

PROJECT #2: BUSINESS LETTERS

Alf I had more time, I would have written a shorter letter.@

Background: Business letters are important to everyone (not just ABusiness Majors@) because, in addition to getting necessary work done, they help build and maintain both personal and corporate images and reputations. Writers use a variety of formulas and conventions to construct business letters, but all business letters include the following basic elements: 1.) they gain readers= attention and create rapport with readers by focusing on readers= interest, needs, and concerns; 2.) they build a bridge between writer(s) and reader(s) by creating a sense of common ground (shared values and assumptions), and by providing critical information; 3.) they encourage readers to take specific actions by offering logical, credible, and persuasive arguments.

Directions: For this assignment you will be writing two different types of letters: a claims letter and a sales letter. Even if you never write one of these specific types of letters ever again (which is highly unlikely), you should gain from this assignment valuable lessons in determining and satisfying audience needs, providing an appropriate level of detail, controlling tone, and business letter format.

The three letters (you will write two sales letters) will be written based on the rhetorical situations listed below; you will need to invent any necessary details:

1.) **Claims letter:** Write a letter that lodges an actual complaint with an actual company, and asks for some kind of reimbursement. The complaint can be about almost anything: a particular product, service, employee, company policy, etc. For example, suppose Northwest Airlines flew you into a Aclosed@ airport, and you were forced to spend the night in Detroit in a hotel. You might write to Northwest asking reimbursement for the hotel room (and maybe even the air fare).

2.) **Sales letter:** You are the marketing director for a company that makes a technical product of your choosing (computer hardware or software, high-end stereo equipment, exercise equipment, etc.). Write a sales letter that might be sent to expert (or informed) readers encouraging them to purchase the product; write another letter which markets the same (or similar) product to a lay (uninformed) audience.

Tips for Proceeding: You might start by thinking carefully about your purposes. Choose one business letter format and follow its conventions consistently. Writers of complaint-type and unsolicited business letters need to pay special attention to tone, positive wording (diction), and sentence rhythm (style), in addition to Aargument@ appropriateness.

The temptation simply to dash off these letters will be great; after all, this assignment does not seem too difficultCjust a few short letters. However, I urge you to resist this temptation. Consider the principles and examples we discuss in class. Think carefully about what you want to say, and more important, how you *ought* to say it. Be forewarned: every word counts, as it will when a Areal@ audience reads a letter you write and actsC or does not actC accordingly. You want to produce letters that will get the desired results from those for whom they are written.

Objectives: Applying basic theory to business letter writing; practicing tone, style, format; adapting content to the requirements of different audiences and purposes; argument construction; and peer editing.

This assignment constitutes 10% of your overall grade.