

Principle of Courtesy in Business English Writing

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A tone of courtesy and sincerity builds goodwill for you and your organization and increases the likelihood that your message will achieve its objective. Courteous messages help to strengthen present business friendship, as well as make new friends. Courtesy stems from sincere you-attitude. A courteous message, like a courteous person, is polite. For example, whenever you ask your reader to do something for you, don't forget to say "Please", "Thank you", "I would appreciate it", and "It would be kind of you", etc. Of course, courtesy is not merely politeness with mechanical insertions of "please's" and "thank-you's". To be courteous, the considerate communicator should follow – in addition to the four guidelines previously discussed under the consideration principle – these suggestions regarding tone and promptness of messages:

- ✓ Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful, and appreciative.
- ✓ Avoid expressions that mistrust, belittle, discriminate or sound condescending.
- ✓ Answer your mail promptly.

1. Be sincerely tactful, thoughtful, and appreciative

A truly courteous person sincerely likes people, is thoughtful of their feelings, and tries honestly helps them. The courteous communicator tries to make messages tactful instead of blunt, and she or he shows thoughtful appreciation in special messages as well as in everyday communication.

Though few people intentionally want to be abrupt or blunt, these traits are a common cause of discourtesy. Sometimes they stem from negative personal attitudes; sometimes from a mistaken idea of conciseness. Avoid expressions like those in the left-hand column below; rephrase as shown in the right-hand column.

<i>Tactless; blunt</i>	<i>Tactful</i>
Write to us and tell us how much you enjoy the goods.	Enclosed is a questionnaire. Please show us your comments on using the products.
You must complete the enclosed form if you need correct shipment.	For a correct shipment, please complete the enclosed form as requested.
Apparently you have already forgotten what I wrote you two weeks ago.	As mentioned in my May 15 letter to you, ...

Writers who send cordial, courteous messages of deserved congratulations, and appreciation help build goodwill. The value of goodwill or public esteem can be recorded on the balance sheet in thousands of dollars. Much money is spent on

advertising to attract new customers and to keep desirable old customers. While advertising may bring buyers into the front door of your firm, discourteous letters can drive customers out the back door! An unpretentious, sincere courtesy note can have far-reaching, favorable effects. Remember, customers indirectly help pay your salary; you should let them know you appreciate their orders, payments, inquiries. For example:

- We were pleased to receive your order for 1000 Model A color televisions. We will be shipping them in two weeks and estimate that there will be seven days in transit. (with no appreciation)
Thank you for your order of 1000 Model A color televisions. You'll be receiving them approximately three weeks from today. (with appreciation)

2. Avoid irritating, belittling and condescending expressions

The thoughtful business writer should avoid expressions that might offend the reader. The following list contains irritating, grudging, mistrustful and condescending expressions to be avoided, particularly when used with "you" and "your".

- due to your questionable credit
- I don't agree with you
- obviously you overlooked
- you claim that
- we must insist that
- your apparent disregard of our previous request leaves us no alternative.
- your complaint
- you are probably ignorant of the fact that
- you forgot to
- you did not tell us
- Simply nonsense
- your neglect
- your stubborn silence
- we expect you to
- you should know

The basic assumption of a courteous message is that the writer and the reader are both reasonable people with good intentions who can solve problems without resorting to any form of psychological or physical force. Courtesy also depends on the writer's understanding of the reader's viewpoint and the assumption that the writer and the reader can cooperate on an equal basis. Compare the following messages:

Poor – This letter is to inform you of an important change in our policy concerning insurance.

Good – Since you are our regular customer, we are writing to let you know about our important policy change in insurance.

Poor – We have received your letter in which you claimed that ten coffee making

machines were damaged in shipment.

Good – We have received your letter in which you mentioned that ten coffee making machines were damaged in shipment.

Poor – What you manufacture is the most suitable one to our requirement.

Good – We find both the prices and quality of your products satisfactory.

3. Answer your mail promptly

For courtesy as well as better results one should answer a business inquiry promptly – in two or three days if possible. Even a handwritten note on a postcard is usually better than a later (or no) reply. If you need time to gather information, or have a stack of other urgent work, before you can answer a request, sending a short note like the following distinguishes you as a courteous person:

- I'll gladly send you the information you need. It may take a few days to assemble the facts. You will hear from me by September 20.
- This is just a short note to let you know that your order of May 20 has been received and is being filled according to your usual instruction.