

# BUSINESS LETTERS

Technical Report Writing

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Any business will have to correspond in writing with its customers, branches, suppliers, bankers, and others with whom it has or would like to have a lasting relationship
- Business letters serve as a means to reach out to people not only within the locality and neighbourhood but also in other cities and nations
- They represent you when you conduct transactions in writing
- They have become such an integral part of every day business that one cannot think of running a business without the related correspondence.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Though there are many modern communication methods available these days, the traditional business letters still retain their importance in the business world for the following reasons:
  - Just as your personal letters help you keep your personal relationship with your friends and relatives alive, business letters assist you in sustaining your business relationships with other businesses and customers.
  - They are the appropriate form of communication when the information you wish to convey is complex.
  - They serve as permanent records and are a valuable repository of information, which you can refer to in future.
  - They help you reach a large and geographically diverse audience thereby enabling you to save money on telephone calls.

# Purpose

- The ultimate purpose of writing any business letter is to sustain the existing business relationships or to create and establish a new business relationship.
- But each individual letter will have a unique purpose. For example, when you apply for a job, you aim at offering your services to your prospective employer.
- Similarly, as the purchase manager of a company when you write a letter complaining about the damaged consignment, your aim is not only to bring the flaw to the notice of the recipient but also to request for a corrective action.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Business letters therefore are written for varied purposes as mentioned below;
  - to inform
  - to congratulate
  - to enquire
  - to order
  - to request
  - to collect dues
  - to complain
  - to make an adjustment
  - to sell a product, service, or scheme
  - to apply for a job

# Structure

- Business letters are different from personal letters as they have a distinct structure and layout.
- Although there are different types of letters, each relevant in a specific context, they share a common structure comprising various elements or parts.
- You need to be familiar with not only these different elements but also their positioning in the letter and the purpose for which they are included in the letter.
- Several of these elements appear in every letter; others appear only when desirable or appropriate.

# Standard Elements

- **Heading:** This element is also known as the letterhead, which shows the organization's name, full address, and also telephone numbers.
- If the letterhead is not used, the heading includes the sender's address.
- Letterheads have the potential to create a favourable impression and hence need to be designed with thought and imagination.
- The colour and quality of paper, the size of the letterhead, the type of fonts that are used, and the spacing are factors to be carefully considered.
- Many companies even seek the help of advertising agencies to design their letterheads.

# Sample Letterheads





# Sample Heading

A sample letterhead is given below:

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**HI Tech Graphics**  
613, Circular Road, Bangalore-560001  
Serving your needs since 1990

**Phone: (080) 2335618 Fax: (080) 2335710 E-mail: [sales@hitechgraphics.com](mailto:sales@hitechgraphics.com)**

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- Whenever a letterhead paper is not used, the sender's address is either aligned with left margin or few spaces away from the centre depending upon the layout of the letter.
- For example, the same heading given above can be displayed as follows:

# Sample Heading

**Hi Tech Graphics**  
**613, Circular Road**  
**Bangalore-560001**  
**Phone: (080) 2335618, Fax: (080) 2335710**  
**e-mail: [sales@hitechgraphics.com](mailto:sales@hitechgraphics.com)**

*or*

**Hi Tech Graphics**  
**613, Circular Road**  
**Bangalore-560001**  
**Phone: (080) 2335618, Fax: (080) 2335710**  
**e-mail: [sales@hitechgraphics.com](mailto:sales@hitechgraphics.com)**

# Standard Elements

- **Date:** This refers to the date the letter was written. It includes the date, the month, and the year. You can represent this in either of the following two ways:
- 3 June 2003 or June 3, 2003
- For international correspondence, check the accepted format for the recipient's region.

# Standard Elements

- **Inside Address** This part of the letter identifies the recipient of the letter and is separated from the date by at least one blank line. The amount of space separating the inside address from the date may be adjusted to suit the length of the letter.
- A courtesy title should precede the recipient's name. Table 13.1 shows you the appropriate titles to be used.
- It is always best to address your letter to a specific person.
- You can usually identify the name of the person by checking the organization's website or telephoning the organization.
- If you do not know the name of a specific person, it is acceptable to address the letter to the department or to a job title.
- Immediately following the addressee's name and title, separate lines should contain the name of the company, the street address or post office box number, and the city and state or province with proper postal code or zip code. If you are writing internationally, the addressee's country should follow in capital letters and occupy the last line of inside address.

# Sample Inside Address

Here are a few samples of inside addresses:

**Ms Christina George  
Corporate Communications Inc.  
3456 Grant  
Chicago, IL 60611  
USA**

**Messers Lal Chand and Sons  
56, Nehru Marg  
Greater Kailash  
New Delhi-110002**

**The General Manager  
Lion Industries Limited  
No. 3-A, East Patel Nagar  
Manasarovar  
Mumbai-400001**

**Professor (Ms) Gayathri Devi  
Department of Chemistry  
Indian Institute of Pharmacy  
Patel Colony  
Secunderabad-500017**

# Courtesy Titles

**Table 13.1: VARIOUS COURTESY TITLES**

Category	Courtesy Title
<b>Men</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All</li> <li>• Professional</li> </ul>	<b>Mr,</b> Professor, Dr, Captain, Father, Reverend, Justice, Brigadier, etc., (as the case may be)
<b>Women</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Unmarried or marital status is unknown)</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Professional</li> </ul>	<b>Ms</b> Mrs or Ms (as per the individual's preference) Professor, Dr, Captain, Reverend, Justice, Brigadier, etc., (as the case may be)
<b>Firm</b>  Dignitaries (President, Prime Minister, Governor, Chancellor, Religious Heads, Royalty)	<b>Messers (Messers Ram and Company)</b>  His/Her Excellency, His/Her Highness, His/Her Holiness (as the case may be)
<b>Limited Company</b>	Designation of the officer concerned. (The General Manager, Bharat Petroleum Limited)
<b>Firms with name element (Sardar Balwant Singh and Brothers)</b>	<b>No title</b>

# Standard Elements

- **Salutation:** Always try to address your letter to a person by name rather than title. If you must send a form letter or if you cannot find a specific name, you may choose a salutation such as:
  - Dear Committee Member
  - Dear Students
  - Dear Colleagues
  - To All Sales Reps
  - To Whom It May Concern
  - Dear Sir or Madam
  - Dear Madam or Sir
  - Dear Purchasing Agent

# Sample Salutations

If your letter is addressed to a company, the proper salutation is:

Gentlemen or Ladies  
Ladies or Gentlemen

If your letter is addressed to an organization of only women or only men, use:

Dear Sirs  
Dear Ladies  
Dear Mesdames  
Gentlemen  
Ladies

If you do not know the gender of the person to whom you are writing, use one of the following:

Dear Mallika Pande  
Dear M. Pande

The way you address the recipient is governed by your relationship with that person. Whether you use the first or last name and whether you drop the *Dear* makes your letter either more formal or less formal:

Dear Mr Gupta:      (most formal)  
Dear Ashok:  
Dear Ashok,  
Ashok,                      (very informal)



# Standard Elements

- **Message:** This part of your letter will usually occupy the greatest amount of space.
- It should be single-spaced, with a blank line separating it from the preceding and the following parts of your letter.
- In addition, you should also separate each paragraph of your message by a blank line.
- Within the message part or the main text of your letter, you can use formatting to help the reader.
- For example you can use bulleted lists, italics, and bold fonts.
- But be certain that these are consistent with the existing practice or style of letter writing in your organization.

# Standard Elements

- **Complimentary Close** This element is a single word or phrase, separated from the message by a blank line. Here is a list of expressions that can be used for complimentary closing:
  - Sincerely
  - Cordially
  - Truly
  - Faithfully
  - Respectfully
  - Faithfully yours
  - Respectfully yours
  - Cordially yours
  - Truly yours
  - Sincerely yours
  - Yours sincerely
  - Yours truly
  - Yours obediently
  - Yours faithfully

# Standard Elements

- **Signature Block** The complimentary closing line is followed by the signature block, which includes your signature, name and title.
- Every letter must end with a signature to give authenticity to the information contained in it. An unsigned letter is of no consequence.
- Place the signature block four lines below the complimentary close. Include your name and the title.
- If your name might leave the reader in doubt about your gender, you may include a title in the signature block as shown in the sample given below:

Cordially,

Ms. Saira Bangash  
Senior Executive

# Standard Elements

- Your letterhead indicates that you are representing your organization.
  - However, if your letter is on plain paper or runs to a second page, you may want to emphasize that you are writing legally for the company.
  - The accepted way of doing so is to place the company's name in capital letters a double space below the complimentary close and then include the sender's name and title four lines below that.

Sincerely,  
SHAREWELL INDUSTRIES  
Mr. Kashif Chauhan  
President

- If an organization has delegated the authority of signing letters to an executive by the Power of Attorney, that executive will add *per pro.* or *pp.* just before the name of the organization and sign below it as:

Cordially,  
Per Pro. Sharewell Industries  
Salman Karim

# Additional Elements

- Formal letters differ greatly in subject matter, the identifying information they need (such as addressee notation, attention line, subject line, or reference line) and also the format they adopt.
- The following elements may be used in any combination, depending upon the requirements of the particular letter, but generally in the order shown below:
  - Addressee notation
  - Attention line
  - Subject line
  - Reference initials
  - Enclosure notation
  - Copy notation
  - Mailing notation
  - Postscript

# Additional Elements

- **Addressee Notation**

- This sort of notation generally appears a double space above the inside address, in all capital letters. Personal, Confidential or Please Forward, Through Proper Channel are examples of such notations which are used in letters that have a restricted readership or that must be handled in a special way.

- **Attention Line**

- An attention line can be used to draw the attention of a particular person or a particular department in an organization so as to ensure a quick and prompt action on your letter.
- You may place the attention line two spaces below the inside address. This line is included in the following manner:
  - Attention: Dr Shoaib Khan
  - Attention: Personnel Manager

# Additional Elements

**Subject Line** This element lets the recipient know at a glance what the letter is about; it also indicates where to file the letter for future reference.

It usually appears below the salutation. But sometimes it is placed above the salutation and below the attention line:

Dear Mr Gohar

Subject: Information regarding last week's inspection

Attention: Personnel manager

Subject: Information regarding last week's inspection

Dear Mr Gohar

The attention line and the subject line are generally given in bold as well as capital letters.

# Additional Elements

- **Reference Initials:** Often, one person may dictate or write the letter and another may produce it. On such occasions, reference initials are included to show who helped prepare the letter. Reference initials appear two spaces below the last line of the signature block. If the writer's name appears in the signature block, only the preparer's initials are necessary. If only the department's name appears in the signature block, both sets of initials should appear usually in one of the following forms:
  - KSM/RK
  - KSM:RK
  - KSM:RK
  - The first set of initials is the writer's and the second set is the helper's.
  - At times, the letter may be written, signed, and prepared by different persons. In such case, at least the file copy of a letter should bear all the three sets of initials ( KSM/AS/RK: signer, writer, preparer). When business people key in their own letters, reference initials are not included. With the increased use of electronic mails, the use of reference initials are becoming more and more rare.



# Additional Elements

- **Enclosure Notation:** This appears at the bottom of the letter, one or two lines below the reference initials. Some common forms are:
  - Enclosure: Draft of proposal
  - Enclosures: Two
  - Enclosures: 1. Report (10 pages)
    2. Photographs (2)
    3. List of participants

# Additional Elements

- **Copy Notation:** This indicates who is receiving a courtesy copy (cc).
  - Some companies indicate copies made on a photocopier (pc), or they simply use copy (c).
  - Recipients are listed in the order of rank if they hold different ranks or in alphabetical order if they hold equal ranks. This part follows reference initials or enclosure notations:
    - Cc: Charles Mathew
    - Pc: Haris Ahmad
    - Copy to Ben Adams
    - C: Aamir Khan
  - In addition to the name of an individual, copy notation may include any combination of that person's courtesy title, position, department, company, and complete address, along with notations about any enclosures being sent with the copies.
  - Cc: Charles Mathew, with the list of absentees and with a request to look into the matter.
  - At times, copies are sent to benefit readers other than the person who receives the original letter. In that case, place the notation bc, bcc, or bpc (blind copy, blind courte. copy or blind photocopy) with the name where the copy notation would normally appear—but only on the copy, not on the original.

# Additional Elements

- **Mailing Notation** This is placed either at the bottom of the letter after reference initials or enclosure notations, or at the top of the letter above the inside address on the left hand side. Mailing notations such as By Registered Post, By Courier, By Speed Post, etc. will generally appear in capital letters to catch the attention. In addition, the same notation will appear on the envelope also.
- **Postscript** Letters may also bear postscripts, i.e., afterthoughts to the letter, to the messages that require emphasis, or personal notes. The postscript is usually the last item on any letter and may be preceded by *PS.*, *PS* or nothing at all. You can also show a second afterthought with the notation *PPS.*, meaning *post postscript*.
- As far as possible try to avoid using postscripts as they convey an impression of poor planning. However, you can use them in your sales letters, not as an after thought but as a punch line to remind the reader of a benefit of taking advantage of the offer.
- The following example (Exhibit 13.1) shows both standard and additional elements.

**RESIDENTS' WELFARE ASSOCIATION  
NEHRU COLONY, JAWAHAR NAGAR  
COIMBATORE**

Date	January 12, 2002
Mailing Notation	<b>By Speed Post</b>
Address Notation	Personal
Inside address	Water Works Department Moorthy Complex Bapu nagar Coimbatore
Attention line	<b>ATTENTION:</b> Mr Rohan Kumar, In Charge, Water Supply
Salutation	Dear Mr Rohan Kumar:
Subject line	<b>SUBJECT:</b> No water supply on 15 <sup>th</sup> October 2003
Body	<p>I am extremely sorry to inform you that our colony did not have any water supply on 15<sup>th</sup> of this month and we had to face acute water shortage because of this.</p> <p>I contacted your office on 15<sup>th</sup> October at 10 a.m. and the person at the receiving end informed us that the water supply has been stopped for certain areas because of some problems in pumping. But he ensured that the supply would resume by 5 p.m. To our dismay, we could not receive water on that day.</p> <p>The complaint letter signed by all the residents of this colony is enclosed. Please look into the matter and see to it that such lacuna does not occur at least in future.</p> <p>Regards</p>
Complimentary close	Sincerely
Signature block	Manokaran, President
Reference Initials	GK
Enclosure line	Enclosure (1)
Copy line	Copy: Chairman, Water Board
Post Script	PS: Please instruct your office to give prior intimation in case of not supplying water on a particular day.

# Layout

- Suitable and correct layout enhances the overall effectiveness of any letter. The layout helps to arrange all the elements of a business letter in an organized manner.
- Although the basic parts of a business letter have remained the same for centuries, the layouts do change. Sometimes a company adopts a certain format as its policy; sometimes the individual letter writer is allowed to choose the format most appropriate for a given letter or to settle on a personal performance, but in general, four major letter layouts are commonly used.
  - Block layout
  - Modified block layout
  - Semi-block layout
  - Simplified layout

# Layout

- **Block Layout**
- This form (Exhibit 13.2) is extremely popular as it makes the letter look attractive, elegant, and efficient. It has the following characteristics:
  - All elements except the letterhead heading are aligned to the left margin.
  - It follows open punctuation. In other words the end punctuation marks are omitted in each element except the salutation, complimentary close, and message.

25 North Main Street  
Maharaja Colony  
Post Box No. 1221  
Mumbai-400001

HEADING

February 16, 2003

DATE

Ms Mary Fernandes  
Customer Relations  
Bharat Telephone Company  
133 Balaji Street  
Mumbai-400001

INSIDE ADDRESS

Dear Ms Fernandes:

SALUTATION

I received a collection notice from the Bharat Telephone Company on February 13, 2003. The letter states that I owe a past due balance from the September 16 to October 16 billing period in 2002. The letter also states that my service will be disconnected unless I act immediately; however, I am now informing you for the second time that I paid that bill on January 1st, 2003.

BODY

On January 15th, I received a call from one of your representatives about this matter, and I immediately told him that approximately two weeks ago I sent a cheque to your office for the due amount of Rs 6,450.00. Unfortunately, I failed to get his name. I am irritated that you have not taken care of this matter since I have the cancelled cheque in my possession, and I am enclosing a copy of it herewith.

I hope that this will settle the matter once and for all.

Sincerely yours,

COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE

Babulal Chotia  
(419) 352-5555

SIGNATURE BLOCK

Encl: copy of cancelled cheque

ENCLOSURES

# Layout

- **Modified Block Layout**
- Modified block format (Exhibit 13.3) differs from block format in the positioning of certain elements:
- Heading, complimentary close, and signature block are aligned vertically with the right margin.
- Although businesses seem to prefer full block format, modified block is acceptable.
- Many people consider the modified block's appearance more balanced and traditional.



25 North Main Street  
Maharaja Colony  
Post Box No. 1221  
Mumbai-400001

February 16, 2003

Ms Mary Fernandes  
Customer Relations  
Bharat Telephone Company  
133 Balaji Street  
Mumbai-400001

Dear Ms Fernandes:

I received a collection notice from the Bharat Telephone Company on February 13, 2003. The letter states that I owe a past due balance from the September 16 to October 16 billing period in 2002. The letter also states that my service will be disconnected unless I act immediately; however, I am now informing you for the second time that I paid that bill on January 1st, 2003.

On January 15th, I received a call from one of your representatives about this matter, and I immediately told him that approximately two weeks ago I sent a cheque to your office for the due amount of Rs 6450.00. Unfortunately, I failed to get his name. I am irritated that you have not taken care of this matter since I have the cancelled cheque in my possession, and I am enclosing a copy of it herewith.

I hope that this will settle the matter once and for all.

Sincerely yours,

Babulal Chotia  
(419) 352-5555

Encl: copy of cancelled cheque

# Layout

- **Semi-block Layout**
- This resembles modified block style except that the start of each paragraph is indented, i.e., each paragraph of the message starts a few spaces away from the margin.
- This form makes the letter somewhat clumsy and has gone out of style (Exhibit13.4).

25 North Main Street  
Maharaja Colony  
Post Box No. 1221  
Mumbai-400001

February 16, 2003

Ms Mary Fernandes  
Customer Relations  
Bharat Telephone Company  
133 Balaji Street  
Mumbai-400001

Dear Ms Fernandes:

I received a collection notice from the Bharat Telephone Company on February 13, 2003. The letter states that I owe a past due balance from the September 16 to October 16 billing period in 2002. The letter also states that my service will be disconnected unless I act immediately; however, I am now informing you for the second time that I paid that bill on January 1st, 2003.

On January 15th, I received a call from one of your representatives about this matter, and I immediately told him that approximately two weeks ago I sent a cheque to your office for the due amount of Rs 6450.00. Unfortunately, I failed to get his name. I am irritated that you have not taken care of this matter since I have the cancelled cheque in my possession, and I am enclosing a copy of it herewith.

I hope that this will settle the matter once and for all.

Sincerely yours,

Babulal Chotia  
(419) 352-5555

Encl: copy of cancelled cheque

# Layout

- **Simplified Layout**
- Though this format (Exhibit 13.5) resembles block format, it is characterized by the following features:
  - Omits salutation
  - Often includes a subject line in capital letters
  - Omits complimentary close
- This format is convenient when you do not know your recipient's name.
- However, some people object to this format because it seems mechanical and impersonal.
- Nevertheless, this drawback may be overcome with a warm writing style.

25 North Main Street  
Maharaja Colony  
Post Box No. 1221  
Mumbai-400001

February 16, 2003

Ms Mary Fernandes  
Customer Relations  
Bharat Telephone Company  
133 Balaji Street, Mumbai-400001

**BALANCE PAYMENT ALREADY MADE**

I received a collection notice from the Bharat Telephone Company on February 13, 2003. The letter states that I owe a past due balance from the September 16 to October 16 billing period in 2002. The letter also states that my service will be disconnected unless I act immediately; however, I am now informing you for the second time that I paid that bill on January 1st, 2003.

On January 15th, I received a call from one of your representatives about this matter, and I immediately told him that approximately two weeks ago I sent a cheque to your office for the due amount of Rs 6450.00. Unfortunately, I failed to get his name. I am irritated that you have not taken care of this matter since I have the cancelled cheque in my possession, and I am enclosing a copy of it herewith.

I hope that this will settle the matter once and for all.

Babulal Chotia  
(419) 352-5555

Encl: copy of cancelled cheque

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- **Principles**
- Read the following message contained in a business letter.

Dear Sir

I am writing to complain that you haven't paid any attention while sending the goods to us. While we had ordered for 15 air conditioners, you sent 50 air coolers instead. This is simply wasting my time and is most annoying. What is the reason for this nonsense? Have you any problems? Are you understaffed? Is the volume of work too much for you to manage? Or is it simply due to sheer carelessness? Whatever the reason, if this kind of mistake occurs again, we shall stop our orders. Look into the matter carefully and do the needful immediately.

Yours sincerely

Mustafa Khattak  
Purchase Manager

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- How do you find this letter?
- If you are the recipient of this letter, how would you receive it?
- Will you react positively to the complaint? Most probably you may not feel like responding. You will only respond to the complaint but also may decide to end your relationship with this customer
- The Chinese proverb *'In the midst of joy do not promise to give a man anything, in the midst of great anger do not answer man's letter'* holds true in business letter writing.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- As already said, business letters are written mainly to create, establish, or sustain your business relationship with others.
- A good relationship is based on respect and courtesy.
- So, when trying to establish good relationships in your business messages, remember to follow the principles of business letter writing mentioned below:
  - Use the You attitude
  - Be Clear And Concise
  - Be Correct And Complete
  - Emphasize the positive
  - Be Courteous And Considerate



# BUSINESS LETTERS

- **‘You’ Attitude**
- Focus on the recipient’s needs, purposes, or interests instead of your own. Even if you must talk about yourself in a business letter a great deal, do so in a way that relates your concerns to those of the recipient.
- This recipient-oriented style is often called the ‘you’ attitude. It does not mean using more *yours* but making the recipient the main focus of the letter. Remember that all letters are not propaganda material.
- Even an unpleasant situation can be changed by using the ‘you’ attitude.
- At the simplest level, you can adopt the ‘you’ attitude by replacing the terms that refer to yourself and your company with terms that refer to your audience.
- In other words, use more of *you* and *yours* instead of *I, me, mine, we, us, our,* and *ours*:

# BUSINESS LETTERS

We/Matter-of-fact attitude	'You' attitude
We are glad we can now send our tape recorders.	You would be glad to know that your tape recorders are ready for sale.
We are happy to receive your request for the automatic locks.	Thank you for your request for the automatic locks.
We regret that the goods did not reach the buyers in time.	We regret that you could not receive your goods in time.
We are pleased to announce our new insurance scheme.	Now you can avail our new insurance scheme.
We offer the printer cartridges in three colours: black, red and blue.	You may choose your printer cartridges from three colours: black, red, and blue.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Remember that the 'you' attitude is not intended to be manipulative or insincere.
- In fact it is an extension of the audience-centered approach.
- Also, this attitude is not just a matter of using one pronoun rather than another; it is a matter of genuine empathy.
- Despite using *you* 20 times in a single letter you may be ignoring your recipient's concerns.
- Hence, it is the thought and sincerity that count and not the pronoun *you*.
- If you are writing to a manufacturer, think like a manufacturer; if you are dealing with a retailer, put yourself in that position. The core of 'you' attitude is your attitude toward recipients and your appreciation of their position or situation.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- But as you know, there are always exceptions to rules. The 'you' attitude may not help at times.
- On some occasions you will do better if you avoid using you. For instance, when someone makes a mistake, you may want to minimize ill feeling by referring to the mistake impersonally rather than pointing out directly.
- You might say, 'we have a problem' instead of 'you caused a problem'.
- Look at these examples. The more impersonal, matter-of-fact tone shows greater sensitivity and avoids creating unnecessary hard feelings in the recipient.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Though the you attitude brings in effectiveness in letters, some organizations may have a tradition of avoiding references to you and I in their technical or business documents.
- If you work for such an organization, follow its style and restrict your use of personal pronouns in these documents.

'You' attitude	Impersonal attitude
You should never use this type of paper for photocopiers.	This type of paper does not work well in photocopiers.
You have not connected the wires properly.	The wires have not been connected properly.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- **Clarity and Conciseness**
- Read the following two versions of the same message included in a business letter and see which one gives you the information clearly and succinctly (briefly):
- **Version 1:** I am extremely sorry to have to point out to you that we do not have these brands in stock at the present moment of time.
- **Version 2:** These brands are presently out of stock.
- The second version is more direct and concise not only because of using lesser number of words but also it does not use redundant expressions which camouflage (disguise) the meaning.
- Alexander Pope, a renowned Eighteenth century Poet says:

*‘ Words are like leaves and where they most abound much fruit of sense beneath is rarely found ’*

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Conciseness means saying what you need to say in as few words as possible—a respected skill in technical communication. While many writers can get their meanings across to readers, only skilled ones can do so succinctly.
- You must make sure that your message is clear. Perhaps a sentence is so messed up that your reader cannot unravel its meaning, or it is constructed in such a way that your reader can interpret it in more than one way.
- By being unambiguous, you can not only be concise but also be clear. Lack of clarity and conciseness is mainly because of the following reasons:
  - Long involved sentences
  - Sentences revealing over-enthusiasm
  - Verbosity or wordiness
  - Redundancy or use of Low Information Content (LIC) words

Now let us try to understand these features through some examples:

Original	Revised
<p>1. It is evident that the company's request for measuring equipment to be kept in the laboratory has become rather important inasmuch as this demand is prioritized in our Managing director's most recent letter. (Involved sentence)</p>	<p>As mentioned by our Managing Director in his recent letter, we need to give priority to the company's request for measuring equipment.</p>
<p>2. Regardless of their seniority or union affiliation, all employees who are expecting that they would be promoted are expected</p>	<p>Regardless of their seniority or union status, all employees anticipating a promotion are expected</p>
<p>to continue their education either by enrolling in the special courses to be offered by the company, which are scheduled to be given after working hours beginning next week, or by taking approved online courses chosen from the list which are kept in the training division. (Involved sentence)</p>	<p>to continue their education in either of the two following ways:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• They may enrol in special courses to be offered by the company.</li> <li>• They may refer to the list in the training division, select and take approved online courses.</li> </ul>



<p>3. I strongly believe that Mr Ram's employment record seems to show that he may be absolutely capable of handling even extremely difficult situations. (Overemphasis)</p>	<p>Mr Ram's employment record shows that he may be able to handle any difficult situation.</p>
<p>4. I am very sure that each one of you will be unquestionably happy to hear the extraordinarily good news that our truly sincere efforts have been duly recognized by the Governmental agencies. (Overemphasis)</p>	<p>All of you will be glad to know that the Governmental agencies have recognized our sincere efforts.</p>
<p>5. Our Chairman is of the opinion that only the Personnel Manager can handle this situation. (Wordiness)</p>	<p>Our Chairman believes that only our Personnel Manager can handle the situation.</p>
<p>6. In spite of the fact that the bill remains unpaid, they placed another order. (Wordiness)</p>	<p>Although the bill remains unpaid, they placed another order.</p>
<p>7. <i>It will be noted that</i> the records of the earlier years show a steady increase in special appropriations. (Redundancy)</p>	<p>The records for the earlier years show a steady increase in special appropriations.</p>
<p>8. By acting now, we can finish sooner <i>than if we wait until a later date.</i> (Redundancy)</p>	<p>By acting now, we can finish sooner.</p>

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- The italicized phrases in examples 7 and 8 are redundant. They serve no purpose and contain little information.
- If you develop the practice of removing such phrases from your business or technical writing, your writing style will turn out to be more effective.
- Examples of some common phrases that can easily be replaced with short, more concise words or descriptions are given in Table 13.2.

**Table 13.2: CONCISE VERSIONS OF LONG PHRASES**

Phrase	Concise Version
along the lines of as a matter of fact at all times at the present time at this point in time because of the fact that by means of due to the fact that for the purpose of have the ability to in order to in spite of the fact that in the event that in the final analysis in the nature of in the neighborhood of until such time as in the near future in accordance with enclosed please find	like in fact always now, currently now, currently because, since by because for can, be able to to although, though if finally like about until soon according to enclosed is

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- **Correctness and Completeness**
- Suppose you enquire from a company about the mode of payment for the equipment you have purchased from them and they reply like this:
- ‘Send your payment by demand draft as soon as possible.’
- You will obviously be irritated by such a reply because
  - it doesn't give you the complete details about payment, i.e., the name on which the draft has to be taken and also whether it should be account payee, and
  - it does not specify the deadline for sending the draft.
- Though your business letters may be concise and clear, unless they are specific or precise and compete in all respects, they may not fulfil the objective.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- The term correctness refers to concreteness or precision, and the term completeness refers to thoroughness or giving all the required details.
- To be correct and completes you need to understand the purpose of your letter and think clearly.
- In addition, you can achieve these qualities in your letter writing by following certain guidelines given below:
  - Use evaluative and factual words/phrases rather than abstract and general expressions.
  - Use unambiguous words/phrases.
  - Proofread your message for accuracy of spelling and grammar before sending.
  - Check whether you have answered all queries and provided all details.

Original	Revised
We need a large office space.	We need at least 10,000 square feet.
A number of customers filed their returns today.	Ten customers filed their returns today.
On July 1 <sup>st</sup> , the company will close its doors.	On July 1 <sup>st</sup> , the company will become bankrupt.
This antiquated merchandising strategy is ineffectual in contemporary business operations.	This old sales strategy will not work in today's business.
If you have any questions, please feel free to contact us.	If you have any questions, please contact us.
We are submitting a cheque in the amount of Rs. 20,000.	We are sending a cheque for Rs. 20,000.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- The italicized words in the original version refer to abstract/general, ambiguous, and grammatically incorrect words/phrases.
- They are changed to factual, unambiguous, and grammatically correct ones in the revised version.
- The examples given in next slide show you how abstract phrases can be substituted with more factual ones in order to make writing more correct and concrete.

Abstract	Factual/Evaluative
Leading company	First among 2000 companies
Substantial discount	Discount of 20%
Light weight	Feather light
As soon as possible	Latest by/on or before 2 <sup>nd</sup> August
Sold a good number of books	Sold 25,300 books
Publications	Books/magazines/manuals/bulletins /brochures
Huge area	7000 square feet
Many storeys	Four floors
The majority	65%
Excellent attendance record	100% attendance record



# BUSINESS LETTERS

- **Positive Approach**
- As you know, one can frame a message in many ways, and each way may convey a different meaning. Much of the difference lies in the meaning of the words as understood by the writer and the reader.
- Consider, for example, the following words of Ernest Hemingway, a renowned American novelist:
  - *Never think that war, no matter how necessary nor how justified, is not a crime.*
- If you need to understand the author's opinion of war, you must shift the negative terms *never* and *not* to positive. In doing so, if you omit one, you may arrive at the intended meaning which is:
  - All war is crime

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Positive words are always best to achieve your goal.
- Most information, even bad news, which you convey through your business letters has some redeeming (positive) feature.
- You should make your audience aware of this feature.
- Emphasize the positive side of your message rather than the negative side.
- Stress what is or what will be rather than what is not and what will not be. Tell what you have done or what you can do instead of what you have not done or what you cannot do.
- Letters which reflect positive attitude are more acceptable to your readers.
- In addition, the positive side of your message will also help in healing the wounded feelings of your customers when you offer criticism or advice.
- Compare the differing results obtained from the negative and positive versions of each of the messages given in next slide:

Negative	Positive
We never exchange damaged goods.	You may exchange the purchased goods provided they are in good condition.
We regret to inform you that we may not be able to grant you request for credit.	For the time being we can serve you on cash basis only.
It is impossible to repair your car in two days.	Your car will be ready by Thursday.
We cannot send you the gowns until you tell us what colour and size you want.	Please check your size and colour preferences in the enclosed order form and send us so that you receive the gowns.
You should have known that the contact lenses cannot be washed with tissue, for it is clearly mentioned in the instructions.	The instructions explain why the contact lenses should be washed only with particular solution.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Also avoid words with negative connotations (suggestion). In other words, try to frame your message with words which will not offend or hurt your readers.
- Replace words with the unpleasant connotations with mild terms

<b>Unpleasant words/phrases</b>	<b>Mild words/phrases</b>
elderly	senior citizen
second hand cars	resale cars
cheap goods	inexpensive goods
toilet paper	bathroom tissue
high-calorie food	high-energy food

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- **Courtesy and Consideration**
- Given below is a business message received by a candidate a week after submitting an application for a job:
  - *Your application for the post of Purchase Manager cannot be considered by our company.*
- You can imagine the candidate's state of mind on reading such curt, discourteous reply.
- Of course it is not possible for the company to give an opportunity for every applicant.
- But at the same time, it can be little courteous in rejecting an applicant.
- Had the company prepared a standard message like the one given below and sent to the rejected applicants, it would not have hurt their feelings and also would have kept the lines of communication open with them:

# BUSINESS LETTERS

Thank you very much for your application dated \_\_\_\_\_ for the post of \_\_\_\_\_ in our company.

We are sorry that we are not able to offer you this position at present. However, we have noted down your credentials and have filed your application for future use. Whenever an opportunity arises in future, we shall consider your application.

We appreciate your interest in working with us.

Our best wishes to you.

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Courtesy is oil; it reduces friction.
- Being polite to your readers is another way of earning their respect and sustaining your relationship with them.
- Not only do you show consideration for their needs and feelings but also you treat them with friendly concern when you are courteous in your business letters. The resultant climate will facilitate both you and your readers to forge stronger bonds.
- When you meet somebody face to face, you can express your courtesy and consideration through non-verbal means and by speaking appropriate words.
- Similarly when you wish to be courteous and considerate to your recipients of your letters, you need to:
  - use a conversational tone (be natural)
  - avoid dogmatism (do not preach)
  - avoid anger (be patient)

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- The following examples will give you an idea of how courtesy and consideration bring in a positive a desirable change in the style of your business letters.
- You may also notice that when you express courtesy, you may have to explain something extra and in this process you may end up with more words.
- But never mind. Cutting down on words is not your objective in writing letters:

<b>Original</b>	<b>Revised</b>
Your indifferent attitude has caused a great loss.	Had you been a bit more careful, we could have avoided this 20% loss.
We cannot grant you the leave you have asked for in your application of 25 July 2003.	As we have to complete the project by the end of this month, you may take leave after 30 July 2003. But sorry, at present it may not be possible for us to grant you leave.
If you do not respond to this letter also, we do not have any option other than lodging legal proceedings against your company.	We hope that you will certainly respond to this letter at least so that we can avoid taking any legal action against your company.



# BUSINESS LETTERS

- Here are certain phrases which may help you in expressing courtesy and consideration:
  - Many thanks for your letter dated...
  - Kindly respond to our request for...
  - Please refer to our order dated...
  - You are correct Ms Zara in saying that...
  - You will be pleased to know that...
  - Please do not forget to send us the original as.
  - We appreciate your prompt response to our...
  - We are sorry that we may not be able to grant you

# BUSINESS LETTERS

- But remember to avoid the artificial and angry expressions as the ones given below:
  - Please permit me to say that...
  - Please be advised that...
  - It has come to my attention that...
  - We beg to state that...
  - Never has there been, nor there will be, a customer as good as you...
  - We have no intention of allowing this state of affairs to continue.
  - I simply cannot understand your negligence.



**THE END**