



IIT Madras

BSc Degree

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English – 1 (Basic English)
Professor Shreesh Chaudhary
Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Chennai
Business Writing

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WRITING



Hello and welcome to this another session of our writing module. I am quite confident that you have taken our suggestions, our advice from the earlier sessions seriously and you have looked through the materials we have been suggesting and you have also done the exercises, the activities that we have advised you to do because in the end learning a language is learning a skill and you do not learn it no matter how much you try only by listening.

Listening is important; reading is important, but more important is writing and speaking, trying what you may already have learned so that you learn more. There may be mistakes; they happen in the course of anything that we learn. But through those mistakes lie, through those mistakes lies the highway to learning, highway to perfection, so please do try. In this session today, we are going to talk about another bit of business writing, describing things, sequence, relevant and irrelevant details, let us look at some of them.

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- Most business writings contain a great deal of factual details, like what, when, where, how much, for how much and how many, etc.
- It is important in business writing to keep the order in which things occur, both by way of form and contents.



Say for example, in most business writings, most business writings contain a great deal of factual details, what is required, when it is required, where it is required, how much of it is required, how much will it cost or will one have to pay and a lot of factual details, the description of goods, the kind of goods, the sub-categorization of goods, if you buy so much then you pay so much, if you buy only so little then you pay so much more, all these things are there by way of description by way of contents of business writing. It is a case of factual description to describe facts.

The next important thing about business writing is that it has a fixed order, you must say A before you say B and you must say B before you say C, which means A comes before both B and C which means D comes after both or all the three A, B, C. There unlike in arts, unlike in literature, unlike in philosophy, unlike in magic, unlike many places in the entertainment industry the order cannot be broken.

If you break the order you create confusion; you leave your reader, you leave your listener grouping for what is important and what is unimportant, what they should attend to, first what they should attend to next, what they should attend to never and what they should attend to all the time. So, the order of importance is also important in itself. Next.

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- Business writing should follow the form strictly. It helps the reader. They expect one thing in one place and another thing in another place.

- Books are kept in one place, clothes in another, shoes in yet another place and vessels and dishes in a different place, etc. This arrangement helps the users.



If you if, what happens if you do not follow the order, if you write to anywhere, from anywhere, subject line anywhere, dateline anywhere, what will happen? Those that are determined to read you will definitely read, members of your family, your friends, they will not mind the hardship because they love you.

But an average ordinary business partner, an average ordinary business reader will get confused and will conclude that if this person's communication skill is so poor, what kind of a business executive or what kind of a business firm this is? Why am I working with him? It will result in only loss and confusion and waste of time, energy and resources.

So, that will not make for effective business writing. So, in business writing, in science writing, in writing for effective communication, a place is fixed for everything, and everything has a place. You see, there is a place for everything and everything has a place. It is just like at home, we keep books in one place, clothes in another, shoes in yet another place.

For example, no matter how small your home, no matter how big your home, in small homes corners are fixed, this corner is for Puja, that corner is for dining, this other corner is for lying down, resting, sleeping, that fourth corner is for maybe a store or something else. Otherwise, anything anywhere that principle helps no one except the lazy who do not have to do anything.

So, anywhere be it a kitchen, be it a library, in libraries actually, they say "a misplaced book is a lost book". You remove the book from its designated spot on the shelf and then that book will be written off as lost because nobody knows where it is and imagine big libraries with hundreds of thousands of books on all, practically on all subjects in the world, how can they trace one book anywhere.

So, it is just like that also in business writing; it helps the users. So, these are the two things we have to remember. Number one, it has a fixed form, and it has a fixed order even in its contents, next.

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Say, for example, look at this kitchen. Do you imagine that pantry and laundry are together, do you imagine that the store and dining hall everything is mixed into one, no matter where you keep spoons, where you keep dishes, where you keep vessels and ladles, the smallest of kitchens has a fixed place for everything so that things can be found easily, things can be stored easily, things can be maintained without much hassle, and that is true of all sciences of all businesses.

Actually, I have had the opportunity to work with surgeons, and in the operation theatre, etc., they say that the surgeon does not have a look at the instrument because the surgeon and their nurse, assisting nurse are so tuned into one, that the nurse automatically knows that for this kind of surgery what is the next tool that the surgeon requires. So, all that the surgeon has to say "next" extending the hand and the surgeon gets that, and if by chance surgeon gets something wrong, their hands tell them that I have got something wrong.

So, that is the importance of precision, that is the importance of accuracy. And business writing requires, effective business writing requires a great deal of factual and organizational ability, everything in its place, one place for everything for each thing and we should follow it strictly, so also for the contents, you must have the important thing first and a little less important thing next and a more unimportant thing after that, next.

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- It is not a good idea to change the format of business writing unnecessarily.
- Contents must also be ordered sequentially. So a rank order should be followed, most important thing from the point of view of communication first, least important last.



So, it is not a good idea to change the order of, or change the format of business writing unnecessarily that may be okay for art, that may be all right for poetry and music and painting, you can have portraits painted of demons with 'hands where feet are and feet where hands are', 'mouth in the stomach and eyes in the shoulder', and 'hands attached to the back rather than to the shoulders' it is all possible in arts but not in business, not in sciences, not in engineering, not in serious academic writing either. So, that is very important.

Similarly, contents must also be ordered sequentially; the most important thing should come first; the least important thing should come last. Obviously, from the point of view of communication otherwise, if you put unimportant thing first then your important thing is also lost, or if you put unimportant thing as in the place of important thing then your reader will get confused, what is it I should send first, should I first send flowers or should I first send this consignment of covaxin in medicines.

So, business writing follows in these two respects, strictly follows order or rank order. Number one, what should occur where and what should be mentioned first, what should be mentioned next, some people call it rank ordering. Important things first, less important things next and still less important things last. Let us look at it.

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A LOST BAG



Within about a 150 words, write a letter to the manager of the bus company requesting him to help you find the bag you left behind on a bus of his company yesterday.



Imagine this is a very frequent proficiency test question, many tests ask you to write this way, IELTS does, TOFYL does, access does, many other standard tests of the English language do that. Describe the contents of a bag in about 150 words, suppose you lost the bag, you left it on a train or on the railway, railway station or in the bus or at the airport, it keeps happening, all of these public places have offices for lost and found pieces of luggage.

Suppose you have that question you are asked to write within about 150 words write a letter to the manager of the bus company, the bus that you use regularly requesting him to help you find that bag, find the bag you left behind on the bus of his company yesterday. What do you write? You can simply say, dear manager; I am sorry to bother you, I left my bag on your bus yesterday, if you have found it, please return it to me, here is my address.

But the problem is that any big public company like a railway train or a company that operates lots of buses or airlines operating lots of flights and aircraft have hundreds of passengers every day and even if one per cent of them leave their things around they may easily have two to three dozen things left in their offices. So, which bag?

Actually, there is a study which says among the items left behind most by passengers are bags, umbrellas, cell phones, books, pens, not so often but also purses, wallets, that sort of thing. Imagine this is the question, you are asked to write in about 150 words about something you lost, let us write, let us see.

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FIRST DRAFT

From: Mira Lobo Prabhu, No. 31, Coondapur Road, Mangalore



To: The Manager,
Mangalagiri Transport Company,
Railway Station Road,
Mangalore

20 Jan, 2021

Sir,

Sub: Left Luggage - Reg.

I am very sorry to inform you that I had an old and very precious foam leather bag that my mother had given me at the time of my wedding some seven years ago, but I left it on your company's bus yesterday.



Then I used my grand mother's phone to check with my friend if she had picked it up while getting down from the bus. But she said no. She had not taken it. So I am sure my bag remained on the bus, and may have reached the depot with the bus.



It has my debit card, my phone, my company id card, some cash, and a few lady's items. The bag is blue colour, and it has long strap.

I will be most grateful if you can find my bag and inform me.

With best regards,

Yours faithfully,

M L Prabhu (278 words)



So, what do you write first? Who is the writer from? It can also be differently arranged I have given it the format of a letterhead, the banner headline saying from whom, you do not even have to say from, the moment there is nothing called from or to there, the reader understands that the writer of this letter is somebody called ms Mira, Lobo, Prabhu, the name is entirely fictitious, any resemblance will be entirely coincidental, so please bear with me.

When you write for exercise, you can also do this way; you do not have to write real names. So, the name of the company is also fictitious, there may be a company like that, but I do not know. So, we write to the manager Mangalagiri Transport Company, railway station road, Mangalore, I wonder if there is a road like that in Mangalore.

Date, then Sir / Madam and then subject 'left luggage regarding'. In some places I have found that subject is written before Sir, so do it the way your organization does it, local rules must be observed, must be followed without any question. In America drive to the right, In Britain, in India drive to the left of the road that is the golden rule.

So, if the organization I work for, write the subject after writing Sir or Madam, so that is how I have written it there. Now, look at this letter, this letter begins on an emotional note, read it, take your time. You can see that in place of 150 words, it has 278 words, nearly 128 words more than required. And does it, therefore, make better description? Look at the beginning, how does it begin?

"I am very sorry to inform you that I had an old bag and very precious foam leather bag that my mother had given me at the time of my marriage some seven years ago, but I left it on your company's bus yesterday." Even if one wants to find it how would they say "bag, bag are you the one who came during the time of your owner's wedding"? The bag will not say that, neither is it likely to have even now the level called happy wedding or X weds Y.

So, this bit of information is nothing, it will be wonderful to have this in one's autobiography, once I was travelling and then a lost the bag, and this bag had been given to me by my mother at the time of my wedding, that will be the right place. But here in business writing this kind of emotional stuff without any factual information, I mean there is some factual information that the writer had not bought the bag, the writer had got it as a gift. But in the absence of any particular information, it will not help find the bag anywhere faster.

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That bag is very dear to my heart, like my life you can say. I have had a sleepless night since I left it yesterday in the evening on your company's bus while coming home from my office. I was talking to a fellow passenger who also lives and works in the same area and we go to work by the same bus together and very often we also come back in the same bus. So was talking to her, when our stop arrived and the conductor suddenly said Bank Stop, Bank Stop two three times, then I said bye to my friend and in a hurry I got down without my bag. I realized that as soon as I reached home, because I keep my cell phone inside and I could not call my husband on my phone.



Similarly, of course, this bag is dear to your heart, that is why you are writing. But how would that help anybody who wants to find your bag? The bag will not say I am dear to my owner's

heart, please, please pick me up and take me to my owner. Even if you had a sleepless night, the reader could pity you; the reader can sympathize with you. But that will not help the reader find the bag quickly.

So, look through the page and see if there are any factual information anywhere, anything that will help the finder get the bag sooner than usual, hardly any, hardly any. At great length describes how the bag had been obtained, how the bag has been lost, but it gives no particular of the bag, so almost an entire page wasted, they will fetch in spite of the fact that this writer makes nearly no mistake of either grammar or punctuation or vocabulary. Apparently writes well but does not know how to write effectively, look at the next.

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Then I used my grand mother's phone to check with my friend if she had picked it up while getting down from the bus. But she said no. She had not taken it. So I am sure my bag remained on the bus, and may have reached the depot with the bus.



It has my debit card, my phone, my company id card, some cash, and a few lady's items. The bag is blue colour, and it has long strap.

I will be most grateful if you can find my bag and inform me.

With best regards,

Yours faithfully,

M L Prabhu (278 words)



Same thing here, some maybe towards the end, it says something it has my debit card, my phone number, again it does not say which company, my phone number which company, my company id card which company, some cash how much, and a few ladies items. What do you mean by ladies items? Clothes or cosmetics, or what?

In the absence of all of these things it cannot be called a great piece of writing, grammatically correct all right, maybe it can be penalized a little for exceeding the word limit, but that is about all. What does it have to convey? Not much. Now, look at the same thing rewritten.

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FINAL DRAFT



From: Mira Lobo Prabhu, No. 31, Coondapur Road,
Mangalore

To: The Manager, Mangalagiri Transport Company,
Railway Station Road,
Mangalore 570 014

20 Jan, 2021

Sir,
Sub: Left Luggage - Reg.

I boarded 7 T, at about 05:35 pm at the Water Tank stop on the Kutchchery Road, and left it at the Corporation Bank Stop on the Sundara Street. But while leaving the bus, I forgot to pick up my bag. Please, be good enough to help me find it.



This is a blue foam leather lady's bag. It has two brass clips, besides two side pockets with zips. A "Parke Smith" can be seen at its. The bag has a red Nokia 512 Cell Phone, which can be called at 94444 20 4850. It also has the following.



1. Camera Bank debit card, with my name. MIRA LOBO PRABHU;
2. Export Promotion Council's ID card with my name;
3. A small pocket note book, bearing my name and address,
4. A pink shade lipstick bearing "La Femme".
5. Side pockets have business cards, mine and also others'.

Please, kindly help.

With best regards,
M L Prabhu (154 words)



I will not say it is a model answer; we can still write better if we try. But maybe this is acceptable, and this has come after several drafts. So, what do we find here? The order, most important thing from whom to whom, when was it written in what context, what subject, everything is given there in that order. And then it is full of information which bus? We know at bus number 7T. At what time? 5:35. Where? Water tank stop. Where did the passenger get down? At the corporation bank stop. Which road? Sundara street.

You ask questions, and those answers are there. Then a physical description of the bag. What colour is this bag? What material is it made of? Does it have accessories? Does it have things

inside, what are those things? There ought to be all of those things plus a description of its contents whatever it contains.

So, here is a list simple within limit any reader will know if the bag has not been stolen, anyone can using this description find the bag anywhere, this will be easy for the finder, and this will be easy for the person who lost the bag. That is why a lot of people say in business writings you must follow the sequence of order versus, sorry of important versus unimportant, strictly one must also follow the order of, the rules of format, next.

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ACTIVITY



In about 150 words, write each of the following as instructed.

1. Write a greeting to your friend on his/her birthday.
2. Write a letter to the Bus Depot Manager, Mahabalipuram requesting him to help you find the wallet you left behind on a bus of his company yesterday.



You can do many different kinds of exercises of this kind to teach yourself, to write better. I am not saying; we do not know. All of us here no writing, I am quite confident you know writing. But is it your best or can you write still better, that is the question? If your answer is yes, I can, and I want to write still better then the first thing you have to do is to do some exercise, some practice every day, no matter what, no matter how much, only 50 words, only ten words, write a greeting to someone whose birthday you are celebrating today or tomorrow or write a slogan for a product or complete a witty proverb, all that is exercise, all that unfolds, the hidden talent of language, imagination and creativity that you have in you.

Otherwise, it is not the case that any teacher can let alone me, any teacher can give you a tablet, and you have it with your breakfast or before breakfast, and by evening you have got language, it does not happen that way. Anyone with a good language has got good language this way, through activities, through practices.

I am quite sure your cell phone has dictionaries, thesaurus you can check there and then if you find that what you have written is not satisfactory, change it, of course by all means. But those

changes will occur only when you do even if wrongly the first draft. Good luck, and thank you very much.

