

SERIE
Archipelago

Correspondence

Tobi Ringeling

Third edition



Noordhoff Uitgevers

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Archipelago

Correspondence

Tobi Ringeling

Maarten Schrevel (editor)

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Preface

From its inception the *Archipelago* series of English textbooks was intended for students studying business skills in Dutch universities of applied sciences. However, the skills taught are skills that students of all types of higher education should be competent in, a fact recognized by students from many other disciplines, who are also using the series. After graduation, nearly all of these students will find jobs in companies, businesses and institutions. Wherever they go, they will have to be skilled in writing e-mails, letters and reports and they will have to be able to participate in meetings and deliver presentations. In short, they will need to communicate effectively. Nearly all of these graduates will find that in the professional world, English is *the* medium of communication.

We have now started developing third editions of the *Archipelago* series. The first to appear will be *Presentations* and *Correspondence*; the others will follow in due time. As before, each of the new books comes with its own website, containing additional material. Those that have not yet been updated will continue to be available until third editions have been produced. The series consists of the following titles:
Grammar, second edition, by Marianne van Vlierden
Correspondence, this third edition, by Tobi Ringeling
Reports, second edition, by Corné Stuij
Presentations, third edition, by Arnoud Thüss
Dialogues, second edition, by Peter Frambach
Reading and Writing, second edition, by Maarten Schrevel
Meetings, second edition, also by Maarten Schrevel.

In the third edition we continue the successful, practical approach of the first and second editions. Each chapter of each book starts with a case study. This case study may demonstrate a certain practice or provide examples of a particular phenomenon. Each chapter is now clearly linked to the levels described in the European Framework of Reference. The rest of the chapter explains the theory, provides examples and sets assignments. All of the chapters contain an extensive list of vocabulary and expressions relating to the particular skill taught. Each communication skill is thus approached from various angles, one of which is a focus on cultural differences. Once students have completed a book, they should be highly competent in that particular skill.

As before, the *Archipelago* series can be used in various educational settings. In the traditional classroom situation, they can be used as standard textbooks. In project work and problem-based learning, groups of students can work with the books and learn all the necessary skills together, supported by their lecturers. In situations where students have to study independently and without the help of lecturers, they will find that the series

is suitable for their needs as well. The clear English and numerous assignments (with suggested answers provided on the websites) make the series suitable for any student who is working on his own.

The websites contain a wealth of material. Not only will users find suggested answers to the assignments there, they will also find additional assignments, also with suggested answers. All of the vocabulary listed in the books also appears on the websites, together with Dutch translations. Depending on the particular communication skill, the websites may contain extra material as well. For example, on the websites dealing with oral skills, there are modules on pronunciation, contracted forms, weak forms and graded speech.

The masculine form of the third person singular is used everywhere in the series, but this should always be read as including the feminine form.

The authors of the *Archipelago* series would like to thank a number of people for their support, co-operation and help. As one of the authors, I would firstly like to thank all the other authors of the *Archipelago* series: we continue to work together as a team and in the friendly and co-operative spirit necessary for such an undertaking. Although each book is attributed to a single author, some of the other team members have also contributed to them. For example, Tobi Ringeling provided a module on contracted forms, weak forms and graded speech for *Presentations*, *Dialogues* and *Meetings*, and Arnoud Thüss provided the pronunciation module for these three books. Peter Frambach kindly allowed his extensive business vocabulary lists to appear elsewhere too. Tobi's, Arnoud's and Peter's help is much appreciated, for it has certainly contributed to making the *Archipelago* series a comprehensive one. I myself contributed the module on communication theory.

We would also like to give our heart-felt thanks to our partners and families for their constant support.

Finally, many thanks to all the *Archipelago* users who have sent us their remarks in recent years. Their comments have helped us to make the third editions even better than the first and the second. We warmly invite all users of the books to send any further comments to us so that we can continue to improve the series.

August 2013
Maarten Schrevel
editor

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How to work with this book

Like the earlier editions, the third edition of this book on correspondence belongs to the *Archipelago* series for students of higher education.

- Chapter 1 is a preamble to the topic of letter writing and deals with basic writing principles.
- Chapter 2 deals with the general layout of letters and appropriate conventions for formal letters.
- Chapter 3 deals with e-mail. As an increasing amount of correspondence is nowadays being replaced by e-mail messages, it is important that you become familiar with the basic principles of electronic correspondence.
- Chapter 4 is concerned with a variety of letters for business purposes, and includes quotations and orders, letters specifying terms of delivery and letters confirming settlement.
- Since many students will find it important to be able to write a letter of application, Chapter 5 deals with this specific type of correspondence. It also includes guidelines on writing a curriculum vitae or résumé.

The layout of this third edition has been revised completely and the chapters have been updated and expanded. Where appropriate, the writing style has been made less formal. Chapter 1 has been expanded to include using online dictionaries, thesauruses and translation sites. Minor changes have been made in Chapter 2. The chapter on e-mail, formerly Chapter 5, has been expanded and has now been included as Chapter 3. Chapters 4 and 5 on business purposes and on writing letters of application have been updated with minor changes and additions where appropriate.

All chapters contain assignments that enable you to practise the material. Suggested answers and ways of doing the assignments have been included on the website, which makes this book useful for self-study.

You will find 'building blocks' in each chapter: idioms and phrases to use in specific circumstances. Where the chapters in the book focus on business principles in particular, the building blocks are for use in rather more general types of letters, such as informative letters, good and bad news letters, goodwill letters and requests. Use them to create your own letters.

The book includes some appendices containing letter models, checklists and some relevant monolingual vocabulary. You will also find the building blocks and appendices on the website. Furthermore, the website contains some sample letters to help you get underway. It also provides some common abbreviations used in letters and gives the vocabulary from the book in translation.

You will find additional material on the website.



When you want to be read as well as understood, you have to be very much to the point and choose your words wisely.

Alumnus Zuyd Hogeschool

Chapter 1

Principles of letter writing

CEFR focus:

- B1 Is aware of the importance of looking at principles of writing to improve his or her writing skills.
- B2 Learns how to write appropriately, with attention to tone, style and degree of formality.



- 1.1 Avoiding vague words
 - 1.2 Unnecessary repetitions
 - 1.3 Being concise
 - 1.4 Linking sentences
 - 1.5 Style
 - 1.6 Tone
- Summary

Writing a letter does not simply involve putting one word after another: it is a process in which you choose appropriate words to convey your ideas. Many writers do not take sufficient time for this process, which makes their letters uninspired and vague. Your letter should reflect your intentions and the reader should not have any difficulty understanding what you mean.

Many inexperienced writers use vague words and repeat themselves unnecessarily. They fail to put sufficient variety into their vocabulary and constructions to make the letter interesting and pleasant to read. They also fail to link up their sentences and ensure that the letter is coherent. These flaws may annoy the reader quite a lot, even to the extent that the letter is discarded as

irrelevant. In this chapter we will first discuss a number of pitfalls to be avoided and thus ensure that your letters are to the point, attractive and informative.

This chapter also includes sections on style and tone, setting out some general principles. The sample letters in the later chapters have been compiled with an eye to demonstrating specific aspects of style and tone.

1.1 Avoiding vague words

Many foreign language learners are lazy in their choice of words. They may refer to 'things' when a more precise word is available. They may not bother to look for more complex solutions, and use words that have very little meaning of their own rather than the right word for the situation or context. A few examples of these words are the 'simple' verbs *be, do, come, get, have* and adjectives like *good, bad, nice*.

Have a look at this excerpt from a report by an aid worker to his office at home:

CASE STUDY

... In the majority of these Third World countries, agriculture is an important means of survival. People cultivate their land and grow *things like rice and so on*. However, they do this so inefficiently that their crops are poor, and consequently they do not *get* sufficient income from their work. This means that they cannot buy other products that are necessary for their health, *such as amongst other things* products that contain proteins. Unless they also have cattle, they will not be able to feed their children properly. *This situation should be changed*.

This excerpt is a mixed bag: vague and inappropriate words and phrases – indicated through marking – together with words and phrases that are quite specific and to-the-point. People often use simple words because they rely on the context to supply the meaning. However, even though simple or vague words may come in handy when you cannot think of a better word, they also weaken your writing considerably:

Things like rice and so on is too vague. The *and so on* is probably a reference to corn, maize, or cereals in general, and these are more appropriate words to use in this context:

- People cultivate their land and mainly grow rice, corn and maize.

If you look up the word *rice* in a good thesaurus, you will probably find some of these words. What is a thesaurus, you may ask? It is a kind of dictionary that groups words with similar meanings together. It is organized along the lines of associations rather than synonyms. The words that are specified belong to the same group. In the example of the word 'rice' you will find the keyword 'cereal' and a number of words that are related to 'cereal', such as 'oats', 'bran', 'corn', 'rye', 'wheat'. Those words do not mean

the same as 'rice', but they belong to the same category, in this case 'cereals'. See how it works by visiting a site like <http://thesaurus.com>

The verb *get* in the phrase *to get sufficient income* is not the right one to use in connection with the noun *income*. Has the writer really thought about the appropriate verb? In this case, it is *obtain* or *earn*. Again, if you look up the word *income* in a good thesaurus, you will find the verb *earn* as well as other verbs to choose from.

The phrase *such as amongst other things* is a formulation the writer has tossed off without apparently realising that he is saying the same thing twice.

It should have been either:

- such as products that contain proteins or
- amongst other things, products that contain proteins.

Finally, the sentence stating *this situation should be changed*, does not add much meaning. Unless the next passage discusses possible solutions, it is perhaps better to leave it out.

Make frequent use of dictionaries to find words that are suitable for the occasion and to avoid words that have little meaning of their own. Some dictionaries, especially cheap bilingual dictionaries, do not always show you how to use words in sentences. It is therefore wise to check such words and their use in a good monolingual dictionary as well. Be aware that online dictionaries vary a lot in their accuracy and quality. Also be aware that while online translation sites may be helpful if you are looking for a specific word, they usually do not specify if a particular word can be used in a particular context. It is important to check monolingual dictionaries for a proper understanding of the specific use of words in contexts.

ASSIGNMENT 1.1

Rank the following sentences according to how precisely the idea is formulated, starting with the least formal and precise one. Explain your decisions.

Situation 1: a letter to a company's service department.

- 1 The machine does not function properly.
- 2 The machine is not working well.
- 3 The machine is out of order.
- 4 The machine is producing a buzz.
- 5 The machine is making a funny sound.

Situation 2: a report to a news agency by a reporter.

- 1 The situation is awkward.
- 2 The situation is not as it should be.
- 3 Things are bad.
- 4 The conflict is dangerous.
- 5 The shooting is posing a threat to life.
- 6 The circumstances are life-threatening.
- 7 This state of affairs is hazardous.

1.2 Unnecessary repetitions

Every writer is faced with the problem of avoiding repetition. While repetition may go unnoticed for frequently used words, if it happens with infrequently used or unusual words, the text may become clumsy and monotonous.

Look at the passage below from a letter by a sales director to the managing director of a firm.

CASE STUDY

The annual report shows that *productivity* this year was less than *productivity* last year. An analysis of the reasons why *productivity* has not increased shows that this is mainly due to *productivity* in the first three months. During this period, our suppliers of raw materials were confronted with a three-week strike, which affected our *productivity* in February. Consequently, our *productivity* for the first three months was below par, but if *productivity* in the other months is compared with *productivity* on a monthly basis last year, *productivity* on average appears to be 3% higher now, and consequently, it may be concluded that overall *productivity* gives no major grounds for concern.

In this passage of approximately 100 words, the word *productivity* was used an unacceptable ten times. Any reader would be irritated by this. Here are some suggestions to make the text less repetitive.

- Use dictionaries to find alternatives and synonyms: *output, performance, turnover*
- Use a phrase putting the idea in the negative: *the reasons for the stagnation...*
- Sometimes the word can simply be left out without affecting your text.
- Use determiners such as *it, this, these, the former, the latter, the one below*.
- Incorporate the idea in a different grammatical structure: *we did not produce the usual amount during the first three months...*

In the rewritten passage below, the words marked in a darker colour are alternatives for the word 'productivity'. (Ø) indicates that the word 'productivity' has simply been left out. Do not worry if you need to reconstruct a sentence considerably to improve it. It is an exercise well worth trying now and again!

The annual report shows that *productivity* this year was less than (Ø) last year. An analysis of the reasons *performance* has not increased shows that this is mainly due to *negative results* in the first three months. During this period, our suppliers of raw materials were confronted with a three-week strike, which *caused stagnation* in February. Consequently, our *output* for the first three months was below par, but (Ø) compared with *productivity* on a monthly basis last year, *it* appears to be 3% higher now, and consequently, it may be concluded that *there are* no major grounds for concern.

ASSIGNMENT 1.2

Where possible, find suitable alternatives for the words *managerial, managing and manager*:

The successful applicant has excellent managerial qualities. *Managerial* experience in a medium-sized non-profit organisation is a prerequisite.

Managerial abilities should include the capacity to carry out financial *management*, legal *management* and sales promotion *management*. The prospective *manager* will work under the supervision of the *managing* director and will co-operate with the *managers* of our other divisions. Previous experience in a *managerial* position in Africa or Asia will be considered an advantage.

See if you can use words like *candidate*, *colleague*, *leading*. Think up alternatives yourself as well.

1.3 Being concise

English has a preference for formulating sentences concisely. An English reader will quickly dismiss a letter as 'waffle' if it does not state what it has to state precisely and without beating about the bush. In the following pairs of grammatically correct sentences, the second sentence has been formulated more concisely.

- 1a The objections that were raised by Mr White are not convincing.
1b The objections raised by Mr White are not convincing.
- 2a As she was interested in these developments, she read every report.
2b Being interested in these developments, she read every report.
- 3a The offender, who is said to be around twenty years old, is on the loose.
3b The offender, said to be around twenty years old, is on the loose.
- 4a Would you be so kind as to confirm receipt of this letter?
4b Would you please confirm receipt of this letter.
- 5a I do not know if this is essential or not.
5b I do not know if this is essential.

The following are some examples of formulaic phrases succinctly expressed in English.

- Enclosed please find our report.
- Food and drinks available.
- Billstickers will be prosecuted.
- Looking at it this way ...
- No offence intended.
- Nothing ventured, nothing gained.

In your native language you will probably need more words to express these phrases.

ASSIGNMENT 1.3

Formulate the sentences below in a more concise manner.

- 1 Would you be so kind as to send us a sample copy of the books that we have ordered?

- 2 The company, one which people say has been located in this area for over fifty years, will move.
- 3 The manager is still a very young man, and as such he occasionally shows signs of inexperience.
- 4 Attached to this letter you will find a proposal for a meeting.
- 5 It is said that he has moved to Leeds.
- 6 Since we have not received your payment, we will not ship further consignments.
- 7 If you asked me personally, I would be against such a scheme.
- 8 Tell me, is this or is this not acceptable to you?
- 9 When I look at it from your point of view, I must admit that this makes sense.
- 10 I'm sorry; I did not mean to offend you.

1.4 Linking sentences

The writer can make a text easier and more pleasant to read by making the text internally coherent. Sentences ought to follow each other logically, and they should be linked by words that relate the previous sentence to the following one. They may be words or phrases enumerating points, introducing a comparison, an additional point, a clarification or a comparison, or may serve another function. Some linking words and phrases are shown below.

Enumeration

first(ly), second(ly), third(ly), in the first place, first of all, for a start, to begin with, in addition, besides, then, on top of this, furthermore, later, moreover, next, finally, ultimately, last(ly), to conclude, to sum up, all in all

Comparison

or, alternatively, by comparison, similarly, likewise, in the same way, namely, in other words, for instance, that is, regarding, rather, for one thing ... for another, on the one hand ... on the other (hand)

Additional point

and, as well, too, furthermore, moreover, besides, even, additionally, also, in connection with / relation to, what is more

Anecdote

incidentally, by the way, as a matter of fact, come to think of it (informal), anyhow, anyway, in any case, at any rate

Limitation

especially, in particular, particularly, more precisely, essentially, in essence, with respect to, with regard to, regarding

Result

because, as, since, consequently, so, accordingly, therefore, that is why, as a result of, for this reason, if ... then, even if, even though

Contrast

(al)though, alternatively, but, instead, otherwise, else, neither, nor, on the contrary, in contrast, even so, nevertheless, nonetheless,

notwithstanding, of a different nature altogether, rather, yet, however,
in spite of, despite

Moment in time

before, earlier, meanwhile, at the same time, in the meantime, later

Do not be afraid to vary the position of these linking words in sentences. They do not always need to come in the initial position:

- Earlier it was shown that this position is not tenable.
- As shown earlier, this position is not tenable.

ASSIGNMENT 1.4

Link the sentences by means of the linking words shown in your book. Try to vary them where possible and avoid choosing the most obvious alternative. If there are various ways of linking them, give at least two examples.

- 1 The metric system is easier to use than English measures. – Most European countries have adopted it.
- 2 Ice hockey is a dangerous sport. – A good many people play it.
- 3 The Romans adopted the Hellenic religion, Hellenic theatre and Hellenic philosophy. – They hardly invented anything themselves.
- 4 John is not going to apply for a scholarship. – He will earn his way through college.
- 5 The situation was confused. – She remained calm and unruffled.
- 6 I will supply the data. – You boot the computer.
- 7 This seems a good idea. – That seems a good idea as well.
- 8 You had better hurry. – You will miss the plane.
- 9 He was so drunk. – His friends were annoyed with him.
- 10 It is a very expensive project. – It is taking too much time.

1.5 Style

Everybody has their own personal writing style. Some people write very concisely, using short and even clipped sentences; others enjoy writing letters with many embellishing words. Some people use embedded or other intricate constructions and complex words, while others prefer simple prose. A person's style of writing is what makes a letter that particular individual's letter, to the extent that readers are sometimes even able to recognise the author by the style used. Since style is highly personal, it should be valued in its own right as the expression of someone's personality. Even so, in formal letter writing you should try to use a precise, neutral, matter-of-fact style that is easily understood and not overly coloured by your personality. Write complete sentences with a subject and a verb and avoid words like 'and' and 'but' at the beginning of the sentence. There are so many stylistic possibilities that there is no need to feel inhibited by the conventions.

There are some stylistic elements that non-native writers tend to avoid, though using them would make their letters much more authentic. Using an *-ing* construction is one of them.

- *Having* received your order of Monday last, *I* regret to inform you that the goods are out of stock.
- *Being* responsible for the declining sales, *the manager* decided to resign.

There may also be an implicit relationship, as is clearly the case in the second sentence: *Because he was responsible, the manager decided to resign.*

Note of warning: if you use an -ing form in the subsidiary clause, make sure that its subject is also the subject of the main clause. It would otherwise be grammatically incorrect. You will understand this from the following grammatically incorrect sentence:

*Hanging on the wall, we saw a wonderful painting.

While this example is quite obvious, the next sentence is also ungrammatical. Can you explain why?

*Living in Britain, the Lake District is one of our favourite areas.

Another construction you could try is *it is ... for ... to + verb'*, where non-natives usually resort to '*it is + that-clause*'.

- It is rather unusual *for a manager to resign* on account of this.
- It is quite inappropriate *for you to announce* the figures in advance.

In formal letters you may want to write passive constructions. Since they lend a certain degree of formality to your letter, they should be used sparingly: there is otherwise a risk that you will sound pompous. Generally, they have a somewhat distancing effect.

- Your complaint will be dealt with by the secretary this week.
- The material will be forwarded to your home address.

Active sentences establish a greater rapport with the receiver:

- The secretary will deal with your complaint this week.
- We will forward the material to your home address.

However, in passive constructions, the agent is often left out, which makes them eminently suitable for sentences where you would like to avoid mentioning a specific person, yourself included!

- This task has not been carried out properly.
- No responsibility will be assumed in the event of gross negligence.

ASSIGNMENT 1.5

Rewrite the following sentences below using an -ing construction.

- 1 Since you have not followed the instructions, you will be reported to the Board.
- 2 I know that you are an expert in this field and I would like to invite you to hold a lecture.

- 3 When she defended her policies to the management, she looked quite impressive.
- 4 He was at his best when he was doing what had to be done.
- 5 We will fly to London because we are unable to contact them here in Bristol.
- 6 The employees were able to start the project after they had been introduced to the new software.
- 7 Since the manager was a man of integrity, he did not wish to negotiate with this dubious firm.
- 8 Because he had reached the age of 65, he was pensioned off.
- 9 When we came home from Berlin, we found your quotation on our doormat.
- 10 If you do the job like this you will arouse antagonism.

ASSIGNMENT 1.6

Use *for ... to + verb* in the following sentences.

- 1 It was unusual that the firm announced its sales figures in March.
- 2 It is rather inappropriate that you should say this.
- 3 It is ridiculous that he travels to Birmingham by plane.
- 4 It is unacceptable that her mother should come along to the interview.
- 5 It is about time that you left.

ASSIGNMENT 1.7

Change the active construction into a passive one.

- 1 The department will deal with your order as soon as possible.
- 2 We will unfortunately have to decline your request.
- 3 I will discuss your letter with the principal this afternoon.
- 4 We have received your letter of 7 March in good order.
- 5 If we cannot guarantee objectivity, we should not introduce the scheme.

1.6 Tone

Creating the right tone in your letters is important and difficult to do. You will have to bear in mind that letters in the English-speaking world are often written in a tone which is more polite than you would expect. The word 'please' is used quite frequently. Questions and requests are often phrased in ways that you may regard as excessively polite.

- Would you be so kind as to deal with the matter at once?
- Would you be kind enough to deal with the matter at once?
- Would you please deal with the matter as soon as possible?
- Would it be at all possible for you to deal with this matter before next week?
- Would it be convenient for you to meet us at 11 o'clock?
- Would it suit you if we arranged a meeting on Monday?
- Enclosed please find the annual report.
- Thank you for your complaint of February last.
- May I suggest that we meet on Monday?
- I would like to suggest that you forward this letter to Mr Hubbard.

- Could I propose that we meet again next week, same time, same venue?
- Do you mind if I leave a little early?

The forms *may*, *would* and *could* are regularly used in polite requests. Avoid using *might*, which indicates hypothetical possibility. Avoid using *should*: it means 'ought to' or 'in case' and is seldom used for questions and requests.

ASSIGNMENT 1.8

Change the sentences to make them sound more polite.

- 1 Bring along a copy of the report.
- 2 Is Wednesday 13 September alright for you?
- 3 A specimen is attached.
- 4 We received your complaint about the defective computer.
- 5 I will leave at 10 o'clock, if that is alright.

Summary

When you write a letter, make certain that you use precise wording and write concisely. Vary your constructions and vocabulary and link the sentences to each other so as to produce a coherent piece of writing. Try to use authentic constructions and maintain a neutral and matter-of-fact-like style. Passive constructions may be used, but be careful not to sound pompous or too formal. Your tone should be pleasant and polite, which probably means that you will have to use words like 'would', 'could' and 'please' more often than you would be inclined to do.