

IMPRESSIVE LETTERS

Whenever you sit planning your career, you have to write. There is no escape from it. Whether you are planning application, CV, or even a letter of resignation, you have to write. Effective expression to career planning and production is as important as breathing to life.

This is important in many other spheres of life, too. You need to write letters of condolence and of congratulations. You have to write essays. You may have to send letters to the editors of newspapers. You have to write reports and dissertations. All demand facility with words and a logical clear style.

You may not acquire sublime style of famed author. In fact, you need not worry on that account. But surely, you can follow Alexander Pope's words, "True case in writing comes from art, not chance, as these move easiest who have learned to dance."

You can, with a little conscious effort, turn yourself into "exact" man as visualized by Bacon. You can, like so many others acquire the art (read skill) of writing that moves, flows smoothly, and promotes your career without breaks and jolts. Efficient writing is not the gift of nation given to a few favourites of fate. It is a craft that people acquire by serious effort. What a "writer" needs most is writing!

You must learn to be economical with words. This is one secret of clear, effective writing. Padding, unnecessary words cloud the theme, waste space and energy. In totality, padding produces "muddy" language.

You may break into print, if you have acquired the skill of effective expression. Some magazines pay even for a good letter, you may write for college/university magazine, see your name in house journal and get a nod for promotion. Anyway, one with good expression is an asset to any organisation.

Writing is one of the ways to make contact with fellow human beings, of establishing your credentials, and making an impact on the people who matter in your career and life on the whole.

Watch your language. Aim at maximum clarity in your writing, whether it is a covering letter, application or CV. Leave nothing to chance or open to more than one confusing, conflicting interpretations. Avoid being informal, and be business-like.

Avoid clichés and jargon. Read the following sentence and see if you can make anything out of it. *We need to achieve conceptual communication within permitted parameters to gain*

maximum mileage from our policies.

If you write that kind of English in your letter or report or anywhere, you are sacrificing practically all basic principles of effective expression. You are defeating the purpose of writing—communication of ideas. You are sacrificing accuracy as well as readability. You are taxing the reader's mind without rewarding him for his effort.

It is hard to see, much less to understand, what exactly you do mean. Perhaps, what you want to say is: we must think and communicate clearly about our policies.

Avoid the use of abbreviations such as *ibid*, etc, *inst*. Shortened version of words like *don't*, *there's* and *isn't* should be kept out of formal letters.

Long-winding sentences, containing many clauses, should be out. They are involved and make the caller go through the sentence again and again. He has to go back to the beginning of the sentence to correct it with the middle and the end. The principle is: cut out all the conjunctions. Begin a fresh sentence. You will have a string of short sentences.

Close the letter with a positive, pointed sentence: *please ring up. Meet at 10 A.M. on Monday. I will call before coming.* Say what you mean.

Avoid not commonly used generalizations like: *Thanking in anticipation. Hoping to hear from you at the earliest. Always at your disposal. Assuring you my best effort in every direction.*

When the draft is ready, revise it. Go through it carefully. First reading should ensure detection and elimination of errors. Second reading is done to arrange or rearrange sentences, if necessary paragraphs. Pay special attention to beginning and endings. Salutations and signatures must be in uniformity, based on principles.

Look for specific spots where improvement is possible—conceptually as well as stylistically. A good word should be replaced with a better one. One sound principle is: edit down, not edit up.

When you are satisfied, your draft is ready for typing. After it has been typed out read it once again for errors in typing, called "typos". Look for minor errors, for example in punctuation.

Finally, always keep office copies of such career-related letters. This is the way to pick up the thread if and when necessary. Also to prevent memory playing a trick on you.