

## WHY SHOULD EFFECTIVE BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE WRITING BE CAREFULLY TAUGHT AND LEARNT

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### ABSTRACT

*Business correspondence is one of the most important business tools. They are used for keeping in touch with company's customers and the close social, business relationship. It also gives a company a competitive edge and offers marvelous results. After graduation, students will become a business person. Business correspondence is used in their working environment every day. An effective business letter can give them opportunities to quickly get ahead in their career.*

*“Business correspondence” is a subject in the syllabus in our university. Surveying the studying situation, our students find it very difficult for writing the kinds of letters. One of the reasons is that students have no real experience in writing. Writing a right business letter is challenges for them. How to write an effective business letter, what are common errors made and how to solve the problems are the purposes focused on in four parts of the presentation.*

**Keywords:** *business correspondence, competitive edge.*

### TÓM TẮT

#### **Tại sao môn *Viết Thư tín Thương mại* muốn đạt hiệu quả cần phải được dạy và học một cách nghiêm túc?**

*Thư tín thương mại là một công cụ quan trọng nhất trong làm ăn kinh tế. Nó được dùng để giữ liên lạc giữa doanh nghiệp với khách hàng và hơn thế nữa, nó còn là phương tiện để giữ chặt chẽ các mối quan hệ làm ăn, xã hội. Thư tín thương mại còn có thể đem lại cho công ty những lợi thế cạnh tranh và những kết quả đạt được to lớn đến bất ngờ. Sinh viên khi ra trường sẽ trở thành một doanh nhân. Thư tín thương mại được dùng hàng ngày trong môi trường làm việc của họ. Việc có khả năng viết được thư giao dịch hiệu quả có thể tạo cho họ cơ hội thăng tiến trong nghề nghiệp một cách nhanh chóng.*

*Thư tín Thương mại là một môn học trong chương trình học ở đại học. Qua khảo sát tình hình học tập cho thấy, sinh viên gặp nhiều khó khăn trong thực hành môn học này. Lý do là bởi họ còn thiếu kinh nghiệm thực tế. Viết đúng được thư tín thương mại là thử thách lớn đối với họ. Làm thế nào để viết được thư tín thương mại hiệu quả, đâu là những lỗi sai thông thường và các giải pháp để giải quyết vấn đề này được trình bày trong bốn phần của bài viết.*

**Từ khóa:** *thư tín thương mại, lợi thế cạnh tranh.*

## 1. Introduction

The effective business correspondence is one of the most important business tools. They are used for keeping in touch with company's customers. The good business letters can make customers impression of the company from the expression of the letter sent to them. Customers want to be dealt with professionally and competently. We can say the clear, effective business correspondence may give a company a competitive edge, while unclear or confusing correspondence can cause many problems, leading to misunderstanding, delays, lost business, or poor relations between companies and customers, partners. It means the clear, effective correspondence has a tremendous impact on the success of a business. A business letter is more formal and complicated than a common letter. It is said that this is a legal document. Information written in it is kept by the interested parties as evidence used during signing their contract; as a result, the business letter must be formal. Remember that friendly tones have to be avoided using during writing.

Writing the business correspondence is also a subject that has been in the syllabus for students. They must be provided good knowledge of writing skills. It is one of the most important qualifications for them, who plan to make a career in the business world. Nguyen Trong Đan says: "Further research is necessary to find out specific problems of commerce students in writing commercial letters in English so as to help them to

write efficiently and accurately at the discourse level" [3, tr.8]. In fact, students find it very difficult for writing the kinds of letters. One of the reasons is that they have no real experience in writing. How to write an effective business letter is challenges for them.

## 2. Classifying business correspondence

There are two types of business communication: internal business communication and external business one. Notice and memorandum (memo) are often used for internal communication within an organization. Notice is used to inform people about changes of a plan or to give instruction or warning in the organization. On the other hand, it is sent to several people in the organization when the important information needs to be updated. Mr. A. Ashley, the author of the *Oxford Handbook of Commercial Correspondence* pointed out a necessity for choosing the blocked style of correspondence and using styles of presentation and layout. He emphasized the importance of choosing the clear and consistent style of correspondence [1]. We can see sample letters below.

This is a letter from Mr. Bui Phu Hung to all English teachers of Faculty of Foreign Languages and Culture in Van Hien University. He wants to inform them about the Symposium taken place in Van Hien University in March 31, 2017. He is responsible for asking his colleagues to write the presentation. It is called a "staff notice" (Letter 1).

Dear colleagues,  
 I would like to invite you to write for the Symposium hosted by Van Hien University in March 31, 2017.  
 For more information, please log on to the link below.  
 Bui Phu Hung  
 Vice Dean - Faculty of Foreign Languages and Culture.

Other kind of internal and external business communication used is Memo. It may be drafted not only by a leader and addressed to other staff or several people. This kind of the letter often is used for internal messages within an organization. It is also the communication between

people in the horizontal position. For example,

Blow is a letter asking for information from Mr. Quentin Dagnet, the English voluntary teacher to Ms. Tuyet (Snow), the English teacher in Van Hien University. (Letter 2)

22 June, 2016  
 Hello Ms. Snow,  
 I am writing to tell you that I have just received the email today with a new schedule starting that I will be teaching with you tomorrow from 7:00 to 9:30 and from 9:40 to 12:10 as well as on Friday from 7:00 to 9:10.  
 What should I prepare for these classes?  
 Looking forward to it.  
 Best regards  
 Quentin Dagnet  
 q.dagnet@gmail.com

Below is the reply letter from Ms. Tuyet. (Letter 3)

Hi Quentin Dagnet,  
 I have received your letter of 22 June. I am glad to give you information requested. The lesson for you to guide in my class is Session B, including:

- Unit 9 – “Than he kissed me”.
- Grammar is focused on “Reported or indirect speech”.
- Vocabulary is practiced to distinguish between “say”, “tell”, and “ask”.
- Pronunciation reviews “the pronunciation of some common past participles”
- The class is in room No BPH 104.

I hope my class would be in your interests. I will wait for you at the door of my class.  
 Best wishes  
 Snow

The business communication taken between management and the staff is known it is between a person in the higher position and others in the lower one. For example, Mr.Tung Bach is the head of the

interviewing team in the company. After interviewing three candidates for the position of receptionist, he has to write an e-mail to Mr.Tung, Regional Director to explain his decision. (Letter 4)

To: Regional Director  
 From: Head, interviewing team  
 Subject: Appointment of receptionist

Dear Mr. Tung,

We recently interviewed three candidates for this position of receptionist.

We have decided to appoint Ms.Thuy Trang as a receptionist.

I will briefly describe the candidate's strengths and explain the reasons for our decision.

Firstly, she can take incoming telephone call and re-direct call to other individual or departments professionally.

Secondly, with a good interpersonal skill, she can greet and welcome visitors with courtesy.

Finally, she has an ability to multitask. This enables her to perform different administrative duties at the same time.

Please let us know if you need any further information.

We are looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely

Tung Bach

Recruitment Officer

Letter of Recommendation must be included in the CV to provide further information. It is extremely important. The writer (usually a person in a supervisory role, such as: applicant' teacher, professor, previous employer, senior colleague...) evaluates the skills and experience required for success in the particular position which an applicant is applying for. Prospective employer often wants to have this letter before choosing

one new employee. Remember, both an applicant and a student-teacher should have it. For example, Ms Nguyen Thi Loc Uyen, an English teacher at Văn Hien University is going to attend to the Doctoral TESOL program at Hue University College of Foreign Languages for her professional development. Below recommendation letter is written by Ms.Tuyet, an English teacher in Van Hien University (Letter 5).

Van Hien University,  
613 Au Co Street  
Phu Trung Ward  
Tan Phu District  
Hochiminh City

e-mail: tuyetnt@vhu.edu.vn  
cellphone: 0937.300.528

August 2, 2016

Dear Sir,

As a senior lecturer of Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures at Van Hien University, I am writing to you in support Ms. Nguyễn Thị Lộc Uyên as a candidate for admission to your Doctoral TESOL program at your University for her professional development. Ms. Uyên has been my colleague for more than four years, I know her quite well and I am willing to vouch for her character and academic abilities.

Based on my observation of her teaching, I see Ms. Uyen's determination to motivate her mixed- ability students with a variety of methods to make her classroom a lively environment. She also makes her students realise English study a fun thing with outside classroom communication activities. I sometimes wonder how she can balance her home life and career when she spends a lot of time in preparing the lessons as well as answering and correcting pile of e-mails from her students.

I am happy to have her as a member in my teaching staff because of her cheerful nature and openness to feedback from leaders, colleagues, and students. As far as I am concerned, her openness to feedback means she is always learning and growing as a learner. This is why Ms. Uyen has my highest recommendation for admission to your program.

I am certain that Ms. Uyen is going to do well at your institute for higher education. If I can be of any further assistance, or provide you with any further information, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully

Nguyen Thị Tuyet, Ph.D  
Senior lecturer  
Faculty of Foreign Languages and Cultures

Letter correspondence can be seen in the printed material and online. Sending messages online known is an e-mail. It is

useful for every business correspondence, especially for short messages. It is used both inside and outside companies. An

email can have a formal business style or very informal style. The informal style is most suitable for e-mail within an organization and for people who know each other well. The language of email can be quite informal. The “greeting” is often “Hi, Hello” or even “How are you?”. “Cheers” is a common ending; or

sometimes, the ending is omitted. In some cases, the writer won't use a capital letter; however, if the sender doesn't know the recipient well, the language used is more formal. The message focuses on giving or asking for information quickly. Below is the letter from Ms. Thanh Phuong, the Head of English Division. (Letter 6)

To: vhu,Tuyet nt; farhane.belayel@gmail.com; andrey.quiquene@gmail.com
Subject: co-teaching timetable
Dear teachers, This is the timetable attached. I am sorry for the inconvenience. Best regards Nguyen Thi Thanh Phuong e-mail: phuongntt@vhu.edu.vn

There are two kinds of communication, such as: face to face or sending a letter. Business letter writing is widely used. There are a lot advantages. It is suitable for all types of communication. The business correspondence can be fast sent to long distant areas. Costs for sending are very cheap. The most importance is that the letters are easy to retain as evidence provided in the business. Letter correspondence writing is a vital role in business.

### 3. Common errors and solutions

Business correspondence means the exchange of information in a written format for the process of business activities. It can take place between organizations within organizations or between the customers and the organization. The correspondence is generally of widely accepted formats and grammatical rules applied universally. In fact, a few people don't understand that

they are not allowed to bend the rules during writing. They write as simply as they speak. It is the reasons why there are a lots of errors in their letters sent to boss, to co-workers or to customers. Rules for formal writing are quite strict. Unlike common letters to friends, business letters must be clear, unambiguous, literal, and well structured.

There are the different kinds of business letters based on the sender's purposes, such as:

- letter of orders,
- letter of enquiries,
- letter of replies and quotations,
- letter of complaints and adjustments,
- letter of promises,
- letter of recommendations,
- letter of application, etc ...

The business letters can be handwritten or printed. They can be sent by post or by their computer. How to write

effective business letters is the question that needs to be answered.

Using wrong standard style, not correcting using language are common errors. A big problem is that wrong grammatical rules are usually made in writing. The key for a success is to learn from the mistakes and experience of others. Below some common errors made and some solutions offered are listed to help the writer to be successful in their career.

The layout of the letter is important because it gives the readers the first strong impression. After reading, the recipients feel this company is profitable and professional. In fact, some writers confuse to addresses of the recipient and the sender. They put them out of order. The heading of the business letter written is not the same of Vietnamese one. The sender's address is often placed in the top right-hand corner of the page. The date is written directly below the sender's address, separated from it by a space. Recipient's address is below and on the opposite of the sender's one. Surname known and titles used in addresses need to be correct.

The length of the business letters is also a problem. A letter is not written too long or too short. If there is little information provided in a letter, it is difficult for a reader to refine the main purpose of a letter. If a letter is too long, because there are opinions repeated, but not related to the sender's purpose, a reader won't guess what the sender wants to say. I think, the main points of each paragraph have to be listed, so that information is not repeated. Errors from the wordy language are prevented. In other words, the effective business letters should be neither too long

nor too short. They must be well organized. To reduce the errors, make plans for what to say, what necessary given in the message and all ideas should be prepared before writing, so that the things wanted to say become logical, complete, concise, and easy to understand.

Language used in business letters is taken care problems. In the common letters, writers can use everyday language, such as slang, jargon, colloquial or abbreviations. In business letters, the language of science is required to express their ideas. Right words and phrases are so important that they give the reader the strong impression and belief in information written. Information has to be put logically with the concise language. The scientific vocabulary or the special terms should be remembered and kept in the mind. For example, "Yours faithfully" and "Yours sincerely" are the same meaning. They are called complimentary close. Be careful, when "Dear Sir/ Madam" is in salutation, the end is "Yours faithfully"; when a personal name (e g, Dear Mr. Minh.) is written in the salutation, "Yours sincerely" is in close. These errors are often made if writers are not careful.

The business letter will become unprofessional if emotional words are used. Expressing dissatisfaction should be said like this "This is the third time when mistake has occurred and we are far from satisfied with the service you offer"; in addition, to ask for giving a solution, it is said, that "It would be great if you could offer me some advice". Avoiding showing unhappy attitudes like your *fault*, *your mistake*. Use an impersonal like *the fault*, *the mistake*.

Before writing the business letter, first at all, senders have to understand the letter sent to whom, who will receive the letter and what is the purpose. Rules for writing a common letter and a business letter are not the same. Audience, purpose, clarity of expression, consistency and tone must be considered. Do not confuse a personal letter with a business one. If a badly written letter is sent to a recipient, he or she can find it annoying. The applicant's CV, for example, should never use more than one page. Employers would be surprised if they received a personal letter rather than an application form. There is lots irrelevant information into the application. Recruitment doesn't have enough time to sift through all things written in it. The most importance is that the business letters must be clear and professional so that readers will receive a clear, concise, effective message. It should be described the applicant's experience first, then qualifications. Remember, an application form has to be used the appropriate language and tone. The kind of this form is a template that employers require job candidates to fill out, typically comprising previous position held, education and contact information. Reading the application form, the employer really only wants to know what candidate's value will be added to the company as an employee and how he or she will be able to prove it. The candidate's qualification is one thing, but the purpose is another. The employer wants to know what are reasons for the candidate to apply for this job, why he or she left their previous post. An application should aim for the neutral tone to talk about their

experiences and reasons for choosing this post. It is necessary for preparing the suitable vocabulary for the specific purpose. The pompous and colloquial language must be avoided; besides, to become the potential candidate, an applicant has to remember that the acronyms, homonym, florid, flowery language (i.e. impressive adjective) are not used. For example, "I am applying to your esteemed company because it would be an honor to work for such a prestigious organization"; (dịch: Tôi làm đơn này mong muốn được vào làm việc ở Quý công ty, một công ty đầy kính trọng. Điều này thật vinh hạnh cho tôi nếu tôi may mắn được làm việc với một tổ chức đầy uy tín và thanh thế này). Long words elaborate phrases and complex sentences must be also avoided. The application form is not place where applicants complain about themselves.

Other requirement is that the writer makes sure about understanding the basic rules of the English grammar. Grammatical errors are a serious problem. In fact, standards in written English are often not taken care. How will customers feel when they receive a badly written business letter? Do they understand if using grammar is incorrect in all details? Customers will find it annoying. The simple grammatical errors can make the business letter look unprofessional; as a result, customers and partners do not want to do business with companies whose correspondence has mistakes in it. Ineffective business correspondence can cost millions in lost sales opportunities; accordingly, paying attention to the English grammar is the first priority.



The meaning of time or tense is the same in Vietnamese. It is not true in English. Time is a concept which is perception of reality. There are three times: past, present and future. Tense is grammatical category which is marked by verb inflection and expressed when an event or action happened in the flow of time. There are also other factors, including voice and mood that allow creating the twelve tenses in English. One tense does not always refer to one time. The present continuous tense may talk about either present or future time. For example,

Ex 1. *Tatsuo works for a financial magazine. At the moment, he is writing an article on insider trading. ("is writing" shows present reference.)*

Ex 2. *I am presenting the new company structure at next week's meeting. ("am presenting" is for future arrangements.)*

This is a reason why learners find tenses in English very difficult to understand. A lot of errors are made during writing their business letters. The solution is that learners should spend enough time studying the English grammatical category.

The passive is used for putting the important information at the beginning of the sentence. The passive can be more impersonal than the active. For this reason, the passive can be used in the formal document, such as in the business letter. The passive is here to emphasize *who* or *what* performed an action. Speaking impersonally, everybody feels, is more courteous than to speaking personally. Impersonal reporting structures are often used in the report. Below are some sentences from the company's report

talking about its financial performance.

Ex 3. *Increased production and met demand have had a positive effect on our cash flow. A number of new projects are financed. The main building and new offices is going be built next year.*

Some simple errors involved in omitted pronouns and articles are easily avoided

Ex 4. "Look forward to hearing from you" is instead of "I am looking forward to hearing from you".

Ex5. "Parcel dispatched for two weeks." is better if it is changed "Her parcel has dispatched for two weeks".

Other problem is that conjunctions "But" and "And" are put in the beginning sentences. Conjunction "And" or "But" are used to connect two parts of sentences which are similar in grammatical status. "And" is used for adding information, "But" for unexpected or different information. "But" should be changed "however", "nevertheless", "in contrast", "instead of"; "And" should be changed "besides", "in addition", "moreover", "furthermore", such as:

Ex 6. *I wanted to go to the trade fair. But it started to rain and I stayed at home.*

The better sentence is: *I wanted to go to the trade fair; however, it started to rain and I stayed at home.*

Ex 7. *All employees can get a four-week paid holiday each year. And the company provides free medical insurance for them.*

The better sentence is: *All employees can get a four-week paid holiday each year; besides, the company provides free medical insurance for them.*

Conjunctions "But" and "And" are

accepted to put at the beginning of the sentence now, but sentences are written like that they are easy to become choppy. Conjunctions “And” or “But” should not be used to start sentences when writing; in contrast, they can be used for speaking.

Another common errors are forming very long sentences. The complex sentences must be punctuated by using punctuation marks, such as the comma (,), the full stop (.), exclamation point (!), question mark (?), the colon (:), the semi-colon (;), the hyphen ( - ), the slash ( / ) .... Every sentence should include at least a capital letter at the start and a full stop, or a question mark at the end. This basic system indicates that the sentence is complete. Commas are used to separate ideas in the complex sentence. It is not easy for a reader to understand ideas provided if they are all written together in one sentence. Punctuation is very important. It shows how the sentence makes the meaning clear.

Effective business correspondence

writing can be a big challenge for everybody, especially for those who speak English as a foreign language. Each language has its own grammatical rules and structures. Because of the influence of Vietnamese, the messages may be translated into English applying the Vietnamese grammatical rules; consequently, the messages will become strange and misunderstand.

Below is a practice exercise in an English class for writing a business letter. Hoàì Nghĩa, the 3rd year student of the University Of Economics (K40), as a director of ACSA writes a report talking about the staff problems to the CEO of ACSA. In this report, he proposes solutions to make the working performance better. This is only the recommendation section of the report. We can compare two reports, one before studying the subject “business correspondence” and other after studying this subject. (Letter 7)

(Letter 7.1 before studying)

*Our salary system has changed especially in bonus field. It is decided by the selling target and it no longer bases on the manager's decision. Specifically, this yearly bonus will in-create due to the differences of selling target this year that compares to the previous year.*

*I think, the manager's goal needs to create the dynamic and creative working environment. Eventually, the manager also has to organize more team building dates to reconnect our staff network. I believe that soft skill training is going to put our team to a next level.*

The wordy language is used. Vocabulary is not exact. The sentences are long, complex. They are made by combining words, regardless of using

correct grammatical rules. The message is not clear to understand. This is not a right business letter.

(Letter 7.2 after studying)

*Our staff salary is lower this year; in addition, the bonus is canceled. The reason is that their selling target was not achieved.*

*In my opinion, the day called "Team building" should be arranged to encourage and motivate our staff. The dynamic and creative environment will improve their working performance.*

In the letter 7.2, the recommendation section of a report focuses on the staff problems and the proposal for the particular solutions is offered. The language used in the recommendation is very formal. The accepted grammatical rules are applied here. This is an effective business letter.

The business person may be dealing with people from many different countries over the world, so messages have to be clear, concise and easy to understand. To do this, business correspondence writing must be taken care properly.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Effective business correspondence writing can give a company a competitive edge. This is the most important business tools. They used for ordering, enquiring, replying, etc... They must be look distinct and high quality. The business letters will be

a representation of a company. Every businessman has seen the strong power of business correspondence. The messages can be sent fast, cheaply, surely to their partners, customers. They also give marvelous results.

Our students have advantages. They go to university before being an entrepreneur. They can get knowledge and skills to avoid risks late. Effective business correspondence writing is very necessary for students after finishing their university. "Business correspondence" is an important subject in the university. Students have to write the all kinds of business correspondence with the correct forms, the clear language and right grammatical rules.

Our conclusion here is that students must be carefully taught and learnt the subject "Business Correspondence". It will help them quickly to move ahead in their career in the future.

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