

Techniques of Business Correspondence

1. The You-View Point

We human beings are self-centered creatures. We structure our thinking our opinions, attitudes and beliefs to conform to our best interests. We want recognition. We want good things to happen to us. We like to talk about ourselves. We like others to say good things about us. In general, we like ourselves better than we like anyone else.

As we are self-centered, we see each situation from our points of view. In letter writing situations this attitude leads us to a writer-oriented, we-View point approach. Such approaches obviously do not give positive responses, do not build goodwill, nor does it help readers to do things we want them to do. Positive are effects possible from reader's point of view, attitude involves seeing situations from readers standpoint and choosing word and strategies that will bring that focus on the reader's point view. You view point involves using second-person pronoun. The pronouns 'you' and 'your' clearly call attentions to the readers and their interests. For example:

We view-point: We are happy to have your order for Kipper products, which we are sending today by railway express.

You view-point: Your selection of Kipper products should reach you by Saturday, as they were shipped by railway express.

We view-point: We have received your report of May 1.

You view-point: Thank you for your report of May 1.

2. Conversational Style

One technique of effective correspondence is writing conversationally – making letters sound human. Words of good conversational effect, correct language and friendly tone are essential. In addition, familiar words of our language communicate best. Conversational style includes the following points:

- i. **Tendency to be formal:** Writing in conversational style is not easy, for we tend to be stiff and formal. We should write in warm and friendly way.
- ii. **The language of business:** Early business writers developed an unnatural style for letters. The language of business was influenced by legal language and the language of the nobility. It was highly stereotyped, detached manner of communication and had a little of the warmth that is as essential for friendly human relations.
- iii. **Use of rubber stamps:** "Rubber stamps" language is a group of words and expressions we use as a habit in certain type of situation. They are expression we use without thought. We can avoid such rubber stamps by writing in conversational vocabulary.

3. Accent on Positive Language

Achieving goal through letters often depend on the words used to carry the message. There are many ways of saying anything and each way conveys a meaning different from others. Accent on positive language can be achieved by effect of words. Positive ways usually are best for letter goals, especially when persuasion and goodwill needed. Negative words stir up resistance and hurt goodwill. Beware of strongly negative words, words that deny and unappealing words.

4. Overall tone of Courtesy

Courtesy is a major contributor to goodwill in letters. It involves the preceding goodwill techniques. In business letters, courtesy can be achieved through following techniques:

- i. **Singling out your reader:** It also involves writing directly for the one reader. This means writing for the one situation giving the reader individualized treatment.
- ii. **Refraining from Preaching:** The effect of courtesy is enhanced by avoiding preaching. Usually preaching is not intended as it results from efforts to persuade. Elementary, flat clear statement often sounds preachy. So, doing more than expected builds goodwill. Giving extra information to the customers also creates goodwill.

- iii. **Avoiding anger:** Anger is not justified in letter writing. Anger destroys goodwill. They make the reader angry. If both writer and reader show anger, there is little likelihood that the two can get together on whatever the letter is about.

5. Showing Insincerity

Business letters must have the quality of sincerity. We must convince our readers that we mean what to say and that our efforts to be courteous and friendly are well intended. The best way to get sincerity into our letters is to believe in the technique we use. If we honestly want to be courteous, if we truly feel that your viewpoint treatments lead to harmonious relations, and if we really feel that tactful treatment will spare our reader's sensitive feelings we are like to apply these techniques automatically; and our sincerity will show in your writing.

6. Techniques of Emphasis

Emphasis also determines effect. Every fact communicated should get its due emphasis. There are four major emphasis techniques:

- i. **Emphasis by position:** Position determines emphasis. The beginning and endings of a unit of written communication carry more emphasis than do the centre parts. The first and the last sentences of a letter, first and the last sentences of a paragraph, and the first and last words of sentence all carry more emphasis than the middle parts.
- ii. **Emphasis by space:** The more space one gives a topic, the more emphasis the topic receives. In conveying the desired effect in our letter, we will need to take care to say just enough about each bit of information we must present.
- iii. **Emphasis by sentence structure:** Sentence structure determines emphasis. Short, simple sentences emphasize content but long, involved ones do not. We should combine the less important information, taking care to present logical relationships in our combination sentences, the more important material should be cast in independent clauses and the less important information relegated to subordinate structures.
- iv. **Emphasis by mechanical means:** Mechanical devices like underscore, colour, diagrams, and such also give emphasis to content. For obvious reasons of appropriateness, these techniques are rarely used as letters, with the possible exception of sales letters.

PRESENTATIONS

In business, we spend more time talking rather than writing. Much of the oral communication that goes on in business is informal. Primarily, it is the face-to-face communication that takes place whenever people get together. Obviously, this is a form of communication in which we all have experience. And most of us do a reasonably good job of it. But some of the oral communication will be formal, as in speeches, lectures, oral reports, meetings, interviews, and dictation. All these more formal kinds of oral communication are a part of the work that business people do.

Making Formal Speeches

Making speeches is difficult for most people. Most of us feel uncomfortable speaking before others and generally do a poor job of it. But it need not be this way. With effort, we can improve our speaking. We can do this first by learning good speaking techniques. Then we put these techniques into practice. Those techniques are as follows:

Selection of the Topic

The first step in formal speech making is to determine the topic of your presentation. In some cases the topic is assigned, usually one within your area of specialization. If the topic is not assigned and if we have to select the topic then we should consider our knowledge, our audience and the occasion.

After the topic is determined what to talk about, we should collect the information that will form the basis of our speech. Primary research can be conducted at library or in company files. We may also consult colleagues or people from other companies. Then the information has to be organized formally.

The formal speech usually begins with the greeting. The introduction of the speech has much the same goal as the introduction of a written report: to prepare the listener to receive the message. SO, we need to gain attention in the opening. After, we have to state the subject of the speech. The ending usually restates the subject, summarizes key points, and concludes the main message.

Determination of Presentation Method

With the speech organized, we should be ready to begin for presenting it. We need to decide on our presentation method – whether to present it extemporaneously, by reading it, or by memorizing it.

Extemporaneous presentation is by far the most popular and effective method. Using this method, we first thoroughly prepare our speech and then make notes and present the speech from them. We need to rehearse it repeatedly.

Memorized presentation is the most difficult method. A very few speakers actually memorize an entire speech. Instead they memorize key parts and use notes to help them through the presentation.

A third method of presentation is by reading. Unfortunately most of us do not read aloud well. We tend to read in a dull, monotone, producing a most uninteresting effect. We fumble over words, lose our place, miss punctuation marks, and such.

Considering personal aspects

A logical first step in preparing a speech is to analyze ourselves because we are a part of the message. Following up the given four characteristics might make our presentation better:

- a. **Confidence:** A primary characteristic of effective oral reporting is confidence. This includes our confidence in ourselves and our audience's confidence in us. To gain our audience's confidence we should be able to project right image, and talk in a strong, clear voice.
- b. **Sincerity:** Sincerity is vital because our audience can easily detect our insincere tone and thus give little value and weight to what we say. So we need to project an image of sincerity by being sincere.
- c. **Thoroughness:** Thoroughness in our presentation generally will make our message better received than scanty or hurried coverage. Thorough coverage gives the impression that you have taken time and care, and such an impression tends to make the message believable.
- d. **Friendliness:** A speaker who projects an image of friendliness has a significant advantage in communication effort. People simply like people who are friendly and are more receptive to what they say. Because friendliness is difficult to pretend so natural sense of it should have to be portrayed.

Audience Analysis

One requirement of good speech making is to know your audience. You should study your audience before and during the presentation. In analyzing the audience before presentation we have to size up the audience in advance. Look for the characteristics that will affect our speech, such as sex, age, education, and knowledge.

Continue analyzing the audience during the speech which we call feedback. This can be done by reading the facial expressions, movements, and noises of audience. These factors help us receive the feedback information which helps us adapt to the audience.

Appearance and Bodily Actions

Our audience forms impressions from the following six factors that can make our oral presentation either impressive or dull.

- a. **The communication environment:** Much of what our audience sees is all that surrounds us as we speak – everything that tends to add to a general impression. This includes the stage, lighting, background, and such. These factors should contribute to good communication rather than distract the audience from our message.
- b. **Personal appearance:** Our personal appearance is the part of the message the audience receives. So our dress code should be proper according to the occasion and should be well clean and well groomed to create an impression.
- c. **Posture:** Posture is likely to be the clearest thing our audience sees in us. Even if the listeners cannot be close enough to detect facial expressions and eye movements, they can see the general form the body takes. Good posture may contribute to the effect of good communication.
- d. **Walking:** The way we walk before our audience also makes an impression on the listeners'. A strong, sure walk to the speaker's position gives an impression of confidence. Hesitant, awkward steps give the opposite impression.
- e. **Facial expressions:** The most apparent and communicative bodily movements are facial expressions. They suggest our confidence on the reporting. Those expressions might create the overall impression or ruin it. Eye contact is also the most obvious one to communicate the message as it reflects our inner self.
- f. **Gestures:** Like posture, gestures add to the message we communicate. Gestures have vague meanings but they do communicate. So the use of gestures should be used attentively.

Use of Voice

Good voice is a requirement for good speaking. Following areas should have to be corrected to make our voice seem impressive:

- a. **Lack of pitch variation:** speakers who talk in monotones are unlikely to hold their listeners' interest for long. Most often the failure to vary pitch is a matter of habit – of voice patterns developed over years of talking without being aware of effect.
- b. **Lack of variation in speed:** Determining how fast to talk is a major problem. As a general rule, we should present the easy parts of the message at a fairly brisk rate and hard-to-understand information at a slower pace.
- c. **Lack of vocal emphasis:** Good communication can be achieved by giving words their due emphasis by varying the manner of speaking. This can be done by varying the pitch of our voice, varying the pace of our presentation, and varying the volume of our voice.
- d. **Unpleasant voice quality:** Unpleasant voice may be natural but speech therapy can improve such voices.

Use of visual aids

Visual aids usually carry key parts of the message. Thus, they are points of emphasis in our presentation. Following measures can be taken to the use of the visual aids:

- a. Make certain everyone in the audience can see the visual aids.
- b. Explain the visual aid if there is any likelihood that it will be misunderstood.
- c. Organize the visual aids as a part of the presentation. Fit them into the plan.
- d. Emphasize the visual aids. Point to them with bodily action and with words.
- e. Talk to audience, not to the visual aids.
- f. Avoid blocking the listeners' view of the visual aids.

ORAL REPORTING

A special form of speech is the oral report. One is more likely to make oral reports than speeches in business, and the oral reports we make are likely to be important. Most of us have had little experience and even less instruction in oral reporting. Thus the following review should be valuable.

Definition of Oral Reports

An oral report is defined as an oral presentation of factual information. A business oral report logically limits coverage to factual business information. An oral business report covers much of the information exchanged in the daily conduct of business. It also covers the most routine and informal report situations. It even includes highly formal presentations.

Differences between Oral and Written Reports

Oral reports differ from written reports in three ways.

1. **Visual Advantages of the written words:** Written reports permit greater use of visual aids to communication. With writing, we can use paragraph to show the reader the structure of the message and to make thought units stand out. We can use punctuation to show relationship of information. These techniques improve the communication effect of the entire message.
2. **Reader control of written presentation:** The speaker controls the pace of an oral report, while the reader controls the pace of written report. Readers can pause, reread, change their rate of reading or stop as they choose. Since the readers set the pace, even the most difficult writing can communicate. Whereas listeners can't control the pace of the presentation.
3. **Emphasis on correctness in writing:** Written reports put more stress on correctness because our written work is likely to be carefully inspected. We have to follow the recognized rules of grammar, punctuation, sentence structure and so on. But for oral presentation we become more lax in following these rules.

ADDITIONAL ORAL COMMUNICATION ACTIVITIES

Formal speaking and oral reporting may be important part of our business communication, but probably various other communication activities will consume more of our time. Specifically, we are likely to spend more time conducting and participating in:

1. Conducting and participating in meetings
2. Interviewing
3. Telephoning
4. Listening

CONDUCTING AND PARTICIPATING IN MEETINGS

From time to time in business, we participate in meetings either formal or informal meetings. In meetings we will be either leader or participant. The following technique will help us in both purposes:

Techniques for Conducting Meetings

The way we should conduct formal meeting is related to the formality of the occasion. Meetings of groups such as formal committees, board of directors and professional organizations usually follow the generally accepted rules of conduct called parliamentary procedure. The following techniques will be helpful to us to conduct the meetings:

1. **Plan the meeting:** To conduct a successful meeting we should plan it and develop the agenda that is to select the topics that must be covered in order to achieve goals of the meeting. The agendas are to be arranged in a logical order and then be made it available to the participants.
2. **Follow the plan:** We should follow the plan item by item. Some discussion may tend to stray the discussion so, we need to keep the discussion on track. New items may be resolved later.
3. **Move the discussion along:** As a leader we have to control the agendas when one item is discussed and the other one should be introduced for discussion. Discussion should not be cut off unless all

important points have been made. We have to use good judgment to bring out every related point regarding the agenda.

4. **Control those who talk too much:** Do not allow one person to talk too much. We need to control these people but in a democratic way. We need to let these people talk as long as they are contributing to the goal. In case of duplication or using useless matter we should step in tactfully.
5. **Encourage participation from those who talk too little:** Encourage everybody to take part. Those who speak little should be encouraged to speak up so as to show respect for their comments and they may contribute to the discussion.
6. **Control time:** When the meeting is time limited we must determine in advance how much time will be needed to cover each item.
7. **Summarize at appropriate places:** After a key item has been discussed we should summarize conclusion and comments made on each item. For some formal meetings, minutes kept by secretary will provide this summary.

Techniques for Participating in a Meeting

As a participant in a meeting the following technique might help us to contribute for a successful meeting:

1. **Follow the agenda:** When an agenda exists we should not bring up items not on the agenda nor should we comment if such items are brought up by others. Following the agenda is the needful.
2. **Participate:** The purpose of the meeting is to get information from everyone concerned. Thus we should fully participate meaningfully to achieve the goal of the meeting.
3. **Do not talk too much:** Avoid talking too much. We have to speak up whenever we have something important to say and that might be helpful to contribute to the agenda of the meeting.
4. **Cooperate:** Every meeting requires cooperation to achieve the goals of the meeting so we should respect the leaders and the other participants and work with them in every practical way.
5. **Be courteous:** We have to act courteous to other group members. Specifically we should respect their rights and opinions and permit them to speak.

INTERVIEWING PEOPLE

Interviewing Skills

Interviewing Skills: Conducting an Interview

Interviewing Skills: Introduction

- An interview is a 2-way communication ; however, it should be controlled by the interviewer
- Every interviewee is a guest in your organization and should be treated in such a manner
- Always welcome the interviewees with a warm greeting
- Encourage interviewees to respond positively and share the information
- It is always better to take notes during Interview
- Good interviews flow smoothly when both the interviewer and the candidate take part in an information exchange

Interviewing Skills: Conducting an Interview

Types of difficult Interviews

- Some interviewees demand a particularly focused interviewing technique.
- In order to get an accurate assessment of a candidate's ability, the interviewer's ability to handle different types of candidate is very important
- Before Interviewing, develop an understanding of the following types of candidates:
 - Nervous candidate
 - Uncommunicative candidate
 - Talkative candidate

Handling a nervous candidate

- Give them an especially warm greeting
- Engage in more small talk than usual
- Point out various facilities or areas of interest within your organization
- Start with specific , fact-based questions that are easy for the candidate to answer and unlikely to be stressful
- Speak slowly in a relaxed, informal manner

Handling an uncommunicative candidate

- Many reserved or uncommunicative candidates simply need to be encouraged to share their thoughts
- Using silence can be effective
- If the candidate is having trouble in answering questions related to their strengths and weaknesses, tell them that you will give them some time to think about it and come back to the question later

Handling a talkative candidate

- Candidates who talk too much , often about things unrelated to the job or interview can be challenging
- Tell the candidate that you will be following a structure, and stress on the time available for each section of the interview
- When necessary, remind the candidate of the time limits
- Redirect the conversation as politely as possible

Interviewing Skills: Conducting an Interview

Conducting the Interview

There are 3 steps to follow while conducting an Interview:

- Open the Interview (Put the candidate at ease)
- Gather Information (Ask questions & listen to responses)
- Close the Interview (Create a positive impression of your organization)

Opening an Interview

- While opening an interview, your purpose is to put both you and candidate at ease , and set the stage for an open conversation
- There are 3 steps you should complete when opening the interview:
 - Build rapport
 - State the agenda
 - Ask for acceptance

Gathering Information

- Gathering Information represents 70 to 80 percent of the interview
- There are 3 steps you should complete when gathering information from the interviewee:
 - Ask lead questions

- Ask follow-up questions
- Transition to the next subject

Closing an Interview

- The close of the interview is used to indicate to the candidate that the information-gathering portion is complete and the interview is about to wind down.
- Take the following 4 steps when closing an interview:
 - Ask for and answer questions
 - Promote the organization and the job
 - Outline next steps
 - Thank the candidate

Interviewing Skills: Conducting an Interview

Evaluation of candidates

- Manage your bias
 - Interviewer should be very careful to identify and overcome any biases
 - Bias is a form of extreme generalization. You may generalize that a candidate lacks written communication skills because of last two people hired from the same college had poor written communication skill.
- 2 steps to evaluate the candidate:
 - Summarize the interview
(Refer the candidate's resume, and the notes taken during interview)
 - Score the candidate
(Review Job requirement, mention success factors , and calculate)

Interviewing Skills: Conducting an Interview

Effective communication techniques

Effective communication techniques include:

- Active Listening
(Follow 70/30 rule : Listen 70 percent of the time Talk 30 percent of the time)
- Nonverbal behavior
(silence, lean forward, eye contact)
- Verbal devices
(Restatement, expanders ("I see", "That's interesting"))

Interviewing Skills

Interviewing Skills: Conducting an Interview

Summary

- A successful interview should determine if there is a match between the individual and the job
- Be prepared for the interview
- Analyze candidate's resume before the interview and frame the lead questions
- Follow a structured process
- Develop a simple outline that covers general job duties
- Behave politely with the candidates

EFFECTIVELY USING THE TELEPHONE

What is the initial contact your customer or client has with your company? If your business is like most others, it's a telephone call. We invest a tremendous amount of time and money to generate that contact. Your customer's or client's experience from that initial contact will largely determine the result -- making or losing the sale, resolving a complaint and keeping a client or customer or losing that client or customer. As the old saying goes, "There's no second chance for making a good first impression!"

In this age of voice mail, the telephone experience of customers doesn't seem to get much thought, *a major mistake!* Whether by personal contact or by voice mail, that experience of your customer or client should be a critical marketing concern. Properly training your team members, especially your receptionist or telephone operator, is critically important.

Without getting into all of the details, which we hope to cover in a future seminar, here are suggested telephone procedures. We will use the word "customer" to include a client, customer or patient.

1. Smile before you answer the telephone. It will help to put you in a positive frame of mind, which is communicated to the customer in the tone of your voice.
2. Answer on the second ring. You need to smile and get to the telephone. On the second ring, your company is "Johnny on the spot!" After the third ring, customer is wondering if anyone is at work in your business.
3. a. If the customer is calling directly to your line, answer in this sequence: "Good morning/afternoon, (company name), this is (your first name, last name)." 99% of the time this will elicit the customer to give his or her name in return. *Do not ask for the customer's name.*

"Good morning/afternoon" communicates good social graces and gives the customer a moment to prepare for your real response. The name of the company communicates he or she has reached the right place. "This is" tells the customer that your name is coming. Giving your first and last name elicits the first and last name of the customer as a response.

I know this will feel terribly long, but once you practice it, it will flow.

b. If the call is being transferred to you, you may answer, "Good morning/afternoon, this is (your first name, last name)."

4. Listen attentively.

5. a. If the customer asks for another team member and the team member is available, respond, "Thanks so much for calling. I'll put you straight through. Could you hold for a moment, please?" (*Don't screen calls.*)

If the customer has told you they are upset about a problem, let the team member know before transferring the call.

b. If the customer asks for a team member who isn't available, respond, "_____ is with someone right now. Is there some way I or another team member can help you?" *Do not say the team member is in a meeting.* If not, "Shall I transfer you to _____'s voice mail, or would you like me to take a message?" If to voice mail, "Thanks so much for calling. I'll put you straight through." If a message, "Let me have some details, so I can help."

If you have voice mail or an answering machine, your message is also important. Most customers will also appreciate being given the option of skipping the message.

Here is a message I have used. "Hello! This is Mike Gray of Michael Gray, CPA. To skip this message, press the star key. Thanks so much for calling. I'm sorry I can't take your call, right now. Please leave me a message and I'll return your call as soon as possible. Thank you!"

If I am going to be out of the office, here is a message I might use.

"Hello! This is Mike Gray at Michael Gray, CPA. Today is Tuesday, March 18. I expect to be out of the office all day today, and return tomorrow. Please leave a message and I'll return your call as soon as possible." (Optional, "If you have an emergency, please call Dawn Gray at 918-3166.")

Using the telephone

The telephone is a personal mode of communication. The telephone can be more difficult than face-to face communication because the telephone makes most non-verbal (unspoken) cues impossible. Most organizations want to convey the message that it is anxious to give good and efficient service. The first contact that many clients have with some organizations is often by telephone. When making a call, the number dialed has to be correct. The caller needs to be prepared and organized before the call is made. They should be clear about what they want before dialing.

Answering the telephone

The following guidelines should be considered when answering the telephone:

- Answer promptly
- Identify yourself
- Never answer the phone with 'hello' or 'are you there'

- Be ready to talk by concentrating and cutting out distractions
- Try not to have the caller waiting too long – ask if the caller can have the call returned
- Use your voice effectively- use appropriate language, grammar, tone of voice, rate of speech and be clear and concise
- Non verbal communication cannot be considered when communicating over the telephone
- Consider the rate of speech - don't speak too quickly, don't be abrupt or rude
- If names, numbers or addresses are needed, spelling confusing words back to the information giver is the best way to make sure the information is accurately communicated
- Answer questions quickly or refer the question to other personnel if answer is unknown
- Avoid slang expressions such as, 'O.K.', 'Hang on'
- If the caller is making a complaint, listen sympathetically and apologise for errors and delays
- If the caller is abusive, continue to respond in a polite manner – use self control and avoid losing your temper
- Be particularly considerate with the elderly and people from non English speaking backgrounds
- Take messages carefully by listening and questioning. If possible use a telephone message pro forma which helps to remind you of information that is required such as time, date, topic etc
- Review the details of the call and make sure that all the information is known
- Don't extend the call time unnecessarily and end it politely and definitely.

Making a Call

When making a call, the caller needs to:

- Ensure that number is dialed correctly
- Organize and prepare for the call. A prepared checklist of the objectives and ideas, and ways to express them, is a good idea. If questions are to be asked, the questions should be prepared beforehand. If information / facts need to be communicated, documents should be on hand to refer to.
- A statement needs to be prepared. The person making the call needs to identify him/herself, the organization they are from and establish some rapport by outlining the reason for the call.

LISTENING

Poor listening is a major cause of miscommunication. We do not hear all. We forget much that we hear. To improve our listening we must keep ourselves alert and force to pay attention. The following techniques can serve as guidelines to help improve our listening:

1. **Stop talking:** Most of us prefer talking to listening. Even when we are not talking we are inclined to focus on what to say next rather than on listening to what is being said. So, we must stop talking before we can listen.
2. **Put the talker at ease:** If the talker is out at ease, the talker can better give details. Then we can have better input with which to work.
3. **Show the talker you want to listen:** We can convince the talker that we want to listen rather than oppose. This can create a better atmosphere for the talker for exchanging information. We should look and act interested. Doing things like reading, looking at your watch, and looking away distracts the talker.
4. **Remove distraction:** Certain activities can also distract the talker. So don't doodle, tap with the pencil, shuffle papers or the like.
5. **Empathize with the talker:** If you place yourself in the talker's position and look at things from his/her point of view we can create the atmosphere of understanding. With such atmosphere established, a true exchange of information can result.

6. **Be patient:** We should allow the talker take plenty of time. We should not interrupt in between so that we can get reliable information. So we must be patient to listen to the talker.
7. **Hold the temper:** We know that angry mind cannot hold good views and cannot contribute to communication so, we must patiently listen to what the talker says.
8. **Go easy on argument and criticism:** Argument and criticism tend to put the talker on defensive. Thus the talker tends to be calm or angry and can't contribute much for effective communication.
9. **Ask questions:** By frequently asking questions, we show an open mind and show that we are listening. Asking questions help develop the message and ensure correctness of meaning.
10. **Stop talking:** The last option was also the first. All other options depend on it.