

PART I

The basics

*All letters methinks, should be as free
and easy as one's discourse,
not studied as an oration....*

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—Dorothy Osborne (Lady Temple), letter to Sir William Temple, October 1653

Successful professionals know the importance of effective letter writing. You can't have a good business relationship with customers if they don't know what you're trying to tell them in a letter. The services or products of a company can't be marketed if a prospective customer is baffled by the service or product described. How can a salesperson expect to make a sale when, because of a muddled letter, the prospect can't even understand what it is that's being sold?

Letter writing is crucial to the success of every professional. Without letter-writing skills, the professional's effectiveness is stymied.

Approaching This Book

Our objective in *The AMA Handbook of Business Letters* is to help you write effective letters. Ineffective letters are a waste of time and money. This realization should be enough to convince every professional of the need to be a good letter writer. Letters may not seem like the crux of your business, but if you consider that effectively written letters can increase the quality of working relationships and the quantity of business you can attract, as well as decrease wasted hours and money, you can begin to see the importance of learning to write letters well.

You should be prepared to approach this book with one chief goal in mind—to learn how to write more effective letters. Remember, too, that although letter writing is not a

simple skill, with practice you can become a good letter writer. Once you learn the basics and put them into practice, your letters will get better and begin to flow more easily.

Approach of This Book

Before you begin to write more effective letters, you must learn what makes up a good letter. The first part of this book takes you step-by-step through the basics of letter writing. You'll learn the importance of planning a letter and gathering all the information you need. The plan is put into practice when you decide on the approach your letter will take and the components necessary to achieve the selected approach. The components of a letter are effective only if you know the proper mechanics involved in a letter's structure and appearance. Grammar, punctuation, spelling, and language usage are important if your letter is to be understood and well accepted by its reader. You needn't fear an extensive course in grammar. What you'll receive here are the fundamental "commonsense" rules of grammar, which are easily learned and should become natural not only to your letter writing, but to all of your other writing as well.

The second part of this book consists of more than 370 sample letters, divided into categories reflecting various aspects of business. Each chapter also contains brief analyses of the strong points of many of the sample letters. Most of the sample letters are based on actual letters written and used by professionals. Names of people or corporations have been changed, but the content remains essentially unaltered. The letters chosen serve as models for ones you may have to write in your everyday business life. You can adapt them to meet your needs or use them as a touchstone to aim toward in your letter writing.

The appendixes to this book consist of helpful lists and rules to refer to in your letter writing.

As with all things, perfection can be reached only with practice. If you apply the basics learned in the first part of *The AMA Handbook of Business Letters*, and study the examples presented in the second, your letter-writing skills will improve greatly. The end result will be a letter that makes your readers think that what took much thought and planning on your part flowed as smoothly and effortlessly as discourse.