

## 19.

# Paper Work

Letters, memos, reports,  
résumés, and presentations

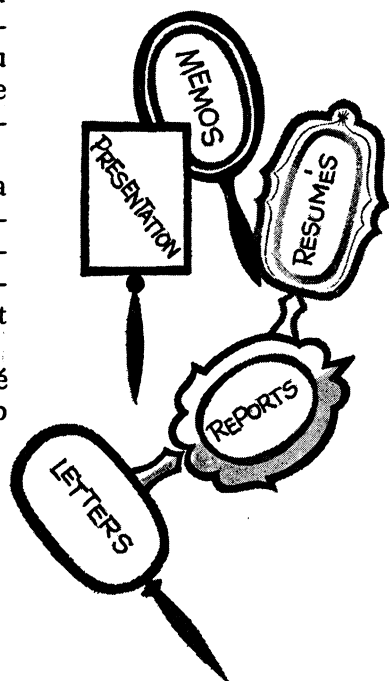
ALL BUSINESS, professional, and education positions have one thing in common — paper work! There are the never-ending, ever-increasing stacks of letters, memos, and reports to be written; the occasional résumé and presentation. And all of these have one thing in common. They can — and do — help to build good personal, business, public, and professional relations.

This is especially true of the letters that you who are in business write in answer to the inquiries of unknown homemakers. Every time you help one homemaker to solve a problem, you are helping to make several new friends for your department, your company, and your profession.

The same thing happens when you put out a forceful interoffice memo, or send a revealing report to your executives. Through those instruments you help the personnel of your organization to realize what home economics is, and what it can do.

Every time you put up a well-rounded résumé to go with a letter of application, you take a step

*The five mirrors that  
reflect one's personality  
and abilities.*



toward opening the door to new opportunities in home economics.

And many times when you prepare an outstanding presentation of an idea, it proves to be the escalator that carries you to a higher level!

Once you reason in this way, you will certainly be inspired to do a better job of what you have considered routine paper work. Then the question becomes *how*.

### Some Definitions

Before going into those "hows," however, some clarification may be in order:

A *letter* is a personalized, personally signed communication from one person to another. Since it is designed to indicate an interest in the person addressed, as well as in the subject matter under discussion, a letter always begins with a personal salutation, as "Dear Mr. \_\_\_\_\_."

A *memo* is an impersonal note on some one subject to another person or persons. Its one purpose is to suggest an idea or offer a point of view or a recommendation that might benefit the business or organization. Since it is strictly impersonal, no salutation is used. Instead, at the top of the page, some form such as this is employed:

### MEMORANDUM

To _____	Subject _____
From _____	Date _____

A *report* goes into details of work done, or progress on an assignment, or aims achieved. Its purpose is to give one's employer or immediate superior or committee chairman a picture of what the writer has been doing. Whether it is set up as a letter or as a memo, the first paragraph should be something of a summary, playing up

first the most important thing accomplished. Subsequent paragraphs should then expand and interpret that over-all statement as concisely and clearly as possible.

A *résumé* is a condensed autobiography set down in outline form, as "Education\_\_\_\_\_. Experience\_\_\_\_\_, etc." Its purpose is to tell a prospective employer at a glance whether the applicant has qualifications and experience that would make it worthwhile to arrange for an interview.

A *presentation* is a "sales piece." More important and more comprehensive than the usual memo, it is designed not only to sell an idea, but to sell oneself as the person best qualified to put the idea into action.

All such communications should be dated. All should be approached from a positive point of view rather than from a negative one. All should be easy to read, easy to understand.

### ***Five Ways To Improve Your Business Letters***

1. Examine a dozen of the letters which you have written during the past few months. As a group are they full of "I," or has the emphasis been put upon the idea and upon the person to whom you are writing? Are the letters brief and brisk almost to the point of curtness? Or do they indicate that, busy though you are, you still take time to be gracious and thoughtful? Are they rambling, confused, inconclusive, full of nothing in particular? Or do they say something and say it clearly and coherently?

Instead of considering how you might have improved some of those letters, stop right now and do a little thinking about yourself. If your letters are spattered with the letter "I," chances are you are thinking too much about yourself and your own problems and affairs. If they sound curt and brusque, perhaps you, under the pressure

### **DICTAPHONE DETAILS**

Know what you are going to say in each letter. Dictate most important ones first, while your mind is fresh. If you are inexperienced, dictate only three or four letters at a sitting, writing each in your mind before you begin. Use a dictaphone occasionally, playing back the records so that you can hear how those letters sound to your secretary.

of business, are getting to be that way. If they are fuzzy and incoherent, it is a sign either that you do not think simply and clearly or that you are careless. Remember, those letters you write are a pretty accurate picture of your own personality. They tell your business contemporaries whether you are friendly, outgoing, and considerate, or self-centered, brusque, and uncooperative.

#### BUSINESS COURTESY

If you ask a busy person to help you to get a job, courtesy demands that once you have your position, you write immediately to that person to say so and to thank her for her help and interest. If you have been extended any business courtesy while on a trip, those courtesies must be acknowledged soon after you return to your desk.

2. Get the *you* approach into every letter. See that it shows up in the first paragraph — better yet in the first sentence if it seems natural to do so. “You have been in my thoughts a great deal since that conference in San Francisco . . . .” “You are a busy person, but even so I am hoping that you will take time to give me some needed advice. . . .” “At our last meeting you will recall that we discussed such and such.” “When I read your letter . . . .”

Putting the emphasis on the one who is being addressed is not a matter of flattery. It is a matter of thoughtfulness. It is business courtesy. And it keeps you from starting out with that unforgivable approach, “I’ve been too busy, etc.” As who hasn’t?

3. Make sure that you have answered every question asked in the letter to which you are replying. Anticipate any questions that may occur to him as he reads what you are writing, and answer them in advance.

4. Keep your letters on the affirmative side. Avoid negative statements or implications. Obviously, you will not always agree with others. You cannot always grant requests. But you can phrase your sentences so that a negative thought is expressed affirmatively. Rather than say, “I’m sorry, but I cannot possibly speak to your group next Friday,” why not turn the sentence around to say, “I am leaving tonight for Chicago, which means

that it will not be possible for me to meet with your group next Friday, much as I should like to do so."

5. Be sincere. This means that you must be honestly interested in the person to whom you are writing, as well as in what you are writing about. Sincerity, as has been said elsewhere in this book, is something you can't fake. If you have it, it shines through between the lines of everything that you write. If you do not have it, your words do not have it.

### ***Eight Rules for Memo Writing***

1. Date every memorandum. Give the name of the person or persons to whom it is being sent. To make it easier to identify and file, and to make it more intelligible, state in the beginning what it is all about.

2. Think of that first paragraph as you would the lead in a news story. Make it a summary of what is in the memo, but do it in a way that will make the reader eager to read all the details that follow. Example: You are a teacher of home economics in a city high school. You are suggesting to the city supervisor that an interschool social event be staged so that all girls taking home economics can become better acquainted and more enthusiastic about home economics. You might approach the memo something like this: "Only 26 girls here at Lincoln High are enrolled in home economics. These girls feel that they are a minority group, and are, I fear, losing interest. The same situation exists in the other city schools. It occurs to me that if we were to get all of our home economics students together for a pleasant social occasion, we might be able to get across some ideas in a way that is not possible in the classroom.

### **SPECIAL NOTE TO STUDENTS**

Writing interesting letters home, going into details of your life at school, is mighty good writing practice. If in spite of all your activities you "can't think of a thing to say," or if you haven't the energy and patience to tell them in a colorful way, how can you ever expect to be a writer?

"As I see it, such an occasion could be handled something like this. . . ."

3. Interpret and elaborate on your statements as necessary in order to bring out the full significance of what you are reporting.

4. Give good *reasons why* whenever you recommend that an idea be carried out. Even though the idea is obviously a good one, point out your reasons, giving evidence to support your statements.

5. Tell how the project or plan can be carried out. Give this information after you have presented your idea and given your reasons why it is, in your opinion, worth adopting or at least exploring. In giving those *hows* include a statement as to how much time and approximately how much money will be required to do the job.

6. Break up long memos typographically to make them look easy to read. Here are some of the ways to do it:

#### MUST YOU CRITICIZE?

If it is absolutely necessary to write a letter of criticism (which it seldom is), begin your letter with a few friendly kind words — a compliment, if possible — then proceed to the less pleasant portion. But, if possible, avoid writing letters of criticism. A personal discussion of the difficulty, either face to face or over long-distance telephone, makes for happier dealings, smoother relationships.

- a. Use short paragraphs.
- b. Allow extra space between paragraphs.
- c. Use subheads when it is feasible to do so.
- d. Underscore *key words* or sentences.
- e. Indent tabulated statements (just as is done here).

Make it a point to study the memos that come to your desk. Judge them from the standpoint of good or not-so-good typography. Discuss them with your secretary. Just as it is important to be conscious of good layout and type arrangement on a printed page, so is it important to know what constitutes an easy-to-read, well-set-up page of typewritten copy.

7. Keep all subheads parallel in construction. This point in good writing, which has been stressed throughout this book, is equally important in writing all types of memoranda.

8. Remember, memos that you write tell more than you think they do. They show whether you have ideas and can follow through on them; whether you know what is significant and what is feasible. They reveal your personal traits: whether you look at things negatively or positively; whether you are as eager to give credit to others for their ideas and contributions as you are to get credit for everything that you do. The sum total of the impressions those office communications make often determines the speed at which you are advanced, the extent to which you are given responsibility.

### ***Rules That Apply in Writing Reports***

Whatever your position in your organization, routine reports, difficult though they are to write, are one of the important functions of your job. Writing them shows exactly how you have been putting in your time, how you have been spending the company's (or tax-payers' or members') money, what you have been accomplishing. They tell your superiors how you are progressing; give an insight into your work, and into the job itself, that would not otherwise be possible to obtain. They indicate what results may logically be expected in the future. And they give you an opportunity to prove that you are really good.

Your employers may give you something of a pattern to follow in making routine reports. It is not enough, however, merely to fill in that form.

Think through what you have been doing; evaluate it; decide what is significant about it and why. If elasticity is permitted or encouraged — and it usually is — take the time and the space to interpret your findings and observations as suggested in No. 3 under "Rules for Memo Writing."

Interpretation is especially important when fig-

### **WORKING GUIDE**

A book which goes into the specific field of report writing is "Technical and Business Report Preparation" by Robley Winfrey.

Designed primarily to train engineers in the writing of papers and reports, but applicable elsewhere, the book includes instruction in planning reports, the mechanics of style, format, illustrations, correspondence, magazine articles and technical papers, oral reports, letters of application, editing, copyreading and proofreading. "Technical and Business Report Preparation" is published by the Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa (1962).

**WHEN YOU ANALYZE  
CORRESPONDENCE**

It's a good idea to have an occasional extra carbon made of letters and put into a folder for special study later. In analyzing them, ask yourself these questions: "Is this letter clear?" "Is it friendly?" "Could it have been written in fewer words?" "How does it look?"

**SIMPLE SYSTEM**

If the matter of overusing the pronoun *I* confuses you, try this: Don't worry about it — just avoid beginning a paragraph with that perpendicular pronoun.

ures are involved. For example, the director of a school cafeteria reports the total amount of money received and paid out for milk. Those financial figures mean little in terms of nutrition or health education unless they are converted first into the number of glasses of milk they represent, then into the number of glasses of milk per child, per day.

Regardless of the form you follow, concentrate first on what you have to say; next on how to say it; and finally, on what you can do to make your copy easy to read and to follow, as suggested in "Rules for Memo Writing." Before final copying is done, check what you have written against this list of questions:

1. Does the title page carry this information: *What* (title of report); *For Whom*; *By Whom*; *Date*? In a several-page report, the title page may well be treated as a cover page, and carry only this information. In a brief report, the information mentioned goes on the first page of the report, above the introduction.
2. Does the title define the subject that is covered in the report?
3. If the report is a long one, is there a table of contents or other outline indicating the order in which topics are discussed? This is not necessary, of course, in the usual interoffice progress or research report. In a several-page report, the outline or table of contents usually follows the cover page.
4. Is there a summary or conclusion? Often this is given in or immediately following the introduction; sometimes it follows the body of the report, before or with the recommendations.
5. Is a distinction made between work done



and objectives accomplished? Between results and conclusions regarding them?

6. Are facts presented in logical order?

7. If references are needed or would prove helpful, are they included? If these are few in number they are usually given as footnotes. If there are a great many they are gathered into a bibliography or appendix at the end of the report.

When your report has been checked against this list, and given its final typing, go over it once more to catch any typographical errors and to see that all figures and data are correct. Then send it along with the same pride you would feel in submitting a story to a magazine.

### ***Suggestions for Writing the Résumé***

If you are an about-to-be-graduated home economics student, soon to be looking for a job in teaching or in business, you'll need to prepare a résumé to accompany your letters of application. That résumé will include your background, education, and school activities, plus any other information that might help an employer to get a clear mental picture of you.

In writing, you will have the recommendations of your vocational counselor and your teachers, but it will still be up to you to inject your own personality. If, for example, you worked summers in your father's grocery store or bakery or office, mention that fact. Some employer may be looking for a girl who understands point-of-sale reactions, or who knows office routines. If you are of Italian or French or Spanish or other descent and can write and speak the language, say so. Such information may be of more importance than you realize.

Make sure your résumé is neatly typed and free from spelling errors. Do not send carbon copies

### **SUCCESSFUL SURVEYS**

Ask the right questions. Don't have pre-conceived ideas as to what the survey should show. Remember: "Research must lead; you cannot lead it." Evaluate answers and results honestly. Dramatize results by means of tables and charts to bring them to life, make them understandable.

— they give the wrong impression. With the résumé, send the best letter of application you can possibly write. Then trust that you will find a position that gives you an opportunity to prove what you can do.

If you're an experienced business home economist or teacher or dietitian planning to seek another position, you, too, will write a résumé but your approach will be that of the executive, rather than that of the student. And, like all executives, you will observe these rules:

#### TO YOUNG HOME ECONOMISTS

If you are seeking a home economics position in a certain company, do find out whether or not there is an existing home economics department. If there is one, address your letter of application to the home economics director, rather than to the personnel department. It's a more graceful approach.

Find out the initials, name, and title of the proper person in the organization to whom your letter should go. One addressed merely to a firm or organization shows that the writer lacks the "savvy" (or is too lazy) to search out the information.

1. Keep the résumé crisp — not over two pages. Telescope details, but avoid sounding abrupt or curt.

2. List first what you have accomplished most recently, because the top half of that first page is the critical area. From it the executive will decide whether or not to read on. Avoid that tendency to put down facts in chronological order; do include your most noteworthy achievements. If the jobs and years of experience are many, you don't need to be specific about all of the earlier ones!

3. Include a summary of your educational training, plus details of family and community background. Don't hide your age. Many times an employer is looking for a home economist of maturity.

4. Make your accompanying letter of application a sincere statement — not of what you have done (your résumé tells that) but of what you *can* do if you are given a chance at that desired position.

#### ***Recommendations for Writing Presentations***

There may be times in your career when you will decide to present an important idea or a revo-

lutionary plan of work to some firm or organization or foundation. If so, these suggestions may be helpful to you.

1. Think that idea through completely and from all angles before you attempt a written presentation. Make sure you have something really important to offer, and that the plan is workable.

2. Plan to send a short note or letter along with the presentation. That letter will serve as the door opener to the idea. Then you can devote all the presentation to the idea itself and to how it can be carried out.

3. State exactly, in the first paragraph, what the idea is about. Then in subsequent paragraphs explore, expand, and explain the idea, and point out briefly a plan of work.

4. Pave the way for a personal interview to discuss that plan of work further, rather than write down details to the point of monotony. The reasoning here is to leave the door open until your presentation has been accepted or rejected.

5. Remember that it is difficult to "sell" an idea unless you sell a plan of work, and sell yourself as the person to carry it out. Few companies have budgets that permit them to buy contributions (as such) from outside the company. But you can hope to get the assignment to follow through, perhaps on a consultant basis.

6. Give importance to your carefully thought out, carefully typed presentation. Put it into a folder or between covers. If it's a long presentation, state near the beginning that the information has been broken down into four or five parts to make for easier reading. Then state what those parts are — let it be a miniature index or table of contents for your piece.

#### FORMS OF COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE

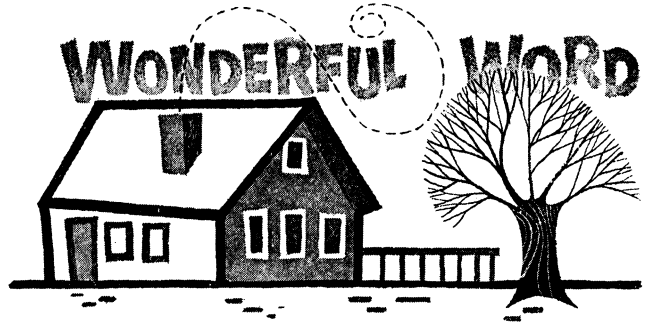
Businesswomen usually close their letters with "Very sincerely yours," or "Sincerely yours." "Sincerely" is used in letters of friendship. Forms of "truly" are considered more formal, less warm.

#### TO FOLD A LETTER

For a small envelope: Bring the lower edge of the 8 x 11-inch sheet up to about  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch from top and crease. Then fold from right to left a little more than  $\frac{1}{3}$  the width of the sheet. Then fold from left to right and crease again so it opens like a book.

For a long envelope: Fold a little less than a third of the sheet from bottom toward top and crease. Then fold upward to within  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch of top and crease again.

Don't be guilty of using incorrect postage. Write the Post Office Department, Washington 25, D. C., for "Domestic Postage Rates." Free.



SPEAKING OF WORDS, isn't it significant that "home," one of the most meaningful words in our language, is the root word of home economics? Isn't it exciting to know that ours is the one recognized profession in which the word "home" appears? It gives us pause, however, to realize that, because of this unique fact, it is our responsibility to safeguard that word "home"; to make sure that its true meaning is neither diluted nor devaluated.

It is not easy to live up to that responsibility. There is often the pressure (or the inclination) to stress frills of homemaking above fundamentals. A temptation to teach or preach "do this, do that," rather than to reach out to where the homemaker lives and inspire her to better ways of living as well as doing. A danger of becoming blinded not only by the glitter of non-essentials, but also by the glittering generalities that are so likely to cloud our communications!

But our work is cut out for us. Acknowledging that homemaking is changing, and that we must change some of our approaches to it, our job is — and must be — to keep the home in Home Economics. — G.A.C.