

SIGNIFICANCE OF FORMAL BUSINESS WRITING SKILLS IN UNDERGRADUATES

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Abstract

Communication has become an essential part of business transactions. Both internal and external communication is vital in the corporate world. The success and smooth running of business units thrive in effective communication. Today, most business organisations have grown globally. Therefore the need to communicate globally has also become essential. Communicating through the written mode has taken an important role. Business writing is a permanent mode to exchange ideas and information. Business writing should be clear, correct and concrete. Business Writing is associated with ‘formality’. Good writing should be formal. The formal tone has to be adopted while writing all business documents. Today, the students who graduate out of colleges lack good writing skills. Their exams are focussed on multiple choice questions. Their emails are informal and SMS has gained top priority. An activity (email writing) was conducted to assess the student’s writing style. Most of the emails had the informal tone. The paper analyzes the aspects of formal business writing and insists in the importance of teaching effective business writing in the tertiary level itself. This would enable them to be successful in the corporate world.

Introduction

Communication is derived from the Latin word ‘communicare’ or ‘communico’, which means ‘to share’ or ‘participate’. The business world has a constant need to communicate. ‘Communicating’ has become an essential part of all kinds of business transactions and it is crucial to success in the business world. In organisations communication involves a dynamic and powerful process. Without communication interaction between people will not be possible. So messages are exchanged in order to pass on information internally and externally. Be it small or large business, success of business depends on the level of communication.

The success and smooth running of business units thrive in effective communication. Internal communication should be efficient. This happens when there is a proper coordination

among the various departments within the company. A productive work ambience is established with effective management-labour relations. Good external communications can be achieved when business units have effective communications with government and other financial organisations. This further enhances the sales and public image of the company. For a professional, good communication is needed for career growth and promotion.

Communication in the Globalised Era

In our technology-driven globalised corporate world, communication has become inevitable. A study shows that:

- (i) 100,000 U.S. firms are engaged in overseas ventures valued at over \$1 trillion.
- (ii) Foreign investment in the U.S has now surpassed the \$2 trillion mark.
- (iii) Financial markets are open 24 hours a day around the world.
- (iv) \$1 trillion of business is done on the internet.
- (v) The Pacific Rim will influence our future – Asia is a \$3 trillion a year market growing at \$3 billion per week.

(Schmidt V. Wallace et al 2007)

The word “global” is not only a geographical term but also a business terminology. Today corporations and businesses communicate extensively and share billions of ideas and information. Communication is predominately done using the four language skills. *In these emerging markets around the globe, successful communication between the negotiating parties is a must. This demands adequate verbal non-verbal language skills, sensitivity towards culture, flexibility, patience, understanding, and tolerance. (Om P Juneja and Aarati Mujumdar, 2010).* They further add that even internally every employee has the need to communicate and share information with the seniors, peers and subordinates. They should be skilled in communication for a faster career growth. For example, the job of a computer programmer is not just to do coding and debugging, but to understand and explain it to others.

Business Writing

The language skills involved in communication are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Written communication in the business world is the exchange of ideas and information through business documents. Business writing is the means of communication that conveys the message with clarity, accuracy and brevity. *It is a medium of communication used by organisations to achieve their objectives, whatever they maybe. It is dressed in warmth and pleasantness so that it creates a positive impact. (Rajendra Pal, J.S. Korlahalli).* A lot of business is done using the internet and this involves the writing skill.

Business writing is direct, to the point and precise. It follows the established format to stay within boundaries and conveys the message briefly. (Neera Jain et al 2012) Good business writing has to understand the need of the audience and then write to address the need. Whether the writing happens internally or externally, it has to strengthen business relations. The business documents should be correct, concise, clear and concrete.

Formal Business Writing

Business Writing is associated with ‘formality’. Good writing should be formal. The formal tone has to be adopted in writing all business documents. All official correspondence should be

precise and accurate. The corporate world demands its employees to have excellent writing skills.

Today, lakhs of students are graduated and they are the promising employees of the business world. The question rises whether they are really employable. They miserably fail when it comes to communication skills. Writing skills are not honed in the graduate level. Their exams are focussed on multiple choice questions. Their emails are informal and SMS has gained top priority.

These kind of informal writings are not accepted by the corporate world. The corporate world demands its employees to excel in writing business documents. They expect the employees to be well versed in the nuances of good and effective writing. The style in writing should attract the readers and the message should be passed on with clarity. Active text styles should be used. Instead of *the week after Christmas is that time of year when sales are held shops and gifts are returned by the unhappy*

we can say *the week after Christmas is that time of year when shops hold sales and the unhappy return gifts* Timothy R V Foster in *101 Ways to Better Business Writing* says “the most frequent criticism about business writing is that it is so often wordy and hard to understand – in fact, just not readable.” Students should be encouraged to write formal business documents. They should have the awareness about the present corporate scenario.

Activity

A group of twenty engineering students were given a brainstorming email writing activity. These students were not very bad in the English language. They do have the basic English skills; but their emails had errors like redundancy, abbreviation, superfluous words etc.

Analysis

Fourteen emails had major errors (lacked formality). The abbreviation errors were like ‘ur’ for ‘your’, ‘mom’ for ‘minutes of the meeting, &’, ‘I’m’ for ‘I am’. The tone also lacked politeness. For example, an email had a sentence like “just go and attend the weekly in-house meeting”. The word ‘Please’ was used in many emails. The style was also pompous. An email had the phrase “with due respect it is to inform you...”

The language of these sixteen emails were average and also above average. But they lacked the formal style and tone that is essential for business writing. The rest of the six emails had adopted the formal style. The information was given in clarity and brevity.

Informal style in business writing can put off the reader. The aim of sending the message is lost. Thus the communication process is blocked. Informal writings have abbreviation, clichés, complex sentence, jargons etc. This should be avoided. A business document with good formal style will not have jargons, abbreviations, clichés and redundancy. Let us briefly see what are jargons, abbreviations, clichés and redundancy.

Jargons

Jargons are words or phrases belonging to a particular profession trade or field of study. It could also be a particular style of writing. Jargon should be avoided so that the message has clarity. Jargons create difficulty in understanding the text. So, the reader gets bored and disinterested. *Jargon is jargon when words are so technical or obscure that they defy comprehension. They contribute nothing to sense or meaning and might just as well not be written at all.* (John Foster,

2008) Jargons should not be used apart from one's professional circle. Business jargons should be used only in the business world. Otherwise the readers will be bewildered. Example: ultimo, proximo, upmarket, downsizing, niche marketing etc.

Abbreviations

Abbreviations or short forms of words that would also create confusion and the message would be distorted. For example abbreviations like ROI (return on investment) and CSR (Corporate social responsibility) will seriously mislead the readers.

Cliché

Cliché means a hackneyed, overworked phrase or a saying that has lost vigour and originality. (John Foster, 2008). It is better to avoid clichés, since the audience would lose interest and they might lose focus in the business document.

Examples for clichés are acid test, a client presentation, corporate hospitality, target audience, focus group, giving 110%, push the envelope, best of breed etc.

Redundancy

Redundant writing in business is a constant threat to the sender and receiver. Most writers do not know to write short and accurate emails or reports. So the sender might not be aware that his sentence is long and the idea is redundant. Once Ernest Hemingway was challenged to write a story using only six words, Hemingway responded with "For Sale: Baby Shoes, Never Worn." Many times we have heard of the phrase, "And as an added bonus you'll receive . . ." Bonus itself is an added thing. So there is no need to say "added".

Clear and succinct business writing makes its point without having to emphasize it. Redundancies clutter your content, adding to your word count unnecessarily and stealing more of your readers' time, says Ashley Smith in Avoid Redundancies in Your Business Writing.

Example

Instead of Your project will be facilitated by our extremely talented and highly meticulous customer representatives, we can say Our talented representatives will handle your project with care.

The principle of adequacy and completeness states that "information should be complete and adequate in all respects. Incomplete and inadequate information spoils understanding and good relations and also affects efficiency of both the sender and the receiver of the communication. "(Dr. Partho Pratim, 2012)

So, it is essential to avoid jargons, clichés, abbreviations and redundancies in order to exchange information with clarity.

Conclusion

If communication has to be streamlined, business documents have to be well constructed. "Academicians and business people view writing skills as crucial, yet increasing numbers of these professionals note steady erosion in the writing abilities of graduates", says Mehak Lal in *Effective Letter Writing*. Two thirds of the students who come out of colleges lack the ability to write a simple letter. Associated Press survey of 402 companies reported 80 percent of its employees at all levels need to improve their writing skills. Another study conducted by Olsten

Corp, a placement agent says that eighty percent of 443 employees need to be given training in writing skills.

It is important that students are taught to write in ‘formal’ language. Students should be taught to write simple, short and straight forward sentences. They should practice to write sentences which have simple and not flowery vocabulary. In the book *Effective Letter Writing*, Mehak Lal says that *writing skills can be a ticket to better college grades and greater academic achievement*.

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