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The Characteristics of a Well Written Business Letter

Contributed by Professional Edge Consulting

Whether it's an email, telephone communication, a proposal, or a business letter, your communication portrays an impression about your business.

Communication is what connects your business with the outside world. Therefore it's essential that the form of communication adheres to corporate norms and principles of etiquette. We must remember that business communication is different from personal communication.

A business letter would differ in length and format from a personal letter. And it's important to bear in mind that any form of business communication must be precise and concise.

As a Communication Etiquette professional, I have had the privilege of meeting many corporate professionals, both in Canada and in the South Asian region. One common question asked by most professionals about the basics of letter writing is how to write an effective business letter that fully conveys their message. Any form of communication can be easily misunderstood as communication differs greatly according to society, culture, and region. Therefore, it's important to stick with the international norms of corporate communication.

What exactly is a business letter and why would a professional write one? A business letter is written to communicate a business matter either within the corporate arena or from business-to-client or client-to-business organization. Being a form of corporate communication, a well formulated business letter would portray a company's commitment to achieve a high level of communication. Bear in mind that the reader will make his first impression of you within 10 seconds of reading your letter.

A business letter should have a purpose, but that purpose is not always to promote business. It can be a letter of inquiry, a letter of acknowledgement, a reply letter, or a claim letter. There are many types of business letters and varying purposes for them.

There are basic parts and formats to a business letter:

A business letter must always be written on a business letterhead. If the business letter is to take the form of a business email, it would be considered professional to have the company logo and/or letterhead on the email. A business letter should always bear the sender's name, address, and email address followed by the date. Next in sequence are the receiver's name, title, company name, and address. The salutation follows next, with the body of the letter and the closing followed by the sender's signature, name, and title. The final part of the letter should indicate to whom copies are sent. When writing a business letter, remember the 8C's of writing. These are eight characteristics of a well written business letter.

COMPLETE – A business letter should be complete, including all details and information pertaining to the subject.

CORRECT – It is important to be completely accurate in all the details you include in a business letter. Always make sure you have included correctly any dates, names, amounts of money, etc. Always proofread the letter before sending it out.

CONCISE – A professional business letter should convey your idea with few words, short sentences, and short paragraphs.

CONCRETE – A business letter should be concrete and not contain vague ideas. Information should be specific.

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COURTEOUS – Be polite in your business letter; mind your P's and Q's.

CLEAR – The importance of clarity and accuracy in a business letter cannot be stressed enough. The chances of your letter being misunderstood are minimal when you adhere to this point. An organized letter is less likely to be misunderstood.

CONSISTENT – Keep the same format and mood throughout the letter. Being consistent shows that you are professional.

COHERENT – A good business letter should flow well. Make the sentences and paragraphs short, so that your letter is easy to read and understand.

A final word of advice is never to convey any form of communication when you are angry or annoyed. That would change the entire mood of the communication and portray a bitter image of yourself and your company.

Always remember that responsible communication is the heart of a business.

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