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# WRITING KODAK LETTERS



**Book No.2**

**Treatment of Subject Matter**

**EASTMAN KODAK COMPANY**  
**Rochester, New York**

## *Introduction to Booklet 2*

THE ability of the writer of a letter to put himself or herself in the reader's position is most important. A customer may be right, mistaken or unreasonable—we may not agree with him always, but his position must be carefully weighed. No matter how thoughtfully or how brilliantly a letter is composed, it misses its mark by just so far as it misses a fair interpretation of the viewpoint of the person who is to receive it.

Genuine service is merely our conception of the needs and ideas of a great number of people who are interested in our products and our company, and the meeting of these needs and ideas with the best we have to offer.

Just as our goods and services are adapted to meet several different types of trade, so must our correspondence be framed to inform and interest many types of people. A large photographic stockhouse is confronted with a mailbag full of letters each day. In writing to an organization of this kind, a short informative letter is appropriate. A smalltown photographer, on the other hand, may receive but one or two letters a day. Each piece of mail makes a distinct impression on him. A longer letter, with a more personal touch, makes him realize our interest in his particular business. Yet the treatment of the subject matter of both these types of letters,

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### *Introduction (Continued)*

the furnishing of information and the statement of facts, should always be concrete and definite.

Individual consideration to every letter takes time—it means definite application to and interest in the information to be furnished and the person who will receive the information. A desk piled with unanswered letters should not mean a rush to get them answered as quickly as possible, nor the slighting of the importance of any one of them, for that one may represent the only letter we shall ever have in which to interpret our service to that particular customer.

Therefore, take the reader's viewpoint first. Measure the nature of the business to be done. These are the basic principles. Then outline the individual letter which you are about to write so that it will be:

<i>Clear</i>	<i>Concise</i>	<i>Coherent</i>
<i>Correct</i>	<i>Complete</i>	<i>Courteous</i>

These six qualifications are the essentials of letter-writing. If any one of them is omitted from a letter which you consider ideal, the result shows that the writers of *good* letters must be mindful of all six.

This booklet will describe and emphasize the need for care in the first five of these elements of good letters. Courtesy and goodwill will be considered in the next booklet.

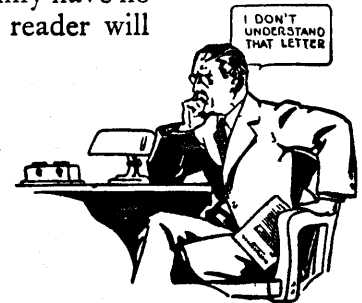
## *Clearness*

**C**LEARNESS is a combination of elements. In the first place, a clear letter is specific. It avoids generalizations. It is to the point. The essence of the information which it contains is not buried in long paragraphs which do not aim at a mark.

Clearness also means vividness and ease of understanding. Obscurity and vagueness reflect on the ability of the writer. A letter which is not clear shows carelessness or an incapable mental condition on the part of its composer. Clear writing must be based on clear thinking.

Clearness implies one interpretation of what you are saying and only one. If a Kodak letter can reasonably be interpreted in more than one way, either in content or by implication, we certainly have no reason to assume that the reader will take the right one.

Letters must be foolproof. They stand or fall on the basis of a definite number of typed words. If they do not make a clear impression on your reader's mind, their whole purpose fails.



*Don't give your reader a chance to misunderstand or to guess what you mean.*

## How Can Clearness Be Secured?

IT is truly difficult to write a clear letter—one which does not permit a possible misinterpretation. Careful thought and attention supersede all rules. But there are a few suggestions which will help to insure clearness.

The customer's wants must be understood. Consider the subject in detail before you attempt to write about it. Read a letter thoroughly before you attempt to answer it. It is a good idea to underline the points in an incoming letter to which you will give your attention in making a reply. Each point can then be written about in a straightforward, orderly and readable fashion.

Plan your letter before you start to dictate. Have all the information at hand to cover each point you will make. If previous correspondence is referred to, or is necessary, get it. Do not trust to chance or memory things which are in black and white in our files. Remember, to study a problem is one thing. To get results of your study over to the other fellow is another. These are two steps in the composition of a good letter.



*Plan your letter before dictating.*

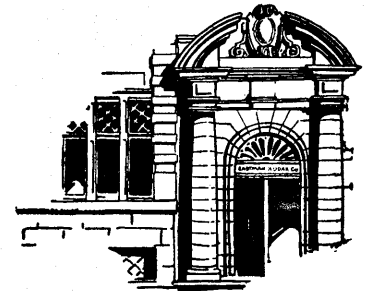
## Correctness

CARELESSNESS sometimes spoils an otherwise good letter through an error in grammatical construction or in vocabulary. An error of this sort diverts the attention of the reader and leaves a bad impression.

The essential consideration of correctness, however, has to do with the information which Kodak letters carry away from our offices and plants. Know that every statement you make is unquestionable and never exaggerated.

If necessary, consult other departments to make sure that accurate information is furnished you to cover the points in letters which you are delegated to write. On the other hand, do not attempt to cover important questions which do not properly come within your jurisdiction. Many times a letter should go to several departments for authentic and comprehensive treatment of the subject matter which it includes.

Correctness is absolutely essential all the time if Eastman Kodak Company is to be considered the headquarters for dependable photographic information.



*Correctness is the basis of dependability.*

## Completeness

**W**HAT could be more unsatisfactory to one of our customers than to write for exact details and receive a reply which is incomplete?

In your reply, if you do not cover what is in the reader's mind, one of two results is inevitable. He must write again, which is an inconvenience, a duplication of effort and an additional expense of time and money. Not all people take the trouble to do this. In that case, Eastman Kodak Company has lost an opportunity, whether it be to make a sale, to help a photographer, or to create a favorable impression toward our service. Oftentimes it is necessary to read between the lines in an incoming letter. But don't make your customer have to do it. It is always better in cases of question to give

more rather than less information than is requested.

Details which will contribute to your reader's understanding and interest should be included. After the letter has been written, it should be a practice to review every point to see that each has been adequately covered.

Learn to be comprehensive first, then practise conciseness.



*Half the story isn't enough.*

## Conciseness

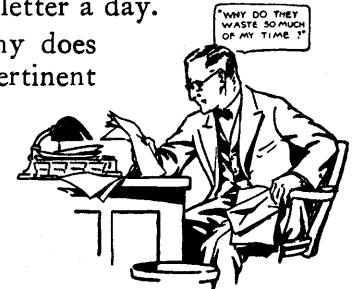
**T**HE compressing of the meaning of a letter into the fewest possible words, still retaining the other desirable qualities of a good letter, is conciseness.

One of our dealers is interested in selling the Ciné-camera. He writes to tell us that he will go through Rochester next Thursday, and to find out whether we can give him a demonstration at that time. We reply "We shall certainly be glad of the opportunity of telling you about the Ciné-camera and to show the outfit in operation. We look forward to seeing you Thursday. When you come to the office please ask to see Mr.——."

The dealer's letter is adequately answered. He doesn't want to be told that we think it is the best camera made, nor that the lens is ground to within one ten-thousandth of an inch of perfection.

Most business people appreciate brevity. Don't give the impression that you are over-anxious, nor that your correspondence quota is one letter a day.

On the other hand, economy does not mean slighting the pertinent facts, nor the omission of such phrases as will add to the tone of a good letter. Say what you have to say as directly, courteously, clearly and convincingly as possible, and be done.



*Long letters are rarely necessary.*

## Coherence

**C**OHERENCE is the welding together of the various elements of a letter into a complete whole. Under this subject, logical order and emphasis may be included.

Each sentence should represent a single thought. These thoughts are grouped into paragraphs, each paragraph dealing with but one phase of the subject of the letter.

Coherence requires a continuous building-up of thought through these sentences and paragraphs. The opening paragraph should contain the sense or purpose of the entire letter. Each paragraph thereafter should be introduced logically to lead the thought of the reader from one point to the next.

Breaks in the sense or progress of thought are detractive. Whenever the thought changes completely, an additional sentence may be advisable to make the transition.

An example will illustrate the transition from one thought to another:

"In addition to its rigid and durable construction, this camera has an exceptionally fine appearance." This sentence implies that the discussion of the mechanical qualities



*Emphasis is easy in conversation,  
difficult in letter-writing.*

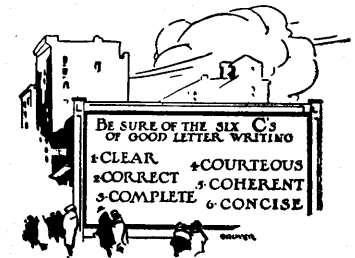
of the camera has been completed, and introduces a paragraph embodying an entirely new line of reasoning.

The final consideration under the subject of coherence is that emphasis should be placed on important points. Just as in letter structure, so in paragraph structure, the first and last sentences are the strategic points for ideas that should receive the especial attention of the reader. A coherent letter is so written that this advantage is secured.



The proof of a letter is in the reading. Even after a letter is carefully dictated, it's not finished. Errors may occur in transcription. But more important than that, your letter may not sound as you thought it would sound. It may not explain as clearly and as completely as you anticipated.

Therefore, always insure every letter by reading it before it carries your signature away with it. If it doesn't quite stack up to what you think is a good letter, re-write it.



*A guide-board that points to  
better letters.*

## *An Answer That Is Not an Answer*

Gentlemen:

In response to your inquiry of the 17th regarding the balance of your shipment of \_\_\_\_\_, we regret to advise that, as yet, it has not been shipped.

There has been an unavoidable hold-up on this material, but we expect to be able to ship it very soon.

We trust this does not too greatly inconvenience you and await an opportunity to be of further service.

Very truly yours,

*This letter does not tell the customer what he wants to know, namely, why there has been a delay and when his goods will be shipped. The suggestion of "further service" is uncalled-for.*

## *This Answers Beyond Point of Doubt*

Gentlemen:

Unfortunately we were compelled to delay the shipment of the balance of your order, referred to in your letter of September 17. This was due to our inability to obtain material to meet our manufacturing schedules. This unusual situation has now been cleared up, and we shall make your shipment in one week by express, marked "Rush".

We hope that your inconvenience has not been too great on account of this delay. Further orders will be filled promptly, we assure you.

Very truly yours,

*This reply satisfies the questions asked and gives a definite promise of future service.*



## *This Letter Is Not Concise*

Gentlemen:

Replying to your letter of October 12, it is not customary for us to take back goods that have been purchased by dealers and carried in their stock, for as a rule goods that have been shipped to the dealers, unpacked, then repacked and returned to this office are not in a condition to place in our stock. Certainly the goods shown on the list enclosed with your letter would show signs of shop-wear and many of the goods would be absolutely valueless, and under the circumstances we could not offer you any credit for the goods but would suggest that you sell them for whatever you can get as it is the only way that you can realize anything on them.

If we had some means of disposing of second hand or shopworn goods we would, of course, be pleased to make you an offer for the goods you wish to return. Unfortunately, however, our demand is entirely for new and strictly modern goods.

Very truly yours,

*Notice the number of repetitions of the same thought.*

## *This Letter Says More in Fewer Words*

Gentlemen:

We wish that we could accept the merchandise which you would like to close out of your stock, as suggested in your letter of October 12. If we knew of outlets for these goods we would be glad to dispose of them for you. Even though they are but slightly shop-worn, you will appreciate the fact that they cannot be sold for new and consequently they would be valueless for our distribution.

Please remember that we always try to cooperate with our dealers. In this particular case we believe that you will understand our position.

Very truly yours,

*Compare this reply with the one on the opposite page.*

*This Letter Is Neither Concise  
Nor Coherent*

Dear Sir:

Replying to your letter of October 15, with reference to our carload shipment of September 11, in which you received a five gallon can of Collodion with a nail driven into the can through the wooden case, which resulted in contents leaking out and running down onto a couple of cases of 11 x 14 Duplitized x-ray film super speed in six dozen packages, staining fifteen of the boxes; wish to advise that the cartons for the Film were shipped to you by parcel post on October 27, which we hope you will receive without delay.

We regret very much the accident of the nail being driven through the case. We have called it to the attention of the shippers of this material and asked them to be very careful on future shipments.

Very truly yours,

*Often the unnecessary repetition of the content of the letter to be answered is detrimental to conciseness and coherence.*

*All That Was Necessary  
Is Said*

Dear Sir:

We regret very much to hear of the damage caused by the punctured can of Collodion, to which you referred in your letter of October 15. However, we thank you for telling us about it as this experience will prompt us to use greater care in future shipments.

On October 27 we sent you by express another can of Collodion and new cartons to replace those which were damaged.

Very truly yours,

*Compare this revision for coherence and conciseness, yet completeness, with the one shown opposite.*

❧

*"Correctness and clearness are the first essentials of every business letter."*

*—Charles M. Schwab.*

*"Clearness in letter-writing depends chiefly on the mental attitude of the writer toward what he is writing. He must think clearly and then he will write clearly."*

*—Andrew Carnegie.*

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