

Business writing basics – Teacher’s notes

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Aim: To review important elements of good business writing in English, especially for letters and emails.

Level: Intermediate

Pre-lesson: This activity revises key aspects of business writing in English, applicable for any business sector.

Procedure

- Have a brief discussion with the whole class about what types of writing they normally do in their jobs. Then elicit 2-3 ideas from the participants about what makes a good professional image in business writing. This will allow you to see if they focus on elements in the worksheet on the organisation and structure of letters and emails.
- Distribute worksheets. The students can work in pairs or groups to complete the worksheet. Time the participants to do one section at a time. Stop them after they complete each section to check answers. Pairs or groups can provide their answers. You can also give the answers on an OHP or as a hand-out.
- **For section 1** elicit a discussion on why especially *writing for the reader* is so important – in terms of clear understanding and wasting someone’s time.
- **In section 2 and 3A** especially check the meaning of *connecting with the reader*. Emphasize the idea of how customers need to know *where they know you from* since everyone deals with so many emails.
- **For section 3 B** elicit how the students decide whether to use a formal or informal style. Normally they should follow the reader/customer’s precedent, unless their company dictates the use of the formal/informal. Point out that suitable register reflects their professionalism.
- **In section 4A and B** discuss the use of punctuation/no punctuation in the greetings as a British or American style. Also stress they should not mix up the styles, i.e. be consistent with either one or the other.

Suggested answers

- | | | | |
|----|---------------|----|--|
| 1A | 1 points | 1B | 1 brief |
| | 2 brief | | 2 polite |
| | 3 direct | | 3 complicated |
| | 4 polite | | 4 points |
| | 5 complicated | | |
| | 6 reader | | |
| 2 | 1 | | opening greeting |
| | 2 | | connecting with the reader |
| | 3 | | reason for writing |
| | 4 | | giving good/bad news; requests; agreeing to requests |
| | 5 | | taking action |
| | 6 | | concluding |
| | 7 | | closing greeting |

- 3A a opening greeting (1)
b connecting with the reader (2)
c reason for writing (3)
d request (4)
e taking action (5)
f concluding (6)
g closing greeting (7)
- 3B 1 the italicized phrases
2 use of short forms (contractions)
3 word choice
4 name address
- 4A a 2 b 1 c 3
- 4B 1 Dear Sirs/Dear Sir or Madam... Yours faithfully/Sincerely (yours)
2 Hi Susan/Dear Robert and Mary
3 Dear Mrs Jones/Dear Mr Smith... (Best/Kind) Regards/Sincerely

Extra tips

- Take sample letters or emails (from you or the students) to make follow-up activities for organizing writing. For example, you can give the text as jumbled up paragraphs in a hand-out or as cut-up sections. In either case, students order the body of the message.
- Write up an email or letter with confusing, mixed up elements of structure and register. Give as pair work to rewrite. Students exchange their writing and compare their ideas.