E-kursuse

„**Written communication**"
materjalid

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Reet Soosaar (Tartu Ülikool), 2012

Types of letters

Business letters are an essential part of making and confirming transactions in the commercial world.They are important in creating a good impression, and therefore *what* is written is as vital as *how* it is presented.

There are various styles appropriate to business letters. These must take into account: the company's letterhead; the company's in-house writing style.

In addition the style of letters is constantly changing in line with different international business practices and new language developments.

However, a good business letter should aim to be: precise; concise; accurate.

The following are examples of five types of business letters:

A letter of application;

a letter of request;

a letter of reply;

a letter of order;

a letter of complaint.

Other types of correspondence

There are more types of correspondence:

fax message;

memo.

Different business documents used in business:

- **an enquiry** — (järelepärimine, päring) a request for information (sent by the customer);
- **a reply to an enquiry;**
- **a quotation** — (hinnapakkumine) the price given for goods or a piece of work;
- **an estimate** — (kalkulatsioon) an approximate calculation of the cost of something;

- **a counter-proposal** —(vastuettepanek) a letter where the customer tries to get better terms
- **an order** — (tellimus) a request to supply goods (sent by the customer);
- **an invoice** — (arve) a bill for goods sent or work done
- **a reminder** — (meeldetuletus) a letter to a customer about an unpaid invoice;
- **a receipt** — (kviitung) a document that proves you have paid for some goods
- **a statement** — (aruanne, kuu väljavõte) a list of amounts paid and still owed, sent every month;
- **a complaint** — (kaebus) a letter saying you are not satisfied about something.

Content and style

Length

All correspondence should be long enough to explain exactly what the sender needs to say and the receiver needs to know.

You must decide how much information you put in the letter. Your style and the kind of language you use can also affect the length.

See the following three letters which are written by different people in reply to same enquiry from Mr. Arrand about their company's products.

Too long It is too wordy, unnecessary explanations and facts.

Too short There are a number of problems with this letter (no proper salutations or endings, it should have begun *Dear Mr Arrand* and ended *Yours sincerely;* neither the date nor reference number of the enquiry are quoted; ideally, a catalogue should be enclosed with a reply to an enquiry about a company's products or indication of a website; when a catalogue is sent, attention should be drawn to items which might be of particular interest; a price list should be included if prices are not given in the catalogue.

The right length A suitable letter. It provides all the relevant information and draws Mr Arrand's attention to some specific products which may be of interest to him.

Order and sequence

Your letter should make all the necessary points in a logical sequence, with each idea or piece of information linking up with the previous one in a pattern that can be followed.

Do not make statement, switch to other subjects, then refer back to the point you made a few sentences or paragraphs before, as in the following example.

Examples of 2 letters.

Unclear sequence This letter is difficult to understand because there is no clear sequence or logical order.

Clear sequence A better version of the same letter, in which the ideas and information are in a logical order.

Planning

Planning enables you to include the right amount of information, and in the right order.

First paragraph

The opening sentence or paragraph is important as it sets the tone of the letter and creates a first impression.

 Generally speaking, you would thank your correspondent for their letter, if necessary introduce yourself and your company, state the subject of the letter, and set out its purpose.

Middle paragraphs

The main part of your letter will concern the points that need to be made, answers you wish to give, or questions you want to ask.

In the middle paragraphs, planning is most important to make sure your points are made clearly, fully, and in a logical sequence.

Final paragraph

At the end of your letter, if it is a reply and you have not done so at the beginning, you should thank your correspondent for writing.

If appropriate, encourage further enquiries or correspondence, mentioning that you look forward to hearing from him or her soon.

Simplicity, courtesy and clarity

Use a simple but polite style of language. Commercial correspondence often suffers from an old-fashioned style of English which complicates the message.

Your style should not, however, be so simple that it becomes rude.

The stylistic devices that are used to make it more polite:

- complex sentences, joined by conjunctions, rather than short sentences;
- the use of full rather than abbreviated forms;
- the use of passive forms and indirect language that avoids sounding aggressive.

It is important to try **to get the right "tone"** in your letter. This means that, generally speaking, you should **aim for a neutral tone**. On the whole, it is better to **avoid using colloquial language or slang**.

Your correspondent must be able to understand what you have written.

Careless mistakes in a letter can give readers a bad impression.

Spelling, punctuation, and grammar should be checked carefully.

Cover letter or Letter of application

Application letter and cover letter are same, just that the context of their uses can vary.

A letter of application typically provides detailed information on why you are qualified for the job you are applying for. It explains the reasons for your interest in the specific organization and identify your most relevant skills or experiences.

A cover letter is a motivational letter that serves as an introduction to the employer in order to catch the interest of the employer.
While **cover letter** can also mean an application letter, it comes in different format and purpose. They are:

- invited cover letter which responds to a known job opening;
- uninvited cover letter which inquires about possible positions;
- other uses of cover letters are e.g. loan application.

Features of a cover letter

Beginning a cover letter

The first paragraph of your cover letter should detail the job you are applying for, and if relevant, where you heard about the job (for example an advertisement, or personal recommendation).

Writing the main body of the letter

In the main body of the letter you need to show why you are the right person for the job, by highlighting your most relevant experiences and skills as they relate to the position you are applying for.

It is important to demonstrate evidence of your skills clearly. It is not enough to claim that you are "a hard-working, flexible team player, with excellent IT skills"; you need to be able to provide evidence.

Matching your skills and experience to the position

In the body of your cover letter it is essential that you are able to demonstrate how your work experience and skills match the specific position you are applying for.

To do this you need to:

- read the job description carefully;
- identify the skills and experience the company is particularly interested in;
- show any parallels with previous posts you have held or other experience

Writing an effective final paragraph

The final paragraph of your cover letter should round the letter off, leaving the reader with a positive impression of your application and a desire to interview you.

- The final paragraph should express willingness to provide any further information that the reader may want.
- It is necessary to mention any items (including the CV) you are enclosing/attaching.
- It is polite to thank the reader for their time and consideration.
- The final paragraph may actually consist of two short paragraphs.

From Ashley,A. Commercial Correspondence.Oxford University Press, 2003.

How to write a perfect sales letter

Do you ever stop to think about what happens to your sales letters after they leave your desk?

You may spend hours drafting and redrafting them. But do you give a moment's thought to how your reader will react to them when they arrive? If not, don't write another word until you do.

Before you write your next letter, **put yourself in the shoes of the customer.**

Make it reader-friendly. The majority of sales letters get filed, lost or binned. The reader-friendly letter stands a better chance.

Rule number one: never insult your reader with what is clearly a mass-mailed letter.

True, mass mailing is the quickest way of reaching hundreds of potential customers. It's also the safest way of ensuring that your letter ends up in the bin.

A short personalised letter, which gets to the point and clearly demonstrates a knowledge of the customer's needs, **will invariably be better received**.

As a general rule, the more important the person, the shorter your letter should be. Managing Directors are deluged with mail. They rarely have time to do more than glance at it and are unlikely to respond to your letter themselves. So in writing to MDs be brief.

Junior managers, on the other hand, are generally looking for ideas they can pinch and present to the boss as their own. Send them long and informative letters.

According to Mark McCormack, author of What They Don't Teach You at Harvard Business School, **different levels of management are responsive to different sales approaches**.

Senior management is usually looking for strategic solutions to long-term problems which fit in with their corporate goals.

Middle managers want tactical answers to departmental problems which will make their lives simpler and which they can easily justify to their bosses.

What **junior executives** need is technical help to tackle immediate problems. Adapt your proposal accordingly.

If you've got three proposals to make to a customer, send three short letters instead of one long one. It saves the reader having to wade through a lengthy document and it obviously makes it easier to pass the proposals on to the appropriate people. Above all, it makes an impression. It shows style.

Some of the best sales letters don't look like sales letters at all. Get someone in your research department to write you a memo outlining how, with your help, your prospect's company could be improving its business.Then send the memo on to the company explaining how you thought it might be of interest. Make your sales letter sound like "inside information" and you'll make it compulsive reading.

Remember, there's no such a thing as a good sales letter that nobody reads. And since the meaning of the message is the response it gets, you can go a long way towards anticipating the response you'll get before you write a single word.

Making enquiries

The contents of an enquiry will depend on three things:

- how well you know the supplier;

- whether the supplier is based in your country or abroad;

- and the type of goods or services you are enquiring about.

Opening

Tell your supplier what sort of organization you are. How did you hear about the company you are contacting?

Asking for catalogues, price lists, etc.

It is not necessary to give a lot of information about yourself when asking for catalogues, price lists, etc. Remember to give your postal address.

Asking for details

If replying to an advertisement, you should mention the journal or newspaper and its date and quote any reference number given.

Closing

Usually a simple "thank you" is sufficient to close an enquiry. However, you could mention that a prompt reply would be appreciated.

First, before you complain, make absolutely sure your facts are right. If you have to respond to an unjustified complaint, be polite and remember that anyone can make a mistake.

Making general complaints

When sending a complaint, you will need to decide whether it is appropriate to use fax or email, where privacy cannot be guaranteed, or to write a letter. For larger or more serious complaints, use a letter.

Opening

Do not delay. Complain as soon as you realize a mistake has been made; delay weakens your case and can complicate the matter as details may be forgotten.

There is no need to open by apologizing for the need (*We regret to inform you ... I am sorry to have to write to you about ...).*

Simply begin*: We would like to inform you ... I am writing to complain about ...I am writing with reference to the Order No.132, which we received yesterday.*

The language of complaints

Emotional terms like *disgusted, infuriated, amazed* have no place in business.

Do not be rude or personal. You may antagonize someone who has probably had nothing to do with the error, he or she could become defensive and difficult to deal with.

Therefore, do not use sentences like:

You must correct your mistake as soon as possible. You made an error on the statement.

Instead **use the passive and impersonal structures** *The mistake must be corrected as soon as possible. There appears to be an error on the statement.*

Do not use words like ***fault*** or ***blame.***

 Never blame your own staff, and finally, while writing the complaint remember that your supplier will almost certainly want to help you and correct the mistake.

Explaining the problem

If you think you know how the mistake was made, you may politely point this out to your supplier.

Suggesting a solution

If you think you know how the mistake can be corrected, let your suppliers know.

From Ashley,A. Commercial Correspondence.Oxford University Press, 2003.

Replying to letters of complaint

Opening

Acknowledge that you have received the complaint, and thank your customer for informing you. *Thank you for your letter of 6 August informing us that ...*

We would like to thank you for informing us of our accounting error in your letter of 7 June.

We are replying to your letter of 10 March in which you told us that ...

Asking for time to investigate the complaint

Sometimes you cannot deal with a complaint immediately, as the matter needs to be looked into. Do not leave your customer waiting but tell them what you are doing straight away. In this case, an email is appropriate.

While we cannot give you an explanation at present, we are looking into the problem and will contact you again shortly.

Explaining the mistake

If the complaint is justified, explain how the mistake occurred but do not blame your staff.

There appears to have been some confusion in our addressing system, but this has been sorted out.

It is unusual for this type of error to arise, but the problem has now been dealt with.

Solving the problem

Having acknowledged your responsibility and explained what went wrong, you should put matters right as soon as possible, and tell your customer that you are doing so.

The database has been adjusted and there should be no more difficulties. Please contact us again if a similar situation arises, and thank you again for pointing out the error.

Closing

It is useful when closing the letetr to mention that the mistake, error, or fault is an exception, and it either rarely or never happens. You should also, of course, apologize for the inconvenience your customer experienced.

Finally, may we say that this was an exceptional mistake and is unlikely to occur again. Please accept our apologies for the inconvenience.

Advantages and disadvantages of emails

Advantages

There are numerous advantages to email. It is personal and easy to use. It can be used both within and between companies, and is an effective way to communicate quickly and easily with people all over the world.

It is especially useful for short messages and for everyday correspondence, e.g. setting up a meeting, passing on information, and making or replying to a request.

Disadvantages

The disadvantages of email include technical problems which may result in the unexpected non-delivery of messages, or attachments arriving in unreadable form.

As with faxes, a major drawback is the lack of privacy and security. Do not use email to communicate confidential information.

Formal and informal style

Three different writing styles are often identified, although in real life the differences are not so clear:

Formal   This is the style of an old-fashioned letter. Ideas are presented politely and carefully, and there is much use of fixed expressions and long words.

The language is impersonal. Grammar and punctuation are important. *This style is not common in emails, but you can find it if the subject matter is serious (for example a complaint).*

Neutral/standard   *This is the most common style in professional/work emails.* The writer and reader are both busy, so the language is simple, clear and direct.

Sentences are short and there is use of contractions (I've for I have, etc.)

The language is more personal. However, the style is not similar to speech — it is too direct. example

Informal   *This is the most common style for emails between friends.* Sometimes the email can be very short or it could include personal news, funny comments, etc.

This is the style that is closest to speech, so there are everyday words and conversational expressions. The reader will also be more tolerant of bad grammar, etc.

Some tips about writing emails

As a general rule, although email correspondence may tend towards informality, it should follow the same principles as any other form of business correspondence.

In general, **email messages follow the style and conventions used in letters or faxes**.

Do not confuse personal messages with business messages. In a business message, the same rules of writing apply as for a letter: **write clearly, carefully, and courteously; consider audience, purpose, clarity, consistency, conciseness, and tone.**

Use correct grammar, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation, as you would in any other form of correspondence.

Do not write words in capital letters in an email message. This can be seen as the equivalent of shouting and therefore have a negative effect.

Keep your email messages short and to the point. People often receive a lot of emails at work,so conciseness is especially important.

In general, **limit yourself to one topic per message.** This helps to keep the message brief and makes it easier for the recipient to answer, file, and retrieve it later.

Check your email messages for mistakes before you send it, justa s you would check a letter or a fax message.

From Emmerson, P. email English. Macmillan Publishers Limited, 2004.

Types of reports

Reports are pieces of factual writing which are usually based on some type of research.

There are various types of reports such as survey reports, reports assessing good and bad points of something, travel/holiday reports, news reports, witness statements, etc.
Reports present and evaluate the positive and negative qualities of a person (e.g.
an employee), or a building (e.g. a hotel, a shop, a cinema complex) in order to make a judgement or recommendation about them.
Proposals present suggestions, plans or decisions about future actions.

Subheadings and a subject or main heading are necessary when writing a survey report, a report assessing good and bad points or a travel report. The subheadings should be used to indicate the beginning of each new section.

Look at the following examples:

Quarterly report;

Report of an advertising agency;

Market research report:

Report in the form of a memo.

Typical format in reports

The following format is common in many reports:

- **Title**

This should indicate concisely the subject of the report.

- **Introduction**

This section is sometimes called the "terms of reference". It states what you are reporting on, who commissioned the report and by when it should be submitted.

- **Body**

This presents the main contents of the report. It should be giving information, setting out findings, putting forward ideas and arguments, etc.

- **Conclusion** (and Recommendations *only if have been asked to do so*)

The conclusion says what *you* think about the facts, how *you* interpret them.
You will probably do some of the following:

- summarise the discussion in the body of the report.

- summarise findings
- make recommendations
- state what action should be taken as a result of your recommendations and by whom.

Style in reports

A formal and impersonal style is normally used for all types of reports except for witness statements and travel reports which are usually less formal.

Do not forget that formal style includes:

• impersonal – not colloquial or chatty language;

• only facts – not insignificant details;

• use of reporting verbs and passive voice (short forms are acceptable in quotes);

Most reports are written in third person:

The purpose of this study was to ... rather than I did this study ... It was found ... rather than I found ...

It is important to know what type of report you have been asked to write. This will ensure that the proper layout and style are used.

Present tenses are normally used for reports. Modals, conditionals and would are normally used in proposals.

Language of report writing

Three areas of grammar are useful when a more formal, impersonal style is needed. They are:

- **the passive** *A decision is expected by the end of the year. 20,000 new jobs were created in the financial sector last year. The final payment will be made in September.*
- **"it"+ passive** *It is recommended that we reduce the training budget by 10%. It should be emphasized that this data is only provisional. It was suggested/agreed that we use a different approach.*
- **Compound nouns** *a planning meeting; a strategy planning meeting; the summer marketing conference*
- When writing a report, also remember to **avoid using contractions such as "don't": you should write "do not", "should not", and "has not" instead of "don't", "shouldn't", and "hasn't".**

Linking words

Sentences and paragraphs need linking words to help the reader understand the structure of the argument.

For example:

First, … Second, … Finally, … sequence

Moreover, … In addition to this, … adding another, related idea

However, … On the other hand, … a contrast

… due to … Therefore … cause and result

Linking words can also be used to show your personal attitude.

For example, if you begin a sentence with the word *Clearly,* what comes next will be obvious.

If you begin with the word *Apparently,* you are indicating that you are uncertain of your facts.

From Ashley,A. Commercial Correspondence.Oxford University Press, 2003.