

Effective Writing
Prof. Binod Mishra
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee

Lecture – 13
Business Letters and Memos

Good morning friends and welcome back to NPTEL online lectures on Effective Writing. The lectures are being delivered by Binod Mishra and you all remember that presently we are in the section which is entitled business writing. If you have a recap of what we have done in the past you may remember that in the previous lecture we talked about the various principles of business writing and we had also thrown some light on what are the various forms of business writing.

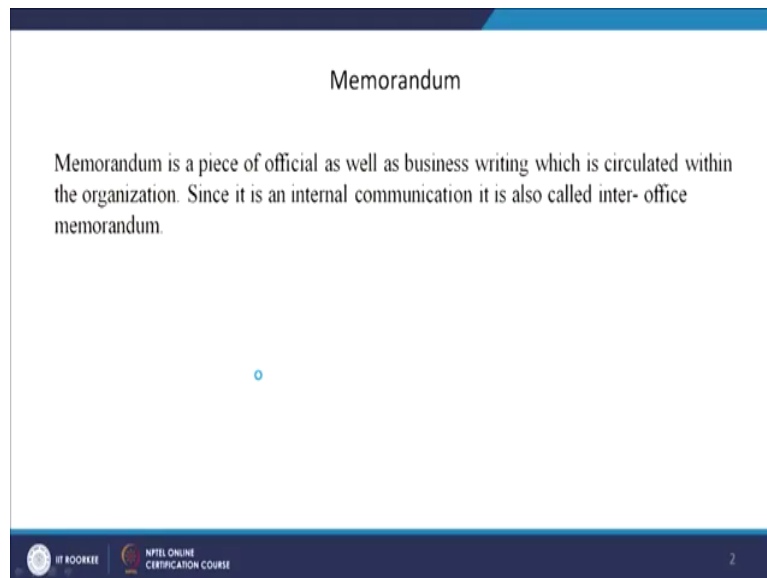
Today we are going to talk about two very important forms of business writing, which are very popular and which actually have given a new lease of life to the world of business, these are business letters and memos.

Now, all of you might be thinking do we really need business letters in an age when we are guided by various electronic writings. You are not wrong to think about the importance as well as the relevance of business letters and memos, but then my dear friends whatever be the facility of electronic gadgets and electronic writings, business letters have come to survive because they can be served; they can be kept as a records.

We have been discussing as to what can make business letters effective, we have already talked about the various principles. In this lecture, we shall be trying to understand how business letters different from memos and why they have their importance still in an age when we can claim ourselves to be living in an age of electronic media were pushing of one button can open a pandora's box. My dear friends at the outset, it will be very important to understand what actually are business letters and what actually are memorandums.

Initially you might be thinking that both these terms some way or the other are synonymous with each other, but then there are certain differences and we shall be trying to understand what is the basic difference, memorandum which in sort we call memos.

(Refer Slide Time: 03:45)



These memos or memorandum; Memorandum is a piece of official as well as business writing which is circulated within the organization.

Now, look at look at these two terms; memorandum of course, letters are also official business writing fine, but then memo actually runs and its circulated within the organization. That is why since it is within the organization, we also call it interoffice memorandum.

Now, you might be thinking how a memo is different from letters. So, it would be pertinent to understand what actually are business letters. Business letters are also official

correspondences, written correspondences rather through which two people two countries, two organizations, two institutions they come in close contact in order to transact some business we have said already in the previous lectures.

Now, when there is a communication between two organizations in the form of business letters, there are several purposes that can be understood and that can be met. One is that you not only try to establish business relationships rather you also try to convince, you try to explain, you try to bring some action I mean it can also be considered to be a sort of call for action sort of thing.

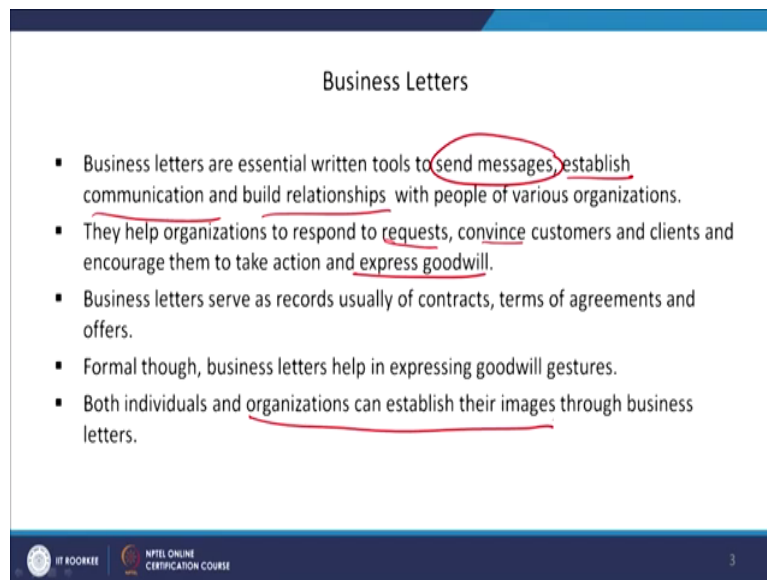
So, when we draft a business letter although on many situations we might not see the person to whom we are writing, that is why the task becomes very challenging and then since we are talking business naturally we cannot be informal, we have to be very formal while we are transacting business. And as we say that business writing is or business letters are one of the modes to establish relationship, so when we establish relationship of course, business being in the background, but then we also create a sort of relationships.

And then it can also occur as a sort of goodwill gesture; for example, you are transacting a business with one organization, but at the same time since that organization if it is busy in developing some new products and you are going to retain a sort of relationship with it then naturally so many things can take place and so many new agreements can be made. Through letters, through business letters, you not only make a sort of contract, you sign a contract, you sign an agreement, you also I mean two business organizations can inform each other what new things they are going to develop, what need new things what new products they are going to launch.

And then since you have got a sort of business relationship with each other you are also providing the other party, I mean the other party who can be these other parties, may be customers, clients, organizations, shareholders, stakeholders; there can be so many and all these people they actually maintain a sort of relationship.

So, the basic difference between a memorandum and business letter is while memorandum is circulated within the organization, letters also go outside the organization. That is why writing or drafting a business letter is more challenging; and since you do not see the person to whom you are writing you can just imagine and you can just anticipate about the person or about the audiences mood, natures. You can also think of, but then you also might be knowing about the business that the other organization is dealing with. So, it becomes very challenging and as a writer of business letters you have to maintain certain decorum. Now, what are these decorums and how we can?

(Refer Slide Time: 08:07)



The slide is titled "Business Letters" and contains a bulleted list of five points. The text is partially underlined and circled in red. The footer includes the IIT Kharagpur logo, the text "NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE", and the number "3".

Business Letters

- Business letters are essential written tools to send messages, establish communication and build relationships with people of various organizations.
- They help organizations to respond to requests, convince customers and clients and encourage them to take action and express goodwill.
- Business letters serve as records usually of contracts, terms of agreements and offers.
- Formal though, business letters help in expressing goodwill gestures.
- Both individuals and organizations can establish their images through business letters.

IIT Kharagpur NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 3

So, here it also is pertinent so to throw some light on certain aspects of business letters. As said earlier that business letters are written to send messages, establish communication and build relationships, these three terms are very important. Now, two organizations when they

come in close contact with each other then at times there can be request, that is why that will later we shall discuss how business letters are can have a different are types.

So, at times you can request, at times you can convince and you convince customers, you also convince clients; you also can convince the other organizations busy in the same business. And then you also encourage them to take some action expedite certain things and also express goodwill.

Now, since as I said earlier memos are circulated within the organization and that is why they are very informal, but business letters have to maintain a sort of formal because it serves as a sort of record, sometimes things may go wrong, sometimes there may be certain confusions because in business world people keep changing, individuals keep changing and when a new person joints and the new person has to write or correspondent what he will refer to he will refer to these business letters or the records that are there available.

So, the terms of agreement suppose somebody writes to an organization are very angry and aggrieved later now the person who is handling the correspondences is unaware of. So, what he should do? He will actually refer to the record that is available, even though business letters appear to be formal they help in expressing goodwill gestures. Sometimes you express thanks, sometimes you congratulate, sometimes you pray for their welfare, sometimes two organizations when they come in close contact with each other they know each other's shortcomings as well as their advantages as well as their merits.

So, in this process of business letters or this exchange of business letters not only the individuals, but organizations can also establish their images. Now, if you have a look at certain reputed organizations certain reputed brands why they have been, so they have actually maintained their images and in order to maintain their images the people who are behind it they have actually made it possible to see that not only among customers, clients, distributors, the stockholders, shareholders, whatsoever they are maintaining a sort of harmony and they exchange from time to time, this is why we say a business letter can also help in expressing goodwill gestures.

It is always said that a good letter can serve as a good essay, but now in an age when we are more electronically conscious, letter writings have already been relegated to, letter writing has become a decayed art, but still there are certain transactions which cannot go or which cannot continue without business letters that is why business letters are still important.

And in order to understand the nitty gritty of business letters what we shall do is we shall try to find out, because once you are employed in an organization maybe at some point of time you are given the task of handling correspondences. And it is not so that only one person will handle correspondence, there can be at times change and some other persons can also be given the task of handling correspondences. That is why for you as an employee who is waiting for a job or as somebody who is in the job it is very pertinent to understand the nuances of drafting successful business correspondence.

Now, when we talk about business letters it is at the same time we shall also be talking about, then we shall be taking these two things quite parallelly because we have already discussed memo, but then what are the functions of a memo and what are the functions of a letter and then we will find out the difference.

Now, what does a memo do? If you are in an organization you might be acquainted with this term memo and this memo is a suit. Now, memos are mostly written when you have very short message to convey when and memos can be written by superiors, subordinates, it can go to subordinates it can also be written by a junior level officer to a senior level one having some requests, having some sort of query or whatsoever that why it is quite appropriate to understand the various purposes of a memo.

Now, suppose some task is going on, suppose some project is going on from time to time every now and then you do not want a people to submit a detailed report isn't it, through memo also you want to confirm, you want to understand what is the progress.

So, memos can function as a sort of confirmation, you can confirm through memo. Sometimes there has been a deadlock and you want things to move on, so in that regard you

can also suggest, you can request sometimes something went wrong and you are served a memo, this is you know memos are served not only always to insult you or to punish you, but at times to know also. Because, the basic rule of a memo is to communicate to communicate information and that is why at times you have to explain something new is going to take place, something new you are going to formalize in your organization and for that you need to make it public.

Make it public means you want to let every employee know for that also you can circulate a memo, hence a memo can also announce, a memo can also report the progress, but at times things may go wrong isn't it, things often go wrong.

So, when things go wrong suppose somebody not because he or she wanted to, but then they because of some amount of you know lack of information or whatsoever they did something and then that resulted into a sort of difficulty. So, from time to time people can be warned also through memo. So, these are basically the functions of a memo. We shall also be trying to understand; now since we have discussed a memo and a later let us try to understand the basic differences, how these two are different.

So, as I said earlier memos are meant for internal circulation. So, internal business communication, memo is an internal business communication, but letters can go outside also. So, while writing a letter you have to be very formal, fine while writing a memo at times you can be informal also at times it has also been seen that people also become a bit you know light mannered light hearted, but in letter this cannot be possible. So, a memo is less formal, a memo is often shorter that is why many organizations you will find that they have a memo pro forma where you do not have to do anything other elements are already there you simply need to write the message whatever message you want fine and memo is more direct than the letter, because it is short and you do not have much time because when you have less time you want to serve a memo you want to circulate a memo.

And if in a letter you will find when we shall be discussing the format of a memo as well as of a letter you will find in letter inside address is important. But in memo there is no inside

address, since it is a printed pro forma and you know that this is within the organization, only when we have the terms like to, from, subject line, date and at times reference also.

So, there is no inside address moreover there is no salutation also in a memo; in a memo there is no salutation. There is no, there are no complimentary closures and leave taking or something like that. It is very direct, it is very short and it is shorter than letters. Now, when we talk about a memo, I think all of you might be curious enough to know how can it be written, that is why here I have provided a sample memo. So, if you have a look at this memo you will not only understand the format of a memo you will also understand the language; you will also understand the language.

So, at times because as I said you can be at times a bit, at times people have also been found to show some amount of humour [vocalized- noise] in a memo, but remember this humour should be such that people can understand, sometimes people creates humour and others do not understand. So, it is this is really a fatal, so do not go for that.

Now, look at this memo; since it is interoffice memorandum willingly I have not given the letter head and all of you know that most of the organizations will have our letterhead when they are going to circulate a memo. So, it is always written interoffice memorandum in the top center and in the middle. Now, the format goes like this.

So, you can write all of them in one line, I mean if they can be aligned or you can divide it into two, I mean they can go alongside as well.

(Refer Slide Time: 18:49)

The slide displays an Inter Office Memorandum with the following details:

- To: All employees
- From: Environment Officer
- Date: 07 October, 2019
- Subject: Pollution Control

The main text of the memo reads:

You will all agree that our environment plays a vital role in our lives but we cannot deny our role in polluting our surrounding. The increasing number of vehicle users has added to this malady. Also, it adds to the problem of parking in our campus.

Based on an internal report, it has been found that 80 percent of our staff members come to their offices by personal vehicles. While these vehicles occupy large open spaces, they also add to air pollution.

I suggest that we should start using bicycles twice a week and help our surrounding remain green. Though initially it may appear difficult yet it will help not only curtail our extravagant ways but also reduce environmental pollution to a great extent.

Satvik Anand

At the bottom of the slide, there are logos for IIT Kharagpur and NPTEL Online Certification Course, along with the number 6.

So, when a memo is circulated to all people, sometimes there are some personal memos also served to people, but most of the time these memos are only to all people for wider circulation. So, you see here we have mentioned here to all employees. And who is the person? So, the name of the person is not there rather since it is official, we write from environment officer and now you see the date is always written and then the subject is written, because whenever a memo is there people get curious as to what the subject is.

So, the subject is a pollution control. Now, let us have a look at the language the language has to be very direct, but at the same time it has to be a little bit persuasive that is why you see now the memo begins like this. You will all agree that of an environment plays a vital role in our lives, but we cannot deny our role in polluting our surroundings.

Now, this is actually a memo to remind people and to advise people are to use their vehicles as less as possible, because the person who is writing is more concerned about the environment and he wants that pollution can also be checked. So, here is a suggestion as I said memos can also suggest. The increasing number of vehicle users has added to this malady. You are trying to create a sort of background and also, it adds to the problem of parking in our campus.

So, you are more concerned, I mean the environment officer is more concerned. Based on an internal report it has been found that 80 percent of our staff members come to their offices by personal vehicles, fine. And then while these vehicles occupy large open spaces, they also add to air pollution. So, you have already stated the problem. Now, through memos because you want to suggest you see what you want to suggest here comes in the last line, because you want to emphasize fine you want to emphasize.

I suggest that we should start using bicycles twice a week and help our surrounding remain green. Though initially it may appear difficult, I mean he also becomes I mean the environment officer also becomes a bit sympathetic, but then there is also a sort of dig and that is very subtle not everyone can understand though initially it may appear difficult yet it will help not only curtail our extravagant ways, but also reduce environmental pollution to a great extent.

And you see now the memo comes to an end and when the memo comes to an end there is no complimentary close except the writer, I mean the environment officer he simply puts his signature he writes his name.

So, this is how a standard memo can be written. Now, you might be able to understand the basic difference between the writing of a memo and the writing of a business letters. But then there are certain things, because business letters will be longer as I said earlier you know that memo is a shorter document, business letter is a longer document because you want to say a certain things which are very essential. Now, in this condition what happens when people start writing a business letter there are certain things that they have to take into consideration.

In the previous lecture also we talked about while discussing the principles we talked about that a letter writer especially a professional letter writer has to keep into consideration the six c's and what are these six c's whatever you want it to say you have to be very clear my dear friends. So, clarity is the hallmark of all business letters I have been repeatedly saying, and then consideration.

Now, you are writing from the point of view of business no you are one you are trying actually not only to establish how can relationship be established unless and until you show your consideration to the other party. You might be thinking that you are writing from the organizations side, but remember that you are writing to a person, there might be some person who will be handling the correspondence and keeping yourself in his position. If something you know you write and then that may be very insulting or hurting. So, that will really stop that will really halt the business and that will make people think about what is being done.

(Refer Slide Time: 23:21)

| Essential features of Business Letters | | |
|--|------------------------------------|--------------|
| | Pompous | Concise |
| - Clarity ✓ | Would like to inform | Inform |
| - Consideration ✓ | Offer my candidature | Apply |
| - Courtesy ✓ | In the event of | If |
| - Conciseness | Pursuant to your request | As requested |
| - Cordiality | Without any loss of time | Urgently |
| - Cooperation | At this point of time | Presently |
| | It would be unreasonable to assume | I assume |

Hence courtesy and consideration are very important and business letters have although even though they are a bit longer, but conciseness is very important, because at times it has been seen that sometimes people while trying to create or while trying to write business letters they actually mess up everything and make the message very foggy.

How does message become foggy? When a person writes longer phrases, longer sentences, longer paragraphs, my dear friend and hence they do not give room to cordiality and cooperation. Since we are trying to establish a sort of goodwill between two organizations through letters, cooperation and cordiality are very important. How can we sow cooperation and consideration?

The first thing that you should keep into consideration is instead of writing pompous words I mean words, which are very lengthy words which are wordy it is always, but you can always

cut down words and be very specific. Some of the examples are given in this table you can find; for example, many people are habituated to write I would like to inform, I mean why do you say I would like to inform you be straight and say I inform fine let me inform, I would like to offer my candidature, I apply isn't it; sometimes they write in the event off.

So, if one word can do why are you trying to create a barrage of words, why are you trying to create a jungle of words my dear friend hence the first essential requirement of a business letter is to keep into consideration these 6 c's clarity, consideration, courtesy, conciseness, cordiality and cooperation. I shall also be providing from time to time some of the examples that can be of great help. Now, the tone of a business letter has to be formal, if it is formal its ok, but then even when you are formal you have to maintain a sort of professional tone.

(Refer Slide Time: 25:27)

Contd.

- Formal but professional tone
- Simple, direct and specific language
- Letters help take decisions

Your credit request has been approved.
Revd.: We are glad to inform you that your credit request has been approved.

You have not responded to our earlier letters despite several reminders.
Revd.: We would be delighted to get your prompt responses to our earlier queries.

IIT ROORKEE | NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 8

This professional tone will come through courtesy and consideration. The language will be simple, direct and the language also will be specific my dear friends because any decision in a business world will be taken based on letters. So, unless and until the letters express things clearly as I have been saying business letters should express and not impress, by using high sounding words you are trying to impress and you are not trying to express.

So, what can be done? There are certain examples given you can see at the second sentence. You have not responded to our earlier letters despite several reminders, I mean there is no problem with the sentence it is grammatically correct, but then it actually lacks consideration and it lacks courtesy. It could be better if you could revise this sentence and you could say you would be delighted to get your prompt responses to our earlier queries. Do you remember in the previous lecture I said that whenever there is a sentence which has a negative connotation it is always better to revert the sentence, it is always better to change the sentence into positive. You see this sentence also expresses the same, but is there a sort of negative word being used no my dear friend not at all.

(Refer Slide Time: 26:49)

Courtesy and Consideration *Inclusive*

You do not qualify for this award as you are not a member of our association.
Revd.: The awards are specifically given to life members of the association.

We are unable to invite everyone for the function.
Revd.: Because of some constraints, only limited number of people have been invited.

Our responsibility ends when we have given the goods to the courier. You should know that everything is not in our hands.
Revd.: We take extra care and ensure that goods reach safely to our customers. However, at times goods get damaged during transit.

IT KOOBEE NPTEL ONLINE CERTIFICATION COURSE 9

And in order to maintain courtesy and consideration again you have to take into consideration that the least amount of negatives are to be used. There are three sentences given here and you can find all this, sometime all these sentences me or the other using negative words unable, do not, fine and then the last sentence you can find again here also we have some negative words. People are we say you have to be straight you have to be simple you have to be specific, but then while being specific please maintain the dharma of maintaining cordiality; for example, look at the last sentence.

This is actually a sentence which a person having least concern about the customer may write, our responsibility ends when we have given the goods to the courier. You should know that everything is not in our hands. Now, by saying this you should know what you are doing you are actually not showing any consideration you were not even courteous.

So, I will not change it and say we take extra care and ensure that goods reach safely to our customers; however, you are admitting my dear friend, but you are admitting in a different manner; however, at times goods get damaged during transit. So, this way because business world only thrives on relationship and you have to maintain that relationship and that can be maintained through courtesy and consideration apart from clarity, conciseness fine and other requirements that we have discussed.

Now, everything lies in the words my dear friends; everything lies in the words, whether you are writing a memo or you are writing a business letter you always have to remember that the wrong use of a particular word even though you are direct, sometimes in order to be direct people what they do they try to be direct, but actually bring such words which are very hurtful as you have seen in the previous one.

If you have a look at the previous one my dear friends; now, you see you do not qualify for this award as you are not a member of our association; I mean what do you want to suggest? What you want to say? The concern is you know the gist of this is that the awards are given to members to life members. So, why do why you are trying to isolate a person you. Remember in the previous lecture we said that the language used in business documents has to be inclusive my dear friend, inclusive language fine not isolative language.

So, when we talk about inclusive language what you have to do is you are actually to bypass the negatives. So, if the sentence can be revised we can always say the awards are specifically given to life members of the association. Now here you are not blaming anyone, you are not isolating anyone in the second sentence also there has been an error of this sort, we are unable to invite everyone to the function. I mean people whom you are inviting perhaps seem to be people having a greater or a better status, no we do not want to isolate people.

Rather if you can put the reason and then you can say whatever you want to say even though you are straight, but then you are convincing. For example, look at the sentence which has been revised because of some constraints only limited number of people have been invited,

only limited number of people have been invited. You do not say that you are unable to invite everyone; I mean you have a sort of limitation.

So, it is all a language game and you know the use of words and sentences the show of courtesy and consideration and consideration because you know you are not talking to one class of people, business letters can be received at times by young people, at times by adults, at times by some people who are very much experienced you never know when they can feel hurt and what word of yours can hurt them.

That is why it is always better to be careful now and say that we have to since we have to continue having a sort of relationship with the other organization or with the other institution we have to maintain a sort of cordiality. For example, every business letters you will find when it begins the very first line of a business letter is thanks for your letter dated such and such even if at times you may accuse the other person, but even then the response will be very warm.

(Refer Slide Time: 32:17)

Summing up

“If there is on earth a house with many mansions, it is the house of words.”

-E. M. Forster

It is it is actually quite pertinent to quote the words of a famous English novelist E M Foster who says if there is on earth a house with many mansions it is the house of words. I mean my dear friend there is no dearth of words there is no dearth of words. And there are words for different occasions, there are words for different opportunities, there words for different circumstances situations, know and words have the ability to pull you out of crisis my dear friend.

Hence, what we should do is we should actually go for words that appear less hurtful less insulting, words which are more familiar, words which are concise, words which are specific, words which we use in our day to day lives because our customers and the receivers of our letters maybe people not having too much qualification like others.

So, when we write letters we must always think that we are talking to people who are our prospective clients who are our prospective customers. Hence it would not be wrong to say that out of this vocabulary go for the words which mean, go for the words which specify, go

for the words which accommodate, go for the words which welcome, go for the words which retain and go for the words which actually can bring back even an aggrieved customer, even an angry client and even an institution with whom you have been maintaining a relationship for years, but because of something or because of some dead like the relationship got soured.

So, it is time we went for the actual and the important words that can bring back the angry customers and aggrieved clients. With this let us come to the end and say again, if there is an earth on how if there is on earth a house with many mansions it is the house of words. And you being considerate and courteous will use the important words that can win the customers and that can help create and run our business very smoothly till then.

Thank you very much, I wish you all a good.