UNIT 6 BUSINESS LETTERS

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6.0 INTRODUCTION

The importance of business letters is discussed in this unit. The student is familiarized with the essentials of a business letter, the various parts it consists of, the different forms it can take. Business letters written by the different departments of an organization are discussed, and handling of complaints tactfully is addressed.

6.1 UNIT OBJECTIVES

In this unit you will learn about:
- Written communication—significance in business
- Essentials of a business letter
- Parts of a business letter
- Forms of a business letter
- Types of business letter
- Writing a good business letter
- Letters of enquiry
- Dealing with complaints

6.2 WRITTEN COMMUNICATION—SIGNIFICANCE IN BUSINESS

The world of business is replete with various types of written communication. Written communication is so much a part of everyday business that one cannot think of a business without related correspondence. Think of any organization or institution—bank, electric company, hotel, college, library, etc. dealing with people and there is obviously some written correspondence. It may be handwritten, typewritten or printed. In the olden days, there were people who were specially assigned the job of taking care of correspondence, even in small businesses. Such persons were popularly referred to as
Enquiries, invitations, price lists, offers, quotations, announcements, due notices, new arrivals, clearance and disposal, recoveries and reminders, orders and a host of other such activities of everyday relevance for any business are covered through written communication. Any business has to correspond in writing with its customers, branches, auditors, suppliers, bankers, media persons, employees, shareholders and others with whom it has a business relationship. Written communication is a convenient way for any business to reach across to people, within the locality and the neighbourhood, and also customers, prospects and other public spread across other cities, regions and even countries. Written correspondence thus has an extremely wide reach and as such is very useful for any business whose operations are widely spread out.

6.2.1 Advantages of written communication

Written communication has certain distinct advantages as compared to verbal communication. It has a much larger reach whereas verbal communication can only go as far as the voice or oral messages can travel. Moreover, while verbal communication goes with the non-verbal message, written communication creates a solo impact. For this very reason, in oral communication, the communicator has to be quite conscious of the accompanying body language and other non-verbal messages, for they have the potential to distort or contradict the basic oral message. Written communication takes several forms—from ordinary business letters to typed and cyclostyled messages, to printed pamphlets and brochures. Any such written communication has certain clear advantages as detailed below:

- Written communication has an extremely wide reach, co-terminus with the literate world.
- Written communication can be well organized to convey the precise message.
- Written communication, generally speaking, can be prepared at the time when the communicator is best prepared to do so.
- Written communication, unlike oral communication, can be effective as a stand alone medium.
- Written communication can be targeted to reach specific individuals/sections.
- Written communication can be sent in a language that the receiver can read and understand.
- Written communication can carry the much-desired personal touch.
- Written communication can be erased, revised and rewritten.
- Written communication, when stored, can be exactly reproduced or repeated.
- Written communication, organized properly, can be cost effective.
- Written communication, very importantly, creates records and reference sources.

The advantages of written communication far outweigh its limitations and this method of communication is extensively used in the business world.

6.2.2 Written communication helps nurture business relationships

Although written communication may not provide the depth and intensity of a face-to-face communication, it meets very well the requirements for a variety of simple and direct correspondence/messages that a business needs for its everyday transactions. There may be occasions when the first letter may not give all the details the recipient wishes to have, necessitating further correspondence. Nevertheless, a good business letter constitutes the basic plank on which effective business correspondence rests. A good business letter has to create, nurture and sustain a good business relationship.
6.3 ESSENTIALS OF A BUSINESS LETTER

Business letters, to be good and effective, must contain certain essentials. In other words, business letters should conform to certain minimum standards of letter-writing. One can look at these essentials from different angles—language, content, context, length, structure, layout, taste, tone, impact and purpose orientation. Any letter is amenable to description in terms of these characteristics or features. To qualify the letter should measure up as good when viewed from any of these considerations. It may or may not encompass all these features. Nevertheless, a good letter-writer should have a clear understanding of all the characteristics that make the letter effective. In order to be clear about what is a good letter, it is also very necessary to know what is a bad letter. While a good letter can be good on many counts, a bad letter may have one undesirable feature which can mar the beauty of the entire letter.

6.3.1 Characteristics of a bad business letter

A bad letter stands out like a sore thumb for any of its deficiencies, which might be any of the following:

- Lack of clarity
- Poor use of words and expressions
- Incorrect spelling and grammatical errors
- Too short or very lengthy
- Too many ideas crowded into one letter
- Inaccurate or factually incorrect
- Fails to convey the main purpose
- Not the reader’s wavelength
- Too much jargon and technical words
- Lacking in aesthetic sense
- Language used not familiar to the reader
- Lengthy paragraphs
- Offensive in nature
- Absence of personal touch
- Lacking in courtesy
- Creates ill-will
- Written out of context
- Absence of relevant information
- Use of poor quality paper, ink, etc.
- Wrong address
- Without address

Business is all about creating goodwill, favourable impressions, attracting attention, creating interest, wooing customers, reaching prospects, and building relationships. All this calls for conscious effort, concerted action and correspondence on a regular basis. As this has to be done in a world that is full of competition, one bad letter can cause avoidable damage to the reputation of the business. Badly written letters cause embarrassment to the people behind the business and show the organization in poor light.
6.3.2 Essentials of a good business letter

Before discussing the essentials of a good business letter, it would be desirable to keep in view what such a letter can achieve for business. A good business letter can reach out and directly address the target, be it a customer or a prospect or a patron or the regulator. A good business letter can address the prospect and set the sales pitch. A good business letter can act as an effective salesperson. A good business letter can strengthen the bond and provide further details to an existing customer. A good business letter can, thus, act as your relationship officer. A good business letter can dispel disinformation and create goodwill. It thereby acts as your ambassador. A good business letter can make announcements, share relevant information and keep you in touch with people who matter. In this way, a good business letter can be your public relations officer (PRO). Well-written and imaginatively drafted letters can play the role of a salesman, a relationship officer, an ambassador and a PRO for business establishments. This is true especially for small businesses which cannot afford to employ people specifically for carrying out these functions.

Let us now briefly discuss the requisites or essentials of a good business letter.

6.3.2.1 Have Clarity

A letter must have clarity. The underlying message should be expressed in clear terms. Care should be taken to avoid ambiguity. The purpose of communication should be made clear. Whether it is to inform, invite, reiterate, emphasize, remind, announce, seek participation or clarity and correct the earlier message, the purpose should clearly be stated.

If a letter-writer is writing a letter on behalf of somebody else, it should be done after obtaining clear instructions. There are occasions when one may receive a letter informing the date and the venue of a meeting without an accompanying invitation or request to attend. The reader or the receiver of the communication, in such an instance, will be in a dilemma. Is the invitation intended and implied but not specifically stated? Or is the letter just meant to be informative and no invitation is being extended. One way or the other, the message should be clear. Just imagine the embarrassment that is caused when people not meant to be invited turn up at the venue and have to be turned back, or when the people who have to attend the meeting feel there is only an intimation and no invitation, and hence fail to turn up. When this happens due to lack of clarity in communication, any business suffers. This is just one example. There are umpteen ways in which the lack of clarity affects the intended purpose of the letter. A letter-writer should be conscious of this and exercise due care.

6.3.2.2 Create an Impact

The letter should create the necessary impact. Behind every letter there is an objective and the letter should have a clear purpose. The purpose of writing a letter is not just to reach out to the customer. Every letter has an intended impact which must be felt. To create the desired impact, it is often necessary to lay emphasis. Emphasis can be laid in many ways. It can be done by proper positioning—placing them in an important position. It can be done by repetition. It can be done by underlining or using a larger type or font. Similarly, to create the right impact, the letter-writer should address the letter to the right person. The right person is the specific person who is the target of the communication, and whose action or response the business considers to be of value. Creating an impact also calls for establishing an appropriate wavelength. The letter-writer should write keeping in view the skill, knowledge, status, and comprehension ability of the reader or the addressee.
Yet another requisite of an impact-creating letter is coherence. It is necessary to use words, phrases and clauses clearly, so as to form balanced sentences. Coherence seeks to establish a proper relationship and links sentences to make the intended message clear. Coherence brings consistency and orderliness to the encoded message.

A letter succeeds in creating the desired impact when it ensures purpose orientation, lays the right emphasis, establishes an appropriate wavelength and is coherent. Some of the common questions asked or statements made in relation to these attributes are:

- What is one trying to convey? (Purpose Orientation)
- Which of these is really urgent? (Emphasis)
- Is it too elementary or is it an overhead transmission? (Wavelength)
- What is the sequence? (Coherence)

It is necessary to give due attention to these areas and build up skills so that the letters become impact-creating.

6.3.2.3 Contain relevant information

The letter should provide the relevant details forming part of the message. Facts, figures, illustrations and other such information, which are both accurate and reliable, as well as relevant to the context of the communication, should be incorporated in the letter. The principle of communication that we are referring to here is also known as adequacy or completeness. A communication can be said to be complete only when it contains all the facts and details which the receiver needs to know in order to respond or act on the basis of that communication. Not giving all the required details leads to protracted correspondence, loss of customers or lack of response. Worse still, although non-submission of full details may be due to an oversight or inadequate attention to details, the receiver may infer that there is a deliberate attempt to withhold or conceal facts and figures. Imagine a letter received from a departmental store announcing the opening of a new branch and seeking your patronage, that does not give details of the new address or timings. Another requirement of a business letter is concreteness. A communication is said to be concrete when it is specific, definite and to the point, and not vague and generalized. Often the letters are so rambling in nature that one can imagine the reader screaming, ‘Please come to the point and be specific’. A concrete letter does not ramble and is sharp and focussed.

6.3.2.4 Use Brevity

Any good communication—oral or written—should necessarily incorporate this essential feature. Brevity is a very important attribute for any business letter. For everyone connected with business, time is of essence. The time that one can allot for reading business letters is certainly limited. The receiver does not have unlimited time to spare towards reading and re-reading the letter and drawing out the message in its entirety. On the contrary, any business letter is competing with a huge mass of business related and other communication targeted at the receiver, waiting to catch attention and time. Recognizing this, any business will have to value the receiver’s time. Brevity in letter writing, therefore, is a must. Long letters, whatever be their merits, are often kept aside for ‘later reading’. Brevity in communication is also referred to as conciseness. Conciseness refers to the skill of conveying what one wants to convey in the fewest possible words, without sacrificing completeness or courtesy. Conciseness eliminates unnecessary words and phrases, repetitive sentences, and keeps the letter focussed. A good letter makes economical use of words. Brevity is a skill that a business communicator must develop. As people move up in an organizational hierarchy, their ability to condense messages into brief and focussed letters counts for a lot.
hierarchical work situations, one can see the ‘drafts’ of letters prepared by the junior staff moving upwards tier by tier ‘for final approval’ and much time and effort are wasted if brevity is not ensured.

6.3.2.5 Keep it simple

Simplicity is the hallmark of any good communication. Simplicity refers to the ease of understanding. Simple writing is the opposite of complex and involved writing. The art of simple writing is mastered through conscious effort and practice. A letter written in a simple, easy, informal style using easily understood words catches the attention, and makes an impact. Simplicity in writing does not, however, necessarily imply simple or plain thoughts. The thoughts may be complex, and the subject quite complicated, but the manner of expression or presentation is kept simple. It takes tremendous insight and skill to express complex matters and complicated issues in a simple form. The normal tendency on the part of the communicator is to resort to complex sentences, cliches, technical jargon and high-sounding words to communicate not-so-simple thoughts and developments, resulting in confusion and bewilderment. One must make constant endeavours to write simple, yet meaningful and impact-creating, business letters. It involves not only the use of simple words, but also, more importantly, a clear insight into the structure of sentences and paragraphs. Brevity and simplicity are so essential for good communication that many writers refer to it with the acronym KISS—Keep It (the letter) Short and Simple.

Figure 6.1: Brevity at its Best

The style of writing varies from person to person. There are people who can communicate very effectively even with the minimum of words. Here is a classic example.

The briefest correspondence in history is reported to be a letter from the great French writer Victor Hugo and the reply to it from his publisher. Hugo’s letter was just “?”

He wanted to know how his newly published novel, Les Miserables, was faring in the market.

The publisher’s reply was just “!”

Understandably, it would be virtually impossible for anyone to communicate so effectively and yet be so brief. To be brief and yet convey effectively is indeed a very fine art of effective communication.

6.3.2.6 Observe Timeliness

Business letters, to be effective, should have proper timing. Letters should be written and dispatched on time. Some messages have a sense of urgency. They call for action, which is ‘immediate’ or ‘urgent’, or within a given time frame. Letters which carry such messages should reflect the associated urgency. They should be so addressed and delivered that there is enough time to permit action within the given time frame. It is not uncommon to see letters seeking some action by a specified date reaching the receiver after that date. Some not-so-uncommon examples of this are:

• A communication from a controlling office to a branch stating, ‘Please send us the statement without fail by 30 September 2001’, reaching on 2 October 2001
• A letter from a committee secretariat asking the member to attend the meeting scheduled on the 10th of the month, reaching him that evening
• A letter from a departmental store announcing ‘Clearance sale for 3 days’, reaching after the sale
• A letter from a personnel department asking an officer to appear for her promotional interview on 6 October 2001 at the regional office, reaching on 5 October 2001
Apart from negating the purpose of communication, such letters reflect poorly on both the organization and the sender of the message. If the action called for is so urgent, the minimum that anyone would expect from the sender is a clear demonstration of the urgency by ensuring speedy communication. This necessitates not only timely writing but also timely dispatch. For example, there may be occasions when a letter dated 15 September 2001 or 20 September 2001 reaches the addressee on 2 October 2001 or 5 October 2001. Goal-oriented and effective communication presupposes that the person concerned acts and intervenes at every stage in the transmission of communication. Timeliness in business writing also involves the choice of the right channel—mail, telegram or courier, as the case may be. Sending letters too much in advance is also to be avoided because unless there is a timely reminder, the message is likely to be forgotten.

6.3.2.7 Use suitable language

Language is an extremely important facet of business communication. First and foremost, it is necessary to ensure that the language used is appropriate, i.e. the language with which the reader is at ease. Apart from English and Hindi, various regional languages are in common use in businesses in different parts of the country. Public sector organizations such as banks follow the three-language formula. Many printed letters are bilingual—both in Hindi and English. Business letters should use the language which the prospect, customer, or addressee can read and understand. Choosing the appropriate language for a large multinational or multi-regional organization is important, not only for furthering business interests, but also for ensuring that the sensibilities of certain sections of people are not offended. When organizations and businesses go global, the choice of appropriate language becomes highly relevant. Having chosen the right language, the next step is to ensure that the phrases, expressions, words, grammar and spellings are correct.

Grammatical errors and spelling mistakes have no place in a good business letter. They create a poor impression on the reader. Every business writer may or may not achieve grammatical perfection. The use of commas at all relevant places in the sentence and avoidance of split infinitives, for example, may not always take place. In fact, certain grammatical imperfections such as the use of split infinitives are tolerated as long as the message is clear. The important point emphasized here is that while the letter-writer may or may not achieve grammatical perfection, glaring and obvious grammatical errors have no place in good writing. A good letter-writer should know his grammar well and seek appropriate reference when in doubt. A business letter with noticeable bad grammar, notwithstanding whatever other merits, creates a poor impression on the reader.

6.3.2.8 Effective use of Vocabulary or word power

For the language to be effective, an important prerequisite is abundant vocabulary or word power. Words are the very essence of written communication. Words translate thoughts and carry the message through to the reader. They lay emphasis as and when required. Since words have the potential to make or mar the language of the business communicator, this aspect has been dealt with in some detail in the following paragraphs.

Figure 6.2: Playing with Words

| Words have a meaning, both in the absolute sense and the relative sense. It is often possible to convey a powerful message by grouping together thoughts and words. |
| For example, LIES. DAMN LIES. STATISTICS. |
| By this line you are hinting that statistics are the superlative degree of lies. |
The world of words, as we have noted earlier, is wonderful and fascinating. The English language has an enormous stock of words. With new words being added constantly, the stock of useable English words keeps growing. *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (2000 edition) gives as many as 80,000 words and references covering both British English and American English. This vast and growing reservoir of words offers at once both an opportunity and a challenge to the communicator. It is an opportunity because there is a tremendous choice of words available to the person. It is a challenge no doubt, for the building up of word power calls for a systematic and ongoing effort, using familiar words and learning new words. One can easily spend one’s lifetime learning new words, understanding their shades of meaning and effectively using all the words available.

Words make the letter. A good letter-writer should choose words with care. To do so, one must necessarily build an enormous word power. Every person keen on becoming an effective communicator should *delve deeply into words and their meanings*. Most words have many shades of meaning. The appropriate word or set of words depends on the context, tone and gravity of the message, and also the relationship with the person to whom it is addressed.

Much as one would like, it is not always possible to readily recall the exact word. As a result, one may often find oneself groping for the right word. Any person keen on building word power and using the most appropriate word in every piece of a write-up must *take recourse to a standard English dictionary and Roget’s Thesaurus*. Until a writer gets a fine command over English words, and even thereafter when a reconfirmation is required on the shades of meanings a word conveys, constant reference to these two sources would be immensely helpful. It is worth emphasizing that the author of this book has made umpteen references to these sources while writing this book. To make it clearer, let us take a look at a few words and try to understand all that they convey.

Take, for example, the word ‘*communication*’. *Roget’s Thesaurus* refers to the following shades of meaning:

- Joining, Transfer, Intercourse, Information, Messages, Oral communication, Conversation, Epistle, Passageway, Giving, Social intercourse.

Each one of them is in turn elaborated under different sections with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and exclamations associated with the word. One of the meanings of communication listed above is information. In turn, the word information covers the following:


Let us take another word, ‘*satisfaction*’. The Thesaurus again refers to the following shades of meaning:

- Adequacy, Satiety, Reparation, Fulfillment, Duel, Payment, Pleasure, Content, Reprisal, Atonement.

Out of these, let us take a look at the word ‘*content*’.

Again, this word could mean the following:

- Adequacy, Satiety, Reparation, Fulfillment, Duel, Payment, Pleasure, Content, Reprisal, Atonement.
Since vocabulary building is of immense value to a communicator, we are giving below some more examples of words and their meanings.

Take for example the word ‘piece’. It essentially means a small amount. There is a range of words to talk about this aspect. The communicator or writer should be in a position to choose the right word to go with the substance being talked about. The range of words relevant here are:

- Piece, Bit, Chunk, Lump, Fragment, Speck, Drop, Pinch, Portion.

Similarly, when you want to say someone is ‘fat’, you have to choose the word most appropriate from the following range:

- Fat, Overweight, Large, Heavy, Big, Plump, Chubby, Stocky, Stout, Obese.

Apart from knowing the word, it would also be desirable to know the various words belonging to that word family. Some examples of this are:

- Rely, Reliable, Reliability, Reliance.
- Perceive, Perception, Perceptive, Perceptible.

There are also words whose meanings are close to each other. One should be clear about the fine difference that exists to be in a position to choose the right word. Some examples of such words are:

- Condition, State
- Classic, Classical
- Altogether, All together

All the above examples and many more such helpful suggestions are highlighted in the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary*. The point to be noted here is that words in the English language have multifarious connotations and uses. There are words which convey the same meaning but each one perhaps has a context where it fits in perfectly. Similarly, there are many words belonging to the same word family. A good writer must build up his word power in such a way that words of all kinds are on top in memory, or as an alternative, the writer has ready access to sources like the Thesaurus. In the absence of a proper supply of appropriate words, the smooth flow of writing gets obstructed. Groping for the most appropriate word or even just a sufficient word causes frustration.

In letter-writing or any other written communication, it is very essential that words are not frequently repeated. Repetition tends to irritate the reader. If you come across a particular word repeated again and again in a sentence and the sentences that follow in the same paragraph, the reader is likely to get a poor impression of the writing.

To be able to avoid repetition, the writer should have a good stock of equivalent words or synonyms. Synonyms are words identical and co-extensive in sense and usage with another of the same language.

**Figure 6.3: Participation and Involvement—Choosing the Right Word**

A farmer couple in a British countryside farm house were discussing the food to be served to their guests expected to arrive the next morning. The husband told the wife, ‘Prepare omelette for breakfast and bacon for dinner’. As soon as he said this, the pig which was in the corner started jumping around shrieking. The hen, on noticing this, asked the pig, ‘What is wrong?’. The pig lamented, ‘Didn’t you hear, they are planing to have bacon for tomorrow’s dinner’. The hen said, ‘So what? They are having omelette for breakfast, which means I have to sacrifice my eggs and yet I am not that perturbed’. In response, the pig made a telling remark. It said agonisingly, ‘My sacrifice is a lot more than yours. Yours is participation, but mine is involvement.’

*As related by a banker friend*
Ivor Brown, in his introduction to the third edition of *Roget’s Thesaurus*, has beautifully summed up the significance of word power and its effective use for any good writer. He says, ‘Words as well as ideas are the raw material that he requires in good supply. But words can be the decoration as well as the tools of good writing. This does not mean that they should be splashed around recklessly: a good artist with the riches of his paint box at hand, does not use them in a lavish or slapdash way. The artist considers, selects, and blends tints, to get both strength and delicacy in the finished picture. So it is with words. To have a copious supply and to use it with judgement is an excellent foundation for good writing and for the possession of what is called ‘style’.

6.3.2.9 Have an Appeal
A good letter should appeal to the reader’s sensibilities. It should go beyond the message it conveys and make an overall good impression. It should have elegance, which means taste, beauty, and decency. A good letter also ensures certain aesthetic appeal. No letter can be called elegant or aesthetically appealing if it does not give due attention to appearance. Mistakes and corrections, striking, overwritings, improper ink flow, unintended gaps and other such deficiencies rob an otherwise good letter of all its elegance.

A letter is appealing when it shows consideration. Consideration means thoughtfulness. It means keeping in mind the reader and putting oneself in the reader’s shoes while writing the letter. Consideration means visualizing the reactions of the reader and accommodating them in the approach to the communication. A good letter-writer invariably makes it a point to think from the other person’s point of view. Another essential for a good writer is empathy. A letter shows empathy when it reflects understanding and comprehension of the impact on the reader. It tells the reader what is of interest to the reader. A good letter uses the ‘you’ more frequently than ‘I’. A good letter makes the reader feel important.

6.3.2.10 Inculcate a good style
Style refers to the manner of writing. It constitutes the collective characteristics of the writing or impression or way of presenting things. Each person has an individual style. The writing style, to create an impact, again needs conscious effort, on an ongoing basis. While encompassing various requisites of letter writing, the letter brings to bear the individual’s stamp on the letter. If you are regularly reading the letters emanating from a particular source, you get to identify the style. People tend to judge the style and categorize them—good style, bad style, free style, etc.

Style can be associated with the person writing the letter and carries certain distinctiveness. Style is also understood as ‘Proper words in proper places’. One can also describe style in other ways—personal or impersonal, formal or informal, narrative or descriptive, rambling or focussed, considerate or harsh, simple or verbose. A simple, informal, considerate and focused style of writing scores high in building a rapport with the reader.

Figure 6.4: They Make Things Happen

˚Some people use language like underwear, merely to cover the subject; others use it like lingerie, to show it at its best. They are the ones who sway attitudes and make things happen. Writing is a two-way transaction, like love. The writer is the suitor who seeks to win the audience; and the audience wants to be won if the conditions and the message are right.˚

*Philip Lesly*

Those who gain excellent command over the language and build a fine repertoire of words and phrases to choose from, use language like lingerie and show it at its best.
A good writing style implies the proper use of idioms and expressions. An idiom is described as the way ideas are used in a language. It is a form of expression peculiar to a language. Like any other language, English too has its idioms. Another aspect worth noting in the context of developing a good writing style is to avoid clichés. Clichés are hackneyed literary phrases. They are often repeated ad nauseum. Some commonly used clichés are; ‘Last but not least’; ‘Better late than never’; ‘However, there is no room for complacency’, and so on.

A good writing style carries sincerity. Sincere writing is straightforward and there is no attempt at manipulation. The writer comes through as honest, genuine and frank. Some writing also gets described as candid and transparent. Being sincere, therefore, means writing naturally. The words reflect feelings, concerns and expectations in a forthright manner.

A good writing style should also encompass politeness or courtesy. It should respect the reader as an individual. It should reflect the basic minimum courtesies that any transaction or relationship demands. It should be appreciative and complimentary to the extent appropriate in the given context. Business letters, by and large, seek to strengthen the relationships that are good for business when the occasion demands. The writer should not hesitate to apologize for omissions or errors.

A good writing style also refers to writing naturally, without undue efforts. Otherwise the writing becomes labored and loses spontaneity. After a while, the tediousness starts showing. The ability to write spontaneously and effortlessly for all occasions has to be consciously developed.

6.3.2.11 Take a Positive approach

A good business letter, in the ultimate analysis is that which has a positive approach. It creates a friendly atmosphere. It avoids negative feelings. One must be in a proper frame of mind to write a really good letter. Thoughts and words must synchronize. The basic objective should not be lost sight of. The letter should bestir and motivate the reader to act or respond as visualized. Good letters cannot be written under extreme emotional conditions such as sorrow, depression, anger, frustration or shock. Such letters may not carry the overall balance in approach which is so essential for effective writing. Similarly, a good letter cannot be written in a great hurry. One must take adequate time to put thoughts into words, choosing the most appropriate ones for the context. The writer should write the letter taking adequate time, with due attention to all relevant considerations.

Apart from the various characteristics already listed, a good letter should have integrity, accuracy and promptness. There should be respect for values, and ethical and moral standards. The writer should demonstrate a sense of legitimacy in his writing. Messages should be accurate and there should not be any misrepresentation and out of context passages. Positive approach also means being prompt in responding. A writer is often also a recipient of communication. The writer should make it a point to respond without any undue delay.

A positive approach does not mean that one has to say ‘yes’, for everything. Any business has its commercial considerations. It has its rules, norms and compliances. One cannot say ‘yes’ if it is commercially imprudent and if the set norms are not met. Good letter-writing, therefore, is the art of learning to say ‘no’ by packaging ‘no’ in a pleasing manner. It is the art of packaging ‘no’ in an acceptable format. It is the art of winning over the customer even while losing that particular offer or transaction. The business offer may or may not come up to the expectation, but, nevertheless, the communication should leave behind a favourable impression.
In any organization and business, there will be umpteen occasions to say No, to disagree, to convey displeasure, to punish, to pull up, to do plain speaking and to call a spade a spade. Quite often this will have to be done by way of a letter. In all such instances, it is necessary that the damage, the feeling of hurt or ill will, if any, is kept to the minimum. While the nature of the message would have certain unpleasantness associated with it, the tone and style can make a difference and soften the blow. It is under such circumstances that the skill of good writing comes into full play. A skilful writer learns to mitigate the hardship or adverse impact of the message through choice of words and manner of presentation. Although what is being said is not pleasant, how it is being said makes it less unpleasant.

A positive approach in letter-writing does in many ways create goodwill for the writer and the organization. It creates regard for the writer and a friendly disposition towards the business. It generates heartiness and kind feeling so essential for the success of any business organization in today’s market place. Another very essential characteristic of good business writing is imagination.

The writer has to bring an unique perspective and experience and, to the extent appropriate, relate them to the letter on hand. It is this imagination that brings excitement into the communication. Communication becomes active and creative. Imaginative writing takes the level of writing to a reader-friendly mode. Organizations and businesses that succeed in the present intensively competitive environment are those that sparkle with innovations and creativity. Written communication emanating from business organizations should, therefore, duly reflect enthusiasm. A good letter radiates enthusiasm. Any good communication should have variety. It is said that variety is the spice of life. Variety adds spice to writing. It makes communication lively and interesting. A good letter makes its impact the very first time. When the letter is repeated, however good and relevant it may be, the impact gets diluted. The reader’s interest wanes. When the subject of the message is repetitive in nature, in terms of thoughts and ideas, there may not be much change. Nevertheless, in terms of choice of words, structure of sentences and intensity of the tone, the letter can and should be different.

Viewed against the backdrop of so many essentials for good letter-writing, models or drafts or stereotyped formats of letters are of limited value. Barring areas such as documentation, legal drafting, routine procedural forms, etc. it is not desirable to follow stereotyped writing models. Any draft or model letter would also carry the writer’s style or approach. Moreover, copying or adopting such formats blindly restricts the writer’s ability to develop a distinctive style of writing. In any case, each situation and every context is quite different and no standard format can be followed without appropriate refinements. At best, such formats can only be taken as broadly suggestive or indicative. Instead of taking a model and attempting to make requisite modifications to suit one’s specific needs, it would be worthwhile to understand the principles and develop one’s writing skills.

In the foregoing paragraphs, we have looked at numerous essentials or requisites of good writing. The attempt has been to make it fairly exhaustive rather than to cover only the minimum requisites. One can refer to the minimum requisites as the ‘ABC’ of good letter writing, where A stands for accuracy, B for brevity and C for clarity. The minimum requisites are necessary, but by no means adequate.

6.3.2.12 Striving for excellence

A good letter-writer should try to achieve a significantly high standard of letter-writing and endeavour to achieve excellence. All the dozen or so essentials outlined above are relevant in building up the skills of effective letter-writing. When we talk of business letters, we refer to a great variety of letters. They range from the routine, repetitive
letters to the more complex, goal-oriented ones. They seek not only to inform, educate and appeal, but also to carry out complex and composite functions such as evaluation, justification, motivation, persuasion, penetration, dispelling of wrong impressions and even award of punishment. They may be as short as half a page or as long as eight to ten pages. The bigger and more complex the letter, greater the scope for skilful writing.

The essentials outlined above are not to be taken as a checklist against which every letter has to be evaluated. Some letters need to be just simple and straightforward and there may not be much scope for imagination or creativity. The nature of the subject, the context of the communication and the relationship of the recipient determine how many qualities or essentials one can build into any letter. Being aware of as many essentials as are relevant in writing a wide range of business letters helps in developing effective letter writing skills.

### 6.4 PARTS OF A BUSINESS LETTER

Business letters are different from personal letters and carry a distinct format and style. Business letters are known to cover several widely accepted parts, and a good business letter should be drafted in accordance with the principles of such formatting. Although there are different types of letters, each is relevant in a specific context, and the parts are generally common to all such letters. One needs to be familiar with not only the different parts of the letter but also, equally importantly, about their positioning in the letter. When we refer to a business letter, we refer to it in its totality, including both external and internal features. As we have seen in the earlier chapters, a good business letter not only carries across the message as intended, but also creates the right overall impression on the reader.

Any letter has its many parts—outside, inside, top, bottom, middle, left, right, first page, second page, enclosures, and annexure. Each one of these parts has a certain significance and carries a definite place in the context of letter-writing. All these external and internal features concerning a business letter carry a time-tested position and significance. All the same, when we refer to a position or placement, we are not necessarily referring to a very rigid position for all times. Over a period of time, business writers have brought in flexibility and improvisations resulting in a certain choice of positioning as well. Thus, notwithstanding the various types and places relevant to a business letter, it is possible to have different styles in writing a business letter.

Let us take a look at the various parts of a business letter and their essential characteristics.

#### 6.4.1 Letterhead

The letterhead announces the name of the business. It often suggests what the business is about—whether it is a bank, an insurance company, a transport agency, a trading firm, a building contractor, an estate agent, etc. While some businesses choose to mention their name as well as their line of business in their letterhead, others confine themselves only to the name. Quite often the constitution of the business is also stated—public limited, private limited, government undertaking, etc. Along with the name and line of business, some relevant particulars such as the date of establishment, location of the head office or registered office, telephone number, fax number and e-mail address are also furnished on the top of the letterhead.

Apart from all these details, the letterhead also carries prominently the logo of the business. If it is a public sector undertaking, as per the official language policy, all these details will have to be furnished bilingually. Each business decides what details it wants
to include about itself on the top of the letterhead. Sometimes the details are distributed among the top and bottom portions of the letterhead. The name and logo are covered at the top and the address, phone number, fax number, etc. are given at the bottom.

Letterheads have the potential to create a favourable impression, hence much thought and effort should go into their design and selection. The colour and quality of paper, the size of the letterhead, the types and fonts used and the spacing are all carefully decided. Such is the importance of the letterhead that some businesses even seek the assistance of advertising agencies or other such specialists in designing their letterheads. A good letterhead not only informs, but also impresses. If the letterhead is the first introduction of the business, one must ensure that it is done well.

When the letterhead does not give the full address or the exact place from where the letter is emanating, the letter-writer will have to incorporate these details himself. The writer should mention specifically the branch, the zone, the section and the department from which the letter is emanating. In its absence, if the business is a large multi-branch, multi-department and multi-division establishment, the receiver of the letter will have difficulty in knowing the exact source of the letter and may fail to respond. In practice, this happens quite frequently in large organizations and people keen to respond have to waste much time and effort in finding out from which branch, or office, division or department the letter has been sent. Too many details, thoughtlessly placed on the letterhead, rob the elegance from it. On the other hand, not furnishing relevant details makes the letterhead an understatement or inadequate. It is essential to strike a proper balance between the two.

6.4.2 Provide a reference line

Business letters have reference details which help in clearly tracing the letter to its source and context. When the business is large, in terms of functions and customers covered, it becomes necessary to compartmentalize the activities into different regions and functions. A separate file can be maintained for each customer. Reference details usually consist of abbreviations, letters and numbers. They may also carry the initials of the person drafting the letter or maintaining the file. The reference line helps both ways. On one hand it helps the letter-writer or anyone else within the organization to know the exact context in which the letters were written and makes it easy to relate it to the specific context on receipt of the reply. Similarly, it also helps the receiver of the letter to make out the exact source and context of the letter and helps the receiver to respond.

Each organization or business would normally have evolved its own reference pattern and the business letter-writer will have to become familiar with the method followed. In the absence of such reference particulars, the business will have to spend considerable time in relating it to the exact file even after it reaches the branch or department concerned. Not taking any chance on this, some organizations make it a point not only to mention the reference number but also request the recipient of the letter to ‘Please quote this reference number in all future correspondence’.

The originating reference number of a letter for any business, would be stated thus; ‘Our reference number’. Similarly, in any business letter, it would be necessary to refer to the other party’s reference details as well. This is stated as, ‘Your reference no.—dated’. This may be stated below the subject line or as the first sentence of the body of the letter.

When a particular business letter is a part of a series of such communication over a period of time, or is a part of a protracted correspondence, the letter-writer may have to refer to the earlier correspondence, in which case one may have to list out the relevant ‘Our letters—dated’ and ‘Your letters—dated’. If the relevant letters are too many, instead of referring to all such letters, the letter-writer may state, ‘Please refer to our earlier correspondence on the subject, resting with our letter—dated’.
6.4.3 Date line

The date line follows or stays close to the reference line and clearly mentions the date, month, and the year of the letter. The date is mentioned in many ways—22.05.2002 or 22 May 2002 or May 22, 2002. The most appropriate way of stating the date would be the second one, i.e., 22 May 2002 for its lack of ambiguity. It is worth noting that the sequencing of date, month and the year, when written only in figures varies from country to country. In the United Kingdom, like it is in India, the date, month and the year are written in that order, viz, 22.5.2002. In the United States of America, however, the practice is to write the month first and then the date and the year. For example 12 May 2002 is written as 5.12.2002. In view of these different practices, writing the date as 22 May 2002 ensures that there is no misreading of the date of the letter. To ensure elegance, it is also appropriate that writing the day in letters ninth, eighteenth, etc. and using abbreviations for months—Feb, Apr, etc. are avoided.

6.4.4 Inside address

The inside address refers to the addressee or the person to whom the letter is addressed. It may be an individual, a functionary, a group, an institution. The letter may be addressed by name or by designation. The inside address need not give the full postal address which has to be necessarily furnished outside. It is generally restricted to the name and/or the designation, the department and the office, since this position is well recognized. The word ‘to’ may be avoided for greater elegance. Another place normally used for the inside address is the bottom of the letter, on the left side at the end of the letter. When the letter is addressed by name, care should be taken to mention the correct initials, name and surname as the individual would like to be addressed. Please take due care in writing the correct name, for that is the least that the letter-writer owes to the addressee. If the letter-writer does not make due effort to ascertain and mention the correct name of the addressee, it amounts to indifference and discourtesy and qualifies as a bad letter. Spell the name correctly, for it makes the reader or the addressee much more responsive. Mr Jagdish should not be mentioned as Mr Jagdeesh or vice versa. Mrs Rajashree cannot be addressed as Mrs Rajashri. So also with the surnames and initials. If it is Banerji, do not change it to Bannerjee or vice versa. In good business letter writing, it is very essential to write the name exactly as the person spells it. If the person has a title such as Professor, Doctor, Father, Reverend, Justice, Captain, Brigadier, etc. the same is to be correctly stated. When there is no title, Mr or Shri is commonly used for men and Mrs, Miss, Smt or Kumari, as the case may be, is used for ladies. Ms is used when one is not sure of the marital status of the lady who is being addressed. The plural of Mr is Messers, which is used in addressing partnerships and groups. Likewise, the designation of the person, whenever mentioned, should be proper.

One should be particularly careful when addressing letters to dignitaries like the President, the Governor, the Chancellor, the Ambassador, the Pontiff, or to religious heads. The appropriate title such as His Excellency, His Highness, His Holiness, etc. will have to be used after ascertaining the same from the appropriate authority. Many such exalted offices have what are known as protocol officers. Any mistake in addressing the person inside the letter certainly distracts the impact of an otherwise well-drafted letter.

6.4.5 Attention line

The attention line usually appears on the right side of the inside address and is relevant when the letter is addressed to a designation, to the group or to a firm. The attention line draws the attention of the specific person to the contents of the letter. There is no need for an attention line when the letter is addressed to a specific person. The attention line
usually reads, ‘Kind attention of Mr so and so’. The attention line does the important function of ensuring that the letter reaches the particular person whose response is essential.

6.4.6 Salutation
A salutation is a must for every letter. It relates the letter to the reader. It can take many forms such as
‘Dear Sir’ or ‘Dear Madam’ or ‘Dear Mr so and so’ or
‘Dear Shri so and so’ or ‘Dear Mrs so and so’
as the case may be.

When the letter is addressed to an organization or a group, the salutation is in the plural form, i.e. Dear Sirs. When the status of the person is high and additional respect is intended to be conveyed, ‘Dear’ is omitted and the salutation is Sir or Madam.

6.4.7 Subject line
After the salutation, the next part of the letter is the subject. The subject of the message is stated clearly and boldly at the centre of the letter paper. This helps to draw and focus the attention of the reader on the specific subject or topic or area which the letter covers. The subject should be stated clearly yet briefly, i.e. in a few words. Often the receiver of the letter looks at the subject and decides as to how important or urgent its contents are for him. A skilled letter-writer learns to state the subject in a manner that attracts attention. The subject should fairly reflect the essence of the letter. Furthermore, since this particular position in a letter is meant for the subject line, mentioning ‘subject’ may be avoided to ensure greater elegance. Where appropriate, the subject itself may be mentioned in bold letters.

6.4.8 Message
The message is the body of the letter which comprises the opening line and the message to be conveyed. The message is organized into appropriate paragraphs in order to convey thoughts sequentially. The paragraphs are so designed as to cover related thoughts and facts. The opening line usually starts with an acknowledgement or introduction. It may draw reference to earlier correspondence, if any. The opening line or the introductory paragraph endeavours to put the message in perspective. In the next paragraph or paragraphs, as the case may be, the message of the relevant communication is dealt with. It is important to note that the message is the essence of communication and the very reason for writing the letter. The length of the message would vary depending upon the thoughts and details which the letter-writer wishes to convey. The message is the crux or core of the letter and all other features are embellishments or accompaniments. The message of the letter, in other words, is usually the content or subject of the communication. The letter is written because the message has to be conveyed.

6.4.9 Closing line
The closing line paragraph is very important for the letter. It should sum up the message and emphasize the action intended. Good writers take pains to make the closing line as effective as possible.

The complimentary closing line comes after the message and before the signature. It is ‘Yours Faithfully’ or ‘Yours Sincerely’ or ‘Faithfully Yours’ or ‘Sincerely Yours’ as the case may be. When the salutation is Dear Sir, Madam, the closing line is ‘Yours Faithfully’ and when the salutation is ‘Dear Shri’, or ‘Dear Mrs’, the closing line is ‘Yours Sincerely’.
The complimentary closing line is followed by the signature. Every letter must end with a signature. The signature gives authenticity to the message. An unsigned letter is usually of little significance. Unsigned letters are deficient and the addressee may not act upon them. Official letters also carry the designation of the person below the signature.

6.4.10 Postscript
Postscript or P.S. is an afterthought. Sometimes, however, a postscript is used by a letter-writer to reemphasize a particular point in the message.

Some of the other parts or related aspects of the letter are enclosures or annexures, a continuation page, spacing, folding, outside address, envelopes and window covers. These too, call for adequate attention in order to ensure the elegance of the letter. Enclosures contain related relevant information and accompany the letters. The reference to the enclosures is made at the end of the letter—encl: 2 or encl: Copy of draft agreement, etc. or in the body of the letter appropriate to the message—(Please see annexure 1) or (Please refer to the table enclosed). Reference to the continuation of the matter in the next page is indicated for greater clarity. The spacing of the letter is important in terms of ensuring elegance and making the letter attractive. Spacing should be such that there is neither crowding of sentences nor undue gaps in between. When the letter extends over several pages, it is essential that all the page numbers are clearly mentioned and appropriately stapled. Quite often, seemingly elementary aspects are overlooked—the stapling or pasting is done so badly that one has to struggle to open the letter intact, or the enclosure which is mentioned in the letter is left out. One can bring in considerable imaginativeness in letterheads, envelopes, colour of the types, spacing and page presentation. While commonly accepted and widely followed positions of various parts are stated in the foregoing paragraphs, it is pertinent to reiterate that a skillful letter-writer can bring in variety and flexibility in approach without sacrificing the principles. Good letters do stand out and gain attention.

6.5 FORMS OF A BUSINESS LETTER
A business letter as we have seen in the earlier paragraphs, has several parts. In order to make the letter attractive and readable it is necessary to arrange all these parts in an organized manner. In other words, the layout of the letter assumes importance. A suitable and correct layout enhances the overall effectiveness of any letter. There are essentially three types of layouts for a business letter. They are:

- Full block layout
- Modified block layout
- Modified block with indented form layout

6.5.1 Full Block Layout
This form of layout is extremely popular. It makes the letter look attractive, elegant and efficient. In this form, each part of the letter—date, sender’s address, subject, salutation, complimentary closing begin at the margin of the page. Apart from making the letter elegant, this form also saves key movements for the typist, since every line begins at the same point on the left.

6.5.2 Modified Block Layout
In this layout, various parts are distributed on the page. Some are on the left, some in the middle, and some on the right. The place, the sender’s address, salutation and each paragraph may be aligned to the left. The complimentary closing line and signature may...
be either centred or aligned to the right. This method is considered conservative and is not very popular. It also adds to the typist’s work.

6.5.3 Modified Block with Indentation Layout

Indenting refers to a setback or beginning the line farther from the margin to mark a new paragraph. The layout here is as in the modified block form, except that the start of each paragraph is indented, i.e. each paragraph starts a few spaces away from the margin. This form makes the letter somewhat clumsy and has gone out of style.

In order to make the letter effective, the letter-writer should ensure that the layout is modern and elegant and creates a favorable impression on the reader.

6.6 TYPES OF BUSINESS LETTERS

Businesses are of numerous types. They may be big or small, old or new, local or national, public or private, proprietary or partnership, monopolistic or competitive, manufacturing or service units, and so on. Nevertheless, by and large, all these businesses have certain common concerns and approaches within any given business environment. They deal with people internally as well as externally. They have their stakeholders in owners, employees, customers and the community. Businesses are also organized into various functional areas such as personnel, marketing, sales, purchase, accounts, administration, secretarial and so on. Business letters are of a wide variety and emanate from all these sources. Similarly, people who deal with these businesses also correspond with all these departments at some stage or other. To be able to correspond effectively with all these departments under various business situations, one has to familiarize oneself with various types of letters and their features. Although the general principles of good letter writing discussed earlier hold good, the approach will have to vary depending upon the functional area to which the letter relates.

When we refer to various types of business letters and their replies, we are covering letters that move both ways, i.e. letters from business organizations to various other agencies as well as individuals and other agencies to business organizations.

Some common areas of business correspondence or the specific types of letters with which a business letter-writer should be well versed are as follows:

6.6.1 From the Purchase Department

- Calling for quotations for products and services
- Inviting tenders for jobs and supplies
- Asking for samples and drawings
- Placing test orders
- Placing orders
- Status enquiries
- Technical bids and commercial bids

When we refer to tenders, quotations and orders, it must be emphasized that there are financial implications. The subject matter and the details of the quotation, tender or order have to be specifically and clearly stated so that there is no ambiguity.

Specifications or details which must be unambiguously mentioned should cover the following:
1. **Number or Quantity**: Given the economies of scale, the cost would vary depending upon the quantity or volume of the work order. Moreover, some businesses may not evince interest if the quantity or size of the job is small or uneconomical. The letter calling for quotations or inviting tenders should therefore clearly state the size of the order or quantity of supply.

2. **Quality or Specifications**: Modern businesses attach considerable significance to the qualitative aspects of any job. Suppliers who do not conform to present acceptable standards are often rejected. In view thereof, it is imperative that the qualitative dimensions such as strength, thickness, purity, colour, texture, age, weight, accuracy, etc. are clearly stated. This will also ensure that those who are not in a position to meet the required standards or quality levels do not respond.

3. **Delivery Time**: The third dimension of significance while calling for orders, tenders, quotations, etc. is time. The time taken for delivering the supplies or executing the order has to be covered. For many businesses, time is money. Time overruns of a project under implementation translate into cost overruns and therefore, execution or delivery time needs to be specifically stated.

4. **Additional Unit**: While calling for quotations, quite often, apart from mentioning the fixed number or quantity, quotes are also sought for every additional unit. For example, if it is an order for printing a booklet, the quotation called for will be, say, for 32 pages, and also plus or minus every 4 pages so that calling for fresh quotations in case there is a small variation in the order size is avoided.

   Calling for quotations, tenders or orders presupposes a competitive scenario and the intention is to get the most competitive offer. It is therefore essential that quotations or orders are sought in such a way that evaluation of alternative quotes is facilitated.

5. **Response Time**: Orders, tenders, etc. relate to the purchase of material, execution of a job, completion of a process, and so on, which are undertaken as per a time schedule. It is necessary to specify a date and even time within which the response is to be made. When the quotations and tenders called for relate to high-value jobs, business organizations, especially government and public sector units follow an open and transparent system for opening the tenders. Any such procedure, wherever applicable, has to be stated while inviting tenders. In such cases, in order to ensure confidentiality and fair play, the quotations or tenders ought to be made in sealed covers.

6. **Other aspects**: Apart from those mentioned above, there are often several other relevant aspects concerning orders, tenders and quotations. These would vary depending upon the nature of the work—whether it is supply of material, execution of a work, a comprehensive project or turnkey order, etc. The terms and conditions of the supplier or the service provider should be clearly ascertained. If the rates quoted are valid only for a specific period, the same is to be ascertained. Correspondingly, the presence of any escalation clause is also to be clarified. So also if accessories are a part of the quoted price and which are chargeable. In order to avoid any likely ambiguity on account of negotiability of prices and terms, while calling for quotations and tenders, quite often the words, ‘your lowest offer,’ ‘your most competitive rate,’ ‘your best terms and conditions,’ and such phrases are used. The idea is to ensure that the work specifications are clear to all and that they are in a position to give relevant and timely quotes to facilitate proper assessments of relative merits.

We have, in the foregoing paragraphs, listed some key features relevant in the context of seeking quotations and tenders. It is important to be clear about the technical and other details of the job so that the communication can be clearly worded. Any student keen on developing appropriate skills in this area should study a variety of such orders, tenders and other such related communication appearing in newspapers, trade journals and other sources, and build up a set of models for use. Since the appropriate model itself would vary depending upon the size, nature and complexity of the work, it is essential that the principles stated above are kept in mind.
6.6.1.1 Tenders

A tender is an offer or a proposition made for acceptance, such as an offer of a bid for a contract. A tender is something that is offered in return for a specific payment, subject to well-laid down terms and conditions. Tenders are invited by large organizations, especially governments and undertakings, for supply of items, construction of buildings, roads, etc., maintenance activities, and other such relatively high value works. Tenders are invited to ensure competitive offers and transparent decision-making. Since substantial monetary payments are associated with the process of inviting tenders and awarding contracts, every care has to be taken to ensure clarity, openness and fair play. Inadvertent omission of key/relevant details could lead to avoidable confusion, complaints and legal action.

Important points that need to be covered in a tender are as follows:

• Name of the Organization and Address
• Tender Number and Date
• Captions such as
  1. Tender notice
  2. Tender notification
  3. Notice inviting tenders
  4. Sealed tenders invited
• Who can Apply—Sealed Tenders are Invited from
  1. Class I civil contractors
  2. Established contractors having customs house agency licence
  3. Manufacturers or their authorised Indian agents, etc.
• Experience/Requirement
  1. With experience in completing similar work
  2. Satisfying the eligibility criteria mentioned below
  3. Who have supplied the tendered items successfully to other government organizations, etc.
• Brief Description of Work or Items/Material to be Supplied
• Contract Period and/or Delivery Schedule
• Earnest Money Deposit
• Contact Address or Authority
  1. For further details please contact/write to
  2. Tender documents can be obtained from
• Date of Issue of Blank Tender Forms
• Cost of Tender Document—Mode of Payment
• Last Date for Receipt of Sealed Tenders—Time
• Time and Date of Tender Opening
• Other Relevant Details such as
  1. Amount of tender
  2. Average turnover (annual) for the last 3 years
  3. Technical bids and commercial bids
  4. Website
• Authority Issuing the Tender Notice
We have seen that tenders can be invited for supply of items or construction works, or also for cleaning, upkeep, and maintenance, etc. In order to elicit a high response, the tender notices are widely advertised. At the specified time and date, the tenders are opened, in the presence of representatives of the tender applicants, and therefore a final decision is taken on the successful bids, and the same is communicated in writing. The following exhibit illustrates how the organisations communicate the acceptance of the tender for a maintenance work.

Figure 6.5: Global Airlines Ltd.

M/s Beauty Cleaners
16, Princess Road,
Worli, Mumbai

Ref: GAL\UCM\M\105  10 February 2003

Dear Sirs,

Sub: Upkeep and Maintenance of Global Airlines Ltd.
Booking Offices in Mumbai.

This has reference to your tender dated 30 December 2002 for the subject work and the subsequent letter dated 15 January 2003. I am directed to convey the approval of your tender for an amount of Rs 35,000/- (Rupees Thirty-five Thousand only) per month, inclusive of cleansing materials of approved quality and equipment for the maintenance of all the six areas mentioned in the tender.

The contract will be initially for a period of 6 months with effect from 1 March 2003 on a trial basis and the same can be confirmed as a regular contract at the above-mentioned amount for a further period of 30 months, if the services during the trial period are found to be satisfactory.

You should employ the requisite number of workers and supervisors as mentioned in your tender on all days, including Sundays and holidays.

You are required to remit an amount of Rs 42,000/- (Rupees Forty-two Thousand only) towards security deposit (being 10% of the annual contract value) before the commencement of the work.

You are required to maintain a register of attendance and wages paid to your workers deployed at various locations and such records should be made available for our inspection as and when required.

For absence of workers and supervisors, Rs 80/- per day per head will be deducted from the monthly bill.

A copy of Accepted Tender Schedules and Conditions is enclosed for your reference and compliance. Your tender dated 3 December 2002 and your letter dated 15 January 2003 will form part of this contract.

You are requested to return the duplicate copy of this work order in token of your acceptance and acknowledgement.

Thank You.

Yours faithfully
For Global Airlines Ltd
S N Dixit
Assistant General Manager
(Finance)

Encl: Accepted Tender Schedule.
NOTES

Figure 6.6: Bharath Coal Fields Ltd

| Koyla Bhavan, 25, M.G. Road, Indore, M.P |
| Notice Inviting Tenders |
| Tender No:- BCL/JAB/JACK/1112 |
| Date: 11 December, 2002 |
Sealed offers are invited from manufacturers or their authorized Indian agents who have supplied the tendered items successfully to Central or State Government Undertakings for the supply of the following items:


Assistant General Manager (Purchase)

6.6.1.2 Orders

Orders are placed by business organisations for purchases to be made by them. They may be for purchase of a commodity, rendering of a service, installation and maintenance or any such activity. Orders are to be specific and clear. An order is a direct request. An order is not an ‘order’ or command. Hence, the statements need to be courteous and yet clear cut. Specific areas to be covered while placing an order are as given below:

- **Order request** The following statements are generally used:
  
  ‘Please send us the following items’
  
  ‘We are pleased to place an order with you for the supply of’

- **Description** The order should clearly state the type of items or material, make or capacity, number of items or quantity and related details unambiguously.

- **Rate** The rate at which the order is being placed should be clear and should relate to units or quantities referred to on the quotations as far as possible. Mention clearly specific details such as rate per piece, rate per metric ton, rate per 1000 ml, rate per box of 10 pieces and so on, as is relevant. Mention whether any tax or packaging charges would need to be paid or whether the rate/amount is all-inclusive.

- **Packaging specifications** Mention the specifications relating to packaging, especially considering the breakage, transport and other such relevant factors.

- **Delivery schedule** Clearly mention when, where and in which lots, the items ordered are to be delivered. This is especially significant when there are penalties for delayed delivery. Further, the delivery may not be at one place and instead may be at different centres/offices. For example, an organization that is placing orders for calendars or diaries may place a centralized order but may instruct that the delivery be made to various offices/branches.

- **Mode of payment** While placing the order, mention the mode of payment and terms, if any. Payments are normally done by Demand Drafts or Cheques payable at specific centres/branches. If payments are in instalments, such details should be clearly stated.

- **Validity** Any purchaser would like to have the items or goods within a specific time period, especially when the goods are perishable or seasonal. The period for which the order is valid has to be stated for ensuring clarity.
• **Other terms and conditions**  The orders should also specify the other terms and conditions as are relevant, such as special packaging, if any, discounts sought, insurance details, conformity to samples, etc.

### 6.6.1.3 Quotations

Quotations relate to offers sought by intending purchasers from intending sellers or suppliers of goods and services. When the proposed purchases are substantial and the purchaser is interested in getting competitive offers, quotations are called for. Based on their experience and enquiries, the probable suppliers are identified or shortlisted and thereafter, their quotations are sought. Thus quotations have two phases. The first part is when the buyer calls for quotations from the seller. The second part is when the supplier responds and sends the quotations or offer with all the relevant details. On many occasions, the supplier may not wait for the request and instead send the quotation, suo moto, for the consideration of the buyer. Quotations are sought and sent by business organizations as regular business correspondence. Quotations become effective when they result in specific orders.

Both while inviting and sending quotations, due attention should be given to all the relevant details and specifications. These include:

- Description covering quantity and quality
- Rates and discounts for bulk orders, etc.
- Mode and terms of payment
- Delivery time
- Taxes, duties and charges
- Transportation and delivery
- Samples and approval
- Insurance, breakage allowed, etc.
- Guarantee period and after sales service
- Annual Maintenance Contract (AMC) details

As clearly stated, in all these business letters, due attention should be given for all relevant details to ensure clear mutual understanding, and avoid different interpretations or expectations.

### 6.6.2 From the Sales/Marketing Department

- Sales letter
- Circular letters
- Preparation of sales letters with the conditions of Sale on the reverse
- Preparation of market survey reports
- Reports from salesperson to sales executives
- Offer of discounts and business concessions
- Launch of a new product or scheme
- Mailing of company literature
- Letter of acknowledgement

In this category, there are two types of business letters. One set relates to the letters emanating from within the sales departments, or from salespersons and marketing personnel in the field to other departments, or to their own executives. The other set of letters relates to letters written by people in sales and marketing to people outside the organization—customers, prospects, agents and distributors, and other agencies. It is the latter category that needs particular attention. Letters to the customers, prospects
and the like either substitute or supplement personal contacts, and as such can make or mar the business promotion efforts. They carry the image of the organization and the people behind the letters. Sales letters should also be elegant and appealing. The presentation should be such that it elicits the attention of the addressee.

6.6.2.1 Sales Letters

A good sales letter highlights what is of interest to the addresses and prompts them to seek more details and respond positively. A pleasing layout and appealing language, along with relevant facts and figures, are a must. Unlike the letters emanating from the purchase department, the letters sent out by the marketing department can be highly creative and innovative. They bring out the product differential. They focus on the unique selling proposition (USP). While avoiding an overdose of superlatives and tall claims, the sales letter should focus on the strength of the company and the merits of the offer.

The business letter-writer should have a good understanding of the essential features of product marketing or services marketing, as the case may be, and use them to advantage while drafting sales letters. Any product has its tangible and measurable features. If the sales letter concerns a product, it is desirable that the product-related features such as price, strength, colour, weight, ease of operation, after sales service, and varied qualitative and quantitative dimensions are appropriately highlighted. Similarly, if the sales letter concerns a service which is essentially intangible, the service-related features such as courtesy, promptness, employee attitude, physical facilities, customer identification/recognition, speed, clarity, communicative and interpersonal skills are to be highlighted.

There is tremendous scope for being creative and imaginative while drafting sales letters. A good letter-writer makes it a point to develop the appropriate word power and play with words and ideas. It is necessary to consciously avoid dull and outdated words and instead use vigorous and current words. Some examples of vigorous and current words are robust, cost-effective, user friendly, savvy, eco-friendly, quality standard, zero defect, premium brand, win-win proposition, tailor-made, designer, garden fresh and fast moving, to name a few. Similarly, compelling phrases can also be used to make a point. For example, freshness of the product was imaginatively brought out by a restaurant in the following statement—‘The fish you are eating today was swimming yesterday’. The skill lies in making the product or service look special or exclusive or distinctly different.

6.6.3 From the Accounts Department

- Dues and collection letters to various agencies and customers
- Follow-up letters
- Correspondence with banks
  - Opening/closing of accounts
  - Regarding overdrafts, cash credit and current accounts
  - Stop payment instructions
  - Request for issue of letters of credit (LCs)
  - Protest for wrongful dishonour of cheques
  - Letters relating to interest payments and service charges
  - Complaint letters covering wrong credits and debits, delays in realization of instruments, etc.
- Correspondence with insurance companies regarding payment of premium, renewal of policies, claims and settlements
- Correspondence with agencies like the Telephone Department, Post and Telegraph Authorities, the Provident Fund Office, Income Tax Office, Commercial Tax Department, etc.
By their very nature, these types of business letters should be accurate, brief, simple and to the point. In particular, letters relating to collection of dues and recovery of money need to be drafted with a keen sense of understanding and sensitivity. Such letters should necessarily vary in terms of terseness or intensity and choice of words, depending upon the nature of dues, age of dues and other such relevant factors. Some of them have to be polite, some persuasive, some firm.

Collection and recovery letters are plain speaking and sometimes harshly worded. The letter-writer should know which approach would be appropriate under each circumstance. Some organizations follow the practice of sending a reminder even before the due date. Obviously, such letters should be very polite and make for pleasant reading. Similarly, even after the due date, the first set of letters will have to be polite and warmly worded. It is common practice to send a simple pre-printed reminder using a well-worded format, duly filling up the name, address, due date, etc. It is possible that the addressee has forgotten or overlooked making the payment, or has been out of station or any such genuine reason. Under no circumstance should such a person be embarrassed or undermined. While collection of dues is important, as far as possible it should be done with sensitivity and without hurting the feelings of the person from whom the amount is due. The letter-writer should discriminate between a wilful or intentional and an unintentional defaulter. The letter-writer should also discriminate between a first-time defaulter and a habitual or hardened defaulter. The customer is important and the business will have to deal with him in future too, as long as the relationship is worthwhile. The letter should not hurt the feelings of the addressee and result in a severing of the business relationship, unless such an extreme situation is warranted.

Notwithstanding what is stated above, there will be occasions when a strongly worded letter will have to be drafted. Skills of letter-writing come into full play under these circumstances. A series of letters may have to be addressed with increasing intensity. Politeness and consideration for feelings and relationship will give way to plain speaking and emphasis on business compulsions. In the Sanskrit language and ancient texts, there is a reference to Chaturopaya, i.e. four options, viz. Sama, Dana, Bhedha and Danda. Starting with a friendly approach, one moves on to threatening and punitive messages. The letter-writer should not only know the category to which the addressee belongs, but also the payment culture in that particular line of business, and when to blow the whistle.

‘Please note that we will be compelled to take the extreme step of legal action against you’ should be the last resort, as far as possible. Another important aspect to remember is not to make a final or terminal statement, limiting the scope for further correspondence. A keen sense of understanding, appropriate choice of words and persuasive skills assume significance.

6.6.4 From the Personnel Department

- Calling candidates for written tests
- Interview call letters
- Offer of appointment
- Provisional and final appointment orders
- Confirmation in service
- Changes in emoluments
- Disciplinary matters—Show cause notices, charge sheets, calling for explanation, dis-charge and other punishments, letters of dismissal, etc.
- Leave and travel sanctions
- Training programmes and deputation
- Letters of reference
When we refer to letters from the personnel department or employee-related letters, we are indeed discussing a very wide variety of letters. These letters may be general or specific, routine or special, pleasant or unpleasant. Letters from the HRD department are normally pleasant or otherwise motivating and training related, whereas letters from the Industrial Relations Department or from the Disciplinary Authority are normally of the none-too-pleasant category. These two are obviously widely different in nature and the letter-writer must use the appropriate language and approach. While HRD and training-related letters should carry a positive, encouraging and developmental stance, disciplinary letters will have to carry an authoritarian and even a legal or procedural approach. It is necessary to acquire adequate familiarity with the terms and ensure that there are no inadvertent inadequacies in the letter.

### 6.6.5 From the Administration and Secretarial Departments

- Change in management
- Changes in business hours
- Opening and shifting of branches and offices
- Invitations and public notices
- Correspondence with directors and shareholders
- Agenda and minutes of company meetings
- Correspondence with shareholders and debenture holders pertaining to dividend and interest payments, transfer and transmission of shares, etc.
- Correspondence with agents and transport companies
- Representations to trade associations, chambers of commerce and public authorities
- Letter seeking appointments/personal interviews

Correspondence relating to directors and shareholders and matters concerning company meetings, especially in listed companies and larger organizations, are often handled by qualified Company Secretaries. The point to be noted here is that such correspondence is generally specialized in nature and will have to be attended to in a systematic and organized manner. The business letter-writer keen on acquiring such letter writing skills will have to necessarily understand secretarial functions.

### 6.6.7 Other types of Business Communication

- Job applications
- Preparation of bio-data and curriculum vitae
- Export and import-related correspondence
- Preparation of bill of exchange, promissory note, hundi, etc.
- Telegraphic and fax messages
- Mild and strong appeals
- Correspondence with foreign institutions and agencies
- Advertisements of various types—newspapers and print media, hoardings, banners, etc.
- Press releases
- Questionnaires and opinion polls
- Legal correspondence
- Publicity literature such as brochures, booklets, etc.
- Newsletters and house journals
- Preparation of charts, graphs, stickers, etc.

(Some of these are discussed in detail in the subsequent chapters.)

- Social letters in business
- Inviting a guest
- Congratulation letters on achievements
6.7 WRITING A GOOD BUSINESS LETTER

We have generally listed in the foregoing paragraphs various types of letters and correspondence that emanate from a business on a regular basis. While most of it is routine involving a primary level of writing, there are some, which call for specialized and cultivated skills. The objective in listing various types of letters from different departments and functional areas is to give an idea of the expanse of business communication. As in other areas, in letter writing too, conscious efforts and willingness to learn are a must. A good business letter-writer has to appreciate the essential characteristics of each such letter and develop relevant skills.

Instead of providing drafts or models of various types of business letters, we have thought it appropriate to present a fairly comprehensive list of business letters for all occasions. We have also highlighted the significant features and principles to be borne in mind while drafting some letters such as orders and quotations, sales letters, and collection and recovery letters. Models tend to inhibit learning. Skills are acquired through attentive learning, application and practice. We are also giving in the following paragraphs some more useful tips or guidelines that should help in developing letter-writing skills. Notwithstanding the routine nature of most business correspondence, it is possible, and indeed desirable, to develop variety and style in writing a letters. Letters must have certain intensity or depth depending upon the situation, and it is not possible to bring out such variations in one or two ‘draft models’. Students and practitioners desirous of improving their skills in letter writing are advised to practise drafting a variety of such letters, i.e. letters for all occasions, taking note of the following additional guidelines, and compare them with standard drafts or models available from authentic sources as confidence-building measures.

6.7.1 Understand the Context

Business letters will have to be necessarily business-like. The letter-writer should understand the context and make the letter specific and precise. There is often not much scope to make the letter lengthy and verbose. When we refer to letters from the Accounts Department or the Purchase Department, the message will have to be direct and specific. On the other hand, when it comes to the Marketing Department, it is possible to be descriptive and qualitative. When we refer to letters relating to the Personnel Department, the general requirement would be to keep such letters polite, and yet firm wherever necessary, and also show respect for authority. A good business letter-writer necessarily takes cognisance of the context. The general tone of letters should take note of the subject matter, context, the person to whom it is addressed and be informative, persuasive, firm or authoritative, as the situation warrants.

6.7.2 Use Words Appropriate to the Subject

Whether it is Accounts, Purchase, Sales or Personnel, there are words, phrases and abbreviations which are relevant and appropriate to each function or department. Words and abbreviations like ‘Closed Tender’, ‘Free on Board (f.o.b)’, ‘After office Hours (a.o.h)’, ‘Clearing Cheque’, ‘Effects not Cleared’, ‘Tax Deduction at Source (TDS)’,
etc. are often used in business correspondence. The business letter-writer should familiarize himself with such words and use them appropriately. Abbreviations are to be generally avoided and if at all used, the letter-writer should ensure that they are understood as intended and that there are no misunderstandings.

Business letters, as we have noted, also vary in terms of intensity and approach. There are routine letters, reminders, persuasive letters, goodwill letters, informative letters, mild and strong appeals, circular letters and memos, representations, etc. and the letter-writer should develop the skill of using the appropriate words relevant to the context.

Figure 6.7: Take Care of Abbreviations

In our letters and other forms of communication, we often use abbreviations or short forms. As long as they are understood as they are intended to be by the writer, they serve a useful purpose. However, it is often true that some of the abbreviations with which the writer is familiar may not be readily comprehended by the reader. Moreover, some abbreviations may convey different meanings depending upon the context. It is necessary therefore, that the writer clarifies what he means at the first instance. Here is a typical example of how the abbreviation conveys different meanings to different persons.

GP may mean
- Gross Profit to the Financial Analyst
- General Practitioner to a Medical Representative
- Government Paper to an Investment Banker
- Gram Panchayat to a Block Development Officer
- Grand Prix to a Race Enthusiast
- Golden Peacock to a Film Director
- Greek Philosophy to a Student
- Garden Path to a City Planner, and so on

To be understood properly, the writer must make himself clear, especially where the abbreviation stands for jargon or unfamiliar terms.

6.7.3 Use short sentences and paragraphs

In business letters, any temptation to use high-sounding language and long-winding sentences should be resisted. The business letter-writer should consciously use short sentences with about 15–20 words at the most. Long sentences carrying 30–40 words tax the reader and make comprehension unnecessarily difficult. Another important requirement is to break the message into appropriate and adequate paragraphs. Short paragraphs, each covering an idea or a message, are generally appealing to any reader.

6.7.4 Provide relevant details

Brevity of letters should not be at the cost of clarity, and all relevant details should be furnished. The date, time and venue of the meeting, whether invitation or information, the number and amount of cheque whose payment is to be stopped, the date, time and place of interview, due amount of money which the collection letter seeks, the exact amount of discount offered, etc. are all details which, though seemingly elementary, may escape attention. [It is worth noting here that while the first sentence of this paragraph has 18 words, the second sentence has as many as 60 words, and the ease of comprehension or effort involved is much more in the latter.] Omitting such relevant details would lead to confusion, misunderstanding and repetitive correspondence. A good business letter-writer gives attention to all such minute details.
6.7.5 Use standard drafts or formats

Most routine correspondence is repetitive in nature. Once the basic approach for writing a variety of letters is mastered, it should be beneficial to build a set of ready-to-use drafts and formats. In banks, insurance companies and a host of other institutions and businesses, there are often printed formats in use. These include stop payment instructions, overdraft facilities, account opening, making claims, etc. When a business letter-writer uses them appropriately and consciously, the formats help in minimizing the time spent on writing the same type of letters. Care should be taken, however, to review such formats or drafts periodically, and improvise and update them to cope with emerging situations.

6.7.6 Specialized writing

Specialized writing such as journalistic writing, advertisements of various types, press releases, developing a questionnaire, preparing an advertorial, etc. call for higher level of skills and application. Skills in these areas are acquired through constant study and efforts.

6.7.7 Constant improvisation

Business writing is dynamic in nature. There should be an ongoing effort at improvization. The business letter-writer should learn to do self-editing. Before finalizing important letters, one should make sure that the message is clear, the language is appropriate, surplus words if any are removed, unwarranted repetition is avoided, and the letter is appealing. Yesterday’s words, phrases, formats and style may not appeal today. Good letter-writers keep themselves updated and modern.

6.8 LETTERS OF ENQUIRY

Letters of enquiry cover various types of enquiry made by a wide cross-section of clientele and prospective customers regarding the availability of various products, services and other related aspects of the business. Most such enquiries nowadays do take place orally and telephonically, and the volume of correspondence has decreased as compared with the past. Modern and computerized organizations in metropolitan centres, in particular, provide tele-contact facility, self-help terminals, kiosks and websites which obviate the need for written correspondence. Nevertheless, business units would be receiving letters of enquiry conveying availability and details of products and services, location of branches and offices, rates and charges relating to products and services, contact persons and numbers, and so on. Letters of enquiry may be from not only individuals, but also from various organizations, institutions, corporate entities and even government bodies.

By its very nature, not much complexity is involved in such types of correspondence. What is necessary is prompt action. There should be a commitment at the branch office level to respond promptly to such enquiries. Apart from promptness, it is also necessary to ensure that not only is the required information provided, but also as a matter of concern for the enquirer, all the related information is also made available. Although the letter itself may be precise and formal, appropriate rate charts, brochures, reports, lists, tables, etc. should be enclosed. Such gestures and prompt responses not only help in business development, but also in creating a favourable impression on the minds of those seeking information. The person making the enquiry is happy that the organization is prompt and keen on doing business. In a competitive environment, it is often the prompt response which can make a difference in gaining or retaining customers.
Customer complaints are indeed a part of any business. There is no such thing as an all-time hundred per cent foolproof service to all customers. As any business depends on people within and people without, as well as several other support facilities, there would be instances when the occasional service failure is unavoidable. Service or product delivery fails to come up to the expectations of the customer, or even the standard set by the organization itself. Complaints do occur. Successful organizations are those that have realized that prompt attention to customer complaints is an essential element of an enduring customer relationship. As the Chairman of British Airways, Sir Colin Marshall, observed, ‘The customer doesn’t expect that everything will go right all the time; the big test is what you do when things go wrong. Occasional service failure is unavoidable’.

Every organization should put in place an effective machinery that swiftly responds when things go wrong. Every organization should have a responsive complaint redressal mechanism that effectively deals with dissatisfied customers. Just as satisfied customers tell others about a business responding to complaints, the unhappy customer too relates his experience, and indeed more so. According to a study conducted for the White House Office of Consumer Affairs, US, while a happy customer talked about it to five others, an unhappy customer narrated his experience to ten others, on an average. This makes it imperative that business organizations attend to customer complaints promptly and effectively in their own interest. Customer grievance redressal should aim to go beyond mere complaint handling and work towards pleasing and retaining the aggrieved customer. If a dissatisfied customer is treated shabbily, there is a likelihood that he will break his relationship and cause much damage to the organization. Moreover, it is far more expensive to get a new customer than to retain an existing one. Communication, both oral and written, has a vital role to play in pacifying an aggrieved customer and winning him over.

When oral complaints are not satisfactorily redressed, the aggrieved customer may prefer a written complaint. Complaint redressal having been recognized as an important facet of customer relations, every organization must have a well-structured customer grievance redressal machinery at various tiers. When the complaint is not redressed at the branch level, or the first tier, the complainant may approach the zonal and corporate level, or the higher tiers. Therefore, correspondence relating to complaints occurs at various levels and it is necessary for the staff at all levels to learn the related handling skills.

6.9.1 Respond promptly

While attending and replying to various types of complaints, some relevant letter-writing principles will have to be followed. The first one is promptness. It is extremely important to be prompt in replying to customer complaints. Organizations do set their own standards in this regard. Highly customer responsive organizations make it a point to respond to all customer complaints within 24 hours. Others may take a somewhat longer time. Nevertheless, the endeavour should be to respond as quickly as possible. However, at times, the nature of a complaint is such that it would be essential to gather relevant facts and figures from various offices or persons in order into draft the reply. This may call for additional time, perhaps running into a few days or even weeks. Under such circumstances, it is imperative that an interim reply is sent to the complainant stating that the complaint is being looked into and a final reply would be sent as early as possible. In the absence of such a reply, the complainant would be at a loss to know if any action has been initiated on the complaint, giving room for further dissatisfaction. Receipt of a complaint should be promptly acknowledged.
6.9.2 Appease complainant's feelings

The second important point to be kept in view is the extra care and courtesy in dealing with such persons. For some reason the complainant is aggrieved. It is likely that some specific deficiency or slip has taken place, as a result of which the customer is displeased or even hurt. The reply should make every effort to appease the hurt feelings. Whether there is any lapse or not at the service provider’s level may or may not be clear while acknowledging the receipt of the complaint or sending an interim reply. Nevertheless, it is desirable to express some regret for the inconvenience and state clearly that the matter would be looked into in right earnest. All the same, unless there is some real deficiency or reason for the hurt feelings, it may not be desirable to concede any lapse, for that may entail compensation or penalty to be paid. Herein lies the skill of the letter-writer. While the letter expresses some kind of regret that the complainant’s expectations are not met, and also assures that the matter would be expeditiously looked into, there is no owning of any deficiency at this stage, especially if it is likely to put the business organization at an undue disadvantage.

Figure 6.8: Let it Cool

Emotions can and do play with words. A wrong word uttered or a letter drafted and despatched in a fit of rage can cause avoidable and unintended damage. Let the anger subside. Remember the Chinese proverb, 'Never answer a letter when you are angry'.

6.9.3 Be sincere about dealing with the complaint

The third important requirement is to bring a tone of sincerity in responding to complaints. Routine and stereotype replies are likely to carry little conviction and put the complainant off. The letter-writer should give the impression that the complaint has been taken seriously. The letter-writer should also convey in some way that the complainant is of value to the institution and thank them for having taken the trouble of writing about the perceived deficiency. After all, the aggrieved person has the choice of quietly severing the business relationship and going elsewhere. An aggrieved customer often looks not only to the specific redressal but also to the overall stance taken by the organization in responding to the complaint.

6.9.4 Respond according to nature of complaint

When we talk of complaints, there is a wide range. Some may be somewhat routine in nature and may relate to lapses in carrying out instructions, or excessive charges, or delays in response and so on. They may arise out of ignorance or misunderstanding of the salesperson. On the contrary, some complaints would be of a serious nature relating to misbehaviour of staff, rudeness, pecuniary demands or lack of integrity, and so on. The response should be in tune with the intensity of the nature of complaints. The letter should give an indication of the gravity of the matter as perceived by the business entity.

Another essential requirement would be to give all relevant facts and figures while convincing the complainant of the stand taken by the business. It is likely that there is no deficiency in service and as such the complaint has arisen out of the unreasonable expectation of the complainant. In such a case, the letter-writer would do well to draw the attention of the complainant to the relevant rules, regulations, charts, terms and conditions, etc. in a polite and convincing manner.

Check Your Progress

5. Give the three layouts for a business letter.
6. Write briefly about the various types of correspondence made by a Purchase department.
7. What should the attributes of collection or recovery letters be?
8. Give 4 features of writing a good business letter.
6.9.5 A Suitable authority should respond
In responding to the complaints, the authority signing the letter on behalf of the organization also assumes importance. When the complaint is of a serious nature or when the complainant has a long-standing and valued business relationship, he would naturally expect the matter to engage the attention of a functionary at a fairly high level in the organizational hierarchy. Hierarchy appropriateness has to be ensured in dealing with the complaints.

6.9.6 Make positive use of a complaint
The final point to be considered in dealing with complaints is that progressive organizations consider complaints as opportunities to strengthen their relationship with the customer. The concern is not just with setting right the deficiency but also with winning over the customer. At the end of the transaction and in the ultimate analysis, the complainant should still entertain positive feelings towards the organization and the people who respond. It is likely that on occasions, the demands or expectations of the complainants are highly unreasonable. The organization may not like to concede to such demands. In all such cases, it is especially the skill of the letter-writer that helps win over the complainant.

6.9.7 Seeking redressal from other organizations
We have so far discussed the complaints which the organization receives from its customers, patrons and others interacting with it on various matters, and the approach the letter-writer should take in responding to them. In the same way, there would be occasions when the business organization may have to refer complaints with other agencies such as banks, suppliers, transport operators, public utilities and other service providers. What is essential under such circumstances is to

- Be specific about the nature of the complaint.
- Give all relevant facts and figures.
- Address the complaint to the proper authority.
- Follow it up till complete redressal is made.

The letter-writer should keep the correspondence polite but firm. If there is a genuine shortcoming or deficiency, one has every right to seek redressal and even some kind of compensation.

6.10 SUMMARY

1. Written communication is very much a part of every business. It is a convenient way for any business to reach across to people within the country and beyond.
2. Any business will have to correspond with varied sections of people—customers, suppliers, auditors, lawyers, bankers and others. Such communication ranges from ordinary handwritten letters to typed and cyclostyled messages, fax messages and printed brochures. A good business letter has the potential to create, nurture and sustain a rewarding business relationship.
3. The essentials of effective business letters relate to various features of the letter such as the language, form, context, content, length, structure, layout, tone, impact, factual correctness, and purpose orientation. Due attention has to be given to all these details, since a bad letter stands out like a sore thumb due to any of its deficiencies listed in this unit.
4. A good business letter can achieve substantial gains for the business. It can establish reach, inform, educate, strengthen bonds, dispel disinformation, create goodwill and generally act as an ambassador or a relationship officer of the business.

5. Requisites or essentials of a good business letter are many. The first and foremost among them is clarity. The message, be it information, an invitation, reminder, acceptance, denial, etc. should be clear and unambiguous. Next, it should create the intended impact. It should have a clear purpose orientation, the right emphasis, appropriate wavelength and coherence. A good business letter should be brief and to the point, and should be characterized by simplicity. This calls for a clear insight into the subject of communication.

6. Proper timing of the letter is very essential for ensuring the effectiveness of the message. Another extremely important requisite concerns the language used. Business letters should use the language which the addressee can read and understand. Herein comes the importance of vocabulary or word power. Anyone keen on developing an abundant word power should keep a standard dictionary, or better still, the Roget's Thesaurus (for English words) at hand for reference. This facilitates avoiding repetition and helps bring in variety. To have a copious supply of words and to use it with judgement, is an excellent foundation for good writing. Any English word of use in business writing will have several equivalents and the writer should learn to pick the most appropriate one.

7. A letter which has elegance carries an overall impression. For this to happen, strikings, overwritings, unintended gaps, mistakes and corrections will have to be scrupulously avoided. Good letters are those that are considerate to the readers and show empathy or understanding towards them. Another essential of a good letter is good style. Style brings to bear the individual's stamp on the letter.

8. Sincerity and politeness or courtesy are the other attributes of a good business letter. Good writing must be natural and not laboured. Good letters show a positive approach. They cannot be written in a great hurry or under extreme emotional stress.

9. Good writing is the art of learning to say 'no' in a pleasing manner. A skilful writer learns to mitigate the hardship or the adverse impact of the message through his choice of words and manner of presentation. He creates goodwill for the organization through effective and convincing writing. Imagination brings excitement into communication. A good letter also radiates enthusiasm.

10. Good letter writing reflects variety. Even where the subject is the same, the letter should vary in terms of choice of words, structure of sentences, intensity of tone and emphasis. In developing the requisite writing skills, it is desirable not to rely too much on stereotyped drafts or model letters. Being aware of various essentials of writing effective letters and using them consciously, and ensuring regular practice is a must for developing excellent writing skills.

11. Business letters consist of several parts—letterheads, reference line, attention line, salutation, subject line, message and the closing line. Letterheads have the potential to create a favourable impression about the business and hence need much attention. Reference details usually consist of abbreviations, letters and numbers. They help both the sender and the receiver in readily identifying the context of the letter.

12. The most appropriate way of stating the date would be 12 May 2002 in view of its lack of ambiguity. Good writers take pains to make their closing lines effective. One can bring in considerable imaginativeness in letterheads, spacing, envelopes and page presentation. The overall endeavour should be to create a favourable impression.

13. There are essentially three types of layouts or forms of a business letter—full block layout, modified block layout and modified block with indentation layout. Full block aligns to the left hand margin and is extremely popular and appealing. Modified
block form distributes various parts of the letter across the page and is considered to be conservative. The indented form is one where each paragraph starts a few spaces away from the margin.

14. Business letters emanate from various departments—purchase, sales, marketing, accounts, personnel, administration, and so on. One has to familiarize oneself with various types of letters emanating from these departments and their features.

15. While drafting business letters such as tenders, quotations and orders, key aspects to be covered are the number or quantity, quality or specifications, delivery time, plus or minus, quality, response time, accessories, validity period, etc. Likewise, a good sales letter should bring out the strength or distinctiveness of the organization and its products or services and create the right impression.

16. Collection and recovery letters should also create the right impression. Varied approaches are necessary depending upon the nature and the amount due, and the relationship with the addressee. *Sama* (tact), *Dana* (discount or remission), *Bhedha* (persuasion or reasoning) or *Danda* (punitive action) are the different measures that are often resorted to and the letter-writer will have to use appropriate language.

17. Letters from the marketing department call for different types of skills as compared to those from personnel or legal departments. Nevertheless, some general principles or guidelines common to all types are as follows: understand the context, use the words appropriate to the subject, provide relevant details and use short sentences and paragraphs. Where for the sake of convenience readymade formats or drafts are used, appropriate modifications and improvisations are a must.

18. Dealing with complaints and corresponding with the aggrieved customer call for good communication skills and proper sensitivity. Prompt response, care and courtesy, sincerity in approach, polite and convincing tone, and hierarchical consideration assume relevance. Similarly, while preferring a complaint, the letter-writer should ensure that all relevant details are furnished and the specific remedy is sought.

### 6.11 ANSWERS TO ‘CHECK YOUR PROGRESS’

1. • Written communication has a wide reach.
   • It can be erased, revised and rewritten.
   • It can create records and reference sources.
   • It helps nurture business relationships.

2. • It inherently shows value for the receiver's time.
   • It conveys the point in precise terms, keeping the focus.

3. A good writing style conveys the honesty of the sender. Politeness of language, apology for errors help strengthen business relationships. The writing is spontaneous and comes across as natural.

4. (a) Letterhead
   (b) Reference line
   (c) Date line
   (d) Inside Address
   (e) Attention line
   (f) Salutation
   (g) Subject line
   (h) Message
   (i) Closing line
   (j) Postscript
5. (a) Full block layout  
(b) Modified block layout  
(c) Modified block with indented layout
6. (a) Tenders for supplies, construction, maintenance, etc. They are invited to ensure competition and select the best comparative. 
(b) Orders for purchases, supplies, services, installation, maintenance, etc. An order is a request and should be concise. 
(c) Quotations are asked for by intending purchasers from potential suppliers. They are shortlisted.
7. There are several steps to the sensible approach:  
1. Send a reminder before the due date  
2. A polite but detailed reminder (in case the addressee has genuinely forgotten).  
3. Only when there is no response, a strongly worded should be sent. Ensure that there is still room for communication.
8. (a) Use of words relating to the subject  
(b) Provision of relevant details  
(c) Brevity  
(d) Continuous improvisation in keeping with changing trends

6.12 EXERCISES AND QUESTIONS

1. Discuss the significance of written communication for any organization. What are its advantages and limitations?
2. Elucidate the essentials of a good business letter.
3. What is the significance of vocabulary or word power in letter writing in business? How can one learn to pick and use the right words?
4. ‘Good letter writing is the art of packaging ‘no’ in a pleasing manner’. Discuss.
5. How do you ensure that a letterhead makes a favourable impression on the addressee?
6. Write short notes on: (a) date line (b) message (c) closing line.
7. Discuss the various forms of a business letter and state with reason which one of them is most desirable.
8. Bring out the details to be covered while preparing letters inviting tenders, orders and quotations.
9. What is the objective of a good sales letter and how does one ensure its effectiveness?
10. Discuss the various approaches relevant in the context of drafting collection and recovery letters.
11. List various social letters relevant for a business organization.
12. Elucidate some guidelines relevant in drafting any business letters.
13. ‘Never reply when you are angry’. Elucidate this statement with particular reference to a customer complaint.
14. Prepare drafts of the following letters:  
(i) A letter to the printers on panel, calling for a quotation for printing your organization’s Annual Report.  
(ii) You are the head of a newly opened branch of your company in a metropolitan city. Write a letter to your prospective customers introducing your company and the product range.  
(iii) As the head of a town branch, draft your monthly report to your regional manager covering your marketing efforts.
(iv) Write a letter to a candidate who has appeared for an interview and has been shortlisted to report.

(v) The telephone department has sent a highly inflated bill to your office. Take up the matter with them.

(vi) Address a letter to your personnel officer to attend an HRD programme of a reputed training institute and submit a report.

(vii) Call for an explanation from your cashier who has been repeatedly coming late to the office.

(viii) Draft a letter to all the members of a committee intimating the date, venue and agenda for the next meeting.

(ix) Write a placatory letter to your customer who has complained to you about the rude behaviour of a counter clerk.

(x) Address a suitable letter to a prominent customer of your organization on his election as the President of the Advertising Agencies Association of India.

(xi) Your personnel department has called for options from officers willing to work in lucrative positions in branches abroad. Write a letter detailing your willingness and suitability.

(xii) You have arranged a dinner for your important customers in connection with the visit of your General Manager. Draft a suitable invitation letter.

6.13 FURTHER READING

*Business Communication and Customer Relations* by R K Madhukar; Vikas Publishing, New Delhi

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