

Writing: Use letter templates to keep in touch



If your company relies on repeat business, keeping in touch with your customers becomes a top priority. You cannot take good customers for granted. They need frequent reminders that you are eager to work for and with them.

What kinds of reminders? The telephone is one method of keeping in touch, but phone calls can seem intrusive. E-mail is another method, but fighting for attention among the wave of e-mails that decision-makers get can be daunting. The letter on paper—as old-fashioned as it may sound—is more likely to be read and digested without being intrusive. Recipients can read these letters when they want.

Writing letters, of course, takes time and talent. You can't just trust anyone in the office to write a polished, effective letter every time a need arises. The solution is letter templates.

Devote the time—your own or your best writer's—to creating a good set of templates for meeting different needs. For instance, create a model marketing letter, a model thank you, a model prospect follow-up. Each template should have the basics and be done in such a way that sales reps, assistants, and others can easily tailor it for each customer and situation. That customization is important because these letters should not be perceived as form letters. Create a brief instructional tool to get people familiar with the process.

Given the template, most people should see that this letter writing is quite manageable and, used over time, will prove very productive.

Marketing Initial unsolicited letter Referral letter	Follow-Ups With accompanying material After a presentation
Thank You For referral For work To subcontractors	Regrets To client To subcontractor
"News" Letters Announcing a new product/service Sharing item of interest with client	Media Release Regarding service Regarding award
	Official Documents Disclaimer Estimate Specifications

Presenting: Write the text but don't read it

The thought of speaking before a group—whether at a large business meeting or a small family gathering—can strike fear into the heart of even the most confident individuals. The first defensive reaction is to decide to write out the "speech" and read it, eliminating the risk of forgetting anything. And with eyes on the paper, the speaker need not even look at the audience.

Reading from a prepared text, however, is one of the worst things a speaker can do. Nothing aggravates an audience more, or loses it more quickly.

While reading a speech is a no-no, writing a speech out is a proven path to successful speaking. By writing out the entire text, good speakers leave nothing to chance.

Writing and revising the text, you become aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the thoughts you are planning. For example, you might realize that the main argument you had planned is not as strong as you thought. Or that a detail is not suitable for the audience. You may discover that the order you planned is confusing, or the words to explain a difficult concept are hard to come by.

By writing out the entire text, you give yourself opportunity to organize, develop, and express your ideas in the best way possible for your particular audience.

This is harder to do if the talk is all in your head or written in outline form.

"But having written out the text," one might ask, "aren't you likely to want to read it?" You may want to, but you will have to fight off the urge. Instead, rehearse the talk often so that you know it well. Don't memorize it word for word, but speak it often—aloud. In these rehearsals, refer to the text as needed, weaning yourself away from it

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Special Book Offer...

If you find this newsletter helpful, you may be interested in getting the full range of writing instruction in book form. See page 3 in this issue.

Watch Your Language!

Close is not good enough

What is wrong with the wording in the following?

1. The town is oversaturated with banks.
2. She was a former CEO .
3. The reason is because of a lack of money.
4. We are in charge of advance planning .
5. As of yet there has been no official word.
6. She has a tendency to over-exaggerate.

Answers:

1. *Saturated* conveys the idea.
2. *Is a former CEO* or *was a CEO*, not a combination.
3. Either the *reason is* or *because*, not both.
4. *Planning* conveys the idea.
5. *As yet* or *as of now*, not a combination.
6. *Exaggerate* conveys the idea.

Presenting (con'd from page 1)

gradually. Eventually, you will need only key words and phrases to move you along or put you back on track if you should draw a blank.

You can jot these key words, called “triggers,” on note cards. Or highlight key words and phrases in the text and take the text with you to the podium. You may feel more comfortable knowing that you have the text at hand should you need more than a trigger. With practice, you won’t need the text and will have the confidence to deliver your talk as a talk, not a reading.

(For more, see my *Powerful Presentations* at www.micromash.com)

Mechanics: Avoid sentence fragments

By definition, a sentence has a subject and a predicate and at least one independent clause, (aka) a complete thought:

-- subject- - - - predicate- - -

Bond prices surged on the good economic news.

---dependent clause--- ---independent clause---

When Wall Street heard the news, bond prices surged.

It is only logical, then, that a fragment is something less than a sentence. Besides reflecting badly on the writer, fragments can confuse the reader, who often is left looking for something more to complete the thought:

As a result of the good news from Washington.

To convert a fragment into a whole—a sentence—insert the words necessary to complete the thought.

As a result of the good news from Washington, stocks are soaring.

Sometimes writers create fragments when they have an afterthought upon completing a sentence. They write the afterthought as a sentence though it is not a complete thought. Sometimes all that is necessary to make the fragment a sentence is to join the two.

<i>Sentence and Fragment</i>	We decided to refinance our mortgage. <i>After we read many articles about the direction rates are taking.</i>
<i>Sentence</i>	We decided to refinance our mortgage, <i>after we read many articles about the direction rates are taking</i>

You Try It

Rewrite the following correctly.

Projects requiring salaried employees and short-term consultants sometimes do not achieve success. Because the employees see the consultants as a threat.

The company enjoyed a substantial increase in profitability. As a result of these projects.

People tend to get nervous whenever talk of downsizing begins to spread. And when news media broadcast those rumors.

Telephone Talk: Prepare your pitch

When making a difficult telephone call, such as to a potential client or employer, plan your strategy. Jot notes for yourself so you don’t get sidetracked or close the call without asking all of your questions or presenting all of your information.

Prepare by writing short answers to questions such as these:

- What do I hope to accomplish?
- How do I introduce myself, quickly?

- What will my opening line be?
- Do I mention a referring person’s name, a past experience, or such?
- How do I follow if he/she seems interested?
- How do I follow if he/she is not?
- What if he/she says now is not a good time?
- How do I get by the gate-keeper?



- What if I’m transferred to voicemail?
- Do I leave a message? What do I say?

Telephone exchanges can be more productive when you are efficient and persuasive in a very short period of time. Prepare for that brief encounter.

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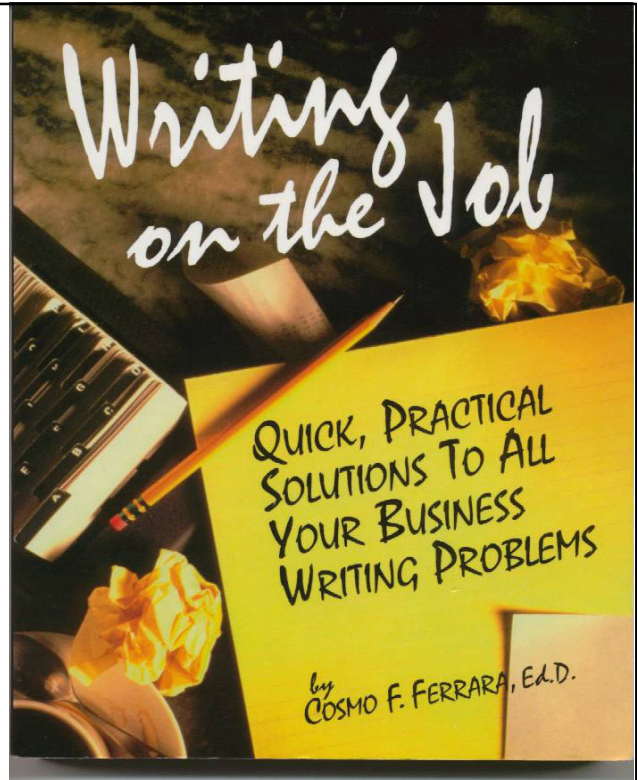
Now you can quickly and easily write business letters and memos that...

Capture Attention, Win Support, and Command Respect

Writing on the Job is a writer's troubleshooter. It helps you write business communications that jump off the page, get noticed, and bring results. More than a guide to the writing process, this 330-page book covers the writing formats you use everyday. Each chapter is packed with models, practical tips, and checklists that provide clear, step-by-step procedures for writing:

- * sales letters
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- * requests
- * proposals
- * instructions
- * job descriptions
- * reports
- * memos
- * resumes
- * reviews
- * claim letters
- * cover letters
- * procedures
- * reference letters
- * adjustment letters

Learn how to make your writing clear and persuasive. Master those pesky punctuation rules. Save time by following these easy steps to organizing, developing, and expressing your thoughts.



Meet the Author

Cos Ferrara has spent more than 25 years learning, practicing, and teaching the art of business writing. A former director of communications for Deloitte & Touche, he provides communications consulting services, writing, and editing for a range of organizations in various industries. He also conducts customized seminars in business writing.

For more on Cos, go to www.cosferrara.com

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