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# Writing to a Client

CTAE-FS-4 Communications: Learners use various communication skills in expressing and interpreting information.

## Understanding and Goals

### Unit Understandings, Themes, and Concepts:

#### Enduring Understandings:

Students will learn that effective writing skills are important when working with clients.

### Primary Learning Goals:

#### Essential Questions:

- What must be considered when constructing a client letter?

#### Objectives:

- Students will be able to write an effective client letter.

### Students with disabilities:

For students with disabilities, each instructor should refer to the student's IEP to be sure that the accommodations specified in the IEP are being provided within the classroom setting. Instructors should also familiarize themselves with the provisions of Behavior Intervention Plans that may be part of a student's IEP. Frequent consultation with a student's special education instructor will be beneficial in providing appropriate differentiation within any given instructional activity or requirement.

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# Administrative Specialist

Since I was promoted to administrative specialist a few months ago, my duties have broadened to include a great deal of writing. On Monday, in between my other administrative duties, I wrote a memo for my supervisor about upgrades needed to our web site. Then I drafted the introduction to a report about problems with our telephone system and wrote a long letter to a customer about the new products that our company will introduce in the spring.

Tuesday, as I tried to catch up on a backlog of work, the manager of the department asked me to edit a ten-page proposal she had written to a prospective customer. I was flattered that she had confidence in my editing ability, but doing a good editing job took time away from my other tasks.

It's only Wednesday, but my To Do list has several other writing and editing assignments: editing the first draft of our division's new business plan for my supervisor to review, preparing an invitation to the going-away party for a long-time employee, and writing letters to several suppliers and customers. Every day, too, I have e-mail messages to answer.

Writing is an important part of my job, but it is only one of many duties, so I need to write efficiently, or I won't be able to get all my other work done. My documents must be clear and interesting, even though I have limited time to get my thoughts together, put them on paper, and send them off to the reader.

## CHAPTER 1

*An administrative specialist writes and edits all kinds of general business documents. In this chapter, you will learn how to:*

- Write and edit a business letter
- Format a letter
- Write vivid descriptions
- Write business memos

## Why and Who?

If you work as an administrative specialist, you may prepare letters, memos, e-mails, reports, manuals, proposals, and other types of documents. Whatever you compose, two key questions should shape your writing:

**Why are you writing?** What is the purpose of your document? What exactly are you trying to accomplish with it? For example, are you conveying information? Are you giving instructions? Do you want to persuade someone to do something?

**Who is your audience?** Who will read the document? How much does the audience already know about the subject? What does the audience need and want to know?

Thinking about these two key questions is part of the prewriting stage that you read about in the Introduction. Your decisions about purpose and audience will affect not only the content of your writing, but also the style and organization.

In your daily life, you already modify your language to fit your audience and purpose. When you invite a friend to lunch, you use different language than when calling your landlord to say that the water heater is broken. Now you need to transfer this skill to writing business documents.

Activity 1.1 provides practice in thinking about *why* and *who* as you plan a business letter to a client.

## Planning a Letter to a Client

Imagine you work for Rapid Solutions, a shipping company that promises speedy delivery of packages to locations anywhere in the world. Today, you must reply to a letter from Dr. Susan Thorpe, the president of Specialty Electronics, a firm that uses your shipping services to send electronics components to overseas markets. Dr. Thorpe has complained that some of her company's packages have arrived late, and she is threatening to switch to another shipper. Her letter was addressed to Leroi Bower, your supervisor, but he is out of town for several days and has asked you to answer the letter.

Mr. Bower gave you this summary of the situation: "Dr. Thorpe's firm makes unusual components that require special forms for U.S. Customs. The software used by her shipping department is out of date, so the Customs forms are incomplete, and the shipments get held up at the Customs office. We have no control over shipping delays by the Customs office, and we aren't even informed when a package has been delayed. We've advised the Specialty Electronics shipping manager about the need for new software, but so far nothing has changed."

### Activity 1.1

### Understanding Documents

A **business letter** is similar to a letter you would write to a friend. It is a short document written by one person to another. A business letter, though, requires more planning than a personal note.

**Step 1: Think about the purpose.**

To plan your letter to Dr. Thorpe, identify its purposes first. Why is it being written? What result do you want?

On the lines below, write all the purposes that you should consider before starting the letter to Dr. Thorpe. Two purposes are already listed.

1. Inform Dr. Thorpe that the shipment delays are not our fault.
2. Convince Dr. Thorpe not to switch her business to another company.

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**Step 2: Consider the audience.**

Think about the background of the person who will read the letter. This will provide clues about how the reader will react—and lead you to what you want to say and how you will say it.

Write several of Susan Thorpe’s characteristics that you should take into account in composing a letter to her:

- She is well educated.
- She may not know the details of Customs regulations or of her own firm’s shipping system.

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**Activity  
1.1 (cont.)**

**ETHICS IN  
WRITING**

How would you approach your letter to Dr. Thorpe if her firm were so tiny that its business was unimportant to your company? Would it be within your rights to ignore her complaint or dismiss it with a discourteous reply? Could you write her a letter that said, in essence, “Quit bothering us, Doc, it’s not our problem”?

That would not be polite, of course, and it would not be ethical. Ethical writing demands that you treat all your clients and business associates with consideration, whether they are big wheels or minor players. This also makes good business sense. Dr. Thorpe’s company may grow and become a major client!

# Sales Associate

As a sales associate for Bernard's, a high-end department store, I spend a good deal of time writing letters and e-mails to my "personal shopping clients." These dedicated, fashion-conscious customers rely on me to tell them when the latest styles will be available at the store.

When I write to my personal shopping clients, instead of just notifying them when a new line arrives, I include recommendations about accessorizing, a schedule of store events, and some fashion industry news.

Judging by the compliments my manager has received from many of my customers, and by the fact that my average sale is about 11% higher than other associates' sales, I believe that my writing skills are among my strongest assets. My ability to communicate effectively in writing with dozens of clients helps bring in business to the store. It also puts me on a promising career track—one that I expect to be both personally and financially rewarding.

Last month, my manager asked me to contribute an article to the company newsletter. The article I am preparing is about how I use my writing skills to communicate with customers, managers, and buyers.

I believe that anyone can write well, with a little practice writing. It does not require a special talent, but it does require a set of skills that can be learned by anyone with an interest in being able to write clearly and effectively—and in getting a message across to the reader.

## CHAPTER 1

*A sales associate writes and edits documents about merchandise, sales, and promotions. In this chapter, you will learn how to:*

- Write and edit a business letter
- Format business documents
- Write vivid descriptions

## Building the Paragraphs

Paragraphs are the building blocks of business letters. A well organized paragraph will convey the message you want to deliver. Here are three simple rules for writing a good paragraph:

1. Include just one main idea.
2. State the main idea at or near the beginning of the paragraph.
3. Use the remaining sentences in the paragraph to explain or develop the main idea. Use examples and details to support the main idea. When you arrive at a new main idea, begin a new paragraph.

Compare the following two paragraphs about a store promotion.

### Well-Organized Paragraph

As many of you know, seating at the annual fashion show is limited. Therefore, we will reserve 30 tickets for store employees and their guests. The tickets will be available at the main reception desk on a first-come first-served basis next Tuesday morning at 9:00. Due to limited seating, each employee is entitled to two tickets.

### Poorly Organized Paragraph

You are not allowed to go to the fashion show if you are a store employee. Unless you are one of the 15 who can go, because not many people can fit, you cannot go. To be one of those 15, be at the main reception desk next Tuesday at 9:00 AM. Fifteen tickets will be given to the first people who arrive. Anyone who is there in time is entitled to two tickets.

In the well-organized paragraph, the main idea appears in the first sentence, and the remaining sentences support that idea by providing important details about the fashion show. The poorly organized paragraph is confusing and unfriendly. It provides the same information as the well-organized paragraph, but the main idea is buried in the middle.

## Beginning a Letter to a Client

In Activity 1.1, you planned your letter to the dissatisfied customer by thinking about the letter's purpose and audience—the *why* and *who*. Now it is time to write the first paragraph, making sure that it is clear and well organized.

### Success Tip

The average paragraph should be just three or four sentences. If a paragraph in a business letter is more than ten lines, it is too long.

### Activity 1.2

Before you begin, look at the following samples of opening paragraphs. Each one would make a poor start to your letter. Can you see why? Study them until you understand why .

### Confusing

Regarding your letter of last week about your experience in our store, I am writing to explain the circumstances. Of course, there is no reason to ever treat a customer the way you were treated, but in this case there may have been a reason, but that reason is no longer relevant anyway. That is because the employee who spoke rudely to you no longer works for Elgee Outdoors.

### Rude Sounding

The employee you complained about no longer works here. That pretty much solves your problem. Have a nice day.

### Disorganized

Elgee Outdoors is committed to the best possible customer service. Our management team makes every effort to prevent negative experiences. Our sales associates are trained in every aspect of customer service and product knowledge. We regret whenever a sales associate displays rudeness to a customer, and we assure you every effort will be made to remedy the situation. The sales associate you wrote about is no longer with the company.

Now you are ready to draft your own first paragraph. Begin by stating what your letter is about and why you are the one responding to the complaint. Also begin to address the purposes that you identified in Activity 1.1. *But remember, a single paragraph should contain only one main idea.*

The beginning of the letter is supplied for you below. Use the blank lines to finish the paragraph.

Dear Ms. Johnson:

Thank you for your letter of July 22 to Ms. DeForest, our manager who was not at the store on the day of your visit. Ms. DeForest asked me to respond, because I was present when the incident occurred.

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## Activity 1.2 (cont.)