

## Seven Cs of Writing ~ Issue 4

Writing a letter or email in another language is not always straightforward, as I know from experience. I always battle with establishing a consistent style, i.e. I tend to mix formal and informal styles, or worse still, I try to translate English standard phrases for letter/email writing directly into the language that I am writing. But as with everything, the good old 'trial and error' eventually gets me there – and a few sympathetic native speakers are also very helpful.

This month's ezine will provide some tips on English business correspondence – more importantly, how to avoid mistakes commonly made in letters and emails.

**1. Always identify your audience before writing.** For example, there is a big difference between a letter a lawyer would write to a client (who knows nothing about the law) and another lawyer. This step also helps you establish the appropriate style and tone.

**2. Always establish your objective for writing and be concise.** So many writers fall into the trap of hiding their message in paragraphs of longwinded prose which they expect the poor reader to decrypt! Remember the **KISS** analogy: **Keep It Short & Simple** (or **Stupid** as some like to say). Very importantly, a reader should NEVER have to reread a sentence because the meaning was not clear the first time.

**3. Ensure your English spelling & grammar check is switched on** – my students always assure me it is, but the red squiggly lines speak for themselves! Remember also to distinguish between British and American English i.e. don't mix – it's either or.

**4. Forget the words 'hereby' & 'herewith'.** In English, it is perfectly acceptable to start with the personal pronouns **I/we**. Many Dutch writers of English fall into the trap of beginning their letters 'Hereby I send you ...' or 'Herewith I write you ...' because they think it is incorrect to start with 'I' or 'we'.

*Some useful phrases for starting your letter or email include:*

**I am writing to** enquire about/ request/ confirm etc.

**Further to your email of** (DATE), please see below the answers to your questions.

**I am sending you** a copy of our terms and conditions.

**I am enclosing/attaching** our terms and conditions

**5. Be consistent in your tone and style** – don't mix formal and informal, don't be overly polite and then suddenly very direct. Look at the difference between the below phrases:

<b>Formal</b>	<b>Informal</b>
I/we would be very grateful if you would/could ...	Please could you ...
We regret to inform you that ...	Sorry, but ...
We will do our utmost to ensure that ...	We will do our best to ...

6. Do not translate directly from Dutch into English– some typical Dutch mistakes include:

<b>What I write</b>	<b>What I should write</b>
I herewith attach a copy of the contract.	<b>I am attaching</b> a copy of the contract
Hereby, I send you the requested information	<b>I am sending</b> you the requested information
I write you about ...	<b>I am writing</b> about ...
Would you be so kind to ...	Would you be so kind <b>as</b> to ...
I look forward to meet you.	I look forward to <b>meeting</b> you.
I would appreciate if you would send me ...	I would appreciate <b>it</b> if you would send me ...
I suggest you to come to the meeting.	I suggest <b>that</b> you come to the meeting
I suggest/recommend/advise to come to the meeting.	I suggest/recommend/advise <b>coming</b> to the meeting.
I like to thank you in advance.	<b>I would</b> like to thank you in advance.
Would you mind to postpone the meeting?	Would you mind <b>postponing</b> the meeting?

7. Be a copy cat– if you regularly receive correspondence from English native speakers, emulate their style and make a note of the phrases that they use. You could draw up a list like the one below:

	<b>FORMAL</b>	<b>INFORMAL</b>
<b>Drawing attention and reminding</b>	May I/we draw your attention to ... I/we would like to point out that ... I/We do not appear to have received ...	Can I draw your attention to ... Can I point out that ... I/we haven't received ...
<b>Final comments</b>	Please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any further questions. Please feel free to contact me/us if you have any questions.	Let me know if you need anything else. Just give me a call if you have any questions.

Well, that's all for this month folks. Next month, I will be looking at **Clarity** in writing. This will include the rules of English word order and sentence structure and the rules of comma usage in English. Until then, happy writing and happy holidays!

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