

Assignment Lt 00/06

**Student Difficulties Writing in English:
Suggested Strategies to help, and their Potential
Beneficial 'side-effects'**

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1 Introduction

When discussing the difficulties students have writing in English, it is important to first determine what the student is attempting to communicate to their reader. A teacher can then decide which strategies to adopt to help the student improve their writing skills to achieve their goal. These strategies can take many forms but a ‘communicative approach’ to language learning, according to McDonough and Shaw (1993: 181-2), would involve an extension of the size of language stretches that can be dealt with from sentence to discourse level and “require learners to understand the overall purpose of a piece of writing, not just the immediate sentence-bound grammatical context.” They state that considerations of both ‘cohesion’ and ‘discourse coherence’ make up some of the criteria used when evaluating a piece of writing as communicative or not, and that sentence-level critiquing and grammar practice is not omitted but is “set in the context of a longer and purposeful stretch of language.” Writing, then, they suggest, is seen as primarily message-oriented, so a communicative view of language is a necessary foundation. Difficulties students appear to have writing in English and strategies to help them overcome these difficulties will be discussed within this communicative context.

1.1 Writing Tasks

Writing tasks assigned to the classes under discussion were ‘application activities’, defined by Richards and Lockhart (1996: 165) as those in which students “complete a written assignment incorporating rhetorical and discourse devices using

ideas and information of their own.” Model business letters and expository compositions illustrating both institutional and personal writing styles were provided for the students to work from. A detailed discussion of some of the difficulties students experienced writing in English will be presented, as will an explanation of the general contextual background in which the writing took place. In addition, a review of the literature on the topic and suggested strategies to help students overcome their writing difficulties will be outlined. Finally, potential beneficial ‘side-effects’ of these strategies and their implications on current teaching practice will be discussed.

2 General Contextual Background

2.1 Classes

The business English classes from which the student writing samples were collected consisted of small groups (6-8) of native-speaking Japanese students each with TOEIC scores ranging from 450 - 650. The classes were divided equally between women and men and their ages ranged from twenty-five to thirty-five. The majority of the students had some experience communicating with foreigners; perhaps on the job, traveling, or in English conversation class. They possessed a substantial knowledge of grammar and vocabulary and had studied and could recognize a large number of idioms. The students belonged to both foreign and Japanese insurance, trading and electronics firms and skill in English was a daily requirement for them. They were all primarily interested in improving their English business communication skills in order to do their jobs more effectively. They had requested instruction in writing English business correspondence with special emphasis on e-mails and faxes, as well as assistance in

responding to customer requests, complaints and orders. The classes, therefore, placed an emphasis on building skills related to writing in a business environment. Four of the six student writing samples examined below represent attempts at formal business English correspondence.

2.2 Materials

When designing the writing tasks, both schematic and systemic assumptions were taken into account. The objective was to choose material students would most likely have relative knowledge about, as well as tasks they possessed language structures to complete. Richards and Rogers (1986: 156) stress the importance of accurately judging student levels when designing a course of study:

Needs analysis focuses on what the learner's present level of proficiency is and on what the learner will be required to use the language for on completion of the program. Its aim is to identify the type of language skills and level of language proficiency the program should deliver.

In general, closed-task structures were decided on since these would provide the students with a clear goal, more support, and opportunities to recycle new vocabulary and rhetorical devices. Sample writing models were provided as both 'in class' exercises and as homework writing assignments (see Appendix B). For the homework assignments, students were encouraged to e-mail their material to the teacher for correction as this was seen as more authentic. As a result, students were composing, e-mailing and receiving a reply all in English, just as they would in their real business environment.

3 Review of the Literature

3.1 Process vs Product

The process vs. product discussion cited by Brown (1994: 320) and others is one area where fundamental differences on what the objectives of a writing task should be are illustrated. Are student writing compositions supposed to meet certain standards of prescribed English rhetorical style, grammar, and audience expectations? Or, conversely, should writing be seen more as a ‘process’ where learners are “allowed to focus on content and message” and where “their own individual intrinsic motives” become the focus of their learning rather than the mastery of certain structures or models? Nunan (1991: 87) comments that in the process approach the focus is on:

quantity rather than quality, and beginning writers are encouraged to get their ideas on paper in any shape or form without worrying too much about formal correctness. The approach also encourages collaborative group work between learners ... and more controversially, attention to grammar is played down.

Brown quotes Peter Elbow (1973: 14-16) when attempting to highlight the different approaches in the process vs. product debate. He states that instead of focusing on the written ‘product’ we should think of writing as an “organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning – before you know your meaning at all – and encourage your words to gradually change and evolve.” However, as Brown himself admits, the real emphasis of process writing must be seen as “a balance between process and product” since “product is, after all, the ultimate goal.” Swan (1985: 81) too, makes the point that we should teach ‘use’ as well as ‘meaning’ and not neglect the

structural elements (for instance, lexis) through which meaning is ultimately conveyed.

3.2 First Language Interference

Another issue related to the teaching of writing is the consideration of to what extent a student's first language may interfere with their writing in a second. Brown (1994: 323) recommends that teachers adopt a "weak" position when attending to first language interference. He suggests that student's "cultural/literary schemata" should be thought of as "one possible source of difficulty." He adds that recent studies in 'contrastive rhetoric' have shown the significance of "valuing student's native-language-related rhetorical traditions" and of leading them through a "process of understanding those schemata, but not attempting to eradicate them." He considers this self-understanding on the part of the students may "lend itself to a more effective appreciation and use of English rhetorical conventions." Nunan (1991: 144) also outlines the different elements of the contrastive hypothesis where 'negative transfer' and 'positive transfer' refer to the interference the first language may have on the second, but states that attempts to prove definitively this relationship have yet to be made.

3.3 Audience

A third factor when discussing writing in the classroom is the notion of the writer's 'audience.' Callow (1992: 8-12) states that a communicator must be constantly aware of the addressee as they attempt to convey their message. The need to be

understood “prompts the communicator to be aware of the addressee’s initial state of knowledge,” and their “continued comprehension.” It is these factors, for Callow, which produce the true orientational elements in a written composition. McDonough and Shaw cite Byrne (1988: 183) as one of several authors on writing skills who stress that: “writing is a process of encoding (putting your message into words) carried out with the reader in mind.” The overall organization of a piece of writing is “best considered in relation to audience and purpose,” while stylistic choices “depend on why and for whom we are writing.”

4 Discussing the Difficulties

4.1 Assessment Criteria

McDonough and Shaw (1993: 190) suggest that when assessing students’ writing we need to take into account the “appropriacy of the writing to its purpose and its intended audience as well as topic and content criteria.” Brown (1994: 342) talks of six general categories often used as the basis for evaluating student writing: content, organization, discourse, syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics (adapted from J. D. Brown, 1991). Brown’s list above - where the order emphasizes the importance of content, organization, and discourse over syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics - will serve as a useful framework for the six writing samples under discussion.

Another important overall consideration involves the degree to which the student writing succeeded or failed to effectively convey its message to the reader. Bozek (1991: 29) states that difficulties of this sort arise when writers misperceive their

readers and assume that they will: “read every word of the document and will know what action to take as a result of the information presented in the document.” With these assumptions, he says, writers often produce documents which are too long, do not clearly specify action requests, or must be read in their entirety for readers to find key points. Examples to highlight such difficulties and others encountered in the students’ writing will be drawn directly from the samples. Where direct quotes are not displayed, but reference is made to a particular sample, refer to Appendix A.

4.2 Content

The term ‘content’ for Brown (1994) includes how effectively a writer relates ideas in their writing and develops those ideas through personal experience, illustration, facts and opinions. Use of description and consistent focus in the writing is also important. Lack of consistent focus was a difficulty in sample 2. A business letter originally intended to confirm a meeting transforms into a letter thanking the client and requesting an opinion on their company’s services. In sample 3, there is a failure to provide the reader with the necessary information they need to address the situation or a clear notion of what action they are being requested to take. Sample 4 suffers from a similar lack of reference and description in its introductory paragraph:

Our company made an order for 100 units last month and received only 50 units by DHL. We do not hear about your partial send at all. When do you think the rest 50 units will be send?

The product under discussion is never described in detail anywhere in the letter and the reader is left without enough information to act on the letter’s request. It is apparent that

lack of content negatively affects the writer's ability to convey their message in the examples cited above.

4.3 Organization

The term 'organization' for Brown (1994) includes such things as effective introductions, logical sequence of ideas, and appropriate length. An examination of sample 1 clearly shows how the opening paragraph to a business letter fails in its introduction:

We received your letter telling us of the problem. We are very sorry to hear that you couldn't get a half of them. We had sent all of them at last week yet. But because we heard the problem, we confirmed about it. Then we could know why the problem occurred. The reason was follows.

Even when the writer goes on to try to describe the "reason" the "problem" occurred, the reader is never informed anywhere in the letter what the problem is. Even in the concluding paragraph, the situation being addressed is still referred to as "the problem" and an appeal is made to the letter's reader to continue business with the company in the future: "We'll care not to cause the problem, so please continue the business relations with our company." In sample 6 there is a similar absence of logical sequence in the fourth paragraph of a small business proposal. The writer refers to the wage arrangement for the family members who will work in the new business, but this issue is never mentioned in the topic sentence of the paragraph in which it appears, or in the general introduction to the proposal as a whole:

In this shop all of my family display their ability. Wages are 20,000 yen for

each person, because it will be supplementary income for us. And also, good thing for family business is easy to understand one another.

It is clear from some of the samples discussed above that criteria with regards to organization and a logical sequence of ideas were not met in a number of the students' written compositions.

4.4 Discourse

For Brown (1994), 'discourse' refers to such things as the student's effective use of topic sentences, paragraph unity, transitions, cohesion, and rhetorical conventions. In the student writing samples business letter format was not always adhered to, even with model letters as a guide. For instance, sections of writing in sample 1 take on a conversational tone when the shipment of some delayed items the customer had ordered are referred to: "By the way, we will send the remains of them soon. So you can get them tomorrow morning. Is that OK?" Similarly, in sample 2, a conversational style is adopted. The writer confuses the reader even more by failing to break their writing into paragraphs, or use the appropriate rhetorical conventions of business letter correspondence (such as appear in the task sample). The student writes:

I want to say thank you for your contracting with our car insurance. I'm sure our company's product is very good for you. If you meet something wrong while driving, don't hesitate and please contact us ease. It is not only mean accident, we can help you lock inside, puncture and gas empty and so on. We can give best support for you.

The issue of poor transitions is a difficulty in some of the other samples, as well. For

instance, sample 3 initially moves from one idea to the next using the transitional word ‘first’ but reverts to the word ‘so’ to introduce the next point and never continues on with the ‘first, second, third’ sequence that should have developed:

Here is our view of the situatoin. First, we sent 100 units together as you see the copy of DHL that we fax today.

So, we contact with DHL Japan office and try to clear where is missing other 50 units. but, nothing clear so far.

Samples 4, 5, and 6 all have examples of breakdown in paragraph unity and fluency - important factors in the effective conveyance of written discourse. Sample 5, in particular, displays such difficulties when moving from the body of the composition to the concluding paragraph:

The third place I want to visit to is Australia. I’d like to enjoy Marine Sports.

At night, I’d like to playing in Casino.

Each places quite different. but we’ll enjoy to each experiences. So, I’m

Interesting to three different places.

It is clear from an examination of the samples above that features such as ineffective topic sentences, paragraph disunity, and problematic transitions all had negative repercussions on the fluency of the students’ writing.

4.5 Syntax/Vocabulary/Mechanics

Syntax, vocabulary, and mechanics were all sources of writing difficulty for the students. Even short sections of writing had a tendency to demonstrate a combination of such difficulties. The Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics (1997: 377) defines

‘syntax’ as: “the study of the rules governing the way words are combined to form sentences in a language.” Sample 1 begins its second paragraph by commenting on a shipment already sent:

We had sent all of them at last week yet. But because we heard the problem, we confirmed about it. Then we could know why the problem occurred. The reason was follows.

Here the reader can infer that the writer is suggesting that their company had sent all of “them” – presumably the product – but heard that there had been a problem and consulted with others about it. They had discovered the reason for the problem, and explain those reasons in the remainder of the letter. Meaning is hampered by the syntax, but still decipherable. However, there are certain instances in the student compositions where difficulties with syntax contribute to a breakdown in meaning, and the writer’s intended message is never effectively conveyed. For instance, in sample 3 the writer explains that their company is not responsible for a product that was never delivered to the customer and that the customer should contact the shipper directly for answers. Once they have cleared up the situation with the shipper, the company can fill another order for them: “Anyway, we believe this is good way that after we or you will find the situation clear, we start action.” As observed in the samples above, a writer’s ability to convey meaning seems to rely heavily on how skillfully they can follow the rules of English syntax when constructing sentences.

‘Vocabulary’ is defined in the Longman Dictionary of Language and Linguistics (1992: 400) as a set of lexical items, “including single words, compound words, and idioms.” Evidence that students used a sufficient variety of appropriate

vocabulary to match the needs of their assigned writing tasks was evaluated. Sample 1 displays difficulties with appropriate vocabulary in its choice of words such as ‘remains’ and ‘met’:

At first, we sent a half of them (50 units) 2 weeks ago. And we sent the remains of them last week. After that, the transport car met an accident. Furthermore, they did not notify about it, so we couldn’t know it by today.

Difficulties with vocabulary appear in sample 4 where inappropriate words confuse meaning and hinder the reader’s comprehension of the writer’s message. The word ‘partial’ appears in the sentence: “We do not hear about your partial send at all,” as the writer is attempting to explain that their company were not notified in advance that the order they would receive would be incomplete. Aside from the other grammatical difficulties in the sentence, ‘partial’ should be replaced with a more appropriate word so as not to confuse a reader into thinking of partial in terms of ‘favored,’ or some other meaning. Idiom can also be confused, as a line from sample 6 illustrates: “And then, the word of the shop spread from mouth to mouth.” And, later, in the composition’s final sentence: “In conclusion, my small business idea for a general store will be a success for ever based on reasons I have just given.” It is clear that, in certain instances, inappropriate vocabulary may lead to difficulties in a writer’s ability to convey their intended meaning, and therefore reduce the effectiveness of their message.

Spelling and punctuation were the most prominent of the mechanical difficulties in the student writing. Most were minor, but others occasionally lead to a breakdown in fluency, or even meaning, for the reader. For instance, a sentence in sample 2 reads: ”If you meet something wrong while driving, don’t hesitate and please

contact us ease.” With the use of the word ‘ease,’ the writer probably intended to convey the notion of ‘at your convenience,’ or something similar, however meaning can still be inferred as it is written. And sample 6, where in the first part of the sentence it is stated: “My sister will use her knowridge of interior design...”- meaning the writer’s sister will use her ‘knowledge’ of interior design – the message is never hindered to the extent that the reader misinterprets it. However, other instances do occur where spelling, and especially punctuation, confuse readers and seriously hamper fluency. For instance, in the conclusion to sample 5: ”Each places quite different. but we’ll enjoy to each experiences. So I’m interesting to three different places.” In both of the examples above fluency, and even meaning, breakdown as a result of the surface mechanical difficulties they display. Such difficulties contribute an overall negative influence on a writer’s ability to effectively convey their message.

5 Suggesting Strategies

5.1 Higher/Lower Order Concerns

Keh (1990: 297-302) distinguishes between difficulties in student writing as either surface mechanical errors (lower order concerns, or LOC), or issues related to the development of ideas, organization, and overall focus (higher order concerns, or HOC). Keh promotes the notion of focusing on HOCs and states that: “the rationale here is that LOCs may disappear in a later draft as the writer changes content.” She states, for example, that students may eliminate paragraphs or rewrite sentences where surface problems existed. Therefore, strategies for the student writing samples above were primarily oriented towards difficulties related to longer sections of writing (at the

discourse level) rather than to those at the sentence level. Of the six factors discussed as areas of difficulty, the first three – content, organization, and discourse – are equivalent to the writing difficulties of the HOC level. The last three – syntax, vocabulary and mechanics – correspond to difficulties at the LOC level.

5.2 Conferencing

One suggested strategy for helping students experiencing writing difficulties of the HOC kind is to involve the students directly in the evaluation process. The writing samples under discussion could be displayed by overhead projector or distributed as copies throughout the class. Students could ask questions about the sample including: Are the author's points clear? Does they give enough examples to support their views? Did they provide a good conclusion? This is what Keh refers to as an example of peer/group feedback and is included in a larger category known as 'conferences.' Nunan (1991: 87) also comments on the classroom technique of 'conferencing' and its emergence from the process approach to writing. He states: "the aim of conferencing is to encourage young writers to talk about their initial drafts with the teacher or with fellow students." He adds that the technique draws on principles of discovery learning, and links reading with the writing process.

5.3 Planning

Another suggested strategy is careful planning of the assigned writing task. Bozek (1991: 55) states that effective subject lines and headings are one way writers can help their readers obtain the pertinent information they need from a document. Readers

can “scan for the main ideas of a written composition and pick and choose the sections of the document that most interest them and set their own reading priorities.” He adds that proficiency in these skills on the part of the writer allows for multiple-reader flexibility and can appeal to readers with different levels of subject matter expertise. Richards and Lockhart (1996: 65) suggest that there is a difference in strategies used by skilled and unskilled writers and that skilled ones tend to:

spend time thinking about the task and planning how they will approach it; they gather and organize information; and they use note taking, lists, and brainstorming to help generate ideas. On the other hand, unskilled writers tend to spend little on planning; they may start off confused about the task; and they use few planning and organizing strategies.

In addition, sequencing strategies such as pre-writing, drafting and revising are generally acknowledged as assisting students in generating new ideas and plans for their writing, as are topic and concluding sentence exercises where an appropriate introduction or conclusion to a sample paragraph is required (see Appendices A & B). Paragraphing tasks (see Appendix C) could assist here, as well. In each of the exercises the focus is on which sort of task best facilitates the acquisition and use of the target language.

5.4 Pair Work

A further suggested strategy for helping students with their writing is the inclusion of pair work in the curriculum. Student’s would be required to comment on what they consider difficulties in their partner’s written composition. This could be through employing their own schematic knowledge of written English, or by utilizing a

similar list of criteria as mentioned above (for peer/group feedback). Richards and Lockhart (1996: 152-65) suggest that students interacting in groups or pairs are given “the opportunity to draw on their linguistic resources in a nonthreatening situation and use them to complete different tasks.” For example, in a writing class:

students may work in pairs to read each others assignments and provide suggestions for improvement. This feedback may address content, organization, or clarity of expression, and serves to provide information that may be useful to the student when revising the piece of writing.

Chaudron (1988: 134) comments as well on the nature of feedback and how it can affect student attitudes to learning: “...the function of feedback is not only to provide reinforcement, but to provide information which learners can use actively in modifying their behaviors.” He later goes on to state that: “information available in feedback allows learners to confirm, disconfirm and possibly modify the hypothetical, “transitional” rules of their developing grammars” but that these things depend on the writer’s willingness to accept feedback given to them.

6 Discussing Potential Beneficial ‘side-effects’

6.1 Overall Targets

The writing activities the students were engaged in were designed to present scenarios in a business context and then allow them to create similar scenarios from their own perspective. Such writing exercises have skill building and more complex communication as their overall targets. Faster student writing speed, increased length and difficulty level of sentences, and heightened confidence in their writing abilities are

some of the potential benefits of such exercises. Providing as many opportunities as possible to actually use the phrases and patterns introduced in the model writing is one way of helping students acquire the target language. Listening to peer comments regarding their writing, defending their work, or providing feedback themselves to other students in the class, all serve to further exposure and enhance acquisition.

6.2 Tasks

Topic and concluding sentence tasks (see Appendices A & B) challenge students to construct a sentence or passage based on the surrounding language context. The inference skills and schematic knowledge required to complete such an exercise could potentially be applied to similar writing situations of their own (e.g. business correspondence, etc.). Benefits to overall skill building include decision-making regarding the appropriacy of certain language. Potentially, students can utilize such decision-making skills - and whatever new vocabulary they have acquired - when revising and redrafting their own work. Awareness of language appropriacy and certain rhetorical devices are heightened by such tasks as students work to construct the most effective and communicative (and thereby, grammatical) writing possible.

6.3 Pair Work/Peer Correction

In addition to employing the skill building techniques of reading, listening and speaking, pair work and peer correction both allow learners the opportunity to bring whatever schematic knowledge they have to the writing task at hand. Pairs or small groups of students can assist each other when evaluating one another's writing. A

written composition read aloud can be checked by both the writer and others for appropriate syntax, cadence, stress, and logical sequencing, among other things. As a consequence, pair work and peer correction can facilitate a range of other skills. Reading, listening and speaking skills are all utilized and therefore have the potential to improve along with the writing skills being practiced.

6.4 Rewrites/Redrafts

Having a student rewrite or redraft their written document challenges them to reassess what they are trying to achieve. Incorporating whatever suggestions others (teacher, pair work partner, etc.) make exposes them to a high occurrence of recycled language and this sort of repetition is thought to aid acquisition. (Nunan, D. 1991: 152) states that such activities, especially when done as pairs, allow students to gain insight into their own approach to learning:

A teacher who...talks about, analyses, compares, contrasts and reflects on written texts, whether they be published texts or the students' own writing, not only promotes an interest in written texts, but provides the students with an language that enables them to reflect on and analyze written texts themselves. It enables the students to...develop an insight into what makes one text successful and another unsuccessful. (Hammond 1989: 19).

The suggested strategies aimed at incorporating as much reading, speaking and listening activities as possible into their design. So, not only are the students developing and improving writing skills they need to complete their job-related tasks, but they are furthering their overall communicative skills in the language as they attempt to master the complexities of English grammar, syntax and, generally, how to convey meaning

through written form.

7 Content in Relation to Current Teaching Practices

7.1 Models

The writing tasks chosen for the students to complete demanded a high level of communicative ability. At the time they were designed, three separate assumptions about the material were made with regards to their suitability: i). schematic (how much relative world knowledge do the students have), ii). systemic (do the students have the necessary language structures to complete the assigned tasks), iii). Interpersonal (are students comfortable with the assigned material). However, even when the above criteria were considered in designing writing tasks for the classroom, students were not always able to achieve the assignment objectives. In certain cases, the students relied too much on the models provided to them. Some only made minor changes or substituted a few different facts without expanding on their own material. Others lost sight of their objective and produced written compositions that did not address the assignment task as set, or failed to recycle most of the target language. Certain of the e-mailing tasks were considered by some students as simply ‘homework’ without any real significance to their actual job situation - even though care had been taken to provide assignments that would authenticate the sort of writing they would normally engage in. Based on class evaluations submitted by students at the end of the course, some felt that time could have been better spent on speaking, listening and reading practice.

7.2 Integrated Skills Approach

To address some of the student concerns mentioned above, writing tasks with an integrated skills approach should be considered. If speaking, listening and reading practice could be components of an assigned writing task, perhaps more effective skill building and language acquisition would occur. For instance, by the end of the course it was found that some students still failed to distinguish completely between appropriate business letter style (institutional), and more casual writing (personal). Students should be challenged to include more background to a problem, a close analysis of certain data, or action they might recommend to address a situation and reasons for such action when they write. In this way, they will be required to utilize other skills such as reading or speaking, and be performing more than just simple language substitution to a writing model.

7.3 Target Culture

When assigning writing tasks, a teacher should consider which exercises are suitable for cultural and cross-cultural studies involving research into the customs, lifestyles, and history of the English-speaking world. Often the ‘foreignness’ of the target culture is neglected with regular course material. In addition, they can take note of how other writers recycle grammar and vocabulary, summarize points, and make transitions between paragraphs, among other things. Students should be encouraged, therefore, to pursue as much extensive reading of this sort as they can.

8 Conclusion

One of the goals of the writing assignments was to give the students practice applying English in authentic business situations with an emphasis on all language skill areas, but particularly writing. What evolved from these series of writing exercises was the notion that a teacher should consider elements of both ‘process’ and ‘product’ in any discussion involving strategies to assist students in improving their writing skills. Without knowledge of writing techniques such as sequencing or repetition structures (important conveyers of meaning) a student’s ability to effectively communicate what they want in the target language is drastically reduced. As the suggested strategies outlined above illustrate, there are a number of ways that a teacher can make their teaching of writing communicative while still moving learners towards a desire for accuracy.

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Appendix A – Student Samples

Sample Letter 1 Assignment # 5 – Responding to Complaints

Standard Electric Co., Ltd
Boston, MA 80633

Takao Oda
1-19-3 Naka-Cho
Musashimo-City
Tokyo, Japan 180-0006

May 26, 2000

Dear Mr. Oda

We received your letter telling us of the problem. We are very sorry to hear that you couldn't get a half of them.

We had sent all of them at last week yet. But because we heard the problem, we confirmed about it. Then we could know why the problem occurred. The reason was follows.

At first, we sent a half of them (50 units) 2 weeks ago. And we sent the remains of them last week. After that, the transport car met an accident. Furthermore, they did **not** notify about it, so we couldn't know it by today.

We certainly know that it is making an excuse, so we will discount the price of them for 10%.

By the way, we will send the remains of them soon. So you can get them tomorrow morning. Is that OK?

We'll care not to cause the problem, so please continue the business relations with our company.

Sincerely,
Donald Townsend
Senior Engineer

Sample Letter 2 Assignment # 11 – Confirming a Meeting

AXA direct Japan
135-8611
3-1-25 Ariake, Koto-ku, Tokyo

Mr. Kazutoshi Maeda
2-5-7 Aso Tobata
Kitakyusyu-shi

Dear Mr. Maeda,

I want to say thank you for your contracting with our car insurance. I'm sure our company's product is very good for you. If you meet something wrong while driving, don't hesitate and please contact us ease. It is not only mean accident, we can help you lock inside, puncture, and gas empty and so on. We can give best support for you. If possible, could you send us short mail about your opinion about our call center when you called us? We eager to know customers real opnion for us.

Sincerely,
Keiichi Nishizawa

Sample Letter 3 **Assignment # 4 - Letter of Complaint**

Reina Machiguchi
8-2-1 KOKURYO-CHO
CHOFU, TOKYO, JAPAN

July 11, 2000 年 12 月 9 日
Manager of distribution section
EPSON ELECTRONIC CO., LTD.
TAICANG CITY, JAINGSU, CHINA

Dear Sir,
Our company made an order for 100 units
last month and received today only 50
units by DHL.
We do not hear about your partial send
at all.
When do you think the rest 50 units will
be send?
Please inform it.
We look forward to hearing from you as
soon as possible.

Thank you and best regards.

Reina Machiguchi
JUKI CO., LTD

Sample Letter 4 Assignment # 5 – Responding to Complaints

EPSON ELECTRIC CO., LTD
TAICANG CITY, JAINGSU, CHINA

Reina Machiguchi July 12, 2000 年 12 月 7 日
8-2-1 KOKURYO-CHO
CHO-FU, TOKYO, JAPAN

Dear Miss Machiguchi,

Your letter of July 12 has received our immediate attention. Here is our view of the situation. First, we sent 100 units together as you see the copy of DHL that we fax today.

So, we contact with DHL Japan office and try to clear where is missing other 50 units. but, nothing clear so far.

Would you pls contact with DHL China office, too.

According to our investigation, there was no fault on our part, and you file your claim with DHL CARGO.

We will ready to spare 50 units if you send new order sheet to us.

Anyway, we believe this is good way that after we or you will find the situation clear, we start action.

We look forward to hear you.

Yours Sincerely,

ATSUSHI UEDA
MANAGER OF DISTRIBUTION SECTION

Sample Letter 5 Multi-Paragraph Composition Assignment

Three Places I'd Like to Visit'

I like to go abroad. My husband and I are planning to our next holiday. We were talking about each interesting places. There are three special places I'd like to visit. The first is Italy. There's so much historic spots in Roma. I'd like to get on a gondola in Napoli and I'd like to take a stroll in Milano. So I'd like to enjoy sight-seeing. The second place I'm longing to visit to Africa. I'd like to watch the sun set into the horizen. I'd like to meet with wild animals in Safari and I want to experience a primitive lifestyle. The third place I want to visit to Australia. I'd like to enjoy Marine Sports. At night. I'd like to playing in Casino.

Each places quite different, but we'll enjoy to each experiences. So, I'm interesting to three different places.

Sample Letter 6 **Drafting a Document - Small Business Proposal**

The Stylish Shop

I believe opening a general store in a residential area will be success for a number of reasons. I will explain my staffing and advertising plans, etc.

First of all my father makes great hand-made furniture. Secondly, language skills of my second oldest sister and me will help us with the importing of stylish foreign goods. And finally my oldest sister will use her knowledge of interior design to coordinate their different goods in the store and my mother keeps the store during the day.

No advertising will be necessary. I think that non commercial style will attract people's attention. Little by little, neighbours in residential area will be potential customers. And then, the word of the shop spread from mouth to mouth.

In this shop all of my family display their ability. Wages are 20,000 yen for each person, because it will be supplementary income for us. And also, good thing for family business is easy to understand one another.

In conclusion, my small business idea for a general store will be success forever based on reasons I have just given.

Appendix B – Model Letters

1. Assignment # 4 - Letter of Complaint

Read the letter of complaint below. Next, write a letter complaining about a problem with some electronic parts that your company ordered from a vendor. Your company ordered 100 units but only 50 were sent. Refer to the format in the sample business correspondence below when composing your own letter.

**Deltasys Electronics
Purchasing Department
Celeron Way, Chicago, Il.
2746481**

January 7, 1999

**Donald Townsend
Senior Engineer
Standard Electric Co., Ltd
Boston, MA 80633**

Dear Sir,

Our company made an order for six semi-conductor units last week and received them by courier this morning. Unfortunately, they had not been properly packaged and two of the units arrived with broken covers. This has caused us a lot of problems as we needed to install all six units to start our new production line this week. Now we will have to wait an unspecified amount of time for the replacements.

We feel we should receive a substantial discount on the replacement units.

Please write or fax us your reply as soon as possible and let us know when the new units can be sent.

Sincerely,

Joe Brown

Joe Brown

Purchasing Department

2. Assignment # 5 - Responding to Complaints

Read the letter below. Decide how you can respond to the complaint letter that you wrote for **Assignment 4**. Use the format in the following letter as a model.

Standard Electric Co., Ltd
Boston, Mass 80633

Joe Brown
Deltasys Electronics
Purchasing Department
Celeron Way, Chicago, Il.
2746481

12, 1999

Dear Mr. Brown,

We received your letter telling us of the problem with two of the semi-conductor units we shipped to you earlier this month. We were very sorry to hear that their covers had been damaged during transit. We can assure you that all six units were in perfect condition when they left our factory.

We regret the installation delay your company had to suffer as a result of this situation and have decided to offer a 20% discount on the replacement units. We will be sending them to you by express shipment this afternoon. You should receive them no later than tomorrow morning.

Once again, please accept our apologies for the trouble this situation has caused for your company.

Sincerely,
Donald Townsend
Donald Townsend
Senior Engineer

3. Assignment # 11 - Confirming a Meeting

Read the letter below. A salesman is writing to confirm a meeting that he arranged during a telephone conversation. Write a similar letter confirming a meeting that you will have with one of your clients.

**Marshall Brothers Inc.
Film Distributors
148 Post Street
San Francisco, CA 99005
U.S.A.**

**Mr. Yasunori Takahashi
Centre Cinema
6-23-15 Ebisu
Meguro-ku, Tokyo 108-0056**

Dear Mr. Takahashi,

I want to thank you for offering to take the time to meet with me during my upcoming visit to Tokyo next week. I'm sure that you will be very impressed with our company's film products and sophisticated distribution system.

I would like to confirm that our meeting will take place on Monday, May 1st at 2:00 pm at your headquarters in Ebisu. If possible, could you have a small meeting room equipped with a TV and video tape player? If you could arrange this in advance it would be much appreciated.

I know that your customers will appreciate our products and I look forward to meeting with you.

Sincerely,
Arthur Marshall
Arthur Marshall
President
Marshall Brothers Inc.

4. Multi-paragraph Composition Assignment

We write **multi-paragraph compositions** when we have too many major ideas for one paragraph. Read the un-paragraphed composition below. With your partner, **decide how it can be broken into paragraphs**. Consider issues such as the **logical division of ideas** and **transition between paragraphs** as you work. Mark the beginning of each paragraph with a [and the end with a]. After you have finished, write your own multi-paragraph composition using order of importance as your method of organization.

Three Companies I Would Like to Work For

I have worked for many different companies in the past. Sometimes these jobs have been outdoor jobs involving lots of physical labor, and sometimes they have been office jobs using computers and other office equipment. I have learned some new lesson or skill from each of these work experiences. However, if I had a chance to work for any company I wanted I think there would be three choices. The first choice would be the software company Microsoft. I think working in the field of software development would be interesting and fun and I have many ideas for computer programs I would like to design. Also, I like Microsoft's corporate image and philosophies and their respect for the employee's individuality and their need for freedom to come up with new ideas. These are very similar to my own ideas about how to run a company. The second company I would like to try working for is Proctor and Gamble. This company manufactures many useful household products and their brand name is recognized throughout the world. They are also famous for their professional approach to business and many students learning economics in university are introduced to P&G's corporate history as a case study about how to successfully run a business. I believe I could learn a lot about things such as sales and marketing by working for such a successful company. The third company I would like to work for is another American firm, Johnson and Johnson. They are a household name when it comes to products related to health care and brand names such as Band-Aid, Q-tips, and the pain-killer Tylenol are all manufactured by J&J. Like the company Proctor and Gamble, J&J make products useful to our everyday lives and I would like to work for a company that contributes to society in such a way. Their ethical approach to both their products and the consumer are well-known and respected throughout the industry. Microsoft, Proctor and Gamble, and Johnson and Johnson are all quite different companies with different products. However, each has its own special attractions for me. If I am given the chance, I would like to work for one of these three companies in the future.

5. Drafting a Document - Small Business Proposal

Step 1: Multi-paragraph Outline

Step 2: Writing a First Draft

After you have decided on your introduction and your central idea, the next step is to add more paragraphs to your proposal. Think of new points to help support your idea for a successful small business. Outline each new paragraph in the manner presented below. After you have finished, compose a first draft of your own proposal for a small business using a similar multi-paragraph format.

Sample:

Title: Wordsmith Bookstore Proposal

Introduction:

Central Idea: I believe opening a bookstore in my neighborhood would be a success for a number of different reasons. I will explain these reasons along with plans for the staffing, financing and future expansion of the business...

Paragraph 1:

Central Idea: Reasons for a bookstore in my neighborhood

Supporting Ideas: 1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Paragraph 2:

Central Idea: Financing & 3-year expansion plan

Supporting Ideas: 1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Paragraph 3:

Central Idea: Staffing and Wages

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Conclusion: _____

Appendix C – Suggested Exercises

The Parts of a Topic Sentence

Remember that a good topic sentence: a) is a complete sentence with a subject, a verb, and a controlling idea, b) states clearly the main idea of the paragraph but does not include specific details, and c) is usually the first sentence in the paragraph.

Identify the topic and underline the controlling idea in each of the following sentences.

Example: **Windows 2000 software** is easy to use.

Practice Samples:

1. Japanese electronics have a world famous reputation.
2. The hi-tech industry is a major part of the U.S. economy.
3. Trade is an important activity between most nations.
4. Bananas are a major export for Brazil.
5. Technology shares are traded heavily on the stock market.

Position of Topic Sentences

Model 1

Trade

Trade between countries is important for many different reasons. One reason is that trade help countries remain economically healthy. In order to compete in world markets they must remain financially strong. A second reason is friendly relations. Different countries need to maintain good relationships to participate in a global economy. Therefore, trade amongst countries is important for these and many other reasons.

Model 2

Stock Exchange

A stock exchange, where shares are bought and sold, is one measure of a country's economic status. These places are trading markets where people who represent companies and industry publicly buy and sell stocks and shares. They are very busy places with lots of noise and activity. A country's future economic strength is decided here. It is therefore important to recognize the central need of a stock exchange in ensuring a country's overall financial health.

Writing Topic Sentences

Practice Exercise:

Write good topic sentences for the following paragraphs in the space provided. Include both a topic sentence and a controlling idea.

Paragraph 1:

For example, the automotive, electronic and photographic industries are all well represented by Japanese companies. Famous product names such as Toyota, Sony and Nikon are known around the world. Furthermore, certain aspects of Japanese products such as compactness, fuel efficiency and affordability have become the industry standard and forced other product makers to follow their lead. Therefore, we can truly see the influence of Japanese products around the world.

Paragraph 2:

That is, a company may consist of different sections, departments or divisions. Various managers are in charge of these different parts of the company. These companies can even be referred to as subsidiaries when they are under the control of a larger organization. As you can see, companies can be multi-layered and quite complex.

Writing Concluding Sentences

Remember that a good concluding sentence: a) signals the end of the paragraph and, b) summarizes the important points briefly or restates the topic sentence in different words.

Model

Trade

Trade between countries is important for many different reasons. One reason is that trade helps countries remain economically healthy. In order to compete in world markets they must stay financially strong. A second reason is friendly relations. Different countries need to maintain good relationships to participate in a global economy. Therefore, trade amongst countries is important for these and many other reasons.

Practice Exercise:

There are many different sorts of companies, but one category is the retail sales business. This kind of company sells their products to individual consumers. They can be represented by individual, privately owned shops and outlets or franchised chains of the kind often found in the convenience store and restaurant business. _____

Practice Exercise:

When retailers want to stock their stores and businesses with the product they sell, they rely on a wholesaler to take care of their needs. This kind of company sells large quantities of merchandise to retail businesses. However, unlike the retailer, wholesalers are not in direct contact with the end-user of the products they sell. _____

Signal Words and Phrases

Practice Exercise:

Compare paragraphs 1 and 2 below. Both paragraphs give the same information, but one paragraph is easier to understand than the other because it contains signal words to lead the reader from one idea to the next. Circle all of the signal words that you can find.

Paragraph 1:

Japan and the United States are both hi-tech nations and both use the latest technology in their transportation systems. The type of transportation used by the average person in Japan is quite different from that used by their U.S. counterparts. Most Japanese use a highly-efficient network of public transportation either for commuting the office or for pleasure. The train and subway systems are extremely overcrowded during peak hours. Americans rely less on public transportation and prefer instead to drive their own cars or ride in carpools. The average Japanese family owns a car, American ones often own two or more. Bicycles and scooters are very popular forms of daily transport when commuting or shopping in Japan. Americans usually use cars for these activities.

Paragraph 2:

Japan and the United States are both hi-tech nations and both use the latest technology in their transportation systems. However, the type of transportation used by the average person in Japan is quite different from that used by their U.S. counterparts. Most Japanese use a highly-efficient network of public transportation either for commuting to work or for pleasure. Thus, the train and subway systems are extremely overcrowded during peak hours. By comparison, Americans rely less on public transportation and prefer instead to drive their own cars or ride in carpools. Although the average Japanese family owns a car, American ones often own two or more. Finally, bicycles and scooters are very popular forms of daily transport when commuting or shopping in Japan. In contrast, Americans usually use cars for these activities.

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