

CHAPTER TEN

WRITING

Writing is a very complex activity. The complexities associated with writing arise from the uniqueness of the subject matter concerned and the flexibility of the writer who is constantly faced with a series of choices among all of the patterns and structures and words available to him. The more a writer knows the resources of the language, the better his chances of writing his subject or topic in a uniquely different way. John-Nwosu (1997) sees writing as “the communication of ideas by means of conventional symbols that are traced or formed on the surface material such as stone, metal, wood or even more commonly paper” (in Okoro et al., 2014:62).

Writing does not occur in a vacuum with nothing to say to no one in particular for no reason. Udoka (2005:108) posits that the writer needs to understand the audience to whom he is trying to communicate. In essence he must determine just what and how much he wants to say about the subject, depending on the audience. In this chapter, efforts would be made to discuss Letter Writing and Forms, with specific writing skills involved in the course of writing a particular letter.

i. LETTER WRITING

A letter is a medium of communication through which we express our emotions, ideas, feelings, opinions and thoughts to our fellow human beings. Such expressions are often guided by the purpose of the letter. Basically, the purpose of the letter determines the letter format and the technicalities involved in the process of writing a specific letter.

The general requirements for any letter writing would include those essential features:

- i. Address
- ii. Date
- iii. Salutation
- iv. Introduction
- v. Body of the letter
- vi. Conclusion
- vii. Complimentary close

These features could be expanded in a business or a formal letter to include those additional requirements.

- viii. Reference
- ix. Receiver's Address
- x. Attention line (if any)
- xi. Subject heading
- xii. Signature

From the above examples, it is obvious that the formats are important features that convey specific information about a particular letter. Eyo (2003) enumerates the purpose of writing to include entertainment, education, information, request, sympathy, condolences, apology, etc. The purpose of a letter has to be established in order to maintain a focus in applying the knowledge of the subject matter as the case may be.

ii. SYSTEM OF ADDRESS

In letter writing, the address is like an identification mark. The address conveys two important information: “Who wrote the letter? Who will receive it” (Mc Dougal, Littell 1985:313).

The system of address differs according to the type of letter that is written. A

friendly or informal letter takes one address only and it is written on the top right side of the writing material. This is known as the sender's address. It contains the authentic location where the letter is coming from, such as a street name, or department. It appears above the date and salutation. Note the example below:

Department of English
Akwa Ibom State University
Obio Akpa Campus
Oruk Anam L.G.A
31st March, 2023.

Dear Kelly,

From the layout, it is easy to trace the location of the letter to a particular department of the University.

In the case of a formal or business letter, the receiver's address appears on the left side of the writing material, below the reference line (if any) and takes up a space that contains vital information such as a department, employer or a company. The receiver's address appears above the salutation and subject heading. Consider this example:

The Editor
AKSU Journal of English
Obio Akpa Campus
Dear Sir,

Submission of Journal Article

If you are writing to a specific person, use Dear Mr, Mrs before the person's name. At other times use a general greeting such as Dear Sir, or Madam. The system of address varies according to the type of letter that one chooses to write. These forms are discussed in the section that follows:

i. **Open – unindented form:**

This form is most applicable to a business letter. At times you may want to order a product online or by mail, make a complaint about a particular product you ordered for, request information or apply for admission or employment. In each of these situations, you would have to write a business letter.

A business letter may use one or two forms: Block form or semi-block form. In a block form, which should be used only in a typed letter, we make use of the open unindented. Here, we begin every part of the letter at the left margin and leave two lines of space between paragraphs. There is no indentation in any of the paragraphs.

Note this example:

Department of English
Akwa Ibom State University
Obio Akpa Campus
31st March, 2023.

The Editor
AKSU Journal of English
Obio Akpa Campus

Dear Sir,

Submission of Journal Article

I write to inform you that I have submitted my article entitled "The gains of Democracy in Nigeria"

in a soft copy through your email address.

I appreciate your past publications and I hope you will still maintain your quality production this time around.

Thank you in anticipation of your prompt delivery.

Yours faithfully,

Murphy Ekpo
08034448880.

ii. **Open-Indented Form**

A semi-block form may be used, either for a hand written or typed written letter. In this format, the letter heading, complimentary close and signature are placed on the right hand side of the page, as it is done in a friendly letter. The paragraphs are indented without spaces between them. Note the example given below:

The Coordinator
Postgraduate Programme
Department of English
Akwa Ibom State University

No. 3 Ikpong Road
Ikot Ekpene
Akwa Ibom State
31st March, 2023

Dear Dr. Udoh

Request for information on Ph.D Programme in English

I write to request for information on the Ph.D programme of the Department of English, Akwa Ibom State University.

I am a graduate of the University of Calabar, where I also obtained my M.A. Degree in English. There is an urgent need for me to acquire a Ph.D as a pre-requisite for my promotion to the next rank in my place of work. Akwa Ibom State University is in a close proximity to my workplace hence my request for information on your Ph.D programme in English.

I would be grateful if you could furnish me with information on the duration of the programme and admission requirements for a Ph.D in your department.

Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely yours

Mfon Umoren
08036659858

In the above examples the features are open in both unindented and indented forms. This means that there are no punctuation devices such as the comma except fullstop and capital letters. (Udoka and Akpan 2009: 76, Eka 2017:177). The comma, fullstop and other devices have their distinctive use in writing but there is an exception to their applications when letter forms are considered. They may remain open or close.

iii. **Closed – Unindented Form**

A letter may equally carry a closed and unindented form. The important thing is that the writer has to be consistent in his application. A single letter should not carry both the open and closed punctuation devices.

In a closed – unindented form, every line of the address, except the last should receive a comma and a fullstop after the date. The comma separates the lines of the Address from the Date which carries a fullstop. An example will suffice here.

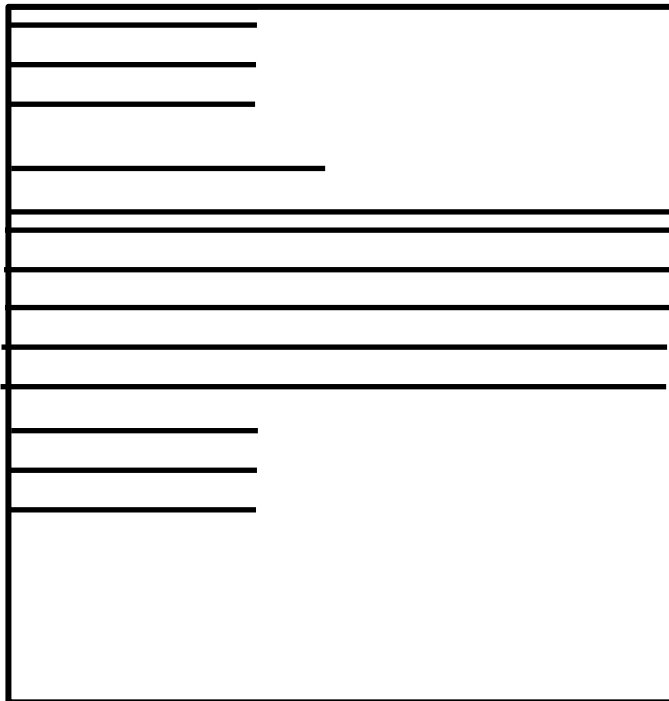
Oliver Twist,

20 Aba Road,
Ikot Ekpene.
31st March, 2023.

The Director General,
N.A.F.D.A.C;
Common Wealth Building
Abuja.

iv. **Closed – indented Form**

A closed and indented letter form tends to be an opposite to open and unindented. In effect, the closed and indented form implies that the Address(es) will receive punctuation devices such as the comma and the fullstop while the letter remains indented. In this case, every line of the paragraph is tilted (indented) towards the centre of the writing material. There are no spaces between the lines. It is imperative on our teachers to delineate properly between the open and closed indented and unindented forms, "in order to give a professional impetus to language teaching". (Udoka 2022:343). It is important for our students to note and understand these various forms of a letter writing which are represented diagrammatically below:





iii. TYPES OF LETTER

Practically there are two types of letter namely, a friendly letter and a business letter.

i. A Friendly Letter

A friendly letter is informal in nature since it is often written to someone whom we are close to or related to in one way or another. It may be our parents, siblings, friends, and colleagues in our place of work. Friendly letters are personal and written to someone we know. The tone should be conversational and detailed. This type of letter permits the use of informal expressions such as slangs, colloquialism, local idioms. An informal letter can be written on various purposes such as sharing information, sending out an invitation for burial, marriage, birthday celebrations.

This type of letter requires the address of the sender, date, salutation, (Dear Mary, Dear Sister Mary). It does not contain a heading but an Introduction that will state the purpose of the letter. This is followed by the Body of the letter where more details are given in say three paragraphs. The Conclusion comes as the last segment of the letter in one paragraph. In the case of an invitation letter, attach a brief caption and include specific information about the Date, Time and Place of the occasion. The complimentary close comes after the conclusion and it can take any form of endearment: Yours truly, Truly yours, Babe, Brother John, Etc.

ii. Business Letter

A business letter is also known as information letter in that it seeks or provides business information. Business letters include letter of application for a job, letter of apology, letter of enquiry, request letter, etc. Business letters according to Winterowd and Murray (1985:226) "are written primarily to get something done: to order a product, subscribe to a service, apply for a job, ask for a certain response or to achieve a similar purpose". Since a business letter often requests the response of the reader in a certain way, it must be clear, direct and complete in stating the purpose and expected response.

BUSINESS LETTERS

i. Application for Employment

This type of letter is written by an applicant to a company, school or Civil Service Commission for the purpose of seeking employment. This is a business letter and it

follows some procedure. Include the parts of a business letter, use block or semi-block form. Be specific and go straight to the point. State exactly what you want, be brief and polite. You are asking someone else to do you a favour so be courteous. Give details about yourself in a well-developed Curriculum Vitae (C.V.).

Writing Activity 1

Think about a part-time or holiday job you would like to have to enable you raise some money for your school fees. Write a letter of application to the Personnel Director of the company. Attach a Curriculum Vitae.

ii. Letter of Enquiry or Request

A letter of enquiry or request is written to seek information on the availability of goods or services, in a particular establishment. Apply the features of formal letter, state your request in a clear and distinct term to avoid any doubt on the mind of the receiver. Write the letter in block form.

Writing Activity 2

Write a letter to the Librarian, Obio Akpa Campus, Akwa Ibom State University, requesting her to speak to your English class on how to use the Reference section effectively, to help students in their research projects.

iii. A letter of Adjustment

A letter of adjustment is written to a company to replace damaged products, refund money or correct an error in billing. You must first of all state the problem in a direct and logical manner. Include only the important details and request for an adjustment within a given time frame.

Writing Activity 3

You ordered for 1000 units of Erisco Bumpet Fire Extinguisher from Amadi and Sons Nigeria Limited, No. 100 Main Avenue Road, Calabar, Cross River State. On delivery you noticed some defects such as leakages, expiry date, wrong sizes and inappropriate labelling. Write an adjustment letter to your supplier, asking for a replacement of the affected products. State the details you need in order to facilitate the transaction.

iv. Writing a Résumé or Curriculum Vitae

One way of introducing yourself to a prospective employer is by means of a résumé, also known as Curriculum Vitae. A C.V. may be written as an alternative to a long letter of application but there is a need to add a short cover letter which must not repeat the information on the C.V.

A résumé contains information which are itemized on the left side of the writing material with a corresponding answer on the right. Consider the example below:

- i. BIO-DATA
 - Name
 - Gender
 - Date of Birth
 - Place of Birth
 - Home Town
 - Contact Address
 - Local Government of Origin
 - State of Origin
 - Nationality
 - Next of Kin
 - Marital Status
 - Religion

Phone Number
E-mail Address

- ii. EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND/INSTITUTIONS ATTENDED WITH DATES/QUALIFICATIONS
 - Primary School
 - Secondary School
 - University/College
- iii. WORK EXPERIENCE WITH DATES
 - a. Skills
 - b. Special Training
- iv. PUBLICATIONS
- v. HOBBIES
- vi. REFEREES

Letter of Complaint

Quite often, people feel the need to voice out their feelings or opinion about a particular situation which affects them directly or indirectly in their living or work environment. This calls for writing a letter of complaint.

Writing a letter of complaint requires some tact. A complaint is not a protest or a petition so do not be abusive or antagonistic to the personnel in charge of the problem you wish to complain about.

First of all, you must express your opinion about the persistent problem succinctly and honestly. Know the appropriate office where to direct your complaint. If the problem requires a statistical information, present it in a clear and convincing manner. The tone of the letter is subdued but the writer must show the effect of the problem on members of the community and suggest some ways of alleviating the problem.

Writing Activity 4

Write a letter to the Chairman of the Sanitation Committee of your school expressing your views on the overgrown bush surrounding most of the classroom blocks and the need for him to take prompt action in order to stop the incessant encroachment of snakes into the classes

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