

*ПОД- СЕКЦИЯ 6. Теория, практика
и методы обучения*

Lunina Olga

Senior Teacher,

Simon Kuznets Kharkiv National University of Economics,
department of Pedagogics, Foreign Philology and Translation

TEACHING BUSINESS WRITING: COMMON PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Keywords: business writing, language proficiency, different skills, practice, business correspondence, formal language, professional communication.

The ability to write well is one of the most important skills students can learn for success in the business world. English has emerged as the leading language of business. Today almost two billion people speak English at a useful level. Being able to command the English language has become a valuable professional skill. The most difficult part of professional communication is effectively writing for your audience and expressing complexity in an easy-to-understand way. Business writing is an essential skill for every working professional, yet writing competence in a foreign language tends to be one of the most difficult skills to acquire [5].

Twenty years ago, the approach to writing was essentially genre-based. The teachers (and the course books) – generally started any lesson by presenting a model version of a text. So students are shown a copy of, for example, a letter or a report. Then the features of the text type are analysed in terms of layout, conventions, fixed expressions etc. And finally students are asked to try and reproduce a similar text type. The approach, which has been referred to as a genre-based approach, has always served us well. It's especially effective when teaching exam courses such as BEC because the written text-types are so clearly defined.

However, in recent years it feels like the world of business writing has been thrown into a state of flux. We rarely write into a neat A4 sized template in the real world. Instead we write shorter messages by email or even shorter sentences and utterances if we use Twitter and text messaging [1].

So how to prepare students to cope with the current trends in writing? Given that it is hard even to predict what kinds of texts we might be writing in the future as technology changes so quickly, perhaps the best we can do is to help students develop certain sub-skills. Here are the sub-skills which should be focused on.

Firstly, students need to express themselves in far fewer words. They need to be able to sum up a product in three or four words rather than in a longer paragraph.

Secondly, every word a student chooses needs to count because there is no space for excess in a world where you are fighting for your reader's attention among the deluge of messages.

Thirdly, students also need to become even more flexible with regard to formality. In other words, after years of training students to use formal expressions in written texts, our emphasis should now be on knowing how to write less formally and more directly [1].

Such skills will require teachers to take an approach to writing that deals with language at word-level and sentence-level rather than taking the traditional approach of dealing with the whole text type – simply because we can no longer be certain that those texts will even exist next year.

Many professionals process large amounts of written material daily and learn how to skim their mail quickly and effectively. There are really not enough hours in the day for a busy person to read each letter slowly, word for word. That is why it is of primary importance to teach students to avoid unnecessary complexity in business correspondence, reports and memos. There are some useful tips and rules for effective correspondence which should be explained to students at the beginning. First, it is necessary to state the purpose in the opening sentence

of the letter. It is also best to use active voice instead of passive voice. Passive voice requires longer verb forms, building longer sentences that are tiresome to read. Second, a formal tone should be used. Although it is important to write a letter that sounds natural and is not long-winded, the tone of a business letter should be more formal than normal, conversational English. Slang and idiomatic expressions should be avoided. If too many ideas are put into one sentence, the reader may become lost in the tangle of words. Third, spelling and grammatical errors must be checked and corrected. Even though someone may be skimming your letter, do not assume that he or she won't notice any spelling or grammatical mistakes. However, a spell check will not help if you spell the word correctly but use it incorrectly. For example, the words "affect" and "effect" are often mistakenly interchanged. Students should be encouraged to consult a dictionary if unsure of the word usage. The use of active rather than passive constructions is recommended. The active voice is stronger than the passive, and it therefore produces more powerful sentences [4].

Simple samples of typical mistakes in business writing and the revised versions can illustrate to students the difference in length and style.

Example 1. Not: *The decision was made to sell the company. The seminar was postponed by the executive directors.* But: *The stockholders decided to sell the company. The executive directors postponed the seminar.*

Students must learn to write concisely. In our culture of quick e-mails, text messaging, and IM, people don't want to read long, verbose text. While writing business letters students should shorten the text whenever possible; use a sentence rather than a paragraph, a phrase rather than a sentence, and a word rather than a phrase when you can do so without losing meaning. Also check for repetitious or superfluous information that can be deleted [2].

Example 2. Not: *In spite of the fact that the deadline has been extended, we will still hold a meeting this morning for the purpose of discussing the estimated*

costs. But: Though the deadline has been extended, we will still meet this morning to discuss the estimated costs.

In business correspondence it is essential to use clear and simple words and avoid flowery and pretentious language, because it is so easy to misunderstand it.

Example 3. Not: *It has been the practice of the company, in most overseas markets, to lend various amounts of money to dealers for the reconstruction of existing retail outlets. Up to the present the total amount loaned for this purpose is about \$100 million. But: In most overseas markets, we have loaned money to dealers to rebuild retail stores. These loans total about \$100 million.*

Another problem in business correspondence, especially for students majoring in IT, is jargon, technical or highly specialized terminology which is notorious in some sectors of the business world. Because such language tends to be exclusive, it is usually best to simply avoid jargon. If the writing is intended solely for others in your profession, including industry acronyms and abbreviations and other jargon may be appropriate, but still use caution [2].

After the document is finished, students should be taught to read over it to make sure that it makes sense and that there is no necessary information that has been omitted and no gaps in logic. Readers should be able to easily grasp the main message or what is expected of them. For longer or more complicated documents, like reports or essays, it is always a good idea to have someone else read over the draft before submitting it to make sure that it is clear and that it contains all the information that it needs to and omits information that it doesn't need [6].

Although writing could be considered easier than speaking, from the point of the level of language required, it is unanimously regarded as more complex. The structure of sentences is complex, the register required is generally the formal one, a more refined selection of words and grammar structures needs to be made. Therefore, students' command of the language should be significant. Some authors argue that all this challenge entangled by higher demands can lead students to

neglect content, as they may fail to put into words exactly the ideas which they want to express [3].

Generally, the target audience of any Business Writing course at universities is represented by pre-experienced learners, i.e. students who have little or no experience of the business world. It should be mentioned that there are also a few general business-experienced students, but these are exceptional cases. As for students' proficiency in English, they are generally intermediate to advanced learners, with good command of General Business English and one of more specialized thematic vocabulary, focusing on important areas in the business field (Marketing, Accounting, Auditing, Mergers and Takeovers, Funding the Business etc.). Consequently, the prerequisites for the course are represented by good linguistic competence (good command of grammar structure, of general and specialized vocabulary) and good discourse competence. The latter means using language in different context: socializing, networking, selling and buying, negotiating, writing, marketing, meetings and presentations [3].

References:

1. Hughes John. Teaching Business Writing in 2010 and beyond [Electronic resource] – Access mode: <https://oupeltglobalblog.com/2010/11/16/teaching-business-writing-in-2010-and-beyond/> (Accessed 22.10.2018)
2. Gunning R., Mueller D., How to take the fog out of writing. Chicago: Dartnell Press, 1998.- 65 p.
3. Maria Anca Maican. Enhancing Business Writing skills in English for Economics undergraduates. [Electronic resource] – Access mode: http://webbut.unitbv.ro/bu2010/Series/languageandlinguistics/17_Maican.pdf (Accessed 22.10.2018)
4. Tarnopolsky, O., Kozhushko, S., Teaching Academic Writing in English to Tertiary Students in Ukraine, http://www.readingmatrix.com/conference/pp/proceedings2007/tarnopolsky_kozhushko.pdf.12.
5. http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/archive/lse_writing/page_01.htm.
6. http://www.businesswritingblog.com/business_writing/teaching_business_writing/(founder: Lynn Gaertner-Johnston).