PRACTICAL ENGLISH WRITING IN TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION
ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tsze Sun Li obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Chinese University of Hong Kong, a Master of Arts degree from University of Oregon and a Doctor of Education degree from Oklahoma State University. He has been working 36 years with 23 years in universities, which spread over seven countries/regions. His current interest includes writing books in practical English written communication. In 2007, he published *Learning Reading Comprehension and Writing from Compositions*. This book *Practical English Writing in Technical Communication for Business: Exemplars and Learning-Oriented Assessments* is the second book of a series of two in business & technical communication, of which *Practical English Writing in Task-based Organizational Communication: Exemplars and Learning-Oriented Assessments* is the first one, published by the Academic Publication Board, Sultan Qaboos University, the Sultanate of Oman. Dr. Li has wide interdisciplinary expertise and interest including business & technical communication, scholarship of teaching-learning, and journalism. The last book he hopes to write will be *The Life of a Floating Scholar: An Autobiography*. 
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks are due to Ann Li, my personal assistant who helped collecting materials and contributed valuable ideas in the early stage of preparing this book, to Prof. Mao Sihui, Director of MPI-Bell Center of English, Macao Polytechnic Institute, to Prof. Chen Long, of the Phoenix College of Communication, Soochow University, the People’s Republic of China, for writing encouraging comments and remarks for the book. I must also thank my current colleagues in Business Communication, particularly Dr. Khamis Al-Gharbi, Assistant Dean of Undergraduate Studies of Sultan Qaboos University, for encouraging faculty publication. Last but not the least, I am grateful to the colleges and universities with which I was affiliated in the past two decades and regret being unable to name them one by one, because without these encounters this book would not be completed.
REVIEWS AND COMMENTS

“This is a very practical writing course book written in lucid international English and specially designed for young adult and adult learners, providing very clear and easy-to-follow practice in writing and producing technical documents in the workplace. It is a solid textbook for teaching and learning technical, professional and business communication.

“Making use of a variety of language learning strategies, the author aims to enhance the learner’s linguistic and communicative competence both in and outside the classroom, offering motivating writing tasks that recognize different learning styles and providing ongoing self-assessment so as to facilitate and monitor progress.

“One particular strength of the book is that it encourages the learners to understand and appreciate professional business communication in different social and cultural contexts.

“I would strongly recommend this book to both teachers and students at institutions of higher education and other language centers for ESP courses such as English Writing for Technical Communication, and Advanced Business Communication.”

Prof. Mao Sihui (PhD)
Director of MPI-Bell Center of English
Macao Polytechnic Institute

“This book comprehensively and systematically introduces the methods and skills of practical English writing. It condenses Professor Li’s long-term research, and will help learners improve their writing ability. For those who want to work in the government or companies, it’s really a new masterpiece and must-read.”

Chen Long, Professor
Phoenix College of Communication
Soochow University
People’s Republic of China
USES OF THE BOOK

For teachers:

1. to teach or supplement teaching writing courses such as *Technical Communication for Business*, *Advanced Business Communication*, *Professional Communication*, and *Practical Use of English*;
2. to expose students to vocabulary frequently used in written technical communication for business;
3. to select writing samples for students to read before engaging them in writing practices;
4. to assess students’ ability in correct use of the English language; and
5. to assess students’ ability in practical English writing.

For English learners (university level):

1. to learn independently a variety of text types and useful vocabulary in technical written communication for business;
2. to improve the ability of completing writing tasks in a variety of generic organizational contexts; and
3. to learn practical English writing through self- or peer-assessments.
PREFACE


Technical communication, according to Mike Markel, author of *Technical Communication* (7th edition), refers to:

…”the communication of specific information to an identified reader so that the reader’s understanding matches the writer’s intention. The writer’s responsibility is to make the communication accurate, clear, complete, concise, and well organized.

This book can be called *Advanced Business Communication* because it is not focusing on writing about technology per se, but the writing style relating to the production of “technical” documents in the workplace including, but not limited to, technology businesses.

Since there are *Technical Communication* textbooks such as Mike Markel’s, why is this book needed? In teaching *Technical Communication for Business*, I have found two weaknesses in these textbooks:

1. They are loaded with wordy explanations of “theory” of writing, paying insufficient attention to practical examples of writing per se. It is evident that only a few examples are included in these textbooks, and these examples are not intended to be the main part of the reading materials as they are presented in smaller font size and are difficult to read. A smart learner would say: “Shun wordiness; show me how to write through writing examples.”
2. These scarce writing examples are culturally bound to western situations, with little reference to the concern and practicality of other societies such as the Middle East or China. The weakness, therefore, is lack of contextual commonality appropriate to non-western countries.

Therefore, aiming at tackling these weaknesses by providing ample examples of practical writing situations in the workplace, this book comprises six units (1) Employment-Related Communication; (2) Summaries, (3) Definitions, Descriptions, Instructions, Guides, and Manuals; (4) Proposals; (5) Reports; (6) Tenders / Advertisements, Brochures, Questionnaires, and Web Pages. Each unit is organized with three components: (A) Introduction (of text type), (B) Exemplars (with notes), and (C) Practice Tasks.

The Practice Tasks are designed in three forms: (1) Fill-in-the-Blank, (2) Proofreading & Editing, and (3) Writing. Suggested answers / guides are appended at the end of the book. The total number of writing examples is 154.
Moreover, all the task-based situations are carefully selected and presented in plain English. More difficult words and their usage in various grammatical forms are highlighted in the Fill-in-the-Blank and Proofreading & Editing practices. The dual purpose of helping learners master commonly-used vocabulary and familiarize with various text types in technical communication is self-evident.

Both teachers and students may find this book useful. For students, this book can be used for independent study of practical use of English in advanced business communication. For teachers, it can be used as a textbook or supplementary workbook in courses like *Technical Communication for Business, Advanced Business Communication, and Practical English Writing*. They may teach the exemplars, ask the students to do the Fill-in-the-Blank and Proofreading & Editing practice tasks and refer to the suggested answers for self-assessments.

For the writing tasks, the teachers may use the Generic Writing Assessment Scheme (Appendix 1) to assess their students’ performance for summative assessments. For formative assessments, they can make use of the Feedback Forms (Appendixes 2-8) to help students improve writing. For weaker learners, the teacher may use the Teacher’s Diagnostic Analysis of Writing Form (Appendix 9) to offer feedback on basic writing mechanics. Certainly, teachers may design their own learning-oriented feedback forms, particularly for the text types without feedback forms in the appendixes of this book. To learn more about the concept and application of learning-oriented assessments, please refer to my article in Appendix 1 of the first book of this series.

It is inevitable to use names in task-based situations. In this book all names including persons, organizations, and buildings used in the exemplars and practice tasks are fictitious; any matching is a mere coincidence.

Finally, let me clarify the sources of the texts. Thanks to the colleagues, schools, colleges, universities, companies and organizations that I have been affiliated with in the past three decades that provided me with exposure to different writing situations in which most of the ideas originated. I wrote most of the pieces, selected some from public sources or textbooks with acknowledgment; some pieces were re-written based on authentic contexts, while some others originated from my students’ writing assignments which have been heavily edited. I would like to take this opportunity to express my gratitude to all of them; without their assistance this book may not be completed.

Dr. Tsze Sun Li
July 2013
SYMBOLS USED IN THE BOOK

Situation **Exemplar**
Based on the situation, a sample text is produced as “exemplar” with notes highlighting key learning points.

PRACTICE TASKS

1. **FILL-IN-THE-BLANK**

Situation **Fill-In**
Choose one of the words given below to fill in each of the gaps to make complete sense. You may need to change the word into the correct form, which may be a few words in case of a verb.

2. **PROOFREADING & EDITING**

Situation **Proofread**
Proofread the text. You need to underline each of the mistakes and write the correct word(s) above it.

2. **WRITING**

Situation **Write**
Based on the situation / information provided, write in the format of the text type required.

Word-Processing
You are strongly advised to write with word-processing software (MS Word or Notepad) for this section.
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A. INTRODUCTION
Common types of employment-related written communication include job-application letter (cover letter), résumé / curriculum vitae (CV), letter of invitation (for interview), and letter of job offer / decline / appraisal / warning / dismissal.

Job-application letters and résumés must be attractive and informative. The résumé must provide clear and specific information without self-congratulation. The cover letter must base on the résumé but convey relevant information or details that are not available in the résumé. Both the cover letter and resume must be error-free and professionally appealing; simple errors—the so-called “careless” mistakes such as wrong spellings and use of tenses, would convey special meanings that reflect on the personality or state of mind of the applicant. Job seekers often cannot afford these “fatal” mistakes.

Students often ask: “Should I write more than one page for the resume?” In general, one page—one full document page with normal font size of 12 (or 11) and good white space, would suffice, particularly for fresh graduates who may not have much working experience. However, for exceptional cases (e.g., those with outstanding achievements, appealing content so to speak), two pages would make sense. In fact, even highly experienced professionals (e.g., professors) are often required to present a two-page resume highlighting the essentials in recent years for consideration to be refereed journal peer reviewers.

Due to fierce competition, more and more job seekers prepare electronic or print portfolios, which are collections of materials including résumé, records of achievements, and other samples of work. Portfolios have become a means of securing a competitive edge in the job marketplace.
B. EXEMPLARS

Situation 1

In response to an advertisement (below), a fresh graduate applies for the post of Assistant Project Engineer.

Advertisement

**Assistant Project Engineer (Ref.: 12)**

- A degree in Mechanical Engineering
- Preferably with experience in aircon project

Write in with a full résumé along with a non-refundable photograph to:
Personnel Manager, Mr. Vincent Leung, A & B Electric Co. Ltd., No. 3, G/F, Marble Mansion, Nathan Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong

Notes:
1. The writer uses the block format to present this job-application letter. “Block format” means the sender’s address, the date, and the receiver’s address (in order) are placed at the top left corner of the A4 paper, and “Yours truly” and the writer’s name and signature at the end of the letter are also placed on the left side rather than the right.
2. There are no punctuation marks at the end of each line of the addresses, except for the word Ltd. (abbreviation for Limited) because the lines are not sentences but the address format.
3. It is appropriate and more formal to use “Dear Sir” when the receiver is known to be male. If his name is also known, another way is to address him by the last name (surname), such as “Dear Mr. Leung” in this case. The punctuation at the end of the salutation can be a colon or comma; the colon indicates a slightly higher level of formality than the comma.
4. The subject line (heading) indicates the post applied for and the reference number, if available. It should be presented in bold (with or without underlining) and in a common heading style, e.g., capping the first letter of each main word. It is better to write the subject line although it is left out at times in some cover letters.
5. In business letter writing, the writer often states the purpose of writing in the introductory paragraph. For the job-application letter, it is routine to mention the source of information, the post applied for, and the applicant’s capability in contributing to the growth of the company / organization.
6. Although it is important to understand that the cover letter should elaborate on key points of the résumé rather than simply repeating them, it is necessary for a fresh graduate to highlight the degree obtained or to be obtained and the courses taken that are relevant to the job.
7. Work experience is always an important element for success in job application. It is crucial for the applicant to respond to the work experience requirement in aircon projects although he has only 3 months of such experience. As a fresh graduate usually lacks work
experience, he or she should think of some kind of work experience or activities such as internship, volunteering, holding offices in student associations, participation in open competitions, which may be of secondary relevance to the nature of the job.

8. Sometimes, employers may also want to know the personality and/or generic skills (e.g., communication skills) of the applicant. It’s advisable to include this information concisely, particularly for fresh graduates who should give the employer impression that they are green but ready for cultivation.

9. The last paragraph is a simple paragraph of routine and courteous, business-like closing. The writer should include contact information such as email address and telephone number. In many places it is not appropriate for the applicant to state that he or she will call the employer after submitting the application because many recruiters mention in the advertisement that if the applicant does not receive feedback within certain period of time, he or she should assume the application is not successful.

10. “Yours truly,” “Yours sincerely,” or “Yours faithfully,” would be most appropriate. Do not write “Best regards,” or “Regards,” as the level of formality should be higher in job applications.

11. The number in parenthesis refers to the number of documents enclosed. That is, in this case the writer has enclosed a résumé and a photo as requested in the advertisement.