Lecture 18

Writing Direct Requests

In this lecture you will learn to

• Why you follow the customs of your audience when making requests across cultural boundaries.
• Clearly state the main idea of each direct request you write.
• Indicate your confidence that the request will be filled.
• Provide a sufficient detail for the reader to be able to comply with your request.
• Clarify complicated request with lists and tables.
• Close with a courteous request for specific action.

For Organizing Direct Requests

• State the request or main idea.
• Give necessary details.
• Close with a cordial request for specific action.

Direct Request

• This approach works well when you request requires no special tact or persuasion.
• Example.
  – HKB’s store managers are certainly interested in helping Levi’s increase sales, just as distributors are interested in filling a HKB order.
• People making direct requests may be tempted to begin with a personal introduction. This approach is not right.
• A better way to organize a direct request is to state what you want in the first sentence or two and let the explanation follow this initial request.
• Tone of your initial request is important.
• Soften your request with such words as please, and i would appreciate.
• Middle part of a direct request usually explains the original request.
• Assume that your reader will comply once he or she understands your purpose.
• In the last section, clearly state the action you are requesting.
• Close with a brief, cordial note reminding the audience of the importance of the request.
• Now take a close look at the three main sections of the direct request.
• This may be useful for brief and oral messages as well.
Main Idea of the Request

- General rule for the first part of the direct request is to write not only to be understood but also to avoid being misunderstood.
- Be aware of the difference between a polite request in question form (which requires no question mark) and a question that is part of a request.

Example.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Request in Question Form</th>
<th>Question that is part of a request</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Would you please help us determine whether Kate Kingsley is a suitable applicant for a position as landscape designer.</td>
<td>Did Kate Kingsley demonstrate to work smoothly with client?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Use a period at the end of a request in question form that requires action.
- Use a question mark at the end of a request that requires an answer in words.

Justification, Explanation and Details

- In the middle section
  - Call attention to how the reader will benefit from granting your request.
  - Give details of your request.
- Ask the most important question first. Then ask related, more specific questions.
- Use numbered list when you're requesting several items or answers.

When you prepare questions

- Ask only questions that relate to your main request.
- Don't ask for information which you can find yourself.
- Make your questions open ended and objective.
- Deal with only one topic in each question.

Close With

- A request for some specific response.
- An expression of appreciation.
- Information about how you can be reached.

Placing Orders

- Order letters are like good mail order forms, although they also provide more room for explaining special needs.
- When placing an order, you don't need to excite your reader's interest; just state your needs clearly and directly.
• It starts with “Please send the following” or “Please ship”.
• Order blanks are arranged to document precisely the goods you want, describing them by catalog number, quantity, name or trade name, color, size, unit price and total amount due.
• Present the information of items in column format, double spacing between the items and totaling the prince at the end.
• To respond to the audience
  – If you are not certain that your purpose in composing a message is compatible with the audience’s purpose, you are likely to deliver irrelevant material.

Checklist for Orders

• Direct Statement of the Request
  – Use wording that indicates an order rather than a request. Write “please send me”, instead of “I want” or “I need” which are neither polite nor legally appropriate for a business order.
  – Open with a general description of your order.

• Justification, Explanation and Details
  – For complex orders, provide a general explanation of what the request material will be used for.
  – Provide all specifications.
  – Use a format that presents information clearly and makes it easy to total amounts.
  – Double check the completeness of your order and cost totals.

• Courteous Close with Request for Specific Action.
  – Include a clear summary of the desired action.
  – Suggest a future reader benefit.
  – Close on a cordial note.
  – Clearly state any time limits that apply to your order, and explain why they are important.

Requesting Routine Information and Action

• When making a routine request, say
  – What you want to know.
  – Why you want to know.
  – Why it is in the reader’s interest to help you.
Request to Company Insiders

• A request in memo form
  – Provides a permanent record.
  – Saves time and question.
  – Tells precisely what is needed.
  – The Basic Request is stated at the beginning.
  – The next two paragraphs explain the problem
    That made the inquiry necessary.
  – The final paragraph requests action and, with
    a built-in Questionnaire, makes a response day.

Example i.e. MEMO

• The Memo begins with the central question.
• A little background information orients the reader.
• The numbered questions focus responses so that they will be easier to tally.
• Specific instructions for replying the memo also includes the courteous tone which helps to ensure a prompt response.
• Adjust writing style in memos to accommodate shared reference points.

Requests to Other Businesses

• When writing a letter in response to an advertisement
  – Say where you saw the ad.
  – Specify what you want.
  – Provide a clear and complete return address on the letter.
  – If the reader is not expecting your letter, supply more detail.
• The Overall request is stated at the beginning. Phrased politely in question form, it requires no question mark.
• The explanation of the request keeps the reader’s attention by hinting at the possibility of future business.
• To avoid burdening the reader with an impossibly broad request, the writer asks a series of specific questions, itemized in a logical sequence.
• To avoid receiving useless yes or no answers, the writer asks some open-minded questions.
• The courteous close specifies a time limit.

Requests to customers and other Outsiders

• Requests to customers often spell out in detail
  – What exactly is needed.
  – How filling the request will benefit them.
• The opening states the purpose of the letter in simple, reader-oriented terms. Providing details of the law convinces the reader that the request is warranted.
• An explanation of procedures is another reader-oriented feature of the letter. To make a complex procedure easier to understand, the writer breaks the direction into two clearly defined steps.
• Routine Requests to customers can be used to establish communication.
• When sending routine requests to individuals rather than other businesses, consider enclosing a stamped, preaddressed envelop.

Structure of Customer Letters
• The opening paragraph states the reason for the letter. The frank request should arouse curiosity and encourage a frank response.
• The request for action should be devised for uncovering trouble without actually suggesting that there might be trouble.
• The actual request for action is left unstated until the end so that it leaves an impression.

Checklist for Routine Requests
• Direct Statement of the Request.
  – Phrase the opening to reflect the assumption that the reader will respond to your request favorably.
  – Phrase the opening so clearly and simply that the main idea cannot be misunderstood.
  – Write in a polite, undemanding, personal tone.
  – Preface complex requests with a sentence or two of the explanation, possibly by a statement of the problem that the response will solve.
• Justification, Explanation and Details
  – Justify the request or explain its importance.
  – Explain to the reader the benefits of responding.
  – State the desired actions in a positive and supportive, not a negative or dictatorial, manner.
  – Itemize parts of a complex requests in a numbered series.
• List Specific Questions.
  – Don’t ask questions that you could answer through you own efforts.
  – Arrange questions logically.
  – Number Questions.
  – Word Questions carefully. Cont…
• Word questions carefully to get the type of answer you need. Numbers or yes’s and no’s if need to tally many replies; more lengthy, detailed answers if you want to elicit more information.
• Word questions to avoid clues about the answer you prefer so as not to bias the reader’s answers.
• Limit each question to one topic.
• Courteous Close
  – Make your request as easy as possible.
  – Indicate gratitude, possibly by promising to follow up in a way that will benefit the reader.
  – Clearly state any deadlines or time frame, and briefly justify it if it is genuinely important.

Requesting Claims and Adjustments
• Claims (Formal Complaints)
• Adjustments (Claim settlements)

• You are entitled to request an adjustment whenever you receive a product or experience service that doesn’t live up to the supplier’s standards.
• Tone is of primary importance; keep your claim businesslike and unemotional.
• In your claim letter
  – Explain the problem and give details.
  – Provide backup information.
  – Request specific action.
  – Be prepared to document your claim. Send copies and keep the original documents.

Checklist for Claims & Adjustments
• Direct Statement of the Request.
  – Write a claim letter as soon as possible after the problem has been identified.
  – State the need for reimbursement or correction of the problem.
  – Maintain a confident, factual, fair, unemotional tone.
• Justification, Explanation & Details.
  – To gain reader’s understanding, praise some aspects of the product or the service.
  – Present facts honestly, clearly and politely.
  – Eliminate threats, sarcasm, exaggeration, and hostility.
  – Make no accusations against any person or company that you can’t backup with facts.
  – Specify the problem: Product failed to live up to advertised standards; Product failed to live up to sales representative’s claims; Product fell short of company policy; Product was defective; Customer service was deficient.
  – Use a non-argumentative tone to show your confidence in the reader’s fairness.
If necessary, refer to documentation (invoices, cancelled checks, confirmation letters, and the like), but mail only photocopies.

Ask the reader to propose a fair adjustment, if appropriate.

Do not return the defective merchandise until you have been asked to do so.

If appropriate, present your idea of fair settlement, such as a credit against the next order you place, full or partial refund of the purchase price of the product, replacement of the defective merchandise, performance of services as originally contracted, or repair of the defective merchandise.

Avoid uncertainty or vagueness that might permit the adjusters to prolong the issue by additional correspondence or to propose a less-than-fair settlement.

• Courteous Close with Request for Specific Action.
  – Summarize desired action briefly.
  – Simplify compliance with your request by including your name, address, phone number (area code if necessary), and hours of availability.
  – Note how complying with your request will benefit the reader.

Making Routine Credit Requests

• The first step in requesting credit is to get an application form.
• The second step is to supply the necessary information.
• Order letters are often combined with a request for credit.

  The main idea of Credit Request is tied in with a statement implying a reader benefit.

• The background details of the business are necessary if credit is to be granted.

• The possibility of continuing order is another reason for the reader to grant credit.

• A request for credit
  – Is supported by documentation
  – Adopts a confident tone.
  – Hints at future business.

In this lecture you learnt to

• Why you follow the customs of your audience when making requests across cultural boundaries.
• Clearly state the main idea of each direct request you write.
• Indicate your confidence that the request will be filled.
• Provide a sufficient detail for the reader to be able to comply with your request.
• Clarify complicated request with lists and tables.
• Close with a courteous request for specific action.

*******************************************************************************