

# BUSINESS CORRESPONDENCE

## VOLUME I

### HOW TO WRITE THE BUSINESS LETTER:

24 chapters on preparing to write the letter and finding the proper viewpoint; how to open the letter, present the proposition convincingly, make an effective close; how to acquire a forceful style and inject originality; how to adapt selling appeal to different prospects and get orders by letter—proved principles and practical schemes illustrated by extracts from 217 actual letters

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#### VOLUME I

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What You Can Do With a

POSTAGE STAMP

## PART I—PREPARING TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER I

Last year [1910] fifteen billion letters were handled by the post office—one hundred and fifty for every person. Just as a thousand years ago practically all trade was cash, and now only seven per cent involves currency, so nine-tenths of the business is done today by letter while even a few decades ago it was by personal word. You can get your prospect, turn him into a customer, sell him goods, settle complaints, investigate credit standing, collect your money\_ --ALL BY LETTER. And often better than by word of mouth. For, when talking, you speak to only one or two; by letter you can talk to a hundred thousand in a sincere, personal way. So the letter is the MOST IMPORTANT TOOL in modern business—good letter writing is the business man’s FIRST REQUIREMENT.

There is a firm in Chicago, with a most interesting bit of inside history. It is not a large firm. Ten years ago it consisted of one man. Today there are some three hundred employees, but it is still a one-man business. It has never employed a salesman on the road; the head of the firm has never been out to call on any of his customers.

But here is a singular thing: you may drop in to see a business man in Syracuse or San Francisco, in Jacksonville or Walla Walla, and should you casually mention this man’s name, the chances are the other will reply: “Oh, yes. I know him very well. That is, I’ve had several letters from him and I feel as though I know him.”

Sitting alone in his little office, this man was one of the first to foresee, ten years ago, the real possibilities of the letter. He saw that if he could write a man a thousand miles away the right kind of a letter he could do business with him as well as he could with the man in the next block.

So he began talking by mail to men whom he thought might buy his goods—talking to them in sane, human, you-and-me English. Through those letters he sold goods. Nor did he stop there. In the same human way he collected the money for them. He adjusted any complaints that arose. He did everything that any business man could do with customers. In five years he was talking not to a thousand men but to a million. And today, though not fifty men in the million have ever met him, this man’s personality has swept like a tidal wave across the country and left its impression in office, store and factory—through letters—letters alone.

This instance is not cited because it marks the employment of a new medium, but because it shows how the letter has become a universal

implement of trade; how a commonplace tool has been developed into a living business-builder.

The letter is today the greatest potential creator and transactor of business in the world. But wide as its use is, it still lies idle, an undeveloped possibility, in many a business house where it might be playing a powerful part.

The letter is a universal implement of business—that is what gives it such great possibilities. It is the servant of every business, regardless of its size or of its character. It matters not what department may command its use—wherever there is a business in which men must communicate with each other, the letter is found to be the first and most efficient medium.

Analyze for a moment the departments of your own business. See how many points there are at which you could use right letters to good advantage. See if you have not been overlooking some opportunities that the letter, at a small cost, will help develop.

Do you sell goods? The letter is the greatest salesman known to modern business. It will carry the story you have to tell wherever the mail goes. It will create business and bring back orders a thousand miles to the very hand it left. If you are a retailer, the letter will enable you to talk your goods, your store, your service, to every family in your town, or it will go further and build a counter across the continent for you.

If you are a manufacturer or wholesaler selling to the trade, the letter will find prospects and win customers for you in remote towns that salesmen cannot profitably reach.

But the letter is not only a direct salesman, it is a supporter of every personal sales force. Judiciously centered upon a given territory, letters pave the way for the salesman's coming; they serve as his introduction. After his call, they keep reminding the prospect or customer of the house and its goods.

Or, trained by the sales manager upon his men, letters keep them in touch with the house and key up their loyalty. With regular and special letters, the sales manager is able to extend his own enthusiasm to the farthest limits of his territory.

So in every phase of selling, the letter makes it possible for you to keep your finger constantly upon the pulse of trade.

If you are a wholesaler or manufacturer, letters enable you to keep your dealers in line. If you are a retailer, they offer you a medium through which to keep your customers in the proper mental attitude toward your store, the

subtle factor upon which retail credit so largely depends. If you sell on instalments, letters automatically follow up the accounts and maintain the inward flow of payments at a fraction of what any other system of collecting entails.

Do you have occasion to investigate the credit of your customers? The letter will quietly and quickly secure the information. Knowing the possible sources of the data you desire you can send forth half a dozen letters and a few days later have upon your desk a comprehensive report upon the worth and reliability of almost any concern or individual asking credit favors. And the letter will get this information where a representative would often fail because it comes full-fledged in the frankness and dignity of your house.

Does your business involve in any way the collecting of money? Letters today bring in ten dollars for every one that collectors receive on their monotonous round of homes and cashiers' cages. Without the collection letter the whole credit system would be toppling about our ears.

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## THE LETTER

SELLS GOODS

## DIRECT

TO CONSUMERS

TO DEALERS

TO AGENTS

## INDIRECT

BUILDS UP LISTS

## *SECURES NAMES*

ELIMINATES DEAD WOOD

CLASSIFIES LIVE PROSPECTS

## OPENS UP NEW TERRITORY

*THROUGH CONSUMERS*

CREATES DEMAND  
DIRECTS TRADE

*THROUGH DEALERS*

SHOWS POSSIBLE PROFIT  
INTRODUCES NEW LINES

AID TO SALESMEN

*EDUCATES TRADE*

*CO-OPERATION*

INTRODUCES  
BACKS UP  
KEEPS LINED UP

AID TO DEALERS

*DRUMS UP TRADE*

HOLDS CUSTOMERS  
DEVELOPS NEW BUSINESS

HANDLES MEN

INSTRUCTION

ABOUT GOODS  
ABOUT TERRITORY  
ABOUT PROSPECTS  
HOW TO SYSTEMIZE WORK

INSPIRATION

GINGER TALES  
INSPIRES CONFIDENCE  
SECURES CO-OPERATION  
PROMOTES LOYALTY

**COLLECTS MONEY**

MERCANTILE ACTS - RETAIL ACTS - INSTALLMENT ACTS - PETTY ACTS

**PERSUASION**

***EMPHASIZE HOUSE POLICY***

EMPHASIZE ADVANTTAGAE OF GOODS  
ESTABLISHMENT OF FORCED COLLECTIONS  
COST OF FORCED COLLECTIONS  
CASH-UP PROPOSITION  
EXTENSION OF ACCOMMODATION

**PRESSURE**

***THROUGH THREATS***

OF SUIT  
OF SHUTTING OFF CREDIT  
OF WRITING TO REFERENCES  
THROUGH LEGAL AVENUES  
THROUGH LEGAL AGENCIES  
HOUSE COLLECTION BUREAUS  
REGULAR COLLECTION BUREAUS  
THROUGH ATTORNEYS

**HANDLES LONG RANGE CUSTOMERS**

**SUPPLIES PERSONAL CONTACT**

SHOWS INTEREST IN CUSTOMER  
WINS CONFIDENCE  
DEVELOPS RE-ORDER SCHEMES  
BUILDS UP STEADY TRADE

HANDLES COMPLAINTS

ADJUSTS

*INVESTIGATES*

MAKES CAPITAL OUT OF COMPLAINTS

WINS BACK CUSTOMERS

DEVELOPS PRESTIGE

GIVES PERSONALITY TO BUSINESS

BUILDS UP GOOD WILL

PAVES WAY FOR NEW CUSTOMERS

\_The practical uses of the business letter are almost infinite: selling goods, with distant customers, developing the prestige of the house—there is handling men, adjusting complaints, collecting money, keeping in touch scarcely an activity of modern business that cannot be carried on by letter\_

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Do you find it necessary to adjust the complaint of a client or a customer? A diplomatic letter at the first intimation of dissatisfaction will save many an order from cancellation. It will soothe ruffled feelings, wipe out imagined grievances and even lay the basis for firmer relations in the future.

So you may run the gamut of your own business or any other. At every point that marks a transaction between concerns or individuals, you will find some way in which the letter rightly used, can play a profitable part.

There is a romance about the postage stamp as fascinating as any story—not the romance contained in sweet scented notes, but the romance of big things accomplished; organizations developed, businesses built, great commercial houses founded.

In 1902 a couple of men secured the agency for a firm manufacturing extracts and toilet preparations. They organized an agency force through letters and within a year the manufacturers were swamped with business, unable to fill the orders.



Then the men added one or two other lines, still operating from one small office. Soon a storage room was added; then a packing and shipping room was necessary and additional warehouse facilities were needed. Space was rented in the next building; a couple of rooms were secured across the street, and one department was located over the river—wherever rooms could be found.

Next the management decided to issue a regular mail-order catalogue and move to larger quarters where the business could be centered under one roof. A floor in a new building was rented—a whole floor. The employees thought it was extravagance; the managers were dubious, for when the business was gathered in from seven different parts of the city, there was still much vacant floor space.

One year later it was again necessary to rent outside space. The management then decided to erect a permanent home and today the business occupies two large buildings and the firm is known all over the country as one of the big factors of mail-order merchandising.

It has all been done by postage stamps.

When the financial world suddenly tightened up in 1907 a wholesale dry goods house found itself hard pressed for ready money. The credit manager wrote to the customers and begged them to pay up at once. But the retailers were scared and doggedly held onto their cash. Even the merchants who were well rated and whose bills were due, played for time.

The house could not borrow the money it needed and almost in despair the president sat down and wrote a letter to his customers; it was no routine collection letter, but a heart-to-heart talk, telling them that if they did not come to his rescue the business that he had spent thirty years in building would be wiped out and he would be left penniless because he could not collect *his* money. He had the bookkeepers go through every important account and they found that there was hardly a customer who had not, for one reason or another, at some time asked for an extension of credit. And to each customer the president dictated a personal paragraph, reminding him of the time accommodation had been asked and granted. Then the appeal was made straight from the heart: “Now, when I need help, not merely to tide me over a few weeks but to save me from ruin, will you not strain a point, put forth some special effort to help me out, just as I helped you at such and such a time?”

“If we can collect \$20,000,” he had assured his associates, “I know we can borrow \$20,000, and that will probably pull us through.”

The third day after his letters went out several checks came in; the fourth day the cashier banked over \$22,000; within ten days \$68,000 had come in, several merchants paying up accounts that were not yet due; a few even offered to “help out the firm.”

The business was saved—by postage stamps.

Formality to the winds; stereotyped phrases were forgotten; traditional appeals were discarded and a plain talk, man-to-man, just as if the two were closeted together in an office brought hundreds of customers rushing to the assistance of the house with which they had been dealing.

Sixty-eight thousand dollars collected within two weeks when money was almost invisible—and by letter. Truly there is romance in the postage stamp.

Twenty-five years ago a station agent wrote to other agents along the line about a watch that he could sell them at a low price. When an order came in he bought a watch, sent it to the customer and used his profit to buy stamps for more letters. After a while he put in each letter a folder advertising charms, fobs and chains; then rings, cuff buttons and a general line of jewelry was added. It soon became necessary to give up his position on the railroad and devote all his time to the business and one line after another was added to the stock he carried.

Today the house that started in this way has customers in the farthest parts of civilization; it sells every conceivable product from toothpicks to automobiles and knockdown houses. Two thousand people do nothing but handle mail; over 22,000 orders are received and filled every day; 36,000 men and women are on the payroll.

It has all been done by mail. Postage stamps bring to the house every year business in excess of \$65,000,000.

One day the head correspondent in an old established wholesale house in the east had occasion to go through some files of ten and twelve years before. He was at once struck with the number of names with which he was not familiar—former customers who were no longer buying from the house. He put a couple of girls at work making a list of these old customers and checking them up in the mercantile directories to see how many were still in business.

Then he sat down and wrote to them, asking as a personal favor that they write and tell him why they no longer bought of the house; whether its goods or service had not been satisfactory, whether some complaint had not

been adjusted. There must be a reason, would they not tell him personally just what it was?

Eighty per cent of the men addressed replied to this personal appeal; many had complaints that were straightened out; others had drifted to other houses for no special reason. The majority were worked back into the “customer” files. Three years later the accounting department checked up the orders received from these re-found customers. The gross was over a million dollars. The business all sprung from one letter.

Yes, there is romance in the postage stamp; there is a latent power in it that few men realize—a power that will remove commercial mountains and erect industrial pyramids.

## The ADVANTAGES Of Doing Business By Letter

### PART I—PREPARING TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER 2

Letters have their limitations and their advantages. The correspondent who is anxious to secure the best results should recognize the inherent weakness of a letter due to its lack of personality in order to reinforce these places. Equally essential is an understanding of the letter’s great\_ NATURAL ADVANTAGES so that the writer can turn them to account—make the most of them. It possesses qualities the personal representative lacks and this chapter tells how to take advantage of them

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While it is necessary to know how to write a strong letter, it is likewise essential to understand both the limitations of letters and their advantages. It is necessary, on the one hand, to take into account the handicaps that a letter has in competition with a personal solicitor. Offsetting this are many distinct advantages the letter has over the salesman. To write a really effective letter, a correspondent must thoroughly understand its carrying capacity.

A salesman often wins an audience and secures an order by the force of a dominating personality. The letter can minimize this handicap by an attractive dress and force attention through the impression of quality. The letter lacks the animation of a person but there can be an individuality about its appearance that will assure a respectful hearing for its message.

The personal representative can time his call, knowing that under certain circumstances he may find his man in a favorable frame of mind, or even at the door he may decide it is the part of diplomacy to withdraw and wait a more propitious hour. The letter cannot back out of the prospect's office; it cannot shape its canvass to meet the needs of the occasion or make capital out of the mood or the comments of the prospect.

The correspondent cannot afford to ignore these handicaps under which his letter enters the prospect's office. Rather, he should keep these things constantly in mind in order to overcome the obstacles just as far as possible, reinforcing the letter so it will be prepared for any situation it may encounter at its destination. Explanations must be so clear that questions are unnecessary; objections must be anticipated and answered in advance; the fact that the recipient is busy must be taken into account and the message made just as brief as possible; the reader must be treated with respect and diplomatically brought around to see the relationship between *his* needs and *your* product.

But while the letter has these disadvantages, it possesses qualities that the salesman lacks. The letter, once it lies open before the man to whom you wish to talk, is your counterpart, speaking in your words just as you would talk to him if you were in his office or in his home. That is, the *right* letter. It reflects your personality and not that of some third person who may be working for a competitor next year.

The letter, if clearly written, will not misrepresent your proposition; its desire for a commission or for increased sales will not lead it to make exaggerated statements or unauthorized promises. The letter will reach the prospect just as it left your desk, with the same amount of enthusiasm and freshness. It will not be tired and sleepy because it had to catch a midnight train; it will not be out of sorts because of the poor coffee and the cold potatoes served at the Grand hotel for breakfast; it will not be peevish because it lost a big sale across the street; it will not be in a hurry to make the 11:30 local; it will not be discouraged because a competitor is making inroads into the territory.

You have the satisfaction of knowing that the letter is immune from these ills and weaknesses to which flesh is heir and will deliver your message faithfully, promptly, loyally. It will not have to resort to clever devices to get past the glass door, nor will it be told in frigid tones by the guard on watch to call some other day. The courtesy of the mail will take your letter to the proper authority. If it goes out in a dignified dress and presents its proposition concisely it is assured of a considerate hearing.

It will deliver its message just as readily to some Garcia in the mountains of Cuba as to the man in the next block. The salesman who makes a dozen calls a day is doing good work; letters can present your proposition to a hundred thousand prospects on the one forenoon. They can cover the same territory a week later and call again and again just as often as you desire. You cannot time the letter's call to the hour but you can make sure it reaches the prospect on the day of the week and the time of the month when he is most likely to give it consideration. You know exactly the kind of canvass every letter is making; you know that every call on the list is made.

The salesman must look well to his laurels if he hopes to compete successfully with the letter as a selling medium. Put the points of advantage in parallel columns and the letter has the best of it; consider, in addition, the item of expense and it is no wonder letters are becoming a greater factor in business.

The country over, there are comparatively few houses that appreciate the full possibilities of doing business by mail. Not many appreciate that certain basic principles underlie letter writing, applicable alike to the beginner who is just struggling to get a foothold and to the great mail-order house with its tons of mail daily. They are not mere theories; they are fundamental principles that have been put to the test, proved out in thousands of letters and on an infinite number of propositions.

The correspondent who is ambitious to do by mail what others do by person, must understand these principles and how to apply them. He must know the order and position of the essential elements; he must take account of the letter's impersonal character and make the most of its natural advantages.

Writing letters that pull is not intuition; it is an art that anyone can acquire. But this is the point: *it must be acquired*. It will not come to one without effort on his part. Fundamental principles must be understood; ways of presenting a proposition must be studied, various angles must be tried out; the effectiveness of appeals must be tested; new schemes for getting attention

and arousing interest must be devised; clear, concise description and explanation must come from continual practice; methods for getting the prospect to order now must be developed. It is not a game of chance; there is nothing mysterious about it—nothing impossible, it is solely a matter of study, hard work and the intelligent application of proved-up principles.

*Gathering MATERIAL And Picking  
Out TALKING Points*

### **PART I—PREPARING TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER 3**

Arguments—prices, styles, terms, quality or whatever they may be—are effective only when used on the right “prospect” at the right time. The correspondent who has some message of value to carry gathers together a mass of “raw material”—facts, figures and specifications on which to base his arguments—and then he selects the particular talking points that will appeal to his prospect. By systematic tests, the relative values of various arguments may be determined almost to a scientific nicety. How to gather and classify this material and how to determine what points are most effective is the subject in this chapter.

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An architect can sit down and design your house on paper, showing its exact proportions, the finish of every room, the location of every door and window. He can give specific instructions for building your house but before you can begin operations you have got to get together the brick and mortar and lumber—all the material used in its construction.

And so the correspondent-architect can point out the way to write a letter: how to begin, how to work up interest, how to present argument, how to introduce salesmanship, how to work in a clincher and how to close, but when you come to writing the letter that applies to your particular business you have first to gather the material. And just as you select cement or brick or lumber according to the kind of house you want to build, so the correspondent must gather the particular kind of material he wants for his letter, classify it and arrange it so that the best can be quickly selected.

The old school of correspondents—and there are many graduates still in business—write solely from their own viewpoint. Their letters are focused on “our goods,” “our interests” and “our profits.” But the new school of letter writers keep their own interests in the background. Their sole aim is to focus on the viewpoint of the reader; find the subjects in which he is interested, learn the arguments that will appeal to him, bear down on the persuasion that will induce him to act at once.

And so the successful correspondent should draw arguments and talking points from many sources; from the house, from the customer, from competitors, from the news of the day from his knowledge of human nature.

“What shall I do first?” asked a new salesman of the general manager.

“Sell yourself,” was the laconic reply, and every salesman and correspondent in the country could well afford to take this advice to heart.

Sell yourself; answer every objection that you can think of, test out the proposition from every conceivable angle; measure it by other similar products; learn its points of weakness and of superiority, know its possibilities and its limitations. Convince yourself; sell yourself, and then you will be able to sell others.

The first source of material for the correspondent is in the house itself. His knowledge must run back to the source of raw materials: the kinds of materials used, where they come from, the quality and the quantity required, the difficulties in obtaining them, the possibilities of a shortage, all the problems of mining or gathering the raw material and getting it from its source to the plant—a vast storehouse of talking points.

Then it is desirable to have a full knowledge of the processes of manufacture; the method of handling work in the factory, the labor saving appliances used, the new processes that have been perfected, the time required in turning out goods, the delays that are liable to occur—these are all pertinent and may furnish the strongest kind of selling arguments. And it is equally desirable to have inside knowledge of the methods in the sales department, in the receiving room and the shipping room. It is necessary for the correspondent to know the firm’s facilities for handling orders; when deliveries can be promised, what delays are liable to occur, how goods are packed, the condition in which they are received by the customer, the probable time required in reaching the customer.

Another nearby source of information is the status of the customer’s account; whether he is slow pay or a man who always discounts his bills. It

is a very important fact for the correspondent to know whether the records show an increasing business or a business that barely holds its own.

Then a most important source—by many considered the most valuable material of all—is the customer himself. It may be laid down as a general proposition that the more the correspondent knows about the man to whom he is writing, the better appeal he can make.

In the first place, he wants to know the size and character of the customer's business. He should know the customer's location, not merely as a name that goes on the envelope, but some pertinent facts regarding the state or section. If he can find out something regarding a customer's standing and his competition, it will help him to understand his problems.

Fortunate is the correspondent who knows something regarding the personal peculiarities of the man to whom he is writing. If he understands his hobbies, his cherished ambition, his home life, he can shape his appeal in a more personal way. It is comparatively easy to secure such information where salesmen are calling on the trade, and many large houses insist upon their representatives' making out very complete reports, giving a mass of detailed information that will be valuable to the correspondent.

Then there is a third source of material, scarcely less important than the study of the house and the customer, and that is a study of the competitors—other firms who are in the same line of business and going after the same trade. The broad-gauged correspondent never misses an opportunity to learn more about the goods of competing houses—the quality of their products, the extent of their lines, their facilities for handling orders, the satisfaction that their goods are giving, the terms on which they are sold and which managers are hustling and up to the minute in their methods.

The correspondent can also find information, inspiration and suggestion from the advertising methods of other concerns—not competitors but firms in a similar line.

Then there are various miscellaneous sources of information. The majority of correspondents study diligently the advertisements in general periodicals; new methods and ideas are seized upon and filed in the “morgue” for further reference.

Where a house travels a number of men, the sales department is an excellent place from which to draw talking points. Interviewing salesmen as they come in from trips and so getting direct information, brings out talking



points which are most helpful as are those secured by shorthand reports of salesmen's conventions.

Many firms get convincing arguments by the use of detailed forms asking for reports on the product. One follow-up writer gets valuable pointers from complaints which he terms "reverse" or "left-handed" talking points.

Some correspondents become adept in coupling up the news of the day with their products. A thousand and one different events may be given a twist to connect the reader's interest with the house products and supply a reason for "buying now." The fluctuation in prices of raw materials, drought, late seasons, railway rates, fires, bumper crops, political discussions, new inventions, scientific achievements—there is hardly a happening that the clever correspondent, hard pressed for new talking points, cannot work into a sales letter as a reason for interesting the reader in his goods.

\* \* \* \* \*

**SOURCES OF MATERIAL:**

/1. SOURCES

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/ 1. RAW MATERIALS --| 2. QUALITY
|                       | 3. SUPPLY
|                       \ 4. PRICE
|
|                       /1. CAPACITY OF
PLANT                   | PLANT
|                       | 2. NEW EQUIPMENT
| 2. PROCESSES OF --| 3. TIME SAVING
| MANUFACTURE       | DEVICES
|                       \ 4. IMPROVED METHODS

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/- 1. THE HOUSE-----|

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|                       | 1. METHODS OF
|                       | SALESMEN
| 3. KNOWLEDGE OF --| 2. POLICY OF
| DEPARTMENTS       | CREDIT DEPT.
|                       | 3. CONDITIONS IN
|                       | RECEIVING &
|                       \ SHIPPING DEPTS.
|
| 4. KNOWLEDGE OF

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		COSTS
		5. STATUS OF CUSTOMER'S ACCOUNT / 1. CREDIT STANDING \ 2. GROWING BUSINESS
		/ 1. OLD LETTERS   2. ADVERTISEMENTS
		6. DOCUMENTS \ 3. BOOKLETS, CIRCULARS, ETC. \ 4. TESTIMONIALS
		/ 1. ACQUAINTANCES   OF OFFICERS
		\ 7. PERSONNEL OF FIRM \ 2. INTERESTS & RELATIONS \ OF OFFICERS
		/ 1. CHARACTER OR - 2. THE CUSTOMERS--  KIND OF BUSINESS
		2. SIZE OF BUSINESS
		3. LENGTH OF TIME IN BUSINESS
SOURCES OF MATERIAL		4. LOCATION & LOCAL   CONDITIONS
		5. COMPETITION
		6. STANDING WITH CUSTOMERS
		7. METHODS & POLICIES
		8. HOBBIES & PERSONAL \ PECULIARITIES

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      / 1. QUALITY
    / 1. GOODS --| 2. EXTENT OF LINES
      \ 3. NEW LINES

      / 1. TERMS
    / 2. POLICIES --| 2. TREATMENT OF
      \ CUSTOMERS

- 3. COMPETITORS----| / 1. SIZE OF PLANT
      | 3. CAPACITY --| 2. EQUIPMENT
      | | 3. FACILITIES FOR
      | \ HANDLING ORDER

      / 1. NEW CAMPAIGNS
    / 4. METHODS --| 2. ADVERTISING
      \ 3. AGGRESSIVENESS

      / 1. METHODS
    / 4. OTHER METHODS--| 2. ADVERTISING
      (NOT |
      COMPETITORS) \ 3. SALES CAMPAIGNS

      / 1. METHODS
    / 1. SUPPLY HOUSES --\ 2. CAPACITY
      |
      | 2. GENERAL MARKET
    \ 5. MISCELLANEOUS--| CONDITIONS
      |
      | 3. CURRENT EVENTS
      |
      | 4. ADVERTISING IN
      \ GENERAL MAGAZINES

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Gathering the information is apt to be wasted effort unless it is classified and kept where it is instantly available. A notebook for ideas should always be at hand and men who write important sales letters should keep within

reach scrapbooks, folders or envelopes containing “inspirational” material to which they can readily refer.

The scrapbook, a card index or some such method for classifying and filing material is indispensable. Two or three pages or cards may be devoted to each general subject, such as raw material, processes of manufacture, methods of shipping, uses, improvements, testimonials, and so forth, and give specific information that is manna for the correspondent. The data may consist of notes he has written, bits of conversation he has heard, extracts from articles he has read, advertisements of other concerns and circulars—material picked up from a thousand sources.

One versatile writer uses heavy manila sheets about the size of a letterhead and on these he pastes the catch-lines, the unique phrases, the forceful arguments, the graphic descriptions and statistical information that he may want to use. Several sheets are filled with metaphors and figures of speech that he may want to use some time in illuminating a point. These sheets are more bulky than paper but are easier to handle than a scrapbook, and they can be set up in front of the writer while he is working.

Another correspondent has an office that looks as if it had been decorated with a crazy quilt. Whenever he finds a word, a sentence, a paragraph or a page that he wants to keep he pins or pastes it on the wall.

“I don’t want any systematic classification of this stuff,” he explains, “for in looking for the particular word or point that I want, I go over so many other words and points that I keep all the material fresh in my mind. No good points are buried in some forgotten scrapbook; I keep reading these things until they are as familiar to me as the alphabet.”

It may be very desirable to keep booklets, pamphlets and bulky matter that cannot be pasted into a book or onto separate sheets in manila folders. This is the most convenient way for classifying and filing heavy material. Or large envelopes may be used for this purpose.

Another favorite method of arrangement in filing talking points for reference is that of filing them in the order of their pulling

power. This, in many propositions, is considered the best method. It is not possible, out of a list of arguments to tell, until after the try-out always, which will pull and which will not. Those pulling best will be worked the most. Only as more extensive selling literature is called for will the weaker points be pressed into service.

No matter what system is used, it must be a growing system; it must be kept up to date by the addition of new material, picked up in the course of the day's work. Much material is gathered and saved that is never used, but the wise correspondent does not pass by an anecdote, a good simile, a clever appeal or forcible argument simply because he does not see at the moment how he can make use of it.

In all probability the time will come when that story or that figure of speech will just fit in to illustrate some point he is trying to make. Nor does the correspondent restrict his material to the subject in which he is directly interested, for ideas spring from many sources and the advertisement of some firm in an entirely different line may give him a suggestion or an inspiration that will enable him to work up an original talking point. And so it will be found that the sources of material are almost unlimited—limited in fact, only by the ability of the writer to see the significance of a story, a figure of speech or an item of news, and connect it up with his particular proposition.

But gathering and classifying material available for arguments is only preliminary work. A wide knowledge of human nature is necessary to select from these arguments those that will appeal to the particular prospect or class of prospects you are trying to reach.

“When you sit down to write an important letter, how do you pick out your talking points?”

This question was put to a man whose letters have been largely responsible for an enormous mail-order business.

“The first thing I do,” he replied, “is to wipe my pen and put the cork in the ink bottle.”

His answer summarizes everything that can be said about selecting talking points: before you start to write, study the proposition, picture in your mind the man to whom you are writing, get his viewpoint, pick out the arguments that will appeal to him and then write your letter to that individual.

The trouble with most letters is that they are not aimed carefully, the writer does not try to find the range but blazes away in hopes that some of the shots will take effect.

There are a hundred things that might be said about this commodity that you want to market. It requires a knowledge of human nature, and of salesmanship to single out the particular arguments and the inducement that will carry most weight with the individual to whom you are writing.

For even if you are preparing a form letter it will be most effective if it is written directly at some individual who most nearly represents the conditions, the circumstances and the needs of the class you are trying to reach.

Only the new correspondent selects the arguments that are nearest at hand—the viewpoints that appeal to him. The high score letter writers look to outside sources for their talking points. One of the most fruitful sources of information is the men who have bought your goods. The features that induced them to buy your product, the things that they talk about are the very things that will induce others to buy that same product. Find out what pleases the man who is using your goods and you may be sure that this same feature will appeal to the prospect.

It is equally desirable to get information from the man who did not buy your machine—learn his reasons, find out what objections he has against it; where, in his estimation, it fell short of his requirements; for it is reasonably certain that other prospects will raise the same objections and it is a test of good salesmanship to anticipate criticisms and present arguments that will forestall such objections.

In every office there should be valuable evidence in the files—advertisements, letters, circulars, folders and other publicity matter that has been used in past campaigns. In the most progressive business houses, every campaign is thoroughly tested out; arguments, schemes, and talking points are proved up on test lists, the law of averages enabling the correspondent to tell with mathematical accuracy the pulling power of every argument he has ever used. The record of tests; the letters that have fallen down and the letters that have pulled, afford information that is invaluable in planning new campaigns. The arguments and appeals that have proved successful in the past can be utilized over and over again on new lists or given a new setting and used on old lists.

The time has passed when a full volley is fired before the ammunition is tested and the range found. The capable letter writer tests out his arguments and proves the strength of his talking points without wasting a big appropriation. His letters are tested as accurately as the chemist in his laboratory tests the strength or purity of material that is submitted to him for analysis. How letters are keyed and tested is the subject of another chapter.

No matter what kind of a letter you are writing, keep this fact in mind: never use an argument on the reader that does not appeal to you, the writer.

Know your subject; know your goods from the source of the raw material to the delivery of the finished product. And then in selling them, pick out the arguments that will appeal to the reader; look at the proposition through the eyes of the prospect; sell yourself the order first and you will have found the talking points that will sell the prospect.

When You Sit Down To  
WRITE

#### PART I—PREPARING TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER 4

The weakness of most letters is not due to ungrammatical sentences or to a poor style, but to a wrong viewpoint: the writer presents a proposition from his own viewpoint instead of that of the reader.

The correspondent has gone far towards success when he can VISUALIZE his prospect, see his environments, his needs, his ambitions, and APPROACH the PROSPECT from THIS ANGLE. This chapter tells how to get the class idea; how to see the man to whom you are writing and that equally important qualification, how to get into the mood for writing—actual methods used by effective correspondents

\* \* \* \* \*

When you call on another person or meet him in a business transaction you naturally have in mind a definite idea of what you want to accomplish. That is, if you expect to carry your point. You know that this end cannot be reached except by a presentation which will put your proposition in such a favorable light, or offer such an inducement, or so mould the minds of others to your way of thinking that they will agree with you. And so before you meet the other person you proceed to plan your campaign, your talk, your attitude to fit his personality and the conditions under which you expect to meet.

An advertising man in an eastern mining town was commissioned to write a series of letters to miners, urging upon them the value of training in a night school about to be opened. Now he knew all about the courses the school

would offer and he was strong on generalities as to the value of education. But try as he would, the letters refused to take shape. Then suddenly he asked himself, "What type of man am I really trying to reach?"

And there lay the trouble. He had never met a miner face to face in his life. As soon as he realized this he reached for his hat and struck out for the nearest coal breaker. He put in two solid days talking with miners, getting a line on the average of intelligence, their needs—the point of contact. Then he came back and with a vivid picture of his man in mind, he produced a series of letters that glowed with enthusiasm and sold the course.

A number of years ago a printer owning a small shop in an Ohio city set out to find a dryer that would enable him to handle his work faster and without the costly process of "smut-sheeting." He interested a local druggist who was something of a chemist and together they perfected a dryer that was quite satisfactory and the printer decided to market his product. He wrote fifteen letters to acquaintances and sold eleven of them. Encouraged, he got out one hundred letters and sold sixty-four orders. On the strength of this showing, his banker backed him for the cost of a hundred thousand letters and fifty-eight thousand orders were the result.

The banker was interested in a large land company and believing the printer must be a veritable wizard in writing letters, made him an attractive offer to take charge of the advertising for the company's Minnesota and Canada lands.

The man sold his business, accepted the position—and made a signal failure. He appealed to the printers because he knew their problems—the things that lost them money, the troubles that caused them sleepless nights—and in a letter that bristled with shop talk he went straight to the point, told how he could help them out of at least one difficulty—and sold his product.

But when it came to selling western land he was out of his element. He had never been a hundred miles away from his home town; he had never owned a foot of real estate; "land hunger" was to him nothing but a phrase; the opportunities of a "new country" were to him academic arguments—they were not realities.

He lost his job. Discouraged but determined, he moved to Kansas where he started a small paper—and began to study the real estate business. One question was forever on his lips: "Why did you move out here?" And to prospective purchasers, "Why do you want to buy Kansas land? What attracts you?"



Month after month he asked these questions of pioneers and immigrants. He wanted their viewpoint, the real motive that drove them westward. Then he took in a partner, turned the paper over to him and devoted his time to the real estate business. Today he is at the head of a great land company and through his letters and his advertising matter he has sold hundreds of thousands of acres to people who have never seen the land. But he tells them the things they want to know; he uses the arguments that “get under the skin.”

He spent years in preparing to write his letters and bought and sold land with prospects “face to face” long before he attempted to deal with them by letter. He talked and thought and studied for months before he dipped his pen into ink.

Now before he starts a letter, he calls to mind someone to whom he has sold a similar tract in the past; he remembers how each argument was received; what appeals struck home and then, in his letter, he talks to that man just as earnestly as if his future happiness depended upon making the one sale.

The preparation to write the letter should be two-fold: knowing your product or proposition and knowing the man you want to reach. You have got to see the proposition through the eyes of your prospect. The printer sold his ink dryer because he looked at it from the angle of the buyer and later he sold real estate, but not until he covered up his own interest and presented the proposition from the viewpoint of the prospect.

Probably most successful letter writers, when they sit down to write, consciously or unconsciously run back over faces and characteristics of friends and acquaintances until they find someone who typifies the class they desire to reach. When writing to women, one man always directs his appeal to his mother or sister; if trying to interest young men he turns his mind back to his own early desires and ambitions.

Visualize your prospect. Fix firmly in your mind some one who represents the class you are trying to reach; forget that there is any other prospect in the whole world; concentrate your attention and selling talk on this one individual.

“If you are going to write letters that pull,” says one successful correspondent, “you have got to be a regular spiritualist in order to materialize the person to whom you are writing; bring him into your office and talk to him face to face.”

“The first firm I ever worked for,” he relates, “was Andrew Campbell & Son. The senior Campbell was a conservative old Scotchman who had made a

success in business by going cautiously and thoroughly into everything he took up. The only thing that would appeal to him would be a proposition that could be presented logically and with the strongest kind of arguments to back it up. The son, on the other hand, was thoroughly American; ready to take a chance, inclined to plunge and try out a new proposition because it was new or unique; the novelty of a thing appealed to him and he was interested because it was out of the ordinary.

“Whenever I have an important letter to write, I keep these two men in mind and I center all my efforts to convince them; using practical, commonsense arguments to convince the father, and enough snappy ‘try-it-for-yourself’ talk to win the young man.”

According to this correspondent, every firm in a measure represents these two forces, conservative and radical, and the strongest letter is the one that makes an appeal to both elements.

A young man who had made a success in selling books by mail was offered double the salary to take charge of the publicity department of a mail-order clothing house. He agreed to accept—two months later. Reluctantly the firm consented.

The firm saw or heard nothing from him until he reported for work. He had been shrewd enough not to make the mistake of the printer who tried to sell land and so he went to a small town in northern Iowa where a relative owned a clothing store and started in as a clerk. After a month he jumped to another store in southern Minnesota. At each place—typical country towns—he studied the trade and when not waiting on customers busied himself near some other clerk so he could hear the conversation, find out the things the farmers and small town men looked for in clothes and learn the talking points that actually sell the goods.

This man who had a position paying \$6,000 a year waiting for him spent two months at \$9 a week preparing to write. A more conceited chap would have called it a waste of time, but this man thought that he could well afford to spend eight weeks and sacrifice nearly a thousand dollars learning to write letters and advertisements that would sell clothes by mail.

At the end of the year he was given a raise that more than made up his loss. Nor is he content, for every year he spends a few weeks behind the counter in some small town, getting the viewpoint of the people with whom he deals, finding a point of contact, getting local color and becoming familiar with the manner of speech and the arguments that will get orders.

When he sits down to write a letter or an advertisement he has a vivid mental picture of the man he wants to interest; he knows that man's process of thinking, the thing that appeals to him, the arguments that will reach right down to his pocket-book.

A man who sells automatic scales to grocers keeps before him the image of a small dealer in his home town. The merchant had fallen into the rut, the dust was getting thicker on his dingy counters and trade was slipping away to more modern stores.

"Mother used to send me on errands to that store when I was a boy," relates the correspondent, "and I had been in touch with it for twenty years. I knew the local conditions; the growth of competition that was grinding out the dealer's life.

"I determined to sell him and every week he received a letter from the house—he did not know of my connection with it—and each letter dealt with some particular problem that I knew he had to face. I kept this up for six months without calling forth a response of any kind; but after the twenty-sixth letter had gone out, the manager came in one day with an order—and the cash accompanied it. The dealer admitted that it was the first time he had ever bought anything of the kind by mail. But I knew *his* problems, and I connected them up with our scales in such a way that he *had* to buy.

"Those twenty-six letters form the basis for all my selling arguments, for in every town in the country there are merchants in this same rut, facing the same competition, and they can be reached only by connecting their problems with our scales."

No matter what your line may be, you have got to use some such method if you are going to make your letters pull the orders. Materialize your prospect; overcome every objection and connect *their* problems with *your* products.

When you sit down to your desk to write a letter, how do you get into the right mood? Some, like mediums, actually work themselves into a sort of trance before starting to write. One man insists that he writes good letters only when he gets mad—which is his way of generating nervous energy.

Others go about it very methodically and chart out the letter, point by point. They analyze the proposition and out of all the possible arguments and appeals, carefully select those that their experience and judgment indicate will appeal strongest to the individual whom they are addressing. On a

sheet of paper one man jots down the arguments that may be used and by a process of elimination, scratches off one after another until he has left only the ones most likely to reach his prospect.

Many correspondents keep within easy reach a folder or scrapbook of particularly inspiring letters, advertisements and other matter gathered from many sources. One man declares that no matter how dull he may feel when he reaches the office in the morning he can read over a few pages in his scrapbook and gradually feel his mind clear; his enthusiasm begins to rise and within a half hour he is keyed up to the writing mood.

A correspondent in a large mail-order house keeps a scrapbook of pictures—a portfolio of views of rural life and life in small towns. He subscribes to the best farm papers and clips out pictures that are typical of rural life, especially those that represent types and show activities of the farm, the furnishings of the average farm house—anything that will make clearer the environment of the men and women who buy his goods. When he sits down to write a letter he looks through this book until he finds some picture that typifies the man who needs the particular article he wants to sell and then he writes to that man, keeping the picture before him, trying to shape every sentence to impress such a person. Other correspondents are at a loss to understand the pulling power of his letters.

A sales manager in a typewriter house keeps the managers of a score of branch offices and several hundred salesmen gingered up by his weekly letters. He prepares to write these letters by walking through the factory, where he finds inspiration in the roar of machinery, the activity of production, the atmosphere of actual creative work.

There are many sources of inspiration. Study your temperament, your work and your customers to find out under what conditions your production is the easiest and greatest. It is neither necessary nor wise to write letters when energies and interest are at a low ebb, when it is comparatively easy to stimulate the lagging enthusiasm and increase your power to write letters that bring results.

How To *Begin* A BUSINESS  
Letter

## PART II—HOW TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER 5

\_From its salutation to its signature a business letter must hold the interest of the reader or fail in its purpose. The most important sentence in it is obviously the\_ FIRST \_one, for upon it depends whether the reader will dip further into the letter or discard it into the waste basket\_. IN THAT FIRST SENTENCE THE WRITER HAS HIS

CHANCE. \_If he is really capable, he will not only attract the reader's interest in that first sentence, but put him into a receptive mood for the message that follows. Here are some sample ways of "opening" a business letter\_

\* \* \* \* \*

No matter how large your tomorrow morning's mail, it is probable that you will glance through the first paragraph of every letter you open. If it catches your attention by reference to something in which you are interested, or by a clever allusion or a striking head line or some original style, it is probable you will read at least the next paragraph or two. But if these paragraphs do not keep up your interest the letter will be passed by unfinished. If you fail to give the letter a full reading the writer has only himself to blame. He has not taken advantage of his opportunity to carry your interest along and develop it until he has driven his message home, point by point.

In opening the letter the importance of the salutation must not be ignored. If a form letter from some one who does not know Mr. Brown, personally, starts out "Dear Mr. Brown," he is annoyed. A man with self-respect resents familiarity from a total stranger—someone who has no interest in him except as a possible customer for his commodity.

If a clerk should address a customer in such a familiar manner it would be looked upon as an insult. Yet it is no uncommon thing to receive letters from strangers that start out with one of these salutations:

"Dear Benson:"

"My dear Mr. Benson:"

"Respected Friend:"

"Dear Brother:"

While it is desirable to get close to the reader; and you want to talk to him in a very frank manner and find a point of personal contact, this assumption

of friendship with a total stranger disgusts a man before he begins your letter. You start out with a handicap that is hard to overcome, and an examination of a large number of letters using such salutations are enough to create suspicion for all; too often they introduce some questionable investment proposition or scheme that would never appeal to the hard-headed, conservative business man.

“Dear Sir” or “Gentlemen” is the accepted salutation, at least until long correspondence and cordial relations justify a more intimate greeting. The ideal opening, of course, strikes a happy medium between too great formality on the one hand and a cringing servility or undue familiarity on the other hand.

No one will dispute the statement that the reason so many selling campaigns fail is not because of a lack of merit in the propositions themselves but because they are not effectively presented.

For most business men read their letters in a receptive state of mind. The letterhead may show that the message concerns a duplicating machine and the one to whom it is addressed may feel confident in his own mind that he does not want a duplicating machine. At the same time he is willing to read the letter, for it may give him some new idea, some practical suggestion as to how such a device would be a good investment and make money for him. He is anxious to learn how the machine may be related to his particular problems. But it is not likely that he has time or sufficient interest to wade through a long letter starting out:

“We take pleasure in sending you under separate cover catalogue of our latest models of Print-Quicks, and we are sure it will prove of interest to you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The man who has been sufficiently interested in an advertisement to send for a catalogue finds his interest cooling rapidly when he picks up a letter that starts out like this:

“We have your valued inquiry of recent date, and we take pleasure in acknowledging,” and so forth.

\* \* \* \* \*

Suppose the letter replying to his inquiry starts out in this style:

“The picture on page 5 of our catalogue is a pretty fair one, but I wish you could see the desk itself.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The reader’s attention is immediately gripped and he reaches for the catalogue to look at the picture on page five.

To get attention and arouse interest, avoid long-spun introductions and hackneyed expressions. Rambling sentences and loose paragraphs have proved the graveyard for many excellent propositions. Time-worn expressions and weather-beaten phrases are poor conductors, there, is too much resistance-loss in the current of the reader’s interest.

The best way to secure attention naturally depends upon the nature of the proposition and the class of men to whom the letter is written.

One of the most familiar methods is that known to correspondents as the “mental shock.” The idea is to put at the top of the letter a “Stop! Look! Listen!” sign. Examples of this style are plentiful:

**THIS MEANS MONEY TO YOU--\_BIG MONEY\_  
LET ME PAY YOUR NEXT MONTH’S RENT  
READ IT—ON OUR WORD IT’S WORTH READING  
STOP SHOVELING YOUR MONEY INTO THE FURNACE  
NOW LISTEN! I WANT A PERSONAL WORD WITH YOU  
CUT YOUR LIGHT BILL IN HALF**

\* \* \* \* \*

Such introductions have undoubtedly proved exceedingly effective at times, but like many other good things, the idea has been overworked. The catch-line of itself sells no goods and to be effective it must be followed by trip-hammer arguments. Interest created in this way is hard to keep up.

The correspondent may use a catch-line, just as the barker at a side show uses a megaphone—the noise attracts a crowd but it does not sell the tickets. It is the “spiel” the barker gives that packs the tent. And so the

average man is not influenced so much by a bold catch-line in his letters as by the paragraphs that follow. Some correspondents even run a catch-line in red ink at the top of the page, but these yellow journal “scare-heads” fall short with the average business proposition.

Then attention may be secured, not by a startling sentence but by the graphic way in which a proposition is stated. Here is an opening that starts out with a clear-cut swing:

“If we were to offer you a hundred-dollar bill as a gift we take it for granted that you would be interested. If, then, our goods will mean to you many times that sum every year isn’t the proposition still more interesting? Do you not want us to demonstrate what we say? Are you not willing to invest a little of your time watching this demonstration?”

\* \* \* \* \*

This reference to a hundred-dollar bill creates a concrete image in the mind of the reader. The letters that first used this attention-getter proved so effective that the idea has been worked over in many forms. Here is the effective way one correspondent starts out:

“If this letter were printed on ten-dollar bills it could scarcely be more valuable to you than the offer it now contains. You want money; we want your business. Let’s go into partnership.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Here is a letter sent out by a manufacturer of printing presses:

“If your press feeders always showed up on Monday morning; if they were never late, never got tired, never became careless, never grumbled about working overtime, you would increase the output of your plant, have less trouble, make more money—that is why you will be interested in the Speedwell Automatic feeding attachment.”

\* \* \* \* \*



This paragraph summarizes many of the troubles of the employing printer. It “gets under his skin,” it is graphic, depicting one of the greatest problems of his business and so he is certain to read the letter and learn more about the solution that it offers.

This same paragraph might also be used as a good illustration of that effective attention-getter, the quick appeal to the problems that are of most concern to the reader. The one great trouble with the majority of letters is that they start out with “we” and from first to last have a selfish viewpoint:

“We have your valued inquiry of recent date and, as per your request, we take pleasure in enclosing herewith a copy of our latest catalogue,” and so forth.

\* \* \* \* \*

Don’t begin by talking about yourself, your company, your business, your growth, your progress, your improved machinery, your increased circulation, your newly invested capital. The reader has not the faintest interest in you or your business until he can see some connection between it and his own welfare. By itself it makes no play whatever to his attention; it must first be coupled up with his problems and his needs.

Begin by talking about him, his company, his business, his progress, his troubles, his disappointments, his needs, his ambition.

That is where he lives day and night. Knock at that door and you will find him at home. Touch upon some vital need in his business— some defect or tangle that is worrying him—some weak spot that he wants to remedy—some cherished ambition that haunts him—and you will have rung the bell of his interest. A few openings that are designed to get the reader’s attention and induce him to read farther, are shown here:

“Your letter reached me at a very opportune time as I have been looking for a representative in your territory.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“By using this code you can telegraph us for any special article you want and it will be delivered at your store the following morning. This will enable

you to compete with the large mail-order houses. It will give you a service that will mean more business and satisfied customers.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“You can save the wages of one salesman in every department of your store. Just as you save money by using a typewriter, addressograph, adding machine, cash register and other modern equipments, so you can save it by installing a Simplex.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Don’t you want to know how to add two thousand square feet of display to some department of your store in exchange for twenty feet of wall?”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Yes, there is a mighty good opening in your territory for hustling salesmen. You will receive a complete outfit by express so you can start at once.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Keep the interest of the reader in mind. No matter how busy he is, he will find time to read your letter if you talk about his problems and his welfare.

Some correspondents, having taken only the first lesson in business letter writing, over-shoot the mark with a lot of “hot air” that is all too apparent. Here is the opening paragraph from one of these writers:

“By the concise and business-like character of your letter of inquiry we know that you would be very successful in the sale of our typewriters. This personal and confidential circular letter is sent only to a few of our selected correspondents whom we believe can be placed as general agents.”

\* \* \* \* \*

As a matter of fact, the gentleman to whom this letter was sent had written with a lead pencil on a post card asking for further particulars regarding propositions to salesmen. It is a good illustration of the form letter gone wrong. The inquirer had not written a concise and business-like letter and there was not the slightest reason why the firm should send him a personal and confidential proposition and if the proposition were really confidential, it would not be printed in a circular letter.

Here is the opening paragraph of a letter typical in its lack of originality and attention-getting qualities:

“We are in receipt of yours of recent date and in reply wish to state that you will find under separate cover a copy of our latest catalogue, illustrating and describing our Wonder Lighting System. We are sure the information contained in this catalogue will be of interest to you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Not only is the paragraph devoid of interest-getting features, but it is written from the wrong standpoint—“we” instead of “you.”

Re-write the paragraph and the reader is certain to have his interest stimulated:

“The catalogue is too large to enclose with this letter and so you will find it in another envelope. You will find on page 4 a complete description of the Wonder System of Lighting, explaining just how it will cut down your light bill. This system is adapted to use in stores, factories, public halls and homes—no matter what you want you will find it listed in this catalogue.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Then it is possible to secure attention by some familiar allusion, some reference to facts with which the reader is familiar:

“In our fathers’ day, you know, all fine tableware was hand forged—that meant quality but high cost.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The opening statement secures the assent of the reader even before he knows what the proposition is. Sometimes an allusion may be introduced that does not come home so pointedly to the reader but the originality of the idea appeals to him. By its very cleverness he is led to read further. Here is the beginning of a letter sent out by an advertising man and commercial letter writer:

“The Prodigal Son might have started home much sooner had he received an interesting letter about the fatted calf that awaited his coming.

“The right sort of a letter would have attracted his attention, aroused his interest, created a desire and stimulated him to action.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Then there is the opening that starts out with an appeal to human interest. It is the one opening where the writer can talk about himself and still get attention and work up interest:

“Let me tell you how I got into the mail order business and made so much money out of it.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“I wish I could have had the opportunity thirty years ago that you have today. Did I ever tell you how I started out?”

\* \* \* \* \*

“I have been successful because I have confidence in other people.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“I was talking to Mr. Phillips, the president of our institution, this morning, and he told me that you had written to us concerning our correspondence course.”

\* \* \* \* \*

These personal touches bring the writer and reader close together and pave the way for a man-to-man talk.

Then there is a way of getting attention by some novel idea, something unusual in the typography of the letter, some unusual idea. One mail-order man puts these two lines written with a typewriter across the top of his letterheads:

“EVEN IF YOU HAD TO PAY TO SECURE A COPY OF THIS LETTER—  
OR HAD TO  
TAKE A DAY OFF TO READ IT—YOU COULD NOT AFFORD TO FAIL  
TO CONSIDER  
IT.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Few men would receive a letter like that without taking the time to read it, at least hurriedly, and if the rest of the argument is presented with equal force the message is almost sure to be carried home.

Another mail-order house sending out form letters under one-cent postage, inserts this sentence directly under the date line, to the right of the name and address:

“Leaving our letter unsealed for postal inspection is the best proof that our goods are exactly as represented.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The originality of the idea impresses one. There is no danger that the letter will be shunted into the waste basket without a reading.

There are times when it is necessary to disarm the resentment of the reader in the very first paragraph, as, for instance, when there has been a delay in replying to a letter. An opening that is all too common reads:

“I have been so extremely busy that your letter has not received my attention.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Or the writer may be undiplomatic enough to say:

“Pardon delay. I have been so much engaged with other matters that I have not found time to write you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The considerate correspondent is always careful that his opening does not rub the wrong way. One writer starts out by saying:

“You have certainly been very patient with me in the matter of your order and I wish to thank you for this.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Here are the first five paragraphs of a two-page letter from an investment firm. The length of the letter is greatly against it and the only hope the writer could have, would be in getting the attention firmly in the opening paragraph:

“My dear Mr. Wilson:

“I want to have a personal word with you to explain this matter.

“I don’t like to rush things; I believe in taking my time. I always try to do it. I want you to do the same thing, but there are exceptions to all rules: sometimes we cannot do things just the way we want to and at the same time reap all the benefits.

“Here is the situation. I went out to the OIL FIELDS OF CALIFORNIA

and while there I DID DEVOTE PLENTY AND AMPLE TIME TO PROPER INVESTIGATION. I went into the thing thoroughly. I went there intending to INVEST MY OWN MONEY if I found things right.

“My main object in leaving for California was to INVESTIGATE FOR MY CLIENTS, but I would not advise my clients to invest THEIR money unless the situation was such that I would invest MY OWN money. That’s where I stand—first, last and all the time.

“I don’t go into the torrid deserts in the heat of the summer and stay there for weeks just for fun. There is no fun or pleasure to it, let me tell you. It’s hard work when one investigates properly, and I surely did it right. I guess you know that.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The letter is not lacking in style; the writer knows how to put things forcibly, but he takes up half a page of valuable space before he says anything vital to his subject. See how much stronger his letter would have been had he started with the fifth paragraph, following it with the fourth paragraph.

The great weakness in many letters is padding out the introduction with non-essential material. It takes the writer too long to get down to his proposition. Here is a letter from a concern seeking to interest agents:

“We are in receipt of your valued inquiry and we enclose herewith full information in regard to the E. Z. Washing Compound and our terms to agents.

“We shall be pleased to mail you a washing sample post-paid on receipt of four cents in two-cent stamps or a full size can for ten cents, which amount you may subtract from your first order, thus getting the sample free. We would like to send you a sample without requiring any deposit but we have been so widely imposed upon by ‘sample grafters’ in the past that we can no longer afford to do this.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The first paragraph is hackneyed and written from the standpoint of the writer rather than that of the reader. The second paragraph is a joke. Seven

lines, lines that ought to be charged with magnetic, interest-getting statements, are devoted to explaining why ten cents' worth of samples are not sent free, but that this "investment" will be deducted from the first order. What is the use of saving a ten-cent sample if you lose the interest of a possible agent, whose smallest sales would amount to several times this sum?

It is useless to spend time and thought in presenting your proposition and working in a clincher unless you get attention and stimulate the reader's interest in the beginning. Practically everyone will read your opening paragraph—whether he reads further will depend upon those first sentences.

Do not deceive yourself by thinking that because your proposition is interesting to you, it will naturally be interesting to others. Do not put all your thought on argument and inducements—the man to whom you are writing may never read that far.

Lead up to your proposition from the reader's point of view; couple up your goods with his needs; show him where he will benefit and he will read your letter through to the postscript. Get his attention and arouse his interest—then you are ready to present your proposition.

How To *Present* Your  
PROPOSITION

## PART II—HOW TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER 6

*\_*After attention has been secured, you must lead quickly to your description and explanation; visualize your product and introduce your proof, following this up with arguments. The art of the letter writer is found in his ability to lead the reader along, paragraph by paragraph, without a break in the *\_ POINT of CONTACT \_* that has been established. Then the proposition must be presented so clearly that there is no possibility of its being misunderstood, and the product or the service must be coupled up with the *\_ READER'S NEEDS*  
*How this can be done is described in this chapter*

\* \* \* \* \*



After you have attracted attention and stimulated the interest of the reader, you have made a good beginning, but only a beginning; you then have the hard task of holding that interest, explaining your proposition, pointing out the superiority of the goods or the service that you are trying to sell and making an inducement that will bring in the orders. Your case is in court, the jury has been drawn, the judge is attentive and the opposing counsel is alert—it is up to you to prove your case.

Good business letter, consciously or unconsciously usually contains four elements: description, explanation, argument and persuasion. These factors may pass under different names, but they are present and most correspondents will include two other elements—inducement and clincher.

In this chapter we will consider description, explanation and argument as the vehicles one may use in carrying his message to the reader.

An essential part of all sales letters is a clear description of the article or goods—give the prospect a graphic idea of how the thing you are trying to sell him looks, and this description should follow closely after the interest-getting introduction. To describe an article graphically one has got to know it thoroughly: the material of which it is made; the processes of manufacture; how it is sold and shipped—every detail about it.

There are two extremes to which correspondents frequently go. One makes the description too technical, using language and terms that are only partially understood by the reader. He does not appreciate that the man to whom he is writing may not understand the technical or colloquial language that is so familiar to everyone in the house.

For instance, if a man wants to install an electric fan in his office, it would be the height of folly to write him a letter filled with technical descriptions about the quality of the fan, the magnetic density of the iron that is used, the quality of the insulation, the kilowatts consumed—“talking points” that would be lost on the average business man. The letter that would sell him would give specific, but not technical information, about how the speed of the fan is easily regulated, that it needs to be oiled but once a year, and costs so much a month to operate. These are the things in which the prospective customer is interested.

Then there is the correspondent whose descriptions are too vague; too general—little more than bald assertions. A letter from a vacuum cleaner manufacturing company trying to interest agents is filled with such statements as: “This is the best hand power machine ever manufactured,” “It

is the greatest seller ever produced,” “It sells instantly upon demonstration.” No one believes such exaggerations as these. Near the end of the letter—where the writer should be putting in his clincher, there is a little specific information stating that the device weighs only five pounds, is made of good material and can be operated by a child. If this paragraph had followed quickly after the introduction and had gone into further details, the prospect might have been interested, but it is probable that the majority of those who received the letter never read as far as the bottom of the second page.

If a man is sufficiently interested in a product to write for catalogue and information, or if you have succeeded in getting his attention in the opening paragraph of a sales letter, he is certain to read a description that is specific and definite.

The average man thinks of a work bench as a work bench and would be at a loss to describe one, but he has a different conception after reading these paragraphs from a manufacturer’s letter:

“Just a word so you will understand the superiority of our goods.

“Our benches are built principally of maple, the very best Michigan hard maple, and we carry this timber in our yards in upwards of a million feet at a time. It is piled up and allowed to air dry for at least two years before being used; then the stock is kiln dried to make sure that the lumber is absolutely without moisture or sap, and we know there can be no warping or opening of glue joints in the finished product.

“Our machinery is electrically driven, securing an even drive to the belt, thus getting the best work from all equipment—absolutely true cuts that give perfect joints to all work.

“Then, as to glue: Some manufacturers contend that any glue that sticks will do. We insist there should be no question about glue joints; no ‘perhaps’ in our argument. That’s why we use only the best by test; not merely sticking two pieces of wood together to try the joint quality, but glue that is scientifically tested for tenacity, viscosity, absorption, and for acid or coloring matter—in short, every test that can be applied.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This description is neither too technical nor too general; it carries conviction, it is specific enough to appeal to a master carpenter, and it is

clear enough to be understood by the layman who never handled a saw or planer.

It may be laid down as a principle that long description should ordinarily be made in circulars, folders or catalogues that are enclosed with the letter or sent in a separate envelope, but sometimes it is desirable to emphasize certain points in the letter. Happy is the man who can eject enough originality into this description to make it easy reading. The majority of correspondents, in describing the parts of an automobile, would say:

“The celebrated Imperial Wheel Bearings are used, These do not need to be oiled oftener than once in six months.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A correspondent who knew how to throw light into dark places said:

“Imperial Wheel Bearings: grease twice a year and forget.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This “and forget” is such a clever stroke that you are carried on through the rest of the letter, and you are not bored with the figures and detailed description.

In a similar way a sales manager, in writing the advertising matter for a motor cycle, leads up to his description of the motor and its capacity by the brief statement: “No limit to speed but the law.” This is a friction clutch on the imagination that carries the reader’s interest to the end.

One writer avoids bringing technical descriptions into his letters, at the same time carrying conviction as to the quality of his goods:

“This metal has been subjected to severe accelerated corrosion tests held in accordance with rigid specifications laid down by the American Society for Testing Material, and has proven to corrode much less than either charcoal iron, wrought iron, or steel sheet.

“A complete record of these tests and results will be found on the enclosed sheet.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Then there are times when description may be almost entirely eliminated from the letter. For instance, if you are trying to sell a man a house and lot and he has been out to look at the place and has gone over it thoroughly, there is little more that you can say in the way of description. Your letter must deal entirely with arguments as to why he should buy now—persuasion, inducement. Or, if you are trying to sell him the typewriter that he has been trying out in his office for a month, description is unnecessary—the load your letter must carry is lightened. And there are letters in which explanation is unnecessary. If you are trying to get a man to order a suit of clothes by mail, you will not explain the use of clothes but you will bear down heavily on the description of the material that you put into these particular garments and point out why it is to his advantage to order direct of the manufacturers.

But if you are presenting a new proposition, it is necessary to explain its nature, its workings, its principles and appliances. If you are trying to sell a fountain pen you will not waste valuable space in explaining to the reader what a fountain pen is good for and why he should have one, but rather you will give the reasons for buying your particular pen in preference to others. You will explain the self-filling feature and the new patent which prevents its leaking or clogging.

It is not always possible to separate description and explanation. Here is an illustration taken from a letter sent out by a mail-order shoe company:

“I hope your delay in ordering is not the result of any lack of clear information about Wearwells. Let me briefly mention some of the features of Wearwell shoes that I believe warrant you in favoring us with your order:

- (A) Genuine custom style;
- (B) Highest grade material and workmanship;
- (C) The best fit—thanks to our quarter-sized system—that it is possible to obtain in shoes;
- (D) Thorough foot comfort and long wear;
- (E) Our perfect mail-order service; and
- (F) The guaranteed PROOF OF QUALITY given in the specification tag sent with every pair.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This is a concise summary of a longer description that had been given in a previous letter and it explains why the shoes will give satisfaction.

Here is the paragraph by which the manufacturer of a time-recording device, writing about the advantages of his system puts in explanation plus argument:

“Every employee keeps his own time and cannot question his own record. All mechanism is hidden and locked. Nothing can be tampered with. The clock cannot be stopped. The record cannot be beaten.

“This device fits into any cost system and gives an accurate record of what time every man puts on every job. It serves the double purpose of furnishing you a correct time-on-job cost and prevents loafing. It stops costly leaks and enables you to figure profit to the last penny.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Explanation may run in one of many channels. It may point out how the careful selection of raw material makes your product the best, or how the unusual facilities of your factory or the skill of your workmen, or the system of testing the parts assures the greatest value. You might explain why the particular improvements and the patents on your machines make it better or give it greater capacity. The description and the explanation must of necessity depend upon the character of the proposition, but it may be laid down as a general principle that the prospect must be made to understand thoroughly just what the article is for, how it is made, how it looks, how it is used, and what its points of superiority are. Whenever possible, the description and explanation in the letter should be reinforced by samples or illustrations that will give a more graphic idea of the product.

The prospect may be sufficiently familiar with the thing you are selling to relieve you of the necessity of describing and explaining, although usually these supports are necessary for a selling campaign. But it must be remembered that description and explanation alone do not make a strong appeal to the will. They may arouse interest and excite desire but they do not carry conviction as argument does. Some letters are full of explanation and description but lack argument. The repair man from the factory may give a good explanation of how a machine works, but the chances are he would fall down in trying to sell the machine, unless he understood how to

reinforce his explanations with a salesman's ability to use argument and persuasion.

And so you must look well to your arguments, and the arguments that actually pull the most orders consist of proofs—cold, hard logic and facts that cannot be questioned. As you hope for the verdict of the jury you must prove your case. It is amazing how many correspondents fail to appreciate the necessity for arguments. Pages will be filled with assertions, superlative adjectives, boastful claims of superiority, but not one sentence that offers proof of any statement, not one logical reason why the reader should be interested.

“We know you will make a mint of money if you put in our goods.” “This is the largest and most complete line in the country.” “Our factory has doubled its capacity during the last three years.” “Our terms are the most liberal that have ever been offered.” “You are missing the opportunity of your lifetime if you do not accept this proposition.” “We hope to receive your order by return mail, for you will never have such a wonderful opportunity again.” Such sentences fill the pages of thousands of letters that are mailed every day.

“Our system of inspection with special micrometer gauges insures all parts being perfect—within one-thousandth of an inch of absolute accuracy. This means, too, any time you want an extra part of your engine for replacement that you can get it and that it will fit. If we charged you twice as much for the White engine, we could not give you better material or workmanship.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Now this is an argument that is worth while: that the parts of the engine are so accurately ground that repairs can be made quickly, and new parts will fit without a moment's trouble. The last sentence of the paragraph is of course nothing but assertion, but it is stated in a way that carries conviction. Many correspondents would have bluntly declared that this was the best engine ever manufactured, or something of that kind, and made no impression at all on the minds of the readers. But the statement that the company could not make a better engine, even if it charged twice as much, sinks in.

Proof of quality is always one of the strongest arguments that can be used. A man wants to feel sure that he is given good value for his money, it matters

not whether he is buying a lead pencil or an automobile. And next to argument of quality is the argument of price. Here are some striking paragraphs taken from the letter sent out by a firm manufacturing gummed labels and advertising stickers:

“We would rather talk quality than price because no other concern prints better stickers than ours—but we can’t help talking price because no other concern charges as little for them as we do.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This is a strong statement but it is nothing more than a statement. The writer, however, hastens to come forward with argument and proof:

“You know we make a specialty of gummed labels—do nothing else. We have special machinery designed by ourselves—machinery that may be used by no other concern. This enables us to produce better stickers at a minimum expense.

“All of our stickers are printed on the best stock, and double gummed, and, by the way, compare the gumming of our stickers with those put up by other concerns. We have built up a business and reputation on *stickers that stick and stay*.”

\* \* \* \* \*

If you were in the market for labels you would not hesitate to send an order to that firm, for the writer gives you satisfying reasons for the quality and the low price of his goods. The argument in favor of its goods is presented clearly, concisely, convincingly.

The argument that will strike home to the merchant is one that points out his opportunity for gain. Here is the way a wholesale grocer presented his proposition on a new brand of coffee:

“You put in this brand of coffee and we stand back of you and push sales. Our guarantee of quality goes with every pound we put out. Ask the opinion of all your customers. If there is the least dissatisfaction, refund them the price of their coffee and deduct it from our next bill. So confident

are we of the satisfaction that this coffee will give that we agree to take back at the end of six months all the remaining stock you have on hand—that is, if you do not care to handle the brand longer.

“You have probably never sold guaranteed coffee before. You take no chances. The profit is as large as on other brands, and your customers will be impressed with the guarantee placed on every pound.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The guarantee and the offer of the free trial are possibly the two strongest arguments that can be used either with a dealer or in straight mail-order selling.

Among the arguments that are most effective are testimonials and references to satisfied users. If the writer can refer to some well-known firm or individual as a satisfied customer he strengthens his point.

“When we showed this fixture to John Wanamaker’s man, it took just about three minutes to close the deal for six of them. Since then they have ordered seventy-four more.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Such references as this naturally inspire confidence in a proposition and extracts from letters may be used with great effect, provided the name and address of the writer is given, so that it will have every appearance of being genuine.

A solicitor of patents at Washington works into his letters to prospective clients quotations from manufacturers:

“We wish to be put in communication with the inventor of some useful novelty, instrument or device, who is looking for a way to market his invention. We want to increase our business along new lines and manufacture under contract, paying royalties to the patentee.

“If your clients have any articles of merit that they want to market, kindly communicate with us. Our business is the manufacture of patented articles under contract and we can undoubtedly serve many of your clients in a profitable manner.”



\* \* \* \* \*

Such extracts as these are intended to impress upon the inventor the desirability of placing his business with someone who has such a wide acquaintance and is in a position to put him in touch with manufacturers.

To send a list of references may also prove a most convincing argument, especially if the writer can refer to some man or firm located near the one to whom he is writing. A mutual acquaintance forms a sort of connecting link that is a pulling force even though the reference is never looked up. In fact, it is only on occasions that references of this kind are investigated, for the mere naming of banks and prominent business men is sufficient to inspire confidence that the proposition is “on the square.”

After you have explained your proposition, described your goods and pointed out to the prospect how it is to his advantage to possess these goods, the time has come to make him an offer.

One of the pathetic sins of business letter writers is to work in the price too early in the letter—before the prospect is interested in the proposition. The clever salesman always endeavors to work up one’s interest to the highest possible pitch before price is mentioned at all. Many solicitors consider it so essential to keep the price in the background until near the end of the canvass that they artfully dodge the question, “What is the cost?”, until they think the prospect is sufficiently interested not to “shy” when the figure is mentioned.

A letter from a company seeking to interest agents starts out awkwardly with a long paragraph:

“We will be pleased to have you act as our salesman. We need a representative in your city. We know you will make a success.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Then follows a second paragraph giving the selling price of a “complete outfit” although there has not been a line in the letter to warm up the reader, to interest him in the proposition, to point out how he can make money and show him where he will benefit by handling this particular line.

After this poor beginning the letter goes on with its explanation and argument, but the message is lost—a message that might have borne fruit

had the writer repressed his own selfish motives and pointed out how the reader would gain. There is then plenty of time to refer to the cost of the outfit.

A letter from a manufacturing concern selling direct to the consumer starts out in this kill-interest fashion:

“Did you get our circular describing the merits of our celebrated Wonderdown Mattresses which cost, full size, \$10 each?”

\* \* \* \* \*

An experienced correspondent would never commit such a blunder for he would not bring in the price until near the end of the letter; or, more likely, the dollar mark would not appear in the letter at all. It would be shown only in an enclosure—folder, circular, catalogue or price list. So important is this point that many schemes have been devised for keeping the cost in the background and this is one of the principal reasons why many concerns are emphasizing more and more the free trial and selling on instalments.

One manufacturing company makes a talking point out of the fact that the only condition on which it will sell a machine is to put it in a plant for a sixty-day trial; then if it is found satisfactory the purchaser has his option of different methods of payments: a discount for all cash or monthly instalments.

There are many propositions successfully handled by gradually working up interest to the point where price can be brought in, then leading quickly to the inducement and the clincher. In such a letter the price could not be ignored very well and the effect is lost unless it is brought in at the proper place, directly following the argument.

Like all rules, there are exceptions to this. Sometimes where the reader is familiar with the proposition it may be a good policy to catch his attention by a special price offer at the very beginning of the letter. This is frequently done in follow-up letters where it is reasonably certain that the preceding correspondence has practically exhausted explanation, description and arguments. The problem here is different and a special price may be the strongest talking point.

Then, of course, there are letters that are intended merely to arouse the interest of the reader and induce him to write for prices and further information. The purpose here is to stimulate the interest and induce the

recipient to send in particulars regarding his needs and ask for terms. After a man's interest has been this far stimulated it is comparatively easy to quote prices without frightening him away.

But in the majority of sales letters an offer must be made, for price, after all, is the one thing that is, to the reader, of first importance. Most men want to know all about a proposition without the bother of further correspondence and so a specific offer should usually follow the arguments.

How To Bring The *Letter* To  
A CLOSE

## PART II—HOW TO WRITE THE LETTER—CHAPTER 7

GETTING ATTENTION, explaining a proposition and presenting arguments and proofs are essentials in every letter, but they merely lead up to the vital part--GETTING ACTION. They must be closely followed by PERSUASION, INDUCEMENT *and a* CLINCHER. The well written letter works up to a climax and the order should be secured while interest is at its height. Many correspondents stumble when they come to the close. This chapter shows how to make a get-away—how to hook the order, or if the order is not secured—how to leave the way open to come back with a follow-up.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nothing will take the place of arguments and logical reasons in selling an article or a service. But most salesmen will bear out the statement that few orders would be taken unless persuasion and inducement are brought into play to get the prospect's name onto the dotted line. Persuasion alone sells few goods outside of the church fair but it helps out the arguments and proofs. The collector's troubles come mainly from sales that are made by persuasion, for the majority of men who are convinced by sound arguments and logical reasons to purchase a machine or a line of goods carry out their part of the bargain if they can.

There are a good many correspondents who are clever enough in presenting their proposition, but display a most limited knowledge of human nature in using persuasions that rubs the prospect the wrong way.

“Why will you let a few dollars stand between you and success? Why waste your time, wearing yourself out working for others? Why don’t you throw off the conditions which bind you down to a small income? Why don’t you shake off the shackles? Why don’t you rise to the opportunity that is now presented to you?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Such a letter is an insult to anyone who receives it, for it really tells him that he is a “mutt” and does not know it. Compare the preceding paragraph with this forceful appeal:

“Remember, the men now in positions you covet did not tumble into them by accident. At one time they had nothing more to guide them than an opportunity exactly like this one. Someone pointed out to them the possibilities and they took the chance and gradually attained their present success. Have you the courage to make the start, grasp an opportunity, work out your destiny in this same way?”

\* \* \* \* \*

This is persuasion by pointing out what others have done. It is the persuasion of example; an appeal that is dignified and inspirational.

And here, as in all other parts of the letter, there is the tendency to make the appeal from the selfish standpoint—the profits that will accrue to the writer:

“We strongly advise that you get a piece of this land at once. It is bound to increase in value. You can’t lose. Won’t you cast your lot with us now? It is your last opportunity to get a piece of this valuable land at this extremely low price. Take our word for it and make your decision now before it is too late.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A manufacturer of folding machines got away from this attitude and cleverly combined persuasion and inducement in an offer made to newspaper publishers during the month of October:

“You want to try this folder thoroughly before you buy it and no better test can be given than during the holiday season when heavy advertising necessitates large editions. Now, if you will put in one of these folders right away and use it every week, we will extend our usual sixty-day terms to January 15<sup>th</sup>. This will enable you to test it out thoroughly and, furthermore, you will not have to make the first payment until you have opportunity to make collections for the December advertising. This proposition must be accepted before Oct. 31<sup>st</sup>.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Such an inducement is timely and doubly effective on this account. The appeal reaches the newspaper man at the season of the year when he is busiest; just the time when he most needs a folder, and the manufacturer provides for the first payment at the time of year when the average publisher has the largest bank account.

Occasionally the most effective persuasion is a ginger talk, a regular “Come on, boys,” letter that furnishes the dynamic force necessary to get some men started:

“There is no better time to start in this business than right now. People always spend money freely just before the holidays—get in the game and get your share of this loose coin. Remember, we ship the day the order comes in. Send us your order this afternoon and the goods will be at your door day after tomorrow. You can have several hundred dollars in the bank by this time next week. Why not? All you need to do is to make the decision now.

“Unless you are blind or pretty well crippled up, you needn’t expect that people will come around and drop good money into your hat. But they will loosen up if you go out after them with a good proposition such as this—and provided you get to them before the other fellow. The whole thing is to get started. Get in motion! Get busy! If you don’t want to take time to write, telegraph at our expense. It doesn’t make much difference how you start, the thing is to start. Are you with us?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Now, there really is nothing in these two paragraphs except a little ginger, and a good deal of slang, but this may prove the most effective stimulant to a man's energy, the kind of persuasion to get him in motion.

One thing to be constantly guarded against is exaggeration—"laying it on too thick." Concerns selling goods on the instalment basis through agents who are paid on commission, find their hardest problem is to collect money where the proposition was painted in too glowing colors. The representative, thinking only of his commission on the sale, puts the proposition too strong, makes the inducement so alluring that the goods do not measure up to the salesman's claims.

Then the correspondent should be careful not to put the inducement so strong that it will attract out of curiosity rather than out of actual intent. Many clever advertisements pull a large number of inquiries but few sales are made. It is a waste of time and money to use an inducement that does not stimulate an actual interest. Many a mailing list is choked with deadwood—names that represent curiosity seekers and the company loses on both hands, for it costs money to get those names on the list and it costs more money to get them off the list.

The correspondent should never attempt to persuade a man by assuming an injured attitude. Because a man answers an advertisement or writes for information, does not put him under the slightest obligation to purchase the goods and he cannot be shamed into parting with his money by such a paragraph as this:

"Do you think you have treated us fairly in not replying to our letters? We have written to you time and again just as courteously as we know how; we have asked you to let us know whether or not you are interested; we have tried to be perfectly fair and square with you; and yet you have not done us the common courtesy of replying. Do you think this is treating us just right? Don't you think you ought to write us, and if you are not intending to buy, to let us know the reason?"

\* \* \* \* \*

If the recipient reads that far down into his letter, it will only serve to make him mad. No matter what inducement the company may make him later, it

is not probable that it can overcome the prejudice that such an insulting paragraph will have created.

Some of the correspondence schools understand how to work in persuasion cleverly and effectively. Here is a paragraph that is dignified and persuasive:

“Remember also that this is the best time of the entire year to get good positions, as wholesalers and manufacturers all over the country will put on thousands of new men for the coming season. We are receiving inquiries right along from the best firms in the country who ask us to provide them with competent salesmen. We have supplied them with so many good men that they always look to us when additional help is required, and just now the demand is so great that we can guarantee you a position if you start the course this month.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Persuasion plays a small part in selling general commodities, such as machinery, equipment, supplies, and the articles of every-day business, but correspondence courses, insurance, banking, building and loan propositions and various investment schemes can be pushed and developed by an intelligent use of this appeal.

Merged with the persuasion or closely following it should be some inducement to move the reader to “buy now.” Description, explanation, argument and even persuasion are not enough to get the order. A specific inducement is necessary. There are many things that we intend to buy sometime, articles in which we have become interested, but letters about them have been tucked away in a pigeon-hole until we have more time. It is likely that everyone of those letters would have been answered had they contained specific inducements that convinced us it would be a mistake to delay.

In some form or another, gain is the essence of all inducements, for gain is the dynamic force to all our business movements. The most familiar form of inducement is the special price, or special terms that are good if “accepted within ten days.” The inducement of free trial and free samples are becoming more widely used every day.

The most effective letters are those that work in the inducement so artfully that the reader feels he is missing something if he does not answer. The skillful correspondent does not tell him bluntly that he will miss the

opportunity of a life time if he does not accept a proposition; he merely suggests it in a way that makes a much more powerful impression. Here is the way a correspondence school uses inducements in letters to prospective students in its mechanical drawing course. After telling the prospect about the purchase of a number of drawing outfits it follows with this paragraph:

“It was necessary to place this large order in order to secure the sets at the lowest possible figure. Knowing that this number will exceed our weekly sales, we have decided to offer these extra sets to some of the ambitious young men who have been writing to us. If you will fill out the enclosed scholarship blank and mail at once we will send you one of these handsome sets FREE, express prepaid. But this offer must be accepted before the last of the month. At the rate the scholarship blanks are now coming in, it is more than likely that the available sets will be exhausted before November 1<sup>st</sup>. It is necessary therefore that you send us your application at once.”

\* \* \* \* \*

It is not necessary to offer something for nothing in your inducement. In fact, a good reason is usually a better order getter than a good premium. Make the man want your proposition—that is the secret of the good sales letter. If a man really wants your product he is going to get it sooner or later, and the selling letters that score the biggest results are those that create desire; following argument and reason with an inducement that persuades a man to part with his hard-earned money and buy your goods.

It is a never-ending surprise—the number of correspondents who cleverly attract the interest of a reader, present their proposition forcibly and convincingly, following with arguments and inducements that persuade him to buy, and then, just as he is ready to reach for his check book, turn heel and leave him with the assurance that they will be pleased to give him further information when they could have had his order by laying the contract before him and saying, “Sign here.”

There are plenty of good starters who are poor finishers. They get attention but don't get the order. They are winded at the finish; they stumble at the climax where they should be strongest, and the interest which they worked so hard to stimulate oozes away. They fail because they do not know how to close.

As you hope for results, do not overlook the summary and the climax.



Do not forget to insert a hook that will land the order.

Time, energy and money are alike wasted in creating desire if you fail to crystallize it in action. Steer your letter away from the hold-over file as dexterously as you steer it away from the waste basket. It is not enough to make your prospect want to order, you must make it easy for him to order by enclosing order blanks, return envelopes, instructions and other "literature" that will strengthen your arguments and whet his desire; and more than that, you must reach a real climax in your letters—tell the prospect what to do and how to do it.

The climax is not a part distinct from the parts that have gone before. Persuasion and inducement are but elements of the climax, working the prospect up to the point where you can insert a paragraph telling him to "sign and mail today." How foolish to work up the interest and then let the reader down with such a paragraph as this:

"Thanking you for your inquiry and hoping to be favored with your order, and assuring you it will be fully appreciated and receive our careful attention, we are."

\* \* \* \* \*

Such a paragraph pulls few orders. Compare the foregoing with the one that fairly galvanizes the reader into immediate action:

"Send us a \$2.00 bill now. If you are not convinced that this file is the best \$2.00 investment ever made, we will refund your money for the mere asking. Send today, while you have it in mind."

\* \* \* \* \*

Here is a paragraph not unlike the close of dozens of letters that you read every week:

"Trusting that we may hear from you in the near future and hoping we will have the pleasure of numbering you among our customers, we are,"

\* \* \* \* \*

Such a close invites delay in answering. It is an order killer; it smothers interest, it delays action. But here is a close that is likely to bring the order if the desire has been created.

“Simply wrap a \$1.00 bill in this letter and send to us at our risk.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A writer who does not understand the psychology of suggestion writes this unfortunate closing paragraph:

“Will you not advise us at an early date whether or not you are interested in our proposition? As you have not replied to our previous letters, we begin to fear that you do not intend to avail yourself of this wonderful opportunity, and we would be very glad to have you write us if this is a fact.”

\* \* \* \* \*

How foolish to help along one’s indifference by the suggestion that he is not interested. Just as long as you spend postage on a prospect treat him as a probable customer. Assume that he is interested; take it for granted that there is some reason why he has not replied and present new arguments, new persuasion, new inducements for ordering now.

A firm handling a line very similar to that of the firm which sent out the letter quoted above, always maintains the attitude that the prospect is going to order some time and its close fairly bristles with “do it now” hooks:

“Step right over to the telegraph office and send us your order by telegraph at our expense. With this business, every day’s delay means loss of dollars to you. Stop the leak! Save the dollars! Order today!”

\* \* \* \* \*

Another unfortunate ending is a groveling servility in which the writer comes on his knees, as it were, begging for the privilege of presenting his proposition again at some future time. Here are the two last paragraphs of a three-paragraph letter sent out by an engraving company—an old

established, substantial concern that has no reason to apologize for soliciting business, no reason for meeting other concerns on any basis except that of equality:

“Should you not be in the market at the present time for anything in our line of work, we would esteem it a great favor to us if you would file this letter and let us hear from you when needing anything in the way of engraving. If you will let us know when you are ready for something in this line we will deem it a privilege to send a representative to call on you.

“Trusting we have not made ourselves forward in this matter and hoping that we may hear from you, we are,”

\* \* \* \* \*

It is a safe prediction that this letter was written by a new sales manager who will soon be looking for another job. Such an apologetic note, with such a lack of selling talk, such a street beggar attitude could never escape the waste basket. The salesman who starts out by saying, “You wouldn’t be interested in this book, would you?” takes no orders. The letter that comes apologizing and excusing itself before it gets our attention, and, if it gets our attention, then lets down just as we are ready to sign an order, is headed straight for the car wheel plant.

Avoid in the closing paragraph, as far as possible, the participial phrases such as “Thanking you,” “Hoping to be favored,” “Assuring you of our desire,” and so forth. Say instead, “We thank you,” “It is a pleasure to assure you,” or “May I not hear from you by return mail?” Such a paragraph is almost inevitably an anti-climax; it affords too much of a let-down to the proposition.

One of the essentials to the clinching of an order is the enclosures such as order blanks and return envelopes—subjects that are sufficiently important to call for separate chapters.

The essential thing to remember in working up to the climax is to make it a climax; to keep up the reader’s interest, to insert a hook that will get the man’s order before his desire has time to cool off. Your proposition is not a fireless cooker that will keep his interest warm for a long time after the heat of your letter has been removed—and it will be just that much harder to warm him up the second time. Insert the hook that will get the order NOW, for there will never be quite such a favorable time again.

“STYLE” In Letter Writing—  
And How To *Acquire It*

PART III—STYLE—MAKING THE LETTER READABLE—CHAPTER  
8

SPECIFIC STATEMENTS *and* CONCRETE FACTS \_are the substance of a business letter. But whether that letter is read or not, or whether those statements and facts are\_ FORCEFUL *and* EFFECTIVE, \_is dependent upon the manner in which they are presented to the reader—upon the “style.” What “style” is, and how it may be acquired and put to practical use in business correspondence, is described in this chapter\_

\* \* \* \* \*

Letter writing is a craft—selecting and arranging words in sentences to convey a thought clearly and concisely. While letters take the place of spoken language, they lack the animation and the personal magnetism of the speaker—a handicap that must be overcome by finding words and arranging them in sentences in such a way that they will attract attention quickly, explain a proposition fully, make a distinct impression upon the reader and move him to reply. Out of the millions of messages that daily choke the mails, only a small per cent rise above the dead level of colorless, anemic correspondence.

The great majority of business letters are not forcible; they are not productive. They have no style. The meat is served without a dressing. The letters bulge with solid facts, stale statements and indigestible arguments—the relishes are lacking. Either the writers do not realize that effectiveness comes only with an attractive style or they do not know how a crisp and invigorating style can be cultivated. Style has nothing to do with the subject matter of a letter. Its only concern is in the language used—in the words and sentences which describe, explain and persuade, and there is no subject so commonplace, no proposition so prosaic that the letter cannot be made readable and interesting when a stylist takes up his pen.

In choosing words the average writer looks at them instead of into them, and just as there are messages between the lines of a letter, just so are there half-revealed, half-suggested thoughts between the letters of words—the suggestiveness to which Hawthorne referred as “the unaccountable spell that lurks in a syllable.” There is character and personality in words, and Shakespeare left a message to twentieth-century correspondents when he advised them to “find the eager words—faint words—tired words—weak words—strong words—sick words—successful words.” The ten-talent business writer is the man who knows these words, recognizes their possibilities and their limitations and chooses them with the skill of an artist in mixing the colors for his canvas.

To be clear, to be forceful, to be attractive—these are the essentials of style. To secure these elements, the writer must make use of carefully selected words and apt figures of speech. Neglect them and a letter is lost in the mass; its identity is lacking, it fails to grip attention or carry home the idea one wishes to convey.

An insipid style, is responsible for much of the ineffectiveness in business letters. Few men will take the time to decipher a proposition that is obscured by ambiguous words and involved phrases. Unless it is obviously to a man’s advantage to read such a letter it is dropped into the waste basket, taking with it the message that might have found an interested prospect if it had been expressed clearly, logically, forcibly.

The first essential for style is clearness—make your meaning plain. Look to the individual words; use them in the simplest way— distinctive words to give exactness of meaning and familiar words to give strength. Words are the private soldiers under the command of the writer and for ease of management he wants small words—a long word is out of place, unwieldy, awkward. The “high-sounding” words that are dragged in by main force for the sake of effect weigh down the letter, make it logy. The reader may be impressed by the language but not by the thought. He reads the words and misses the message.

Avoid long, unfamiliar words. Clothe your thoughts in words that no one can mistake—the kind of language that men use in the office and on the street. Do not make the reader work to see your point; he is busy, he has other things to do—it is your proposition and it is to your interest to put in that extra work, those additional minutes that will make the letter easily understood. It is too much to expect the reader to exert himself to dig out *your* meaning and then enthuse himself over *your* proposition.

The men who write pulling letters weigh carefully every sentence, not only pruning away every unessential word but using words of Anglo-Saxon origin wherever possible rather than words of Latin derivation. "Indicate your selection" was written as the catch line for a letter in an important selling campaign, but the head correspondent with unerring decision re-wrote it—"Take your choice"—a simpler, stronger statement. The meaning goes straight to the reader's mind without an effort on his part. "We are unable to discern" started out the new correspondent in answering a complaint. "We cannot see" was the revision written in by the master correspondent—short, concise, to the point. "With your kind permission I should like to say in reply to your favor"—such expressions are found in letters every day—thousands of them. The reader is tired before the subject matter is reached.

The correspondent who is thinking about the one to whom he is writing starts out briefly and to the point by saying, "This is in reply to your letter," or, "Thank you for calling our attention to, and so forth." The reader is impressed that the writer means business. The attitude is not antagonistic; it commands attention.

Letters are unnaturally burdened with long words and stilted phrases, while in conversation one's thoughts seek expression through lines of least resistance—familiar words and short sentences. But in writing, these same thoughts go stumbling over long words and groping through involved phrases.

Proverbs are sentences that have lived because they express a thought briefly in short, familiar words. Slang becomes popular because of the wealth of meaning expressed in a few words, and many of these sayings gradually work their way into respectability—reluctantly admitted into the sanctuary of "literature" because of their strength, clearness, adaptability.

While short words are necessary for force and vigor, it may be very desirable at times to use longer and less familiar words to bring out the finer shade of meaning. A subtle distinction cannot be ignored simply because one word is shorter than another. "Donate" and "give" are frequently used as synonyms, but "give" should not be used because it is a short word when "donate" expresses the meaning more accurately. As a usual thing, "home" is preferable to "residence," but there are times when the longer word should be used. "Declare" and "state," "thoroughfare" and "street"—there are thousands of illustrations on this point, and while the short, Anglo-Saxon word is always preferable, it should not be used when a longer word expresses more accurately the thought which the writer wishes to convey.

Many letter writers think that these rules are all right for college professors, journalists and authors, but impractical for the every-day business correspondent. Some of the most successful companies in the country, however, have recognized the importance of these very points and have adopted strict rules that give strength and character to the letters that are sent out. For example, here is a paragraph taken from the book of instructions issued by a large manufacturing concern in the middle west:

“Don’t use a long or big word where a short one will do as well or better. For example: ‘Begin’ is better than ‘commence’; ‘home’ or ‘house’ better than ‘residence’; ‘buy’ better than ‘purchase’;

‘live’ better than ‘reside’; ‘at once’ better than ‘immediately’;

‘give’ better than ‘donate’; ‘start’ or ‘begin’ better than ‘inaugurate.’”

The selection of words is not the only thing that the writer must consider. The placing of words to secure emphasis is no less important. The strength of a statement may depend upon the adroitness with which the words are used. “Not only to do one thing *well* but to do that one thing *best*—this has been our aim and our accomplishment.” In this sentence, taken from a letter, emphasis is laid upon the word “best” by its position. The manufacturer has two strong arguments to use on the dealer; one is the quality of the goods—so they will give satisfaction to the customer—and the other is the appearance of the goods so they will attract the customer. This is the sentence used by a clever writer: “We *charge* you for the service quality—we *give* you the appearance quality.” The strength comes from the construction of the sentence throwing emphasis on “charge” and “give.”

“Durability—that is our talking point. Other machines are cheaper if you consider only initial cost; no other machine is more economical when its durability, its length of service is considered.” Here the unusual position of the word “durability,” thrown at the beginning of the sentence, gives an emphasis that could not be obtained in any other way. And so the stylist considers not only the words he uses but he places them in the most strategic position in the sentence—the beginning.

In the building of a climax this order of words is reversed since the purpose is to work up from the weakest to the strongest word or phrase. The description, “sweet, pure and sanitary,” gives emphasis to the sanitary feature because it comes last and lingers longest in the mind.

After the study of words, their meaning and position, the writer must look to completed sentences, and the man who succeeds in selling goods by mail

recognizes first of all the force of concise statements. “You can pay more but you can’t buy more.” This statement strikes home with the force of a blow. “We couldn’t improve the powder so we improved the box.” There is nothing but assertion in this sentence, but it carries conviction. Not a word is out of place. Every word does duty. The idea is expressed concisely, forcibly. The simplicity of the sentence is more effective than pages of prosaic argument.

Here is a sentence taken from a letter of a correspondence school:

“Assuming that you are in search of valuable information that may increase your earning capacity by a more complete knowledge of any subject in which you may be interested, we desire to state most emphatically that your wages increase with your intelligence.” This is not only ungrammatical, it is uninteresting. Contrast it with the sentence taken from a letter from another correspondence school:

“You earn more as you learn more.” It is short, emphatic, thought producing. The idea is clearly etched into your mind.

Short sentences are plain and forceful, but when used exclusively, they become tiresome and monotonous. A short sentence is frequently most striking when preceding or following a long sentence—it gives variation of style. Following a long sentence it comes as a quick, trip-hammer blow that is always effective. And there are times when the proposition cannot be brought out clearly by short sentences. Then the long sentence comes to the rescue for it permits of comparisons and climaxes that short sentences cannot give.

[Illustration: \_Unique enclosures catch the eye and insure a reading of the letter. Here are shown two facsimile bonds—one, an investment bond and the other a guarantee bond; a sample of the diploma issued by a correspondence school and a \$15.00 certificate to apply on a course. The axe-blade booklet carries the message of a wholesale hardware house, and the coupon, when filled out, calls for a free sample of toilet preparation\_.]

[Illustration: \_Neither printed descriptions nor pictures are as effective as actual samples of the product advertised. Here are shown different methods of sending samples of dress goods, shirtings and cloth for other purposes. At the right are some pieces of wood showing different varnishes and wall decorations, and at the bottom are veneers that show different furniture finishes; the various colored pieces of leather are likewise used by furniture houses in showing the styles of upholstering\_.]



It is the long, rambling sentences that topple a letter over onto the waste basket toboggan. But the sentence with a climax, working up interest step by step, is indispensable. By eye test, by mechanical test, by erasure test and by strength test, Orchard Hill Bond makes good its reputation as the best bond on the market for commercial use. There is nothing tiresome about such a sentence. There is no difficulty in following the writer's thought.

\* \* \* \* \*

## THE LETTER

THE VEHICLE

## WORDS

SHORT

SAXON

SPECIFIC

INDIVIDUAL

PHRASES

VIVID

NATURAL

FIGURES

IDIOMS

SENTENCES

CLEAR

FORCEFUL

CLIMATIC

POLISHED

PARAGRAPHS

SHORT

UNIFORM

LOGICAL

ORDERLY

## THE LOAD

## IDEAS

GRAPHIC

TECHNICAL

CLEAR

COMPLETE  
STATEMENTS  
FACTS  
PROOFS  
REFERENCES  
TESTIMONY  
EXPLANATIONS  
SPECIFIC  
TECHNICAL  
CLEAR  
COMPLETE  
ARGUMENTS  
LOGICAL  
CLIMATIC  
CONCLUSIVE  
CONVINCING

\_There are two elements in every letter: the thought and the language in which that thought is expressed. The words, phrases, sentences and paragraphs are the vehicle which carries the load—explanations, arguments, appeal. Neither can be neglected if the letter is to pull\_

\* \* \* \* \*

Here is another sentence showing the force to be attained through the use of a long sentence: “Just as the physician may read medicine, just as the lawyer may read law, just so may a man now read business—the science of the game which enables some men to succeed where hosts of others fail; it is no longer enveloped in mystery and in darkness.” There is no danger of the reader’s becoming confused in the meaning and he is more deeply impressed because his interest has been gained by the gradual unfolding of the idea back of the sentence, the leading up to the important thought.

And after the choice of words, the placing of words and the construction of a sentence comes that other essential element of style—the use of figures of speech, the illustrating of one’s thought by some apt allusion. Comparison adds force by giving the reader a mental picture of the unknown, by suggestions of similarity to familiar things. The language of the street, our conversational language, secures its color and expressiveness through

figures of speech—the clever simile and the apt metaphor light up a sentence and lift it out of the commonplace.

“Don’t hold yourself down,” “Don’t be bottled up,” “Don’t keep your nose on the grindstone”—these are the forceful figures used in the letters of a correspondence school. The most ignorant boy knows that the writer did not mean to be taken literally. Such figures are great factors in business letters because they make the meaning clear.

Here is the attention-getting first sentence of another letter:

“Don’t lull yourself to sleep with the talk that well enough should be let alone when practical salary-raising, profit-boosting help is within your reach.” The sentence is made up of figures; you do not literally lull yourself to sleep with talk, you don’t really boost profits, you don’t actually reach out and grasp the help the letter offers. The figures merely suggest ideas, but they are vivid.

A sales manager writes to the boys on the road regarding a contest or a spurt for records: “Come on, boys. This is the last turn round the track. The track was heavy at the start but if none of you break on the home stretch you are bound to come under the wire with a good record.” The salesman will read this sort of a letter and be inspired by its enthusiasm, when the letter would be given no more than a hurried glance if it said what it really means: “Get busy! Keep on the job! Send in more orders.” By framing your ideas in artistic figures of speech you bring out their colors, their lines, their fullest meanings—and more than that, you know your letters will be read.

But in the attempt to add grace and attractiveness by some familiar allusion, one must not overlook the importance of facts—cold, plainly stated facts, which are often the shortest, most convincing argument. In the letter of an advertising concern is this plain statement: “Last year our business was \$2,435,893 ahead of the year before.” No figure of speech, no touch of the stylist could make such a profound impression as this brief, concise statement of fact.

The average correspondent will agree that these are all essential elements of style—his problem is practical: how can he find the right words; how can he learn to put his proposition more clearly; how think up figures of speech that will light up the thought or illustrate the proportion.

To some men an original style and the ability to write convincingly is a birthright. Others have to depend less on inspiration and more on hard work. One man carries a note book in which he jots down, for future use, phrases, words and comparisons that he comes across while reading his

morning paper on the way down town, while going through his correspondence, while listening to callers, while talking with friends at lunch, while attending some social affair—wherever he is, his eyes and ears are always alert to catch a good phrase, an unusual expression or a new figure of speech. At his first opportunity a notation is made in the ever-handy memorandum book.

Another man systematically reads articles by Elbert Hubbard, Alfred Henry Lewis, Samuel Blythe and other writers whose trenchant pens replenish his storage with similes, metaphors and crisp expressions.

The head of a mail-order sales department of a large publishing house keeps a scrapbook in which he pastes words, phrases, striking sentences and comparisons clipped from letters, advertisements, booklets, circulars, and other printed matter. Each month he scans the advertisements in a dozen magazines and with a blue pencil checks every expression that he thinks may some time be available or offer a suggestion. It is but a few minutes' work for a girl to clip and paste in these passages and his scrapbooks are an inexhaustible mine of ideas and suggestions.

Another man, after outlining his ideas, dictates a letter and then goes over it sentence by sentence and word by word. With a dictionary and book of synonyms he tries to strengthen each word; he rearranges the words, writes and rewrites the sentences, eliminating some, reinforcing others and devising new ones until he has developed his idea with the precision of an artist at work on a drawing.

The average correspondent, handling a large number of letters daily, has little time to develop ideas for each letter in this way, but by keeping before him a list of new words and phrases and figures of speech, they soon become a part of his stock in trade. Then there are other letters to write—big selling letters that are to be sent out by the thousands and letters that answer serious complaints, letters that call for diplomacy, tact, and above all, clearness and force.

On these important letters the correspondent can well afford to spend time and thought and labor. A day or several days may be devoted to one letter, but the thoughts that are turned over—the ideas that are considered, the sentences that are written and discarded, the figures that are tried out—are not wasted, but are available for future use; and by this process the writer's style is strengthened. He acquires clearness, force, simplicity and attractiveness—the elements that will insure the reading of his letters.

And one thing that every correspondent can do is to send to the scrap-heap all the shelf-worn words and hand-me-down expressions such as, "We beg to acknowledge," "We beg to state," "Replying to your esteemed favor;" "the same;" "the aforesaid;" "We take great pleasure in acknowledging," and so on. They are old, wind-broken, incapable of carrying a big message. And the participial phrases should be eliminated, such as: "Hoping to hear from you;" "Trusting we will be favored;" "Awaiting your reply," and so on, at the close of the letter. Say instead, "I hope to hear from you;" or, "I trust we will receive your order;" or, "May we not hear from you?"

Interest the man quickly; put snap and sparkle in your letters. Give him clear and concise statements or use similes and metaphors in your sentences—figures of speech that will turn a spot-light on your thoughts. Pick out your words and put them into their places with the infinite care of a craftsman, but do not become artificial. Use every-day, hard-working words and familiar illustrations that have the strength to carry your message without stumbling before they reach their goal.

Making The Letter HANG  
TOGETHER

## PART III—STYLE—MAKING THE LETTER READABLE—CHAPTER 9

The letter writer looks to words, phrases and sentences to make the little impressions on the reader as he goes along. The letter as a whole also has to make a SINGLE IMPRESSION—clear-cut and unmistakable. The correspondent must use this combination shot-gun and rifle. To get this single rifle-shot effect a letter has to contain those elements of style that HOLD IT TOGETHER; there must be a definite idea behind the letter; the message must have a unity of thought; it must be logically presented; it must have a continuity that carries the reader along without a break, and a climax that works him up and closes at the height of his enthusiasm.

\* \* \* \* \*

Thinking is not easy for anyone. And it is too much to expect the average business man to analyze a proposition in which he is not interested. His

thoughts tend to move in the course of least resistance. If you want him to buy your goods or pay your bill or hire you, present your arguments in a way that will require no great mental exertion on his part to follow you.

A single idea behind the letter is the first requisite for giving it the hang-together quality and the punch that gets results. The idea cannot be conveyed to the reader unless it is presented logically. He won't get a single general impression from what you are saying to him unless there is unity of thought in the composition. He cannot follow the argument unless it has continuity; sequence of thought. And, finally no logic or style will work him up to enthusiasm unless it ends with a strong climax.

These five principles—the idea behind, logic, unity of thought, continuity, climax—are the forces that holds the letter together and that gives it momentum. Because these principles are laid down in text books does not mean that they are arbitrary rules or academic theories. They are based on the actual experiences of men ever since they began to talk and write. Essay or sermon; oration or treatise; advertisement or letter; all forms of communication most easily accomplish their purpose of bringing the other man around to your way of thinking, if these proved principles of writing are followed. Merely observing them will not necessarily make a letter pull, but violating them is certain to weaken it.

You cannot hit a target with a rifle unless you have one shot in the barrel. The idea behind the letter is the bullet in the gun. To hit your prospect you must have a message—a single, definite, clearly-put message. That is the idea behind the letter.

Look at the letter on page 61. It gets nowhere. Because the writer did not have this clear, definite idea of what he wanted to impress upon his prospect. Not one reader in ten would have the shallowest dent made in his attention by this letter, as he would have had if the writer had started out, for instance, with one idea of impressing upon the reader the facilities of his establishment and the large number of satisfied customers for whom it does work.

With this dominant idea in mind, a correspondent has got to explain it and argue it so logically that the reader is convinced. Here is a letter from a manufacturer of gasoline engines:

Dear Sir:

I understand you are in the market for a gasoline engine and as ours is the most reliable engine made we want to call your attention to it. It has every modern improvement and we sell it on easy terms.

The inventor of this machine is in personal charge of our factory and he is constantly making little improvements. He will tell you just what kind of an engine you need and we will be glad to quote you prices if you will call on us or write us, telling us what you need.

Hoping to hear from you, we are,

Yours truly,

[Signature: THE MADEWELL ENGINE CO.]

\* \* \* \* \*

The letter is illogical, disjointed and lacking in that dominant idea that carries conviction. Yet the writer had material at hand for a strong, logical selling letter. To have interested the prospect he should have told something specific about his engine. Here is the letter, rewritten with due regard to the demands of unity, sequence, logic and climax:

Dear Sir:

A friend told me yesterday that you want a gas engine for irrigating, so I am sending you bulletin "B."

Do you notice that all its parts are in plain view and easy to get at? Mr. Wilbur, who invented this engine, had a good many years of practical experience installing gasoline engines before he started to manufacture his own, and he knows what it means to tighten up a nut or some other part without having to send to the factory for a special man with a special wrench to do the work.

Sparkers sometimes get gummed up. To take the Wilbur sparker out you simply remove two nuts and out comes the sparker complete, and you cannot get it back the wrong way. It isn't much of a job to wipe the point off with a rag, is it?

And the governor! Just the same type of throttling governor that is used on the highest grade of steam engine, allowing you to speed her up or slow her down while the engine is running. That's mighty handy. Few engines are built like this. It costs a good deal of extra money but it does give a lot of extra satisfaction.

Nothing shoddy about the equipment described in the bulletin, is there? No. We don't make these supplies ourselves, but we do watch out and see that the other fellow gives us the best in the market because WE GUARANTEE IT.

This sounds very nice on paper, you think. Well, we have over four thousand customers in Kansas. Mr. W. O. Clifford, who lives not so far from you, has used a Wilbur for three years. Ask him what he has to say about it.

Then you will want to know just what such an engine will cost you, and you will be tickled to death when you know how much money we can really save you. I don't mean that we will furnish you with a cheap machine at a high price, but a really high-grade machine at a low price.

I await with much interest your reply telling us what you want.

Very truly yours,

[Signature: L. W. Hamilton]

\* \* \* \* \*

The commonest cause of a lack of punch in a letter is the temptation to get away from the main idea—unity of thought. This is what a mail-order house writes:

“This is the largest catalogue of the kind ever issued, it will pay you to deal with our house. Every machine is put together by hand and tested, and we will ship the day your order is received.

“An examination of the catalogue will prove our claim that we carry the largest stock of goods in our line. Should our goods appeal to you, we shall be glad to add you to our list of customers.”

\* \* \* \* \*

There is neither unity nor logic in a letter like this, although there is the suggestion of several good ideas. The fact that the house issues the largest catalogue of its kind might be so explained to me that it would convince me that here is the place I ought to buy. Or, the fact that every machine is tested and put together by hand, if followed to a logical conclusion, would prove to me that I could rely on the quality of these goods. But when the writer doesn't stick to one subject for more than half a sentence, my attention will not cling to it and my mind is not convinced by a mere statement without proof.



Unity does not necessarily mean that the whole letter must be devoted to one point. A paragraph and even a sentence must have this quality of unity as much as the entire letter. And the paragraphs, each unified in itself, may bring out one point after another that will still allow the letter to retain its hang-together.

In the letter quoted, not even the individual sentence retained unity. This writer might have presented all his points and maintained the unity of his letter, had he brought out and simplified one point in each paragraph:

First: The size of the catalogue as an indication of the large stock carried by the house and the convenience afforded in buying.

Second: The quality of the machines; the care exercised in their assembling; the guarantee of the test, and the assurance that this gives the far-away purchaser.

Third: Promptness in filling orders; what this means to the buyer and how the house is organized to give service.

Fourth: The desire to enroll new customers; not based solely on the selfish desires of the house, but on the idea that the more customers they can get, the bigger the business will grow, which will result in better facilities for the house and better service for each customer.

And now, giving a unified paragraph to each of the ideas, not eliminating subordinate thoughts entirely, but keeping them subordinate and making them illuminate the central thought—would build up a unified, logical letter.

In the arrangement of these successive ideas and paragraphs, the third element in the form is illustrated—continuity of thought. Put a jog or a jar in the path of your letter and you take the chance of breaking the reader's attention. That is fatal. So write a letter that the reader will easily and, therefore, unconsciously and almost perforce, follow from the first word to the last—then your message reaches him.

How to secure this continuity depends on the subject and on the prospect. Appealing to the average man, association of thoughts furnishes the surest medium for continuity. If you lead a man from one point to another point that he has been accustomed to associating with the first point, then he will follow you without a break in his thought. From this follows the well-known principle that when you are presenting a new proposition, start your prospect's thoughts on a point that he knows, which is related to your

proposition, for the transition is easiest from a known to a related unknown.

An insurance company's letter furnishes a good example of continuity of ideas and the gradual increasing strength in each paragraph:

“If you have had no sickness, and consequently, have never felt the humiliation of calling on strangers for sick benefits—even though it were only a temporary embarrassment—you are a fortunate man.

“Health is always an uncertain quantity—you have no assurance that next week or next month you will not be flat on your back—down and out as far as selling goods is concerned. And sickness not only means a loss of time but an extra expense in the way of hospital and doctor bills.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In the next paragraph the idea is further strengthened; a new thought is presented with additional force:

“If there is one man on earth who needs protection by insurance against sickness it is you. There are two thousand one hundred and fifty ailments covering just such diseases as you, as a traveling man, expose yourself to every day.”

\* \* \* \* \*

These are specific facts, therefore decidedly forceful. Then, while interest is at its height, another paragraph presents a specific offer:

“We will protect you at an extremely low annual cost. We guarantee that the rate will not exceed \$9.00 a year—that's less than two and a half cents a day. Think of it—by paying an amount so small that you will never miss it, you will secure benefits on over two thousand sicknesses—any one of which you may contract tomorrow.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Here is the logical presentation of subject matter by paragraphs, leading up from an interest-getting general statement to a specific proposition. Break

this continuity of ideas by a space filler or an inconsequential argument and the reader loses interest that it will be hard to regain.

Make this the test of each paragraph: if it does not illuminate the central thought, fit into the argument at that point, or add to the interest of the reader, eliminate it or bring it into conformity with the “idea behind the letter.”

And there must be an actual continuity of thought from paragraph to paragraph. Merely inserting a catch-word or a conjunctive does not build a logical bridge.

The letter from another insurance agent might have been saved if this test had been applied, for it was well written except where the writer forgot himself long enough to insert an irrelevant paragraph about his personal interest:

“We are desirous of adding your name to our roll of membership because we believe that every man should be protected by insurance and because we believe this is the best policy offered. We are endeavoring to set a new record this month and are especially anxious to get your application right away.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The continuity of thought is broken. The preceding paragraphs have been working up the reader’s interest in casualty insurance by pointing out the dangers to which he is exposed, the humiliating position in which it will place him and his family to be the recipients of charity in case of sickness or accident, and so on. Then the writer short-circuits the reader’s interest by a paragraph of generalities which call attention to his desire for profits—things in which the prospect is not interested.

Most propositions can be developed in different ways, along different angles. The problem of the correspondent is to determine upon the way that will prove easiest for the reader to follow. He may have his path smoothed for him if he understands how facts, ideas and arguments will cohere in the reader’s mind. It is much easier to follow a proposition if it is developed along some definite channel; if it follows the law of continuity, the law of similarity; of association or contrast, or of cause and effect.

Some epigrammatic thinker once said, “When you get through, stop!” This applies to letter writing as well as to speech. But don’t stop a letter on the

down grade. Stop after you have given your hardest punch. This is what rhetoricians call the climax.

A letter constructed along these principles of style will almost inevitably have a climax. If there is an idea behind the letter, if it is carried out logically, if the letter sticks to this one idea, if the argument is carried along step by step, proceeding from the general statement to the specific, from the attention-getting first sentence to the inducement, then you are working up your reader's interest to the point where with one final application of your entire idea to his own individual case, you have accomplished your climax, just as was done in the re-written letter about gasoline engines.

A letter from a firm manufacturing a duplicating machine starts out by calling attention to the difficulty the personal salesman has in getting an audience with the busy executive. The second paragraph shows how his time and "your money" is wasted in call-backs and in bench warming while the solicitor waits for an opportunity to be heard. The third paragraph tells how over-anxious the salesman is to close a sale when a few minutes is granted—and usually fails, at least the first time. The fourth paragraph shows how this costly process of selling can be reduced by using the mails; then follow a couple of specific paragraphs telling about the advantage of the company's machine. A paragraph on the saving on five thousand circulars that would pay for the machine brings the proposition home to the reader and then, with interest at the height, the last paragraph—the climax—urges the reader to fill out a post card to secure the additional information regarding capacity, quality of work and cost. Logic, unity, sequence, climax—each does its part in carrying the load.

The principles of style and form in letter writing do not reach their highest pulling power as long as the correspondent handles them like strange tools. The principles must, of course, first be learned and consciously applied. But to give your letter the touch of sincerity and of spontaneity; to give it the grip that holds and the hook that pulls, these principles must become a part of yourself. They must appear in your letters, not because you have consciously put them in but because your thinking and your writing possesses them.

How To Make Letters  
ORIGINAL

## PART III—STYLE—MAKING THE LETTER READABLE—CHAPTER 10

The average business letter is machine-made. It is full of time-worn phrases, hackneyed expressions and commonplace observations that fail to jolt the reader out of the rut of the conventional correspondence to which he is accustomed: consequently it does not make an impression upon him. But occasionally a letter comes along that “gets under the skin,” that STANDS OUT from the rest because it has “human interest;” because it is original in its statements; because it departs from the prescribed hum-drum routine; because, in short, it reflects a live, breathing human being and not a mere set of rules

\* \* \* \* \*

Study the letters the janitor carries out in your waste-basket— they lack the red blood of originality. Except for one here and one there they are stereotyped, conventional, long, uninteresting, tiresome. They have no individuality; they are poor representatives of an alert, magnetic personality.

Yet there is no legerdmain about writing a good letter; it is neither a matter of luck nor of genius. Putting in the originality that will make it pull is not a secret art locked up in the mental storerooms of a few successful writers; it is purely a question of study and the application of definite principles.

A lawyer is successful only in proportion to the understanding he has of the law—the study he puts on his cases; a physician’s success depends upon his careful consideration of every symptom and his knowledge of the effect of every drug or treatment that he may prescribe. And it is no different with correspondents. They cannot write letters that will pulsate with a vital message unless they study their proposition in detail, visualize the individuals to whom they are writing, consider the language they use, the method of presenting their arguments, their inducements—there is no point from the salutation to the signature that is beneath consideration. You cannot write letters that pull without hard study any more than the doctor can cure his patients or the lawyer win his cases without brain work.

So many letters are insipid because the correspondents do not have time or do not appreciate the necessity for taking time to consider the viewpoint of their readers or for studying out new methods of presenting their proposition. Yet the same respect that would be given to a salesman may be

secured for a letter. Any one of four attitudes will secure this attention. First of all, there may be a personal touch and an originality of thought or expression that commands immediate attention; in the second place, one can make use of the man-to-man appeal; then there is the always-forceful, never-to-be-forgotten “you” element; and finally, there are news items which are nearly always interest-getters.

By any one of these appeals, or better, by a combination of appeals, a letter can be given an individuality, a vitality, that will make it rise above the underbrush of ordinary business correspondence.

To begin with, vapid words and stereotyped expressions should be eliminated, for many a good message has become mired in stagnant language. So many correspondents, looking for the easiest road to travel, fall into the rut that has been worn wide and deep by the multitudes passing that way. The trouble is not the inability of writers to acquire a good style or express themselves forcibly; the trouble is mental inertia—too little analytical thought is given to the subject matter and too little serious effort is made to find an original approach.

Most business letters are cold, impersonal, indifferent: “Our fall catalogue which is sent to you under separate cover;” “We take pleasure in advising you that;” “We are confident that our goods will give you entire satisfaction,” and so on—hackneyed expressions without end—no personality—no originality—no vitality.

The correspondent who has learned how to sell goods by mail uses none of these run-down-at-the-heel expressions. He interests the reader by direct, personal statements: “Here is the catalogue in which you are interested;” “Satisfaction? Absolute! We guarantee it. We urge you not to keep one of our suits unless it is absolutely perfect;” “How did you find that sample of tobacco?” No great mental exertion is required for such introductions, yet they have a personal touch, and while they might be used over and over again they strike the reader as being original, addressed to him personally.

Everyone is familiar with the conventional letter sent out by investment concerns: “In response to your inquiry, we take pleasure in sending you herewith a booklet descriptive of the White Cloud Investment Company.” Cut and dried—there is nothing that jars us out of our indifference; nothing to tempt us to read the proposition that follows. Here is a letter that is certain to interest the reader because it approaches him with an original idea:

“You will receive a copy of the Pacific Coast Gold Book under separate cover. Don’t look for a literary product because that’s not its purpose. Its object is to give you the actual facts and specific figures in reference to the gold-mining industry.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A correspondence school that has got past the stage where it writes, “We beg to call attention to our catalogue which is mailed under separate cover,” injects originality into its letter in this way:

“Take the booklet we have mailed you and examine the side notes on Drawing for Profit and Art Training that apply to you individually and then go back over them carefully.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The reader, even though he may have had nothing more than the most casual interest is certain to finish that letter.

Here is the way a paper manufacturer puts convincing argument into his letter, making it original and personal:

“Take the sheet of paper on which this letter is written and apply to it every test you have ever heard of for proving quality. You will find it contains not a single trace of wood pulp or fillers but is strong, tough, long-fiber linen. Take your pen and write a few words on it. You will find the point glides so smoothly that writing is a pleasure. Then erase a word or two and write them again—do it twice, three or four times—repeated erasures, and still you will find the ink does not blot or spread in the least. This proves the hard body and carefully prepared finish.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Even if a person felt sure that this same letter went to ten-thousand other men, there would be an individuality about it, a vividness that makes the strongest kind of appeal.

In a town in central Indiana two merchants suffered losses from fire. A few days later, one sent out this announcement to his customers:

“We beg to announce that temporary quarters have been secured at 411 Main Street, where we will be glad to see you and will endeavor to handle your orders promptly.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The second firm wrote to its customers:

Dear Mr. Brown:

Yes, it was a bad fire but it will not cripple the business. Our biggest asset is not the merchandise in the store but the good-will of our customers—something that fires cannot damage.

Our store does not look attractive. It won't until repairs are made and new decorations are in, but the bargains are certainly attractive—low prices to move the stock and make room for the new goods that have been ordered. Everything has gone on the bargain tables; some of the goods slightly damaged by water, but many of the suits have nothing the matter with them except a little odor of smoke that will disappear in a couple of days. Come in and look at these goods. See the original price mark—you can have them at just one-half the amount.

Very truly yours,  
[Signature: Smith and Deene] 82

\* \* \* \* \*

Here is originality; emphasis is laid on “good will” in a way that will strengthen this “asset.” The merchant put a personal element into the letter; gave it an original appeal that made it not only a clever bit of advertising, but proclaimed him a live-wire business man.

Here is the letter sent out by a store fixture manufacturer:

“If one of your salesmen should double his sales slips tomorrow you would watch to see how he did it. If he kept up this pace you would be willing to double his wages, wouldn't you? He would double his sales if he could display all his goods to every customer. That's the very thing which the Derwin Display Fixture does—it shows all the goods for your salesman, yet you don't have to pay him a higher salary.”



\* \* \* \* \*

A merchant cannot read this letter without stopping to think about it. The appeal strikes home. He may have read a hundred advertisements of the Derwin fixture, but this reaches him because of the originality of expression, the different twist that is given to the argument. There are no hackneyed expressions, no involved phrases, no unfamiliar words, no selfish motives.

And then comes the man-to-man attitude, the letter in which the writer wins the reader's confidence by talking about "you and me." A western firm handling building materials of all kinds entered the mail-order field. One cannot conceive a harder line of goods to sell by mail, but this firm has succeeded by putting this man-to-man attitude into its letters:

"If you could sit at my desk for an hour—if you might listen a few minutes to the little intimate things that men and women tell me— their hopes, their plans for the home that will protect their families—their little secret schemes to make saved-up money stretch out over the building cost; if you could hear and see these sides of our business you would understand why we give our customers more than mere quality merchandise. We plan for you and give expert advice along with the material."

\* \* \* \* \*

There is nothing cold or distant in this letter; it does not flavor of a soulless corporation. It is intimate, it is so personal that we feel we are acquainted with the writer. We would not need an introduction—and what is more, we trust him, believe in him. Make the man feel that you and he are friends.

Write to the average college or university for a catalogue and it will be sent promptly with a stereotyped letter: "We are pleased to comply with your request," and so forth. But a little school in central Iowa makes the prospective student feel a personal interest in the school and in its officers by this letter:

My dear Sir:

The catalogue was mailed to you this morning. We have tried to make it complete and I believe it covers every important point. But I wish you could talk with me personally for half an hour—I wish you might go over our

institution with me that I might point out to you the splendid equipment, the convenient arrangement, the attractive rooms, the ideal surroundings and the homelike places for room and board.

Won't you drop me a line and let me know what you think about our school? Tell me what courses you are interested in and let me know if I cannot be of some personal assistance to you in making your plans.

I hope to see you about the middle of September when our fall term opens.

Very cordially yours,  
[Signature: Wallace E. Lee]  
President.

\* \* \* \* \*

This letter, signed by the president of the institution, is a heart-to-heart talk that induces many students to attend that school in preference to larger, better-equipped colleges.

A large suit house manufacturing women's garments uses this paragraph in a letter in response to a request for a catalogue:

"And now as you look through this book we wish we could be privileged to sit there with you as you turn its pages. We would like to read aloud to you every word printed on pages 4, 5 and 6. Will you turn to those pages, please? Sometimes we think the story told there of the making of a suit is the most interesting thing ever written about clothes—but then, we think Columbia suits are the most wonderful garments in the world."

\* \* \* \* \*

The letter creates a feeling of intimacy, of confidence in the writer, that no formal arguments, logical reasons or special inducements could ever secure.

Important as these two attitudes are—the personal appeal and the man-to-man appeal—they can be strengthened manifold by making use of that other essential, the "you" element in letters. The mistake of so many writers is that they think of their interests in the transaction rather than the interests of the men to whom they are writing. It is "we" this and "we" that. Yet this "we" habit is a violation of the first rule of business correspondence. "We are very desirous of receiving an order from you." Of course; the reader knows that. Why call his attention to so evident a fact and give emphasis to

the profit that you are going to make on the deal? To get his interest, show him where *he* will gain through this proposition—precious little he cares how anxious you are to make a sale.

Mr. Station Agent—

Brother Railroader:

As soon as you have told the fellow at the ticket window that the noon train is due at twelve o'clock and satisfied the young lady that her telegram will be sent at once and O.S.'d the way freight and explained to the Grand Mogul at the other end of the wire what delayed 'em, I'd like to chat with you just a minute.

It's about a book—to tell the truth, just between you and me, I don't suppose it's a bit better book than you could write yourself if you had time. I simply wrote it because I'm an old railroad man and telegrapher myself and had time to write it.

The title of the book is "At Finnegan's Cigar Store," and the hero of the fourteen little stories which the booklet contains is Mr Station Agent. The first story in the book, "How Finnegan Bought Himself a Diamond," is worth the price of that ten-cent cigar you're smoking, and that's all the book will cost you.

I know you'll like it—I liked it myself. I'm so sure of it I am enclosing a ten-cent coin card for you to use in ordering it. A dime in the card and postage stamp on the letter will bring you the book by first mail. "Nuff said."

"73"

E. N. RICHARDSON.

P. S.—I am enclosing another card for your night operator, if you have one—I'd hate to have him feel that I had slighted him.

\* \* \* \* \*

\_ This letter, sent out under a one-cent stamp to 80,000 agents, pulled 22,000 replies with the money. The writer did not address them individually, but he knew how to flag the interest of a station agent—by working in familiar allusions he at once found the point of contact and made the letter so personal that it pulled enormous results\_

\* \* \* \* \*

No other appeal is so direct, so effective, as that which is summed up in the words “you,” “your business,” “your profits,” “your welfare.” “It costs you too much to sell crockery, but your selling expense can be cut down by utilizing your space to better advantage;” “Your easiest profits are those you make by saving expense;” “Did you ever figure up the time that is wasted in your mailing department by sealing and stamping one letter at a time?”— these are the letters that will be read through. Keep before the reader *his* interest. Show him how your proposition would benefit him.

This letter was sent to lady customers by a mail-order house:

Dear Madam:

You want a dress that does not sag—that does not grow draggy and dowdy? Then you want to make it of Linette—the new dress goods.

You have seen the beautiful new look and rich luster charm of a high-priced fabric. You can find this same quality in Linette at only thirty-nine cents a yard, and then—just think—it will stay in your dress through wearing, washing and wetting, and you will be surprised to see how easily dresses made of it may be washed and ironed and what long service the material will give.

Very truly yours.

[Signature: Anderson & Anderson]

\* \* \* \* \*

In this letter there is not the faintest suggestion of the profits that the writer hopes to make by the sale. A man is going to listen just as long as you talk about him; a woman will keep on reading your letter as long as you talk about her. Shout “You” and whisper “\_me\_” and your letter will carry home, straight to the heart of the reader.

A capitalized “YOU” is often inserted in letters to give emphasis to this attitude. Here is a letter from a clothing concern:

Dear Madam,

Remember this—when we make your suit we make it for YOU just as much as if you were here in our work roomed and, furthermore, we guarantee that it will fit YOU just a perfectly as if you bought it of an individual tailor. We guarantee this perfection or we will refund your money at once without question, and pay the express charges both ways.

We have tried hard to make this style-book interesting and beautiful to you and full of advantage for YOU.

Your friends will ask “Who made your suit?” and we want you to be proud that it is YOUR suit and that WE made it.

Yours very truly,  
[Signature: Adams & Adams ]

\* \* \* \* \*

And there is yet another quality that is frequently most valuable to the correspondent in making his letter personal. It is the element of news value. News interests him especially when it is information about his business, his customers, his territory, his goods, his propositions. Not only does the news interest appeal to the dealer because of its practical value to him, but it impresses him by your “up-to-the-minuteness” and it gives a dynamic force to your letters.

Tell a man a bit of news that affects his pocket book and you have his interest. Offer to save him money and he will listen to your every word, and clever correspondents in manufacturing and wholesale establishments are always on the alert to find some selling value in the news of the day.

One correspondent finds in the opening of lake navigation an excuse for writing a sales letter. If the season opens unusually early he points out to the retailer just how it may affect his business, and if the season opens late he gives this fact a news value that makes it of prime interest to the dealer. A shortage of some crop, a drought, a rainy season, a strike, a revolution or industrial disturbances in some distant country—these factors may have a far-reaching effect on certain commodities, and the shrewd sales manager makes it a point to tip off the firm’s customers, giving them some practical advance information that may mean many dollars to them and his letter makes the reader feel that the house has his interests at heart.

Another news feature may be found in some event that can be connected with the firm’s product. Here is the way a manufacturer of stock food hitches his argument onto a bit of news:

“No doubt you have read in your farm paper about the Poland China that took first prize at the Iowa State Fair last week. You will be interested to know that this hog was raised and fattened on Johnson’s stock food.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This is the way a manufacturer of window screens makes capital out of a new product:

“Throw away that old, rusty, stationary fly screen that you used last season. You won’t need it any more because you can substitute an adjustable one in its place.

“How many times when you twisted and jerked at the old stationary screen did you wish for a really convenient one? The sort of screen you wanted is one which works on rollers from top to bottom so that it will open and close as easily and conveniently as the window itself.

“That’s just the way the Ideal screen is made. It offers those advantages. It was placed on the market only a few months ago yet it is so practical and convenient that already we have been compelled to double the capacity of our factory to handle the growing business.

“All the wood work is made to harmonize with the finish of your rooms. Send the measure of your window and the colors you want and get a screen absolutely free for a week’s trial. If you are not perfectly satisfied at the end of that time that it’s the most convenient screen you ever used, you need send no money but merely return the screen at our expense.

“The Ideal screen is new; it is improved; it is the screen of tomorrow. Are you looking for that kind?”

\* \* \* \* \*

The news element may have its origin in some new feature, some attachment or patent that is of interest to the prospect. A manufacturer of furniture uses this approach effectively:

“The head of my designing department, Mr. Conrad, has just laid on my desk a wonderful design for something entirely new in a dining room table. This

proposed table is so unique, so new, so different from anything ever seen before, I am having the printer strike off some rough proofs of this designer's drawing, one of which I am sending you under separate cover."

\* \* \* \* \*

This letter is manifestly a "today" product. It wins attention because it is so up to date, and a new article may possess the interest-compelling feature that will lead to an order.

Then there are the letters that tell of the purchase of goods. A retailer puts news value into his letter when he writes that he has purchased the entire stock of the bankrupt Brown & Brown at thirty-eight cents on the dollar and that the goods are to be placed on sale the following Monday morning at prices that will make it a rare sales event. This is putting into the letter news value that interests the customer. It is original because it is something that could not have been written a week before and cannot be written by anyone else.

Then there are other elements of news of wide interest—the opening of a new branch office, the increase of facilities by the enlargement of a factory, the perfecting of goods by some new process of manufacture or the putting on the market of some new brand or line. These things may affect the dealer in a very material way and the news value is played up in the most convincing style. The correspondent can bear down heavily on the better service that is provided or the larger line of commodities that is offered. Search through the catalogue of possibilities, and there is no other talking point that it seized upon more joyfully by the correspondent, for a news item, an actual occurrence or some new development that enables him to write forceful, interest-impelling letters, for the item itself is sufficient to interest the dealer or the consumer. All that is required of the correspondent is to make the most of his opportunity, seize upon this news element and mount it in a setting of arguments and persuasion that will result in new business, more orders, greater prestige.

Making The *Form* Letter

PERSONAL

PART III—STYLE—MAKING THE LETTER READABLE—CHAPTER 11

\_Over ONE-HALF of all the form letters sent out are thrown into the waste basket unopened. A bare\_ ONE-THIRD \_are partly read and discarded while only\_ ONE-SIXTH \_of them—approximately 15 per cent—are read through. This wasteful ratio is principally due to the carelessness or ignorance of the firms that send them out— ignorance of the little touches that make all the difference between a personal and a “form letter.” Yet an increase of a mere one per cent in the number of form letters that are\_ READ \_means a difference of hundreds—perhaps thousands of dollars to the sender.

This article is based on the experiences of a house that sends out over a million form letters annually\_

\* \* \* \* \*

There are three ways by which you can deliver a message to one of your customers: you can see him personally, you can telegraph or telephone him, or you can write him a letter. After you have delivered the message you may decide you would like to deliver the same message to 252 other customers.

To see each customer personally, to telegraph or telephone each one, or to write each a personal letter, would prove slow and expensive. So you send the same letter to *all* your customers, since you wish to tell them all the same story.

But you do not laboriously write all these letters on the typewriter; instead, you print them on some kind of duplicating machine.

But it is not enough to print the body of the letter and send it out, for you know from your own point of view that the average man does not give a proposition presented to him in a circular letter, the same attention he gives to it when presented by a personal appeal. And so little plans and schemes are devised to make the letter look like a personally dictated message, not for the purpose of deceiving the reader, but to make your proposition more intimate. This form of presentation is merely a means to an end; just because a letter is duplicated a thousand times does not make the proposition any the less applicable to the reader. It may touch his needs just as positively as if he were the sole recipient. The reason the letter that one knows to be simply a circular fails to grip his attention, is because it fails to get close to him—it does not *look* personal.



So, if form letters are to escape the waste basket—if they are to win the prospect's attention and convince him—they must have all the earmarks of a personally dictated communication. If a proposition is worth sending out it is worthy of a good dress and careful handling.

All the principles of making the individual letter a personal message hold good with the form letter, except that greater pains must be taken to make each letter look personal. Nothing should be put into the letter to a dozen or a thousand men that does not apply to each one individually.

From the mechanical standpoint, there are five parts to a letter:

superscription, body of the letter, signature, enclosures and envelope. In each of these five parts there are opportunities for original touches that make letters more than mere circulars.

The superscription and the way it is inserted in a form letter is the most important feature in making it personal. No semblance of a regularly dictated letter can be given unless the date, name and address are filled in, and if this is not done carefully it is far better to open your letter with "Dear Sir," and thus acknowledge that it is a circular.

To the left, and in exact alignment with the paragraphs in the body of the letter, should appear the name and address of the reader. If this superscription appears a fraction of an inch to either side of the margin the fill-in is evident. The style of type and the shade of the typewriter ribbons used in filling-in must match with absolute accuracy. This is vital and yet the most common error in form letters is imperfect alignment and conspicuously different colors of ink.

To secure an exact match between the filled-in name and address and the body of the letter, it is necessary to use ink on the duplicating machine which matches your typewriter ribbon. The ink used on the duplicating machine can be mixed to correspond with the color of the ribbons. Long experience has shown that violet or purple shades of ink are best for form letters, for these colors are the easiest to duplicate. Black and blue are very difficult to handle because of the great variety of undertones which are put into these inks.

Duplicating machines which print through a ribbon give variable shades and the typist in filling in must watch carefully to see that her typewriter ribbons match the impressions made in the body of the letter, especially where the form letters are printed several months in advance and exposed to changing conditions.

In departments where the stenographers fill in only a few letters a day, a piece of a “fill-in” ribbon is attached to the end of the regular ribbon and used for this purpose.

For speed and better work, typists who do nothing but fill in form letters, overlay their work—that is, before one sheet is taken out of the machine another is started in. A scheme which is slower but gives accuracy, is to work backward on the name and address, writing the “Gentlemen” or “Dear Madam” first, beginning flush with the margin. The town or city is next written, beginning on the paragraph or established margin line and then the name and the date are filled in. Guides may be secured so that all sheets will be fed into the machine at one place, thus assuring an exact margin.

Too much emphasis cannot be laid on the necessity of doing this fill-in work carefully, or not at all. If letters are printed by means of some duplicating machine which prints through a ribbon, care must be taken that the first run from the fresh ribbon is filled in on the typewriter with an equally fresh typewriter ribbon. Later when the machine ribbon is worn, giving a lighter impression, an older ribbon is used on the typewriters.

This fill-in work is difficult, and even when done properly many firms adopt all kinds of little schemes to help out the personal appearance. Separating the superscription from the body of the letter so that the immediate contrast is not so great, accomplishes this purpose.

One familiar scheme is to print the shipping or sales terms of the company across the letterhead so that the first paragraph comes beneath the printed matter and the filled-in superscription above. Then if there is a slight difference in shades of ink it is not so apparent. The same care must, however, be taken with the alignment.

Mr. L. B. Burtis,  
1034 Elm Ave.,  
Ravenswood, Ill.,

Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter of July 3d I  
take pleasure in enclosing the free book  
asked for.

All that I ask is that you read the book—

no longer letter is necessary.

Everything I could say to you in this letter about my chest is in my book. I wrote every word of it so when you read it, I wish you would take it as a personal message from me.

We deliver this chest to Ravenswood at the price quoted in the book.

This is all I am going to say. When you have selected the chest you wish, simply check it on the enclosed post card, and mail to me. Promptly upon its receipt the chest will go to you subject to your approval.

I shall be looking for your post card.

Very truly yours,  
OLD ENGLISH CHEST COMPANY.

\* \* \* \* \*

New York,  
July 7, 1910,

Mr. L. B. Burtis,  
1034 Elm Ave.,  
Ravenswood, Ill.

Dear Sir:

I enclose with pleasure the free book you asked for in your letter of July 3<sup>rd</sup>.

All that I ask is that you read the book—no longer letter is necessary.

Everything I could say to you in this letter about my chest is in my book. I wrote every word of it so when you read it, I wish you would take it as a personal message from me.

The prices quoted you in this book include freight prepaid to Ravenswood.

This is all I am going to say. When you have selected the chest you wish, simply check it on the enclosed post card, and mail to me. Promptly upon its receipt the chest will go to you subject to your approval.

I shall be looking for your post card.

Very truly yours,  
OLD ENGLISH CHEST COMPANY  
[Signature: Edward Brown, Pres.  
Dict EB-ERS.]

\* \* \* \* \*

The wrong and right way of handling form letters. In the first letter the type of the fill-in does not match and the lines are out of alignment. Wide white space at both sides of the date "July 3d" and the town, "Ravenswood," calls attention to the poor fill-in. The second letter shows the same fill-ins coming at the end of paragraphs. The second letter has a date line, personal signature and initials of dictator and stenographer—little touches that add to the personality of the letter.

\* \* \* \* \*

A similar scheme is to write the first paragraph or sentence in red ink. This is a somewhat expensive process, however, for the letter must be run through the duplicating machine twice and skill is required to secure an exact register.

Now that two-colored typewriter ribbons are in such general use the name and address and date are printed in red, eliminating the necessity of matching the ink of the body of the letter. This is an effective attention-getter, but unless carefully printed the impersonality is apparent.

In certain kinds of communications where the more formal customs of social correspondence are sometimes employed, the letter is often opened with the salutation, "My dear Sir." The full name and address is then written in the lower left corner, in alignment with the paragraphs of the body of the letter.

Some businesses, presenting a proposition to a limited number of persons, write the entire first paragraph. It is usually short and of course should be made pointedly personal. "Typing" the name and address onto the form letter is another familiar scheme to make it more personal.

Use of a body fill-in is always effective. But the right way to do this is to phrase the letter so that the name, or date, or word, to be inserted, comes at the beginning or end of the paragraph, preferably at the end. Otherwise the fill-in may be too short for the space allowed and the result is farcical.

Here is an all too common mistake:

"You may be sure, Mr. Hall, that this machine is just as represented."

\* \* \* \* \*

The advantage of having the fill-in at the end of the paragraph is because names vary so much in length that they seldom just fill the space that is left and when there is a long blank space, as in the sentence given above, the scheme is anything but effective.

A manufacturer of automobiles, writing old customers who might wish to exchange their machines for newer models, added a real personal touch by filling in the serial number of each machine at the end of a line. Another individual touch was added in this way:

"You will be interested to know that we have recently sold one of our machines to a near neighbor of yours, Mr. Henry C. Smith of Rock Creek."

\* \* \* \* \*

This sentence was so phrased that the neighbor's name came at the end of a line and could be easily filled in.

A furniture manufacturer works in a personal touch by closing a paragraph of his letter with this sentence:

“You can find our liberal offer to ship freight pre-paid to Rogers Park on page 3 of the catalogue.”

\* \* \* \* \*

The name of the town and page number of the catalogue came at the end of the sentence. Another manufacturer opened his letter with this sentence: “On April 2, we received your inquiry.” In this case, “On April 2,” was filled in at the beginning of the sentence. Both schemes give the “one-man” attitude. A personal touch in the body of the letter indicates an individual communication—as it really is.

There are four ways for making the body of the letter look like a regularly typewritten message: it may be typewritten, printed on a printing press, printed through a ribbon or printed by means of a stenciled waxed paper.

Firms sending out only a few form letters typewrite them so that no effort is necessary to give an individual touch.

But the letter printed from typewriter type by means of an ordinary printing press is obviously nothing more than an ordinary circular. Filling in the name and address by a typewriter is absolutely useless. It is usually advisable to print form letters by means of some duplicating process which prints through a ribbon.

Where a stencil is used, the waxed paper is put in the typewriter and the letter is written on it without a ribbon. Here the stenciled letter replaces the usual type, and the impression secured can seldom be detected from a typewritten letter. A stencil can be made more quickly than type for the same letter can be set. Then the exact touch of the typist is reproduced on the duplicated letters through the stencil. No stenographer can write a letter without making some words heavier than others, the distribution of the ink is not the same throughout, so absolute uniformity in the printed letter is not advisable.

In printing the body of the letter select some process which gives the appearance of typewriting and then match the fill-in. One merchant secured

an effective matching of fill-in and body by printing the form with a poorly-inked ribbon on the duplicating machine and then filling in the name and address with a typewriter ribbon that had been well used. While the general appearance of the letter was marred by this scheme, the impression was that of a letter written on a poor typewriter and it was effective.

The business man, the clerk and the farmer—everyone visited by the postman—is becoming more and more familiar with letters. The day has passed when anyone is deceived by a carelessly handled form letter. Unless a firm feels justified in spending the time and money to fill in the letter very carefully, it is much better to send it out frankly as a circular.

Nor is this always a weakness, for a clever touch can be added that introduces the personal elements. One mail-order house sent out a large mailing with this typewritten notice in the upper left corner of the letterhead:

“You must pardon me for not filling in your name and address at the beginning of this letter, but the truth is I must get off fifty thousand letters tonight, and I have not the necessary stenographic force to fill in the name and address on each individual letter.”

\* \* \* \* \*

In spite of the fact that each man was frankly told that 49,999 other persons were receiving the same letter, the appeal was as personal as an individual message. Another writer opened his communication in this way:

“This letter is to YOU. and it is just as personal as If I had sat down and pounded it off on the typewriter myself, and I am sure that you, as a business man, appreciate that this is a personal message to you, even if I am writing a hundred thousand others at the same time.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This letter struck a popular and responsive chord, for each reader took it to himself as a frank, honest appeal, from a frank, honest business man. It was a direct personal communication because each reader felt that although it was duplicated a thousand times it nevertheless contained a live message.

But the care that some writers take to make the form letter look personal, is the very thing that kills it. They make the letter too perfect. To avoid this

result, leave an imperfect word, here and there, throughout the body of the letter. Watch the setting up of the type to be sure the lines are not spaced out like a printed page. Many correspondents imitate the common mistakes of the typewritten letter from the mechanical standpoint and in the language.

Time spent in correcting these errors with pen and ink is usually considered a paying investment. The tympan of the duplicating machine is sometimes made uneven so that the impression of a typewriter is still further carried out. Some duplicating machines advertise that their type print "loose" for this very purpose. A favorite scheme with firms where letter presses are used is to blur the letter slightly after it has been filled in and signed. A word "XXX'd" out as by a typewriter lends an impression of the personal message, as does also the wrong spelling of a word, corrected by pen and ink.

But fully as vital to the individuality of the letter is the manner in which it is closed. The signature of the form letter is a subject that deserves as careful consideration as the superscription and the body of the letter. The actual typewritten letter to Henry Brown is signed with pen and ink. Even where the name of the company also appears at the end of the letter, the personal signature in ink is desirable. And when you write all the Henry Browns on your mailing list, you should apply the pen-and-ink signature to every letter. That is the only effective way.

It is not so essential that the signature should be applied by the writer personally. Often a girl writes the signature, saving the time of a busy department head. Many firms use a rubber facsimile stamp for applying the signature, but it is not as effective, for it is seldom that the stamped name does not stand out as a mechanical signature. One concern adds the name of the company at the bottom of the letter and has a clerk mark initials underneath with pen and ink.

The form letter has a heavy load which carries a row of hieroglyphics at the bottom of the page—the "X-Y-Z," the "4, 8, 6," the "Dictated WML-OR" and the twenty and one other key numbers and symbols common to the form letters of many houses. When a man receives such a letter, he is impressed by the mass of tangled mechanical operations the message has undergone; on its face he has the story of its mechanical make-up and its virility is lost, absolutely.

Then consider the various notes, stamped in a frankly mechanical manner at the bottom of the letter, such as, "Dictated, but not read," "Signed in the



absence of Mr. So-and-So.” To the average man who finds one of these notes on the letter, there is the impression of a slap in the face. He does not like to be reminded that he may converse with the stenographer in the absence of the president. When a letter says “Not read” he feels that the message was not of sufficient importance to warrant the personal attention of the writer. Eliminate all such notes from the form letter.

Sometimes a postscript may suggest a note of personality. For instance, one firm writes underneath the signature: “I want you to look especially at the new model on page 37 of the catalogue.” This is effective if done with pen and ink, but if printed or stamped, it gives no additional tone of individuality to the letter. One manufacturer had a postscript written on an extra slip of paper which he pasted to the corner of the sheet.

Another concern writes out on a piece of white paper the blue-penciled postscript: “I’ll send you this three-tool garden kit *free* (express prepaid) if your order for the patent roller reaches me before the 5<sup>th</sup>.” This is made into a zinc etching and printed in blue so perfectly that the postscript appears to have been applied with a blue pencil.

Still another postscript scheme is to write the form letter so that it just fills the first page, then to dictate and sign a paragraph for a second page—a most effective plan.

Then you must consider the enclosure that often goes with the letter. This frequently stamps it a circular. If you are offering a special discount or introductory sale price, for instance, it would be ridiculous to say in your letter, “This is a special price I am quoting to you,” when the reader finds the same price printed on the circular. Print the regular price, and then blot out the figures with a rubber stamp and insert the special price with pen and ink, or with a stamp.

If you offer a special discount it is best to say so frankly:

“I am making this special discount to a selected list of a few of our old friends. And in order that you may be sure of this discount I am enclosing the discount card which will entitle you to the special prices.”

\* \* \* \* \*

[Illustration: \_A series of letterheads that illustrate various uses of the product and so not only vary the appearance of successive letters but afford good advertising\_.]

[Illustration: \_For different departments, to handle different classes of correspondence or simply to vary their follow-up, varying letterheads are used\_.]

\* \* \* \* \*

The discount card should be filled-in with the name of the person written and stamped with a serial numbering machine. The date the special offer expires should also be stamped on the circular. In making a special offer to a "limited number of persons," the enclosure describing it and the return order blank should not be too elaborate or carefully prepared. It is more effective to make them inexpensive and give a careless appearance. Aim to carry the impression that with a hundred or so you could not afford to do it better.

Do not let an opportunity pass to give the enclosure the same personal touch that you aim at in the letter. Some houses even sign the reader's name to the card. A pencil or pen mark over some particular feature of the enclosure is another way to suggest personal attention.

Refer to the enclosure in a way that indicates individual attention.

A correspondence school takes off the weight of the overload of enclosures by inserting this paragraph:

"So in order that you may properly understand our proposition I am enclosing these circulars and application blanks. It is impossible to tell one whole story in a single letter, or even a series of letters. To make them perfectly plain I have asked my stenographer to number them with a pen, and I will refer to them in this letter in that order."

\* \* \* \* \*

A manufacturer who has succeeded in the mail-order business turns down a page in his catalogue, and refers to it in this way:

"I have turned down the corner of a page--39--in my catalogue that I particularly want you to read. On this page you will find pictured and described the best value in a single-seated carriage ever offered to the public.

Turn to this page now and see if you can afford not to investigate this proposition further.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A successful campaign prepared by a wholesale house consisted simply of a letter and a cheap-looking yellow circular, across the top of which had been printed with a typewriter duplicating machine this heading:

“There is no time to prepare an elaborate circular—the time limit set on this offer is too short.”

\* \* \* \* \*

This idea was further strengthened by additional typewritten notes on the top and sides of the circular. The special offer and order blank appeared in typewriter type on the back of the circular.

Another scheme which pulled results for a tailor was this typewritten postscript:

“The enclosed is a circular letter. If I sent it to you without this personal note, I fear you would be too busy to give it the attention it deserves. So I ask you now—in justice to your interests—to read this circular as carefully as if I had put the whole thing in a personal letter to you.”

\* \* \* \* \*

It is an easy matter to enclose a few typewritten names, so a paper manufacturer says in his answer to an inquiry:

“I’m sending you a list of the printers in your immediate vicinity from whom you can secure our bond papers.”

\* \* \* \* \*

A land concern refers to an enclosed list in this way:

“So you can investigate for yourself just what our proposition will do for you, I am having my stenographer make up a list of a few purchasers in your vicinity from whom you can secure first hand facts.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Another concern typewrites the note “Personal Matter” on the enclosed return envelope to give added individuality to it. Thus the return envelope contributes to the general impression of the one-man message. But whether it is the superscription, the body of the letter, the closing or the enclosure, there is one general principle that must be followed: first consider how you would handle the individual letter, then make the form letter similar. Make the form letter talk as though it were intended for one man. Keep this rule in mind and your form letters will pull.

Making *Letterheads* and *Envelopes*  
DISTINCTIVE

#### PART IV—THE DRESS OF A BUSINESS LETTER—CHAPTER 12

\_The dress of a business letter reflects the character and the standing of a house no less than the dress of its personal representative. The quality of the paper, the kind of printing or engraving, the mechanical make-up—all these things contribute to the *IMPRESSION a letter makes upon the recipient even BEFORE THE MESSAGE IS READ.* \_Many letters come to nothing because their dress is unattractive, cheap, slovenly; and so progressive business men are learning to select their stationery with care to insure for it both tone and dignity. The kind of paper to select—the size, the tint and the quality—is described and explained in the following chapter\_

\* \* \* \* \*

The first impression created by a business letter is based upon its outward appearance—upon its mechanical make-up, the quality of its paper, the

grade of its printing or engraving; upon the superficial qualities that are apparent at a glance.

The externals do not necessarily reflect the quality of the message within the letter. But the experienced business man, who is trained to make his estimate quickly, gets an impression of some kind—good, bad or indifferent—of every letter that comes before him, even before a word of that letter is read.

In other words, the general appearance of the letter is the first appeal that it makes to the average man. The nearer that appearance conforms to the appearance of the letters from reputable concerns with which he is familiar, the more favorably he is impressed with it. The farther its appearance departs from the established and approved standards, the more forcibly will that letter force itself upon his attention. But whether the recipient is favorably or unfavorably impressed by this prominence depends upon the skill and ingenuity with which the letter is made up mechanically.

Generally speaking, business correspondence paper may be classified as follows:

First: The *conventional* stationery, that conforms to the established rules and the principal variation of which is in the quality of its paper and printing.

Second: The *individualistic* stationery, that departs from the usual styles and is good to the extent that it meets the unusual requirements for which it is designed.

Third: The *eccentric* stationery, which is usually merely a fanciful violation of the conventions for the purpose of being conspicuous.

Of these three types of business stationery, the first is essentially practical and sane; the second is forceful if it does not violate the fundamental rules of color and design, and if it has a peculiarly apt application; while the third is almost invariably in as poor taste as eccentricity in dress.

The first consideration in the preparation of business stationery is the paper, or “stock.”

The quality of this “stock,” like the quality of material of a suit of clothes, largely determines the taste, if not the resources of the owner. Important messages may be written on cheap stationery; big men with big plans are sometimes clad in shoddy garments. But ninety-nine out of a hundred are not, and the hundredth man, who does not conform to the accepted order of things, is taking an unnecessary business risk of being wrongly classified. After a man has delivered his message, the quality of his clothes is not an

important item. After a letter has been read, the quality of its paper is insignificant. But as the man is seen before he is heard, and the letter before it is read, it is good business to make both dress and stationery conform to approved styles.

For instance, the average financial institution, such as a bank or trust company, takes every precaution to create an impression of strength and security. The heavy architecture of its building, the massive steel bars, its uniformed attendants the richness of its furnishings, all tend to insure a sense of reliability. Does it use cheap stationery? On the contrary, it uses rich, heavy bond. The quality of its paper conforms to the dignity and wealth of the institution; indeed, so long has the public been trained to expect good letter paper from such concerns that it would be apt to mistrust, perhaps unconsciously, the house that resorted to cheap grades of stationery which is almost invariably associated with cheap concerns or with mere form letters issued in large quantities.

Stationery should be representative of the business from which it comes. The impression created by a well-dressed man, as well as of a well-dressed letter, is seldom analyzed; the first glance is generally sufficient to establish that impression. A letter soliciting an investment of money, if printed on cheap stock, may create such a tawdry impression as to be discarded instantly by the average business man, although the letter may come from an entirely reliable house and contain an excellent business proposition on good, substantial paper. For this reason, the letter that departs from the usual standards must assume unnecessary risks of being thrown away unread.

To discriminate at a glance between important and inconsequential business letters, is what most men have been trained to do. It is not exaggeration to claim that the success of many business letters often depends upon the paper. The difference between the letter of an obscure country merchant or lawyer, and that of his well-known correspondent in the city, lies often in its mechanical appearance. The one, who is not trained to observe what he considers trifling items, uses paper that is cheap and easily available; the other, experienced in the details that tend to increase the dignity of the house, selects his stationery with care from a wider assortment. Ninety-nine times out of a hundred the two letters may be identified at a distance. The message of one letter may be just as important as the other; but one is properly and the other is improperly "clothed."

What the firm thinks about business stationery is not so important as what the recipients think. Do not buy good stock because it pleases the "house,"

but because it influences the man to whom the house writes. First impressions are usually strongest and the first impression produced by a letter comes from the paper upon which it is written.

Some men seem to feel superior to creating a good impression. They do not want to stoop so low as to go to the best hotel. They will not buy a hat or an umbrella that can help them get business. Their general idea is to bang their way into the market and succeed in their shirt sleeves, as it were, and on the strength of the goods. Of course, if a man has time to succeed in his shirt sleeves, there is no objection to it. The idea of having as one's address the best hotel, or in writing one's business on the best paper, is not that a man could not succeed in his shirt sleeves, if he set out to, but that he has not time. He gets little things out of the way and proceeds to business.

The quality of the paper must be largely influenced by the purpose, as well as by the quantity of the letters to be written. A firm that sends out hundreds of thousands of form letters to sell a small retail article in the rural districts, will not use an expensive stock; it will use a cheaper quality of paper. If the form letter goes to business or professional men in the city, the quality of the paper will be determined accordingly. In every instance, stock should be selected which will meet the expectations of the recipient.

The fact that the recipient knows a form letter as such, largely nullifies its influence. A business man who sends out a large number of form letters a year claims that when he gets a reply beginning, "In response to your form letter," he knows that the effect of that letter is absolutely lost on a large percentage of this list who seldom or never bother to read such communications. And one of the distinguishing marks of such a letter is the poor quality of its paper.

Different grades of stationery may be used for the various departments. For inter-house or inter-department correspondence, an inexpensive paper is desirable. For many purposes, indeed, a low-priced stock is entirely permissible. But the higher the quality of paper, the more exclusive and personal that letter becomes, until, in the cases of executive heads of corporations, the stock used is of the best. One well-known corporation regularly uses six different grades of paper for its letters; one grade is engraved upon a thin bond of excellent quality and used by the president of the company when writing in his official capacity; another grade is engraved upon a good quality of linen paper and is used by the other officers, sales managers and heads of office departments when writing official letters to outside parties; when writing to officers or employees of their own concern, the same letterhead, lithographed on a less expensive grade of paper, is used;

A fourth grade of bond paper is used by officers and department heads for their semi-official correspondence. The sixth grade is used only for personal letters of a social nature; it is of a high quality of linen stock, tinted. Thus, the size, shape and quality of the paper and letterhead in each instance is made to conform to the best business and social usages.

For business correspondence, custom allows but little leeway in the choice of paper. For print shops, advertising concerns, ink manufacturers, engravers, or paper manufacturers, stationery offers an opportunity to exploit their taste or products in an effective and legitimate manner. For most houses, however, a plain bond, linen, or the vellums and hand-made papers that are coming into favor, furnish the best letter paper.

Colors on correspondence paper are seldom used to good effect; the results are frequently glaring and cheap. When in doubt as to what tint to use in the paper stock, use white, which is always in good taste. Tinted stock is occasionally used to good advantage as a "firm color." In such cases all the correspondence of that house has a uniform tint, which thus acquires an advertising value in attracting attention to itself among a mass of other letters. Aside from this occasional and often doubtful advertising value, tinted stock tends toward the eccentric except in the cases of paper dealers, publishers, or printers who have a purpose in displaying typographical effects.

Many concerns use paper of various tints, each of which identifies the particular department from which it comes. Thus, white paper may mark the letters from the executive department, blue from the selling department, and brown from the manufacturing department. But, even in such cases, the colors are used ordinarily only for inter-house or inter-department communications.

The sheet should be of standard size; that is the letter sheet should be folded to fit exactly into the envelope that is used.

Only such paper stock should be selected as can hold ink readily. Never select a stock that is not entirely serviceable on a typewriting machine. Never sacrifice the practical to the eccentric in business stationery.

An inferior quality of stationery is sometimes accepted by the shrewd observer either as a deliberate act to economize or as an indication of poor taste or indifference. A man who gets an estimate, for example, written on cheap paper, may be led to believe that the man who skimps on letter paper is apt to skimp on his work. So long as the paper represents the sender, just so long will the sender be judged by it.



From a semi-business or social standpoint, stationery often plays an important role; many instances are recorded where a man's private note paper has been the means of eliminating his name from select, social lists. The lady who, in writing to an employment office for a butler, used her private stationery with the remark, "that is one more way of giving them to understand what sort of a butler I want," knew the effect produced by proper letter paper.

In other words, the *stationery* of a business house—the size, the proportions, the tint, the quality of its correspondence-paper— offers the first of the several opportunities for the correspondent to put the recipient into a receptive state of mind toward the communication. It is an item that the shrewd correspondent does not ignore, because it offers him an opportunity—and the first opportunity—to score.

### The *Typographical* Make-Up Of BUSINESS LETTERS

#### PART IV—THE DRESS OF A BUSINESS LETTER—CHAPTER 13

All business houses recognize the necessity for having printed letterheads and envelopes, but the variety of designs and styles are infinite. Nothing, not even the paper, affords such an index to the character of the individual or firm as the typography of the envelope and letterhead. An impression, favorable or otherwise, is created BEFORE THE LETTER IS READ. This chapter describes the methods of printing, engraving and lithographing; the advantages of each process, and the difference in prices; the proper placing of date, name and address, the width of margins, spacing between lines—little points that contribute to the appearance of the letter and give it tone.

\* \* \* \* \*

The feature of a business letter that invariably commands the first conscious attention of the recipient is the name—printed or written—of the firm or individual from whom the letter comes.

Except when the correspondent intentionally omits this information for the purpose of inducing the recipient to notice a circular letter that he might otherwise ignore, the name and address of the sender is printed on the envelope.

This is done for two reasons: it brings the name of the correspondent before the recipient immediately upon receipt of the letter; it tends to secure favorable attention, and it enables the post office authorities to return letters to the senders in case of non-delivery because of removals, death, wrong address or other causes.

In either case, the interests of the correspondent are best served by printing this information in the upper left corner of the face of the envelope. It is this side of the envelope that bears the address and the stamp, and consequently the only side, under ordinary circumstances, that receives attention from either the postal officials or the recipient. When the sender's name is printed in this position, it is brought prominently to the attention of the recipient as the letter is placed before him. But even a more practical reason for putting this data in the upper left corner is that such a location on the envelope permits the post office rubber stamp, “\_Return to Sender\_,” to be affixed, in case of need, without the confusion and annoyance that is caused when this address is printed on the back of the envelope, as is sometimes done.

As a rule, the printed matter that appears on the envelope should consist merely of the name and address of the sender in plain, legible letters.

In no case should the address be ambiguous. However many branch offices the firm may have, the use of more than one address on the envelope is apt to be confusing and may result in a communication's being returned to an office other than that from which it comes. To avoid this, only one address should be printed on the envelope, and that should be the address to which the correspondence is to be returned by the postal authorities in case of non-delivery to the addressee. The trade mark or other similar distinctive imprint of a firm may properly be used on the envelope, but only in cases where it will not tend to confuse or crowd the essential wording. The name of the person to whom the letter is to be returned is of considerable more practical value to the postman than a unique design with which the envelope may be adorned.

The letterhead offers wider opportunities for an array of data. Pictures of offices, buildings and factories, trade marks, lists of branch offices, cable codes and the names of officers and executive heads may be used, but too

much reading matter leads to confusion. The tendency today is toward simplicity. The name and address of the firm, and the particular department or branch office from which the communication comes, is regarded as sufficient by many houses. The day of the letterhead gay with birds-eye views of the plant and much extraneous information seems to be passing, and money that was once spent in elaborate designs and plates is now put into the “quality” of the letter paper—and quality is usually marked by dignified simplicity and directness.

Letterheads may be mechanically produced by several different processes that range widely in costs. The principal methods of printing letterheads are:

First: From type.

Second: From zinc or half-tone plates made from drawings—generally designated as “photo-engraving”.

Third: From plates engraved on copper or steel.

Fourth: From lithograph plates, engraved on stone.

Fifth: From photogravure or similar engraved plates.

Generally speaking, letterheads printed from type are the cheapest. The costs of type composition for an ordinary letterhead will vary from fifty cents to four or five dollars, dependent upon the amount of work. The printing ranges in cost from one dollar a thousand sheets for one color to several times that amount, dependent upon the quality of ink and paper, and upon local conditions. Many concerns are discarding letterheads printed from type, as more individuality can be shown in some form of engraved or lithographed work.

Good results may often be secured from “line cuts” or zinc plates— which cost from five to ten cents a square inch, with a minimum charge ranging from fifty cents to a dollar—made from pen-and-ink drawings. Good and distinctive lettering may often be secured in this way, where type matter does not offer the same opportunities. The cost of printing from zinc plates is practically the same as the cost of printing from type. If the drawings are made in water color, “wash” or oil, or if they contain fine crayon or pencil shadings, the reproductions must be made from half-tone plates. These cost from twelve cents to twenty cents a square inch, with a minimum rate that usually is equivalent to the cost of ten square inches. Half-tones, however, can be printed only on an enamel or other smooth-surface paper, and cannot be used satisfactorily on a rough-surface paper as can zinc plates.

Copper or steel engravings are made from designs furnished either by the engraver or by some other designer. For simple engraved lettering such as is customarily used on business stationery, the cost of a copper plate is about ten cents a letter. For elaborate designs the costs increase proportionately. Steel plates, which are more durable, cost about sixty per cent more. Printing from such plates is considerably more expensive than the two processes previously described. Engraved letterheads cost from six dollars upward a thousand for the printing, while the envelopes cost approximately two dollars and fifty cents a thousand. The envelopes are usually printed from steel dies, which cost about ten cents a letter.

For large orders of stationery, exceeding 20,000 sheets, lithography offers economies in price and other advantages that render it more practical than metal engraving. The design is engraved upon stone and printed from the stone block. While the initial costs of lithography are high, ranging from \$25.00 to \$100.00 for the engraving (with an average cost of about \$50.00), the price of printing is so moderate as to make this form of production popular among extensive users of business paper. Lithography gives a smooth, uniform and permanent impression on the paper, and permits of an indeterminate "run." The cost of printing from lithographic plates is practically the same as from steel or copper plates. The savings effected in large orders is in the cost of the plates, for copper and steel must be renewed as they become worn down.

The photogravure process is costly both in the plate-making and in the printing. While it gives a rich and uniform impression on the letter paper, and is highly valuable for reproducing pictures and ornate designs, it is adaptable only for special purposes and is not generally regarded as suitable for commercial work. A photogravure plate costs from seventy-five cents to one dollar and twenty-five cents a square inch, or about \$12.00 to \$50.00 for a letterhead. The printing costs about the same as for other engraved stationery. With other processes, somewhat similar in the market, this method of printing letterheads has not yet won extensive favor.

It is now almost universally recognized that a letter should be written on one side of the sheet only.

A copy should be kept of every communication that leaves the office. Either a carbon copy may be made at the time the letter is written—six good copies can be made simultaneously on the average typewriter, although one is usually sufficient—or a letter-press copy can be made from the sheet after it is signed. Both forms have been accepted by the courts as legal copies of correspondence.

Such copies are usually filed alphabetically either by the name of the company or individual to whom the letter is addressed.

Letter-press copies must necessarily be filed chronologically, even when separate books for each letter of the alphabet are maintained. In either case the search through the files for a letter copy is facilitated by placing the name, address and date of a letter at the top.

For the same reason the date of a letter should be placed in the upper right corner of the page; the recipient must know when the communication is sent; it may have a bearing on other communications. The name and address of the addressee, similar to the address on the envelope, should in all cases be placed, as the formal salutation, in the upper left corner of the sheet, whether the correspondent be greeted "Dear Sir" or "Gentlemen." Not only does this establish at once the exact individual for whom the communication is intended but it facilitates the filing of the correspondence, both by the recipient and by the sender.

The margins of a business letter, owing to the limitations of the typewriter, are usually variable. The space occupied by the letterhead must, of course, determine the margin at the top of the sheet. Theoretically, the margins at the left and right should be exactly the same size; practically, however, the typewriter lines will vary in length and cause an uneven edge on the right side. In printing, the use of many-sized spaces not only between words but at times, between the letters themselves rectifies these variations, but the typewriter does not permit this. The more even the right margin is and the more uniform it is to the left margin, the better the effect. The margins should be about one and a half inches in width. The margin at the bottom should not be less than the side margins. Should it be smaller, the page will appear cramped for space as the reading matter will be really running over into the margin—a typographical defect that is as noticeable on typewritten as on printed pages.

The spacing between the lines and between the paragraphs of a business letter may vary to suit the tastes of the individual, although considerations of a practical nature tend to establish a few general principles.

Both for purposes of convenience and of economy, a letter should be as compact as possible, both in words and in mechanical production. It should not take up two sheets if the message can be written on one without undue crowding. Hence most business letters are single spaced; that is, only one space on the typewriter separates the lines. Even when a letter is short, it is advisable for purposes of uniformity, to use single spaces only.

The first line of each paragraph is usually indented from five to fifteen points on the machine. Each business house should establish exactly what this indentation shall be in order to secure uniformity in its correspondence. Instead of indenting the first line, some concerns designate the paragraphs merely by separating them by double spacings, beginning the first line flush with the left margin. The best practice, however, seems to embody both of these methods, but the average business letter usually has its paragraphs separated by double spacing and indenting the first line.

The address on the envelope, to which the salutation at the top of the letter should correspond, either exactly or in slightly condensed form, may be properly typewritten in various ways. The style that is most observed, however, and which has the stamp of general approval, provides for an indentation of about five points on each line of the address.

Between the lines the spacings may be either single or double but the latter is preferable. Greater spacing tends to separate the address too much to allow it to be read quickly.

Another approved, though less popular form of address does not indent the lines at all.

Any radical departure from these forms should be made cautiously, especially if the various items of the address are separated from each other.

The address, like a paragraph, is generally read as a unit—as a single, distinct idea. The closer the address conforms to the generally accepted forms, the more readily are the envelopes handled by the postoffice and the less danger of delay.

Getting a UNIFORM *Policy* and  
*Quality* in Letters

#### PART IV—THE DRESS OF A BUSINESS LETTER—CHAPTER 14

Every correspondent naturally reflects his own personality in his letters. His distinguishing characteristics, good, bad and indifferent, inevitably tend to find expression in his correspondence—UNLESS THOSE TENDENCIES ARE GUIDED. That is exactly what the modern business house does. It directs the work of

its correspondents by means of general and specific rules as well as by instruction in the policies of the house until all of its letters are uniform in quality and bear the stamp of a consistent personality—the personality of “the house”\_

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A number of years ago, the president of a company manufacturing carriages felt that he was not getting adequate results for the money he was spending in the mail sales department. One day he called a meeting of all his correspondents and asked each man what arguments he used in writing to prospects. He discovered that eight correspondents were using eight different lines of talk. One emphasized this feature of the carriage, a second based his argument on another feature, and no two correspondents were reaching prospects from the same angle or making use of the same arguments.

“Here are eight different approaches,” said the president. “It is certain that one of these must be more effective than the other seven. They can’t all be best. It is up to us to test them out and determine which one is best and then we will all use it.”

When the proposition was presented in this way, it was so elementary that everyone wondered why it had not been thought of before. A series of tests followed with the different arguments and presentations and by a process of elimination the company proved conclusively which was the strongest approach. Then all of the correspondents used it in the first letter and the second strongest argument was used in the second letter, and so on through the follow-up. It was no longer left for each man to develop his arguments and his selling talk according to his own ideas. Through tests, consultation and discussion, every point was considered and all the correspondence was on the same level.

By adopting a uniform policy the efficiency of the sales department was increased, the quality of the letters was raised and the work was handled more expeditiously and more economically.

One cannot write to all his customers and prospects; that is why it is necessary to have correspondents in the various departments. It is an easy matter to adopt rules and establish policies that will make their letters of a much higher standard and give them greater efficiency than if each went his own way without rule or regulation to guide him. Every correspondent represents the house in a dignified manner and handles the subjects

intrusted to his care in a way that will reflect the best thought and the most successful methods of the house. Not everyone can be developed into a master correspondent but it is possible to establish a policy and enforce rules that will give quality and at least a fair measure of salesmanship to all letters.

Many businesses have grown so rapidly and the heads have been so absorbed in the problems of production and extending markets that little time or thought has been given to the work of the correspondents. And so it happens that in many concerns the correspondence is handled according to the whims, the theories and the personality of the various men who are in charge of the different departments. But there are other concerns that have recognized the desirability of giving individuality to all the mail that bears a house message. They have found that the quality can be keyed up and the letters, even though they may be written in a dozen different departments, all have the family resemblance and bear evidence of good parentage.

And it may be certain that when all the letters from a house impart this tone, this atmosphere of quality and distinction, it is not because of chance. It is not because the correspondents all happen to use a similar policy. Such letters imply a deliberate, persistent, intelligent effort to keep the correspondence from falling below a fixed level. Such a policy represents one of the finer products of the process of systematically developing all the factors in modern business—the stamping of a strong individuality upon all of the correspondence of a large organization.

To secure this uniformity in policy and in quality, it is necessary to adopt a set of clear, comprehensive rules and to impress upon the correspondents the full significance of the standing, the character and the traditions of the house.

There are certain tendencies on the part of some correspondents that can be overcome by a general rule. For instance, there are the correspondents who try to be funny in their letters. Attempts at humor should be forbidden for the day has gone when the salesman can get orders by telling a funny story. Another correspondent may deal too largely in technicalities in his letters, using words and phrases that are not understood.

Then there is the correspondent who has an air of superiority in his letters and writes with impudence and his letters suggest a condescension on his part to explain a proposition; or the complaint department may have a man who grants an allowance or makes an adjustment but puts a sting into his letter that makes the reader wish he had never patronized the house. All



such tendencies may be eradicated by a set of rules giving specific instruction on how to handle every point that comes up and the attitude that is to be assumed in answering complaints, collecting accounts, making sales, and so forth.

And in order to have the letters reflect the house, rules have been adopted in some cases that cover every conceivable point from a broad policy in handling arguments to a specific rule regarding the use of commas.

For instance, it is no longer left to the discretion of the correspondent to start his letter "John Smith." A rule provides that all letters shall begin "Mr. John Smith." For the sake of dignity, a western mail-order house decided to use "Dear Sir" and "Dear Madam" in the first three letters that went to a customer. But on the third and succeeding letters this house uses the salutation "Dear Mr. Smith" or "Dear Mrs. Smith."

This is a matter of policy, a rule that will keep the letters up to a fixed standard.

\* \* \* \* \*

Page from One Firm's Book of Rules:

In a long letter, or where two or more subjects are treated, each subject must be introduced with an appropriate subhead.

All letters, long or short, must carry a general subject head between the address and the first paragraph. This general head and the subheads must be in capitals, underscored with a single line, and as nearly as possible in the middle of the sheet from right to left.

Carefully avoid even the appearance of sarcasm.

Be wary of adjectives, particularly superlatives. "Very," "great," "tremendous," "excellent," etc., have marred many an otherwise strong phrase and have propped needlessly many a good word, all-sufficient of itself.

Never use the first personal pronoun "I" when writing as Blank Company. "We" is the proper pronoun. Where a personal reference is necessary, "the writer" may be used; but even this should be avoided wherever possible.

Don't forget that certain small words are in the language for a purpose. "And," "a," "the," are important, and their elimination often makes a letter bald, curt, and distinctly inelegant.

Carefully avoid such words and stock phrases as “beg to acknowledge,” “beg to inquire,” “beg to advise,” etc. Do not “beg” at all.

Do not say “kindly” for “please.”

Do not say “Enclosed herewith.” Herewith is superfluous.

Do not “reply” to a letter; “answer” it. You answer a letter and reply to an argument.\_

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In determining a uniformity in policy and quality, the rules may be grouped in three classes: those which determine the attitude of the writer; those that relate to the handling of subject matter; and then there are specific rules, such as the style of paper, the salutation, the subscription, signature, and so forth.

The attitude and policy of the house must be determined according to the nature of the business and the ideas of the management. The same rules will not apply to all houses but this does not lessen the desirability of an established policy. For instance, one large corporation, selling entirely to dealers and to large contractors, forbids the use of the first person singular. Under no consideration is the correspondent permitted to say “I”. And if a personal reference is absolutely necessary, he must refer to “the writer”.

The rule is to say “we” and the correspondents are urged to avoid this personal pronoun, using the name of the company, as, “It has always been the practice of the Workwell Company,” and so on.

Most mail-order houses, on the other hand, get just as far away from this formal attitude as possible. Here it is the policy to get up close to the reader by a “you-and-me” attitude. Some mail-order houses have letters written in the name of the company, signed by the writer as department manager, sales manager, or other officer. Then there are other houses that omit the company name entirely in order to get away from the “soulless corporation” idea as much as possible, and letters to a customer are always signed by the same individual to get a personal relationship that is considered a most valuable asset. This does not mean merely the matter of the signature, but the entire attitude of the letter. “Address your reply to me personally” is the spirit of these firms—a policy that has been adopted after tests have

demonstrated that it is the one appeal most effective with the average mail-order customer.

A large concern aims to make its points stand out more clearly by having the arguments presented in a one, two, three order, and each paragraph is introduced with a subject printed in capitals at the beginning of the first line, such as *Location, Terms, Guarantee*. This company, dealing in lands, usually finds it necessary to write rather lengthy letters and the subject heads serve as guide-posts and tend to concentrate attention.

One firm has barred all superlative adjectives, not merely to guard against exaggeration but because the superlative degree lacks conviction. The statement that "This is the best collar ever made" is not believed, but to say that it is a "fine" collar or a "good" collar for it is five-ply, and so forth, rings true. It is a better selling talk and so the superlative is not permitted.

Then there are other general policies that concerns have adopted, such as a rule that the price of articles cannot be mentioned in a letter. A printed enclosure gives this information and reference may be made to it, but the dollar mark does not appear in the letter itself. This policy has been adopted to emphasize upon readers the fact that the company quotes but one price to all, and it makes an effective selling talk out of the point that special discounts and "inside prices" are never given. As confidence is always the first essential in building up a mail-order business, this policy has done much towards increasing the standing and reputation of the houses using it.

And then come certain specific instructions covering a multitude of details. For instance, the style of paper is a matter that progressive business houses no longer ignore. The policy of the house may be revealed in the envelope and letter paper before one has had time to read even the date line. Some firms provide different grades of stationery for different departments, the sales letters going out in a much finer dress than letters from other departments.

The style to use is largely a matter of personal taste and preference. The significant thing is not in the kind that is used by certain companies but the fact that progressive business houses now appreciate the necessity for a uniformity in stationery and in the manner of handling it.

Harmony of color is especially desirable—the tint of the paper, the color of the lithographing, embossing or printing, the color of the typewriter ribbon used and the color of the ink used in signing. None of these points are too small to be considered in the progressive business houses today.

The closing is no less important than the opening and most rule books relieve the correspondent of all responsibility in deciding on what subscription to use or how to sign the letter. For instance, he is told that the house policy is to close with "Yours truly" and that the name of the company is written with the typewriter followed by the signature of the writer and his title, such as "President," or "Sales Manager."

A publishing house in the east for years clung to the established policy of having all letters go out in the name of the president. But it was finally decided by the executive committee that this policy tended to belittle the house, for it was obvious that no institution of any size could have all its mail handled directly from the president's office. It was argued that if the president's name were used only occasionally, greater prestige would be given to the letters that actually came from his office, and thereafter letters were signed by different department heads as "Manager of Sales," "Advertising Manager," "Managing Editor," "Manager of Collection Department," and so forth.

And just so one could go through the book of rules of any business house and find a good reason for every policy that has been adopted. For while it is desirable to have a "family resemblance" which is possible only through established rules, and while letters written under specific instructions have added dignity and character, yet there is back of each rule some additional significance, the force of some tested argument, the psychological effect of some timely suggestion.

No longer do large manufacturing and mercantile houses send out their salesmen and allow each one to push his line as he sees best. Many concerns require the salesmen to take a regular course of training to learn thoroughly the "house" attitude, and they are given instructions on the best way to present arguments and overcome objections—just so the men who sell by letter are now instructed in the best methods for getting results.

The best way to secure a uniform policy is a practical question. Some houses employ a correspondent expert to spend a few weeks in the correspondence department just the same as an expert auditor is employed to systematize the accounting department. In other houses the book of rules is a matter of evolution, the gradual adding of new points as they come up and as policies are tried out, a process of elimination determining those that should be adopted. In some concerns the correspondents have regular meetings to discuss their problems and to decide upon the best methods of meeting the situations that arise in their work. They read letters that have

pulled, analyze the arguments and in this way try to raise the quality of their written messages.

While it must be admitted that some men have a natural faculty of expressing themselves clearly and forcibly, the fact remains that letter writing is an art that may be acquired. It necessitates a capacity to understand the reader's attitude; it requires careful study and analysis of talking points, arguments and methods of presentation, but there is no copyright on good letters and any house can secure a high standard and be assured that distant customers are handled tactfully and skilfully if a uniform policy is worked out and systematically applied.

### Making Letters UNIFORM In *Appearance*

#### PART IV—THE DRESS OF A BUSINESS LETTER—CHAPTER 15

\_Business stationery should reflect the house that sends it out but unless specific rules are adopted there will be a lack of uniformity in arrangement, in style, in spelling, infolding—all the little mechanical details that contribute to an impression of\_ CHARACTER *and* INDIVIDUALITY. \_Definite instructions should be given to correspondents and stenographers so that letters, although written in a dozen different departments, will have a uniformity in appearance. What a book of instructions should contain and how rules can be adopted is described in this chapter\_

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Just as progressive business houses now aim to have their correspondence uniform in policy and quality, so too, they aim at uniformity in letter appearance—the mechanical production. It is obvious that if the letters sent out by a house are to have character, one style must be adopted and definite rules must be formulated for the guidance of the stenographers. The authorities differ on many points such as the use of capital letters, abbreviations, the use of figures, and so forth, and it is not to be expected that stenographers, trained at different schools and working in different

departments, could produce uniformity unless they all follow specific instructions.