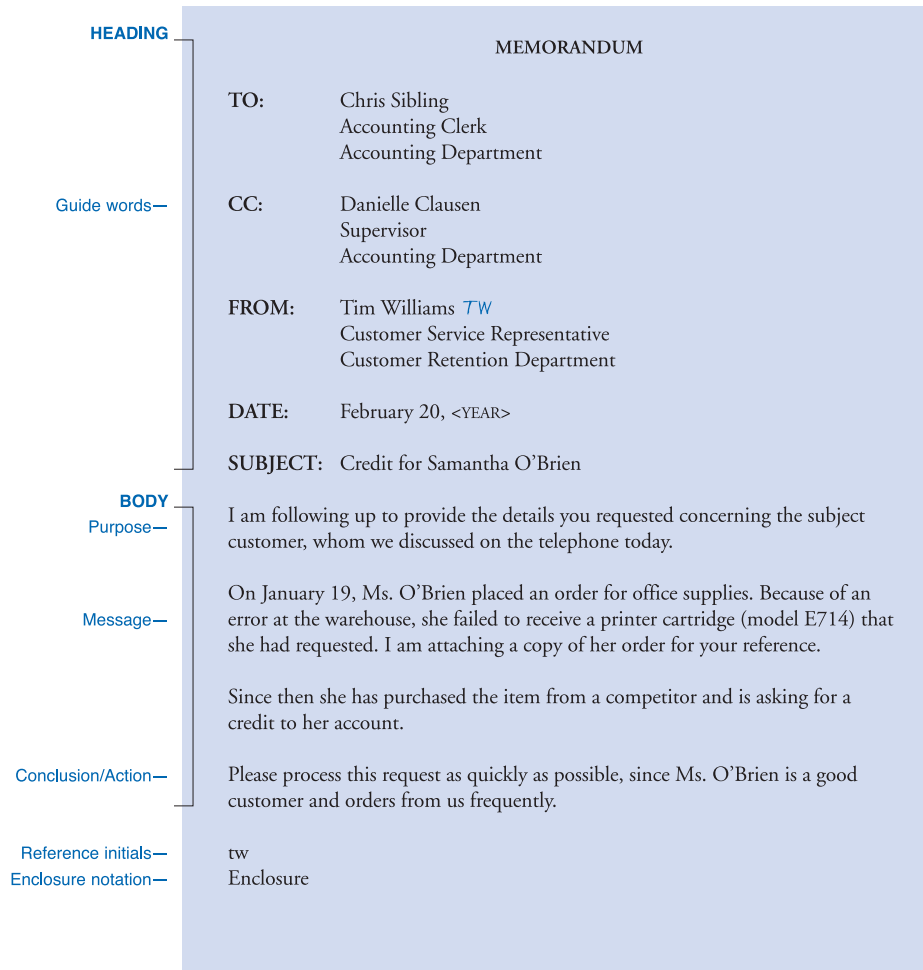
Memo formats vary widely. Many organizations have style manuals that dictate how written correspondence should be formatted. Some companies even have computerized memorandum *templates* or printed forms for employees to use. If your organization does not have these tools, use the following formatting guidelines (see also Figure 10);

Set 1- to 1 1/4-inch margins on the sides.

Start typing 2 inches from the top of the sheet or about 1/2 inch under the organization's name, if your organization provides preprinted stationery.

Double-space the guide words in the heading (e.g., *To*, *CC*, *From*, *Date*, and *Subject*).

FIGURE 10
An Example of a
Memorandum



Use a colon after each heading guide word.

Tab after each guide word (clear the longest guide word by at least 2 spaces).

Use uppercase and lowercase letters for the addressee's name, sender's name, title and/or department, date, and subject.

Start the message body at the left margin. Use block style (all lines begin at the left margin). Use a ragged right margin (do not justify the right margin).

If you have enclosures (attachments to the memorandum), place an enclosure notation under the originator's initials. Reference initials, file name notations, and enclosure notations should all begin at the left margin.

E-Mail

E-mail is an integral part of nearly all businesses in the twenty-first century. When using this tool for customer communication, you must remember e-mail etiquette.

Because of the informal nature of this medium of communication, use e-mail carefully and sparingly in interactions with customers. When you do use it, choose your words carefully, proofread, spell-check, and double-check your message before clicking on "Send."

The importance of your message is crucial in deciding whether to use e-mail or some other method of message delivery. For example, if you need a record of mes-

sage delivery, e-mail may not be the best choice. Even though some systems give you a return receipt notification when a message is received, you do not know who received it. You only know that it got to a destination. Also, if someone changes his or her e-mail provider without informing you, the message may be lost in an electronic void. Or, if you are lucky, the undelivered message may be returned to you. E-mail is not like the U.S. Postal Service.

6 Setting the Tone of Your Correspondence

Concept: The tone that you set in your correspondence can influence your customer to do business with you or not.

Remember what you read about tone of voice in earlier chapters? Tone can send a very powerful message about your attitude, even when you write. Tone can convey your frame of mind—arrogant, angry, frustrated, sarcastic, friendly, hostile, and so on. Tone is conveyed through your word choice, sentence structure, and punctuation. For example, if you respond to a customer’s voice message or e-mail with an abrupt e-mail that uses short sentences punctuated with exclamation points and negative words, you can send a negative message. Read the following examples to see how different messages can be transmitted. Assume that the customer has called twice during the week about a problem with a product shipment, and then e-mailed you today.

Here is one response to the customer:

Dear Ms./Mr. _____

As I told you in our last telephone conversation, I am researching the problem you have called about twice before! I will contact you as soon as I have more information.

Thank you for writing.

Here is another response:

Dear Ms./Mr. _____

Thank you for writing concerning the problem you and I discussed on the telephone earlier this week. I apologize for the delay in resolving the issue. I am still researching the clause; however, I do not have an answer yet. I will contact you this coming Monday to update you, or sooner if I get the answer.

Thank you for your patience.

As a customer, which response would you react to more positively? Why?

One way to avoid sending a negative message when you are emotionally charged is to have someone else read what you have written before you send it to a customer. If this is not possible, write a draft, set it aside for a couple of hours or a day to give you time to cool off, and then reread it. Ask yourself the following questions and then modify the text as necessary:

What message is this correspondence supposed to convey? Did I convey that message?

Have I addressed the customer’s questions or problems?

How would I react to this message?

Is there anything in the wording, punctuation, or sentence structure that could be misconstrued by the customer?

Did I use the active voice in structuring the sentences?

What do I need to add or take away?

Speak to Your Customer

People typically respond better to information that is directed to them. When you personalize what you write through use of words such as *you*, *your*, *I*, *ours*, *we*, and *mine*, you have established a mental link with your reader. Think of the way this book is written. Throughout, the words *you* and *your* have been used to make the text more conversational. Often, people do not consciously realize that you are using a personalized approach, but they react positively to the relaxed or friendly tone.

Use a Positive Tone

Even when you have to say no or deliver “bad news” to a customer, try to do so in a positive manner. Choose your words carefully so that you sound courteous and friendly, and yet assertive. To do so, keep the saying “It’s not what you say, but how you say it” in mind. Use all the standard pleasantries such as *Please*, *May I*, and *Thank you* as you write in order to help make the customer feel appreciated and important to you and your organization (Figure 11).

The most successful strategy for communicating a positive tone is through effective “reader management.” By choosing the right words and style of writing, you can often guide your reader to a decision or in the direction in which you want them to go. To do this in correspondence that has good news or is advantageous to the customer, use the AVARFM principle. In other words, give the customer a reason to read on.

Here are some ways to get the reader’s attention in a good-news letter.

Congratulations Mr. Hostler! You have won the grand prize . . .

Greetings and congratulations! It is my pleasure to inform you . . .

Today is your lucky day!

You are cordially invited . . .

You have been selected . . .

Good news!

FIGURE 11
Words that Convey
a Positive Tone

The following words can help impact a positive tone to messages:

able	enriched	markedly	productive
absolutely	expanded	marvelous	progress
advantage	favorable	modern	promise
appreciation	free	monumental	recommended
approval	genuine	motivation	revolutionary
assist	grateful	multifaceted	reward
assure	great	necessary	satisfactory
bargain	guarantee	notable	save
benefit	happy	offer	security
complimentary	helpful	often	superior
comprehensive	honest	opportunity	terrific
congratulations	important	original	thank you
delighted	initiative	outstanding	timely
determine	invaluable	particular	total
easy	kind	patronage	unique
effective	lasting	perfect	unlimited
efficient	long-lasting	permanent	valued
enhanced	major	pleasure	wonderful

Delivering Bad News or Saying No Positively

Writing to a customer to say that you cannot satisfy his or her needs may not be an easy task for you. You may remember what you learned as a child: “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” Or, you may have compassion for the customer and realize how you might feel if you received such correspondence. Regardless of how you might feel, part of your job as a representative of your organization may be to deliver bad news to customers. Keep in mind that your customer does not want to hear what you cannot do. Instead, the customer wants to hear how you can assist him or her.

When you must say no, try to do so in a manner that protects the relationship between the customer and your organization. One way to accomplish this is to be considerate in your writing style and avoid words that convey a negative tone (see Figure 12). With letters that are likely not to be well received, and in which you must relay some negative information or news, start off with some pleasant information and lead up to the letdown or bad news. Here are three basic parts to use in such communications:

- *Use a buffer.* This is a mild statement that communicates friendliness and comes across as neutral; for example: “We recently received your documentation and a request for reimbursement of expenditures resulting from the repair of the refrigerator you purchased from us three years ago. Thank you for bringing the issue to our attention.”
- *State the reason for the refusal.* In this part, use an honest, open approach to explain why the customer’s request cannot be fulfilled; for example, “Over the years, (company name) has wrestled with the issue of creating a reimbursement policy that is fair to our customers and ourselves. Last year, we decided to set a two-year cutoff for reimbursements except in unusual cases. That decision was based on the fact that if any problems are going to occur, they usually do so during that period. We have consistently found that the quality of our products typically prevents repair problems. After reviewing your documentation, and for these reasons I have just described, I must reject your request for repair reimbursement. If you have questions or comments about this matter, please contact me immediately.”

FIGURE 12
Words that Convey
a Negative Tone

The following words and phrases might conjure up negative images:

abuse	complain	false	lose	sorry
angered	crisis	fault	mediocre	stubborn
anxious	damage	guilty	misinform	stupid
apology	deceive	harass	misrepresent	tardy
argue	delay	hardship	mistake	trouble
bad	delinquent	hate	neglect	unable to
blame	difficulty	helpless	negligence	unfair
broken	disappoint	ignorant	oversight	unfortunate
canceled	dispute	impossible	problem	unsuccessful
cannot	exaggerate	insist	regret	useless
careless	excuse	invalid	rude	victim
cheap	fail	irritate	shortsighted	wrong



Convert the following passive sentences to the active voice. Be prepared to explain your responses to the class.

Passive voice:

Your request for a refund was received yesterday.

Sometimes requests cannot be honored.

Your request will be processed as promptly as possible.

Your request will be processed by Chris.

Customers are typically notified of the status of their requests within seven working days.

- *Reaffirm the value to your organization of the customer and the relationship.* End the correspondence in a manner that maintains the customer-provider relationship and shows goodwill toward the customer; for example, “Mr. Moreno, although we could not assist you in this matter, we do value your business and want to continue to serve you in the future. To help demonstrate our sincerity, I am enclosing a certificate good for 25 percent off the price of any merchandise in our store (including sale items), good for 60 days . . .”

Use the Active Voice When Writing

People writing in the business world sometimes take a low-key or passive approach to writing. This can confuse a reader. Use a direct or active approach when you write to customers. This is especially important when someone must take an action. If you use the **active voice**, you focus action on the subject of your sentence and help the reader understand who is taking action. The active voice helps define where, when, and why an action is taking place. It also livens up sentences by eliminating unnecessary words.

On the other hand, passive sentences make it hard to determine the focus of the action, for no responsibility is assigned in a sentence written in the passive voice. Look at the following examples to get a better idea of the effect of each type of sentence (active and passive):

Active voice: Next week, a third-party vendor will contact our customers.

Passive voice: Our customers are being contacted by a third-party vendor next week.

Active voice: Charlotte will handle the new account.

Passive voice: The new account will be handled by Charlotte.

Active voice: Carl will change the customer’s oil later.

Passive voice: The customer’s oil will be changed later by Carl.

Use Inclusive Language

Respect for others must be observed in the workplace. This is not only because there are laws saying that you must respect the rights of others, but because it is the right thing to do. The easiest way to accomplish this and send a positive tone at the same time is to choose appropriate words in addressing people in your writing.

FIGURE 13
Gender-Specific
and Gender-Neutral
Terms

Avoid using the gender-specific terms listed below, and instead use the suggested gender-neutral terms.

Gender-Specific Terms	Gender-Neutral Terms
anchorman or anchorwoman	anchorperson
boss man or boss lady	supervisor or manager
businessman or businesswoman	businessperson
chairman or chairwoman	chair or chairperson
clergyman	member of the clergy
fireman	firefighter
foreman	foreperson or supervisor
guys or gals	men or women
mankind	human race or humanity
man-made	synthetic
policeman or policewoman	police officer
repairman	service technician
salesman or saleswoman	salesperson, sales associate, sales representative
spokesman or spokeswoman	spokesperson
stewardess or steward	flight attendant
waiter or waitress	server
weatherman or weather girl	meteorologist
workman or workmen	worker or workers

FIGURE 14
Inclusive Nouns

Capitalize the proper names of peoples, races, tribes, religions, and so on. Use lowercase for common nouns describing groups of people.

Aryans	hill tribes
African Americans	Italians
Asian Americans	Jews
blacks	Native Americans
bush people	Navajo
Caucasians	Puerto Ricans
Catholics	whites

Specifically, when you refer to individuals, groups, job positions, and other workplace-related topics, be sure that you use **inclusive language**. This means using appropriate nouns and pronouns that include people of all races, gender, religions, and ethnicities (see Figures 13 and 14).

7 Style and Writing Sources

Concept: Effective word choice and style are essential when you correspond. When you are in doubt about either, refer to a reference or style book.

Developing an effective writing style can take years of practice and review. This chapter has barely touched the surface of what you need to know. Depending on whether you are drafting a letter or memorandum, or developing a formal report or research paper, there are many sources that you can look to. In addition to books listed in the Bibliography, the following are standard references.

William A. Sabin, *The Gregg Reference Manual*, 9th ed., Glencoe/McGraw-Hill, Columbus, OH, 2001.

Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed., Modern Language Association of America, New York, NY 2003.

The American Psychological Association, *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, 5th ed. Washington, D.C., 2001.

The University of Chicago Press, *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 5th ed., Chicago, IL, 2003.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, you have explored some of the basics of effective business writing, starting with the eight parts of speech and the use of the KISS principle in selecting just the right words for your message. You also read about the need to plan, draft, and edit anything you write before sending it to a customer. Failure to do so can lead to a reduced image of professionalism and customer confusion. Once you have organized your message, you must consider who will be receiving the message, your purpose for writing, the format and appearance, the appropriate time to deliver the message, and how you will send it (e.g., letter, memorandum, or e-mail).

In addition, you should consider the tone of what you write. Tone is influenced by the way you address your customer (e.g., *you* or *your*), the approach you use (positive or negative), and the voice (active or passive).

Quick Preview Answers

- | | | |
|------|------|-------|
| 1. F | 5. T | 9. T |
| 2. T | 6. T | 10. T |
| 3. F | 7. T | 11. F |
| 4. F | 8. T | 12. F |

Chapter Review Questions

1. How can the information provided in this chapter help you to better serve customers?
2. Why is it sometimes important to put communications to customers in written form?
3. What are some of the basics that are important to use effectively when writing to a customer?
4. How does word choice affect your customer's reaction to a written message?
5. What is the value in following a three-step process when preparing written material?
6. What are the role and importance of formatting when writing to a customer?

Search it Out



Search the Internet for Names and ZIP Codes

To practice obtaining names, addresses, and ZIP codes to use with customer correspondence, log onto the Internet to search for information:

1. Go to the U.S. Post Office site www.usps.com, click on “ZIP Codes/Addresses,” and search for the following:
 - Type in *George Mason University* and the ZIP Code *22030* to get the complete mailing address and last four digits of the ZIP Code.
 - Type in *1600 Pennsylvania Ave., NW, Washington, D.C.*, to get the name of the resident and the ZIP Code.
 - Type in *1331 F St., Washington, D.C.*, to get the name of the organization and suite number for a group that works with disabled employees.
2. Go to any search engine and type in *state senators* or *representatives*. Get the names of the senators or representatives from your state. Next, go to the <www.whowhere.com>, type in a senators or representative’s name, and get his or her mailing address.

Collaborative Learning Activity

Writing Appropriate Correspondence

Select one of the following options to practice using the skills outlined in this chapter.

1. Your instructor will provide you with written materials (e.g., articles or promotional materials). Use them to practice identifying parts of speech in the sentences that make up the first paragraph of one of the selections.
2. Select one of the following scenarios and create either a letter or a memorandum to the customer based on the information provided and what you read in this chapter:
 - A customer has failed to pay an invoice within the 30 days required. You must write to remind her of the tardiness and to request payment.
 - Write to a customer informing him or her that in order to receive a complimentary two-night resort stay, he or she must return an attached marketing survey by a specified date.
 - The owner of a small business wrote to inform you that the catalogs that were to be delivered earlier this week have not arrived and that she has a special mailing of the materials scheduled for next Wednesday.

Face to Face



Written Correspondence at William's Pest Control

Background

William's Pest Control services is a locally owned business in Charlotte, North Carolina. The company has a good customer base in and around the downtown Charlotte area. Most of its clients are businesses; however, there are also some residential customers.

William Mascot established the company after he was released from active duty in the Marine Corps in 1985. As a teenager, he had worked for another pest control business for three years, prior to spending seven years in the Corps. William's younger brother John and cousin Mark help with service calls. The service consists of basic rodent and pest control and an occasional call to deal with insect or rodent infestations.

Chris Mansfield, who has been with the company for over three years and runs the office, schedules appointments, dispatches service technicians, and handles administrative functions, including all incoming calls and correspondence. Everyone deals with routine customer service matters while on calls.

Your Role

You are Chris Mansfield. Three months ago, service was provided to a long-time client Stephanie's Convenience Mart. John and Mark went to the business site to spray for flying ants. This was done as a routine service call. Nothing has been heard from the client until a letter arrived in the mail today. According to the letter, the flying ants were actually termites, which have eaten away portions of the supporting beams in the roof and parts of the walls. Stephanie's got a repair estimate last week—\$18,000. The letter demands that William's pay for the repair. You have conferred with William, who has asked you to write a letter to Stephanie's.

Critical Thinking Question

Write the letter to Stephanie. What do you think the reaction will be to your letter?