

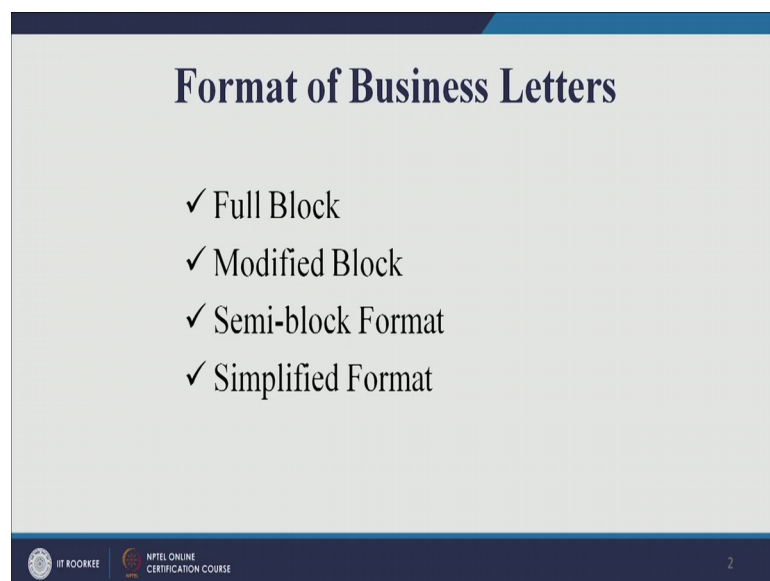
**Soft Skills**  
**Dr. Binod Mishra**  
**Department of Humanities & Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Roorkee**

**Lecture - 28**  
**Business Letters: Format & Style**

Welcome back to NTPEL online lectures on Soft Skills. In the previous lecture we talked about business letters and we talked about their structures. Towards the end of the lecture as we had discussed politeness being the hallmark of all business letters. Of course, we can be polite in terms of the language, but then we can also be polite and so our consideration by maintaining a proper format. In this lecture we are going to talk about the various formats and then also the style that are the requisites of an effective business letter. Now you remember as I had said you have to follow the practice of letter writing in your organization as it exists there.

Now, various organizations have different ways different formats depending upon the facility provided and depending upon the practice running in an organization you have to follow the format, but is there any harm to know about other formats as well. Usually a letters may have 4 formats.

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The first is the full block format. We will also discuss them one by one and so them through examples. Then is the modified block format then we have semi block format

and then we have simplified format. Now let us discuss what exactly do we mean by full block format. If you have a look at letters which are being drafted nowadays, and the layout of letters you can see here are given all the 4 formats.

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**Format of Business Letters**

			(SIMPLIFIED)
<p><b>Full Block</b></p> <p>Miss Cleaveland 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001 October 27, 2008</p> <p>Mr. Richard Cleaveland General 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001</p> <p>Dear Mr. Cleaveland:</p> <p>I am writing to you regarding the matter we discussed in our meeting on October 22, 2008. I am pleased to hear that you are interested in our services and I am confident that you will find them to be of great value to your organization.</p> <p>We have been looking for a new partner who is interested in our services. The challenge of finding a partner who is interested in our services is a great one. We are looking for a partner who is interested in our services.</p> <p>Sincerely, G. Davidson General 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001</p>	<p><b>Modified Block</b></p> <p>Miss Cleaveland 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001 October 27, 2008</p> <p>Dear Mr. Cleaveland:</p> <p>I am writing to you regarding the matter we discussed in our meeting on October 22, 2008. I am pleased to hear that you are interested in our services and I am confident that you will find them to be of great value to your organization.</p> <p>We have been looking for a new partner who is interested in our services. The challenge of finding a partner who is interested in our services is a great one. We are looking for a partner who is interested in our services.</p> <p>Sincerely, G. Davidson General 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001</p>	<p><b>Indented/Semi-Block</b></p> <p>Miss Cleaveland 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001 October 27, 2008</p> <p>Dear Mr. Cleaveland:</p> <p>I am writing to you regarding the matter we discussed in our meeting on October 22, 2008. I am pleased to hear that you are interested in our services and I am confident that you will find them to be of great value to your organization.</p> <p>We have been looking for a new partner who is interested in our services. The challenge of finding a partner who is interested in our services is a great one. We are looking for a partner who is interested in our services.</p> <p>Sincerely, G. Davidson General 123 Main St. New York, NY 10001</p>	<p><b>Letter Head</b></p> <p>Date</p> <p>Inside Address</p> <p>Subject All Caps</p> <p>Name And Title</p>

Now, the first format is a full block one. The second is a modified the third is indented and the fourth is simplified. Now what actually are the characteristics of a full block format? Nowadays in most of the organizations this format, I mean the full block format is much in use.

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**Full Block**

- All the parts of the letter start at the left-hand margin.
- The date, salutation, complimentary close, and signature are placed in left.
- There is no punctuation followed.
- Double space is followed between:
  - i. Salutation & Subject line
  - ii. The end of the body & the complimentary close.

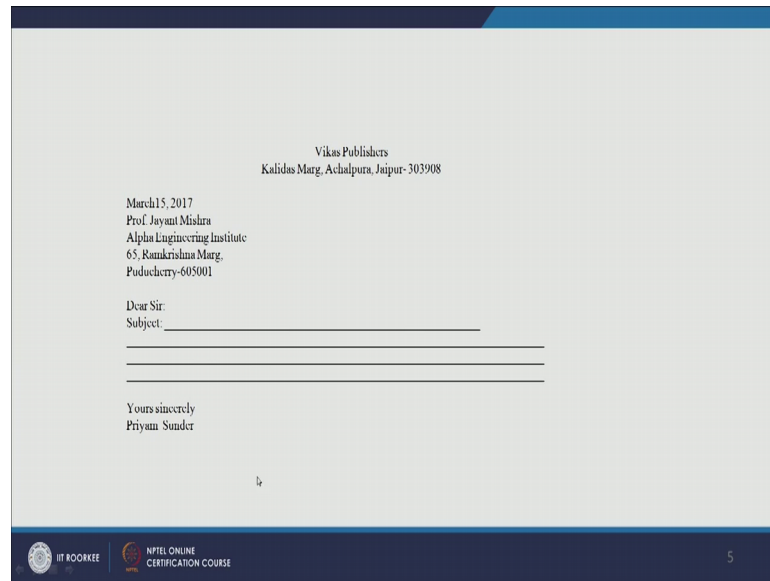
Now, why do we call it full block and what are its characteristics. You will find in the full block format you know till now you have been having the practice of writing the date on the right hand side apart from the letter head. Let the letter head be where it is, but you know the date line is always written on the right hand side, but now with full block format I sometimes in a very light manner say we have actually become one who follows the left meaning thereby all the parts of the letter are at the left hand margin.

For example, if you remember the structure of the business letters date will come first. So, the date will also be towards the left. And just below the date will be the salutation I mean even the date salutation close signature lines enclosures everything will be towards the left. Moreover, there is no punctuation followed in the letter. Especially except the body. I mean if you write the date there is no need of putting any comma. If below that if you write the inside address once again there is no need of putting any punctuation. And then you write this salutation even in salutation when you write dear sir or dear madam whatsoever. You will find that you will have to make a sort of alignment towards the left.

Just below the salutation you will write the subject line that also will be towards the left and then aligning it you will start your letter. But remember there is a provision that there will be no punctuation in the inside address nor even in the complimentary close, but as regards the body of the letter there will be open punctuation in the body. And there is no punctuation followed in the inside address remember you should not forget that there was no punctuation in the body. It is a body will have the punctuation.

But there will be no punctuation in the inside address nor in the complimentary close double spaced will be allowed between the salutation and the subject line.

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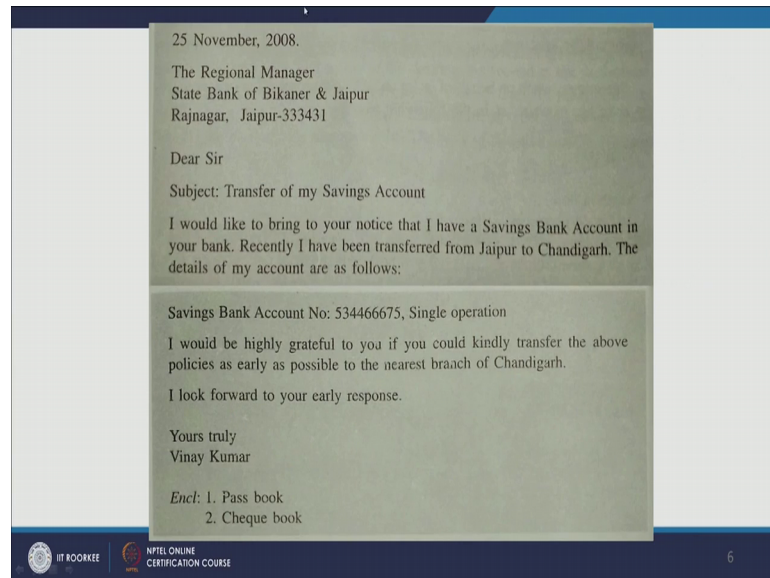
For example, here is one that I want to show you. Now here you find that this name I mean name this is the later head which is actually in the top center and below that sorry, below that you find that this is the date here you find that we are not putting any you know period or something like that. We write the date and then start way straight way we come to the inside address. In inside address there is no provision of giving any punctuation and start where we start with dear sir that is a salutation. And then we write the subject the subject languages and there is alignment you see the alignment is towards the left.

And when you are going to come to close it you give a complimentary close once again you are going to write your sincerely or yours faithfully. And after that you will write your name type your name, but you will keep your name in the bracket and between your name and this complimentary close there has to be space here because of the shortage of space I have not given, but it is advisable that you maintain a gap. I mean you have to maintain a gap between your sincerely I mean complimentary close and then you write the name of the person. In many cases if you feel that it is being written by a person who has got a designation and all you can also mention below the name of this Priyam sunder his designation.

And whatsoever now this is an example of full block format. And most of the organizations I mean there are 2 formats which are being followed one is full block

format or modified format or simplified format, but remember there is a semi block also you will find that there is a semi block also.

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Here once again, here is an example you can find this is actually a mixed version, but again you can find here that there is no punctuation in the inside address. And then there is no punctuation even in the salutation line then again in the subject there is no punctuation, but this punctuation is there open punctuation is there in the body of the letter.

And when there is a complimentary close the person write yours truly you may write your sincerely whatsoever. I mean I am not going to focus here from the point of view of language, but from the point of view of the structure as well as of format.

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## Modified Block

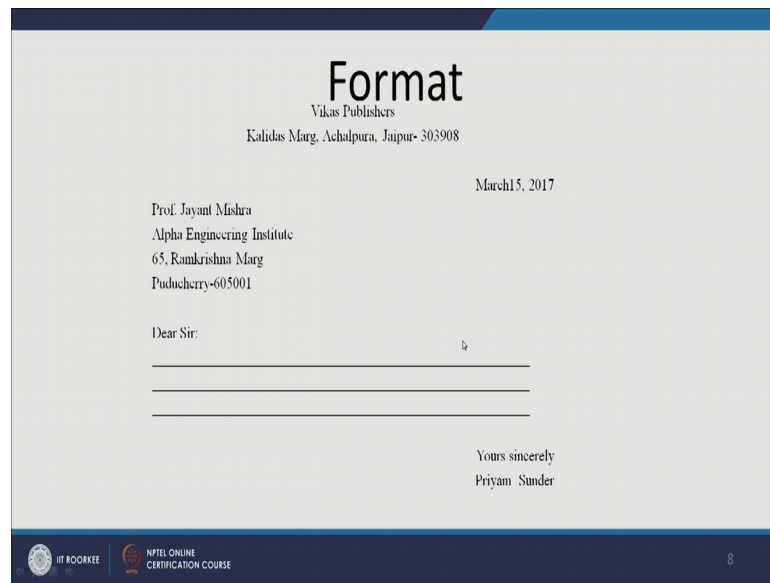
- ✓ It is block because of the address, subject line, and salutation are aligned with the left-hand margin.
- ✓ The paragraphs in the body are blocked.
- ✓ Date, complimentary close and signature are placed between the right hand margin and centre of the page.

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Next is a modified block. Now the question is what is this modification in this block. It is also written the way a block format is drafted, but it is block because of the address subject line and salutation. They are aligned with the left hand margin fine the paragraphs in the body are also blocked, but when it comes to date complimentary close and signature.

I mean there is no set guideline many people we have seen that this date complete. Date may be here on the top hand top right hand side; you know I mean here there is no practice of putting even the date on the left hand side. May be the date can be this is actually a sort of facility provided to the users that date complimentary close and signature. They may be also in the right or they may be towards the right, but between the right and the center date. Complimentary close and signature are placed between the right hand margin and center of the page. That is why we call it a modified block format.

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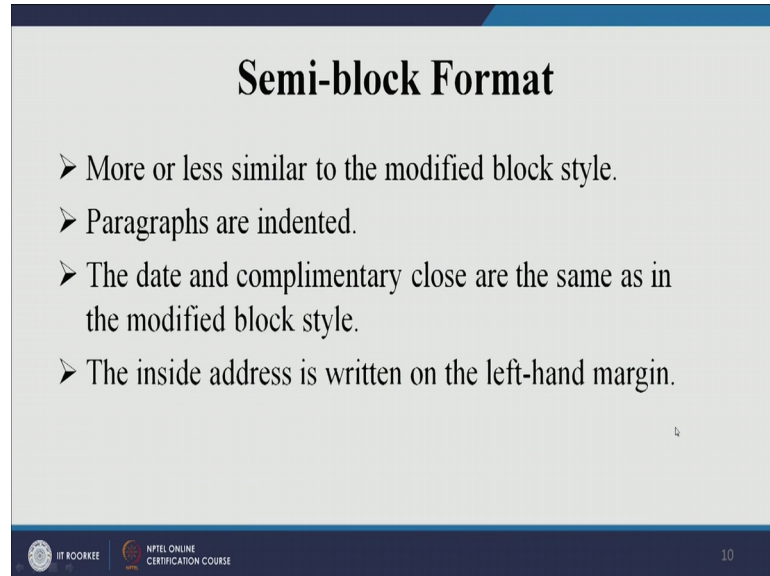


For example, here you can find that this is this again is the format. Here you may find the date is on the right hand side and complimentary close and even a signature line that is on the right hand side fine. And moreover if there is a complimentary close for example, say if it is thanking you or if it is with regards that may come in and between I mean they may come in the center, but then when it comes to the address line or when it comes to the inside address, that will always be in the left hand side and then dear sir and below dear sir will be the subject line. Nowadays there has been a new practice that after dear sir many people have started writing or putting a colon. Even some organizations also have come forward by giving a colon just after dear sir.

But remember other things will be aligned towards the left and open punctuation will be there in the body of the letter. So, this is called modified format of the letter. Next here once again is an example you can see this this I have taken from a book. I mean here you will find the dateline is given on the right and as I said as we discussed that the dateline the complimentary close, I mean here you can see the complementary close the complimentary close has also been aligned, but then the dateline and the close and then finally, the signature line that have been flushed towards the left. Otherwise you know the address then the salutation then the subject and then the body of the letter all of them have been flushed.

All of them have been flushed as it is in this block one. So, that we have to take into consideration.

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**Semi-block Format**

- More or less similar to the modified block style.
- Paragraphs are indented.
- The date and complimentary close are the same as in the modified block style.
- The inside address is written on the left-hand margin.

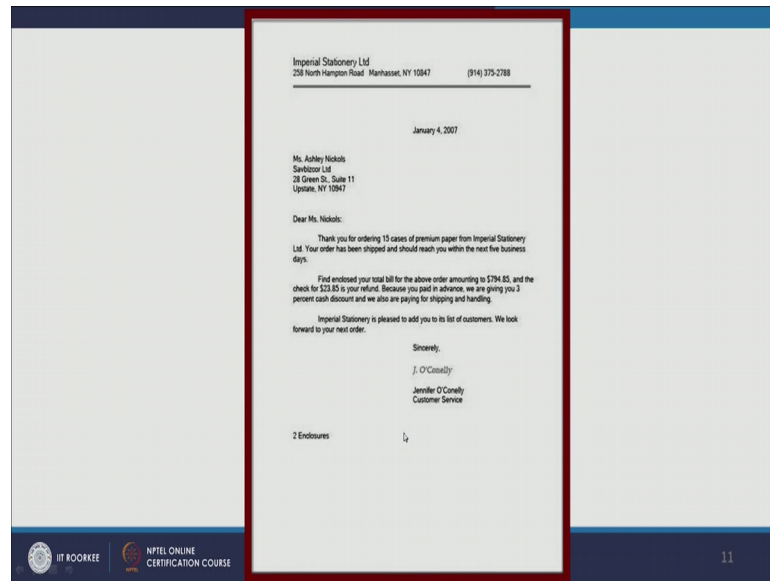
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Next is a semi block format. In semi block format you know the name is semi, semi means half. So, it is it will also be half block only. So, more or less it is similar to the modified block style. You know in in in some you know some letter writers feel that the modified block and the semi block format are the one. So, paragraphs, but then there is one point of difference. And the difference is that paragraphs are indented. I mean you have to leave one space after you begin a paragraph. If there again there is second paragraph again you have to indent.

So, when you indent the paragraph they actually look beautiful, they appear beautiful. The date and the complimentary close are the same edge in the modified block style and then the inside address is written on the left margin. So, these are the characteristics of a semi block format.



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Now, here you can see this is actually a letter which is which is from an organization. Here you can find the date they have not written the date even on the right hand side or on the left hand side, but the date here is written in the middle you know. And the name of the organization the letter head also is towards the left. So, different organizations have different ways of formulating or drafting their letter.

And if they have a printed one you know you nothing you have to do nothing except you have to draft the letter on the letter head. Then the date is here and again you find here the inside address is towards the left you know. Whatsoever is the name and then here this person he does not write dear sir or dear mam, but he write dear miss such and such. Now meaning thereby he actually knows the recipient of the letter. He knows the recipient of the letter. Sometimes I it so happens that people are often confused also about the gender of the person. In such a case you should simply write the first name of the person.

For example, dear Rahil, if you write dear Rahil or you can also write dear Stella, dear Stephanie, I mean you are not aware of the gender of the person. That is why the safe side is to write dear and to and then to write the first name. And again you will find every business letter if it is the response, if it is the reply letter it will begin with thanks that is that is where we talk about the cordiality every business letter has to be cordial. So, what we do is we write thanks for a letter. I mean here you could have I mean some people

also write thanks for a letter dated such and such, but then you can also follow the practice of writing as I said in the earlier lecture you can write your reference number or reference number. Or you can also mention thanks for a letter dated such and such and then you straightway come to the topic.

Whatsoever it was and then if you are replying if you are providing them some information it is always better to state I mean a state straight. I mean straightway come to the point find please find enclosed, please find attached like that I mean there is no need of writing a lot in the beginning. Because people do not have time and it may rather confuse them more. So, it is always better to state a straight meaning there by specifically mention please find the details of such and such. And the last line last line should always be cordial meaning thereby in all sorts of business letter as you will find when we talk about the various examples of business letter.

You will find that you have to reemphasize I mean you have said something, but then a sort of re emphases is there in order this actually shows. Not only your sincerity, but at the same time your business sense. Anyway you know because every business letter has to have a sort of friendly approach has to have a sort of approach that is you approach we call. And then finally, once again here you find the end I mean the complimentary close before leave taking we can also call that leave taking he said sincerely and then it is neither left nor right, but in and between. But care has to be taken that the dateline and the complimentary close they are actually aligned. Sometimes as I said there has to be enclosure.

So, please enclose and write the number of enclosures.

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## Simplified Format

- ✓ When the writer is not aware of status/gender of the receiver.
- ✓ The date, complimentary close, and signature are spaced on the right-hand margin.
- ✓ The attention line is also written in capital letters.

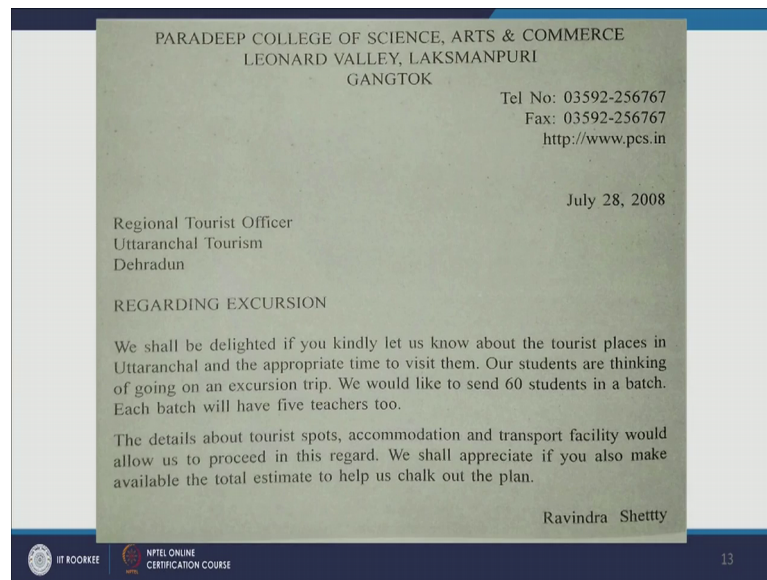
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Next is the simplified format. In simplified format the writer is not aware of the status or the gender of the receiver. As I said you can write dear Stephanie dear, Stella like that, but then the date complementary close and signature are spaced on the right hand margin I mean many organizations because of the facility I mean it is not too difficult to type such a letter. So, what they do is they actually go for the simplified format in certain cases you will find in certain cases they also mention an attention line and attention line is also written in capital. For example, if you are writing from one organization.

And you want the attention of a particular person in the organization say I mean chartered accountant say finance officer. So, there you have to mention attention fine. And then put a column and then write finance officer or you write registrar finance or whatsoever. Naturally if it goes to the organization, but straightway it will be sent to the person concern. So, this is very important. Here you can see an example.

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Of a simplified letter in simplified letter it is not mandatory that you give a salutation. Simply by writing the inside address or simply by writing the designation of the person you can straightway start the letter, but you have to give the subject. You have to give the subject for here you can find after letter head.

And having given the date and others the date is on the right hand side here there is only the designation of the person regional toward his officer. And just below that there is no mention of any salutation. That does not mean it is hurting it actually sometimes you know people may feel that it is hurting or insulting, but it is not the question it is actually because the writer of the letter does not know and is not clear about the gender and since it is official that is why he comes to the official business and he writes regarding excursion regarding excursion this is actually subject and a straightway he starts the letter and then he discusses whatsoever be the issue.

And finally, in such a letter there is also not any need of putting a complimentary close or having mentioned a leave taking. Rather straightway just like your memo I think you remember well what we discussed in memo, it is just like a memo. So, there you simply write your own name I mean the name of the writer whosoever it be and that also is written on the right hand corner. So, the dateline and the signature line they are actually in alignment with each other rest of the things are in open punctuation, but there is no

open punctuation in the inside address. There is no mention of subject line there is also no mention of complimentary close.

So, this is called the simplified format of letter writing. And since not much pain is involved in it many organizations find it easier, but remember what you have to do is whenever you are going to write a letter follow, the trend follows the practice, that exists in the organization to which you belong. Having understood the format of the letter you also might be curious to know what should be. The style a letter especially a business letter is no way different from other forms of business writing, but then while in other forms of business writing you will find the selection of words depends upon the particular say area or the particular a say subject or a particular issue.

But in a letter even though the issue may be different what should be maintained is the politeness or the cordiality. So, adopt language. In terms of language all we need to understand is let us try to understand the language that has got a friendly approach. I mean the reader friendly approach. The by reader friendly approach we mean keeping yourself in the position of the reader. So, if you do that if you imagine yourself to be in the position of the reader, naturally that is why a lot of planning is to be done before you write a letter. We have already discussed that a letter represents you or represents a person even in his absence that is why a letter has to be reader friendly.

And in order to make it reader friendly you have also to ensure that it should maintain a you approach. There have been times when you write a particular line and you feel that if the same line or if the same letter reaches you perhaps you would not feel well. And that will give you a chance to improve your language and make it a language that has got an approach which is friendly. We have also discussed about the courtesy and the consideration. You know how you can maintain a courtesy now when you are writing a letter it is the demand of the courtesy, as we have said every in every business letter we start with a thank you note.

So, start with a thank you note and also mention because you know a letter is a medium to connect. That is why when you put thank you for a letter dated such and such you are actually connecting you are actually reminding the reader or the recipient of a previous correspondence between the 2. So, maintain a sort of curtesy and have consideration. So, when we talk about consideration, we have to be considerate not only above the

language, but also about the content about the length. You know no one would like a lengthy letter nowadays. Everyone whether in job or out of job do not have time enough to read a letter which is very lengthy. So, you can show your consideration not only by ensuring a cordial language or a courteous approach but also by being to the point. And specially in business letters you have to maintain this etiquette, that you are being to the point you are being specific.

Sometimes you will find when you order for certain goods and they do not come in the right way or there has been a delay or there has been some other sort of confusion and all you tend to be angry. We are all human beings we also become angry, but remember if you write anything in anger that is going to be different you know. So, that is that is why you need to put yourself in the condition of the recipient and think if the same angry letter comes to you how will you react.

So, the best way to avoid that is do not blame the reader. Suppose somebody gets a complaint letter is working an organization and gets a complaint letter the language of the complaint letter is very aggressive. It is very full of allegations the language is very fiery the words chosen are also very harsh. So, in such a condition you can always put yourself to a safe position by not blaming the reader. Do not blame the reader and moreover sometimes when you are writing something, it is always better to restrict yourself not to use too many negatives. For example, if somebody writes if you are not going to make this payment in such as such time.

I mean you will we will lose you as a customer. I mean this can be said in a different manner also. This way if you are writing like this this way you are not maintaining a sort of cordiality. Hence all you need to do is you are actually to think about what you are writing. And the best way is when you have written something. Of course, what you write may be genuine, but it may hurt also. So, you can change the approach and you can also say, we will appreciate if such in such payment is made in time. I mean you are saying the same thing, but you are having a different language. We appreciate timely payment to have a continuous relationship with our customers.

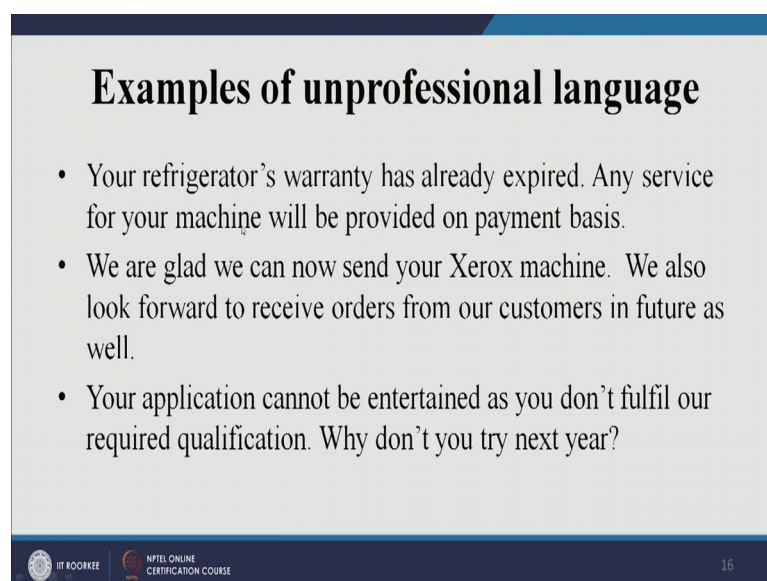
And then you need to be very precise, but in order to be precise do not sacrifice the content. Be precise, but be natural. You also have to be very simple when I say simple I mean the choice of words has to be simple and the choice of words have to be specific. I

mean here suppose you are writing a complaint letter, or you are writing a letter of order, but you are not expressing or you are not mentioning the sort of model or the sort of makeup the sort of the design the sort of the color. In such a situation you are not only being inconsiderate, but you are also not becoming specific.

And you know specific letters are responded fast. Moreover, you also have to distinguish between the proper use of I and we people who are responding to our letters or people who are drafting letters in an organization as the people like you and me. So, try to understand the difference between I and you when you are writing from the point of view of the organization you should maintain you should write we, but there are times when you need to be more informal, then only you can suppose a manager writing naturally he will write I, and when he writes I. He actually represents the organization. It is always better that you draft all your sentences in the active one.

And you must not always be using the active ones. Remember when you are giving them some good news it is always better to be it is always better to use active voice, but sometimes when you feel that you have to write a letter which is indirect for example, when somebody has blamed you or you are trying to defend yourself naturally you have to go for a passive construction. There are several examples I can give you which sound very unprofessional. For example, if you look at.

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**Examples of unprofessional language**

- Your refrigerator's warranty has already expired. Any service for your machine will be provided on payment basis.
- We are glad we can now send your Xerox machine. We also look forward to receive orders from our customers in future as well.
- Your application cannot be entertained as you don't fulfil our required qualification. Why don't you try next year?

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Some of these sentences which have been taken from some of the letters, you will find and you will rather think that such a language should have been avoided. For example, look at the language your refrigerators warranty has already expired. Any service for your machine will be provided on payment basis.

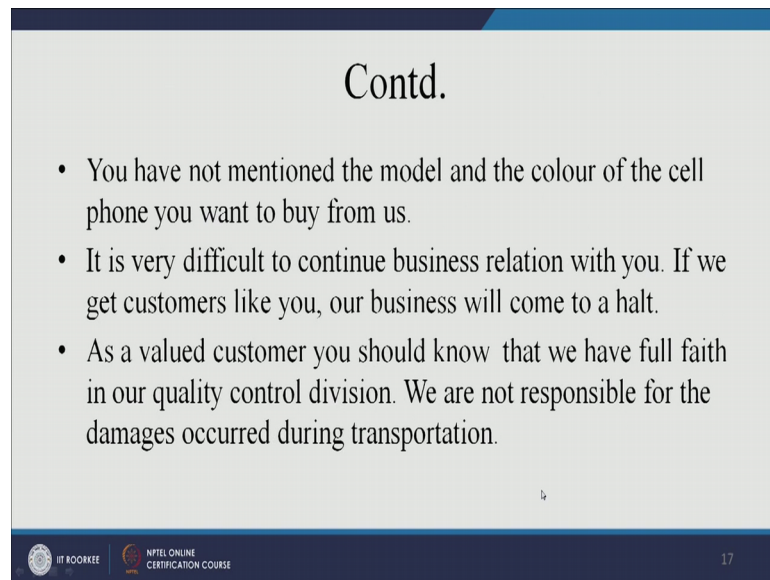
Now, since we say that business organizations try to maintain a goodwill with their customers and if they write such a language if they using use such a language it will perhaps be very insulting. So, this can be revised and you can write it in a very positive language. And then you can also say we welcome you as one of our valid customers or one of our valuable customers, but then the next sentence can be for those goods which are out of warranty period and amount of or you can mention a payment of such and such has to be paid. Or people who expect service even after warranty period need to pay for the service.

Now, this is positive. Here you are not saying that it has expired that is why we will not do you see the next sentence we are glad we can now send your Xerox machine we also look forward to receive orders from our customers in future as well.

Once again here also this can be changed and you can always say please find your new Xerox machine. We look forward to receiving orders from our valuable customers in future. No it is always said that when you are writing a business letter you are continuing a sort of relationship. Say if you get a letter which has the content like this your application cannot be entertained as you do not fulfill our required qualification why do not you try next year; this language appears to be very insulting is not it. So, in order to make or in order to ensure that people are not heard the same sentence can be revised and you can have a better and you can also drop a positive language. You can also say our organization expects a full-fledged application having all the educational details. May we request you to submit a detailed resume a fine. So, now, this language appears to be very polite and this language appears to be.



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Contd.

- You have not mentioned the model and the colour of the cell phone you want to buy from us.
- It is very difficult to continue business relation with you. If we get customers like you, our business will come to a halt.
- As a valued customer you should know that we have full faith in our quality control division. We are not responsible for the damages occurred during transportation.

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Quite welcome there are some others also. For example, if you say as a valued customer you should know that we have full faith in our quality control division, we are not responsible for the damages occurred during transportation.

Now, even if this is right you should never try to speak in such a language or write in such a language. You can always say though we take adequate care in our quality control division, we always yet things in transportation are out of our hands. Or you can also say things may go wrong in transportation, we are always ready to provide you services. I mean you are to retain the customers not to lose the customers and a letter is a bridge. It connects people it connects organization. And I do hope that if you maintain a sort of cordiality by conforming yourself to the format of a particular organization as regards the drafting policy of letters and maintain a cordial language a business worthy language I think you will sign forth like gold.

Thank you very much.