



Society Strategies

Federation of Genealogical Societies

P.O. Box 200940 Austin TX 78720-0940

Series Set V Number 2

Rev. February 2000

Set V Strategies for Secretaries

Correspondence: General Principles

by Betty R. Kaufman

Supplemental Page

This strategy paper, written some years ago, is an FGS *Classic* that contains ideas and strategies still relevant today in society management.

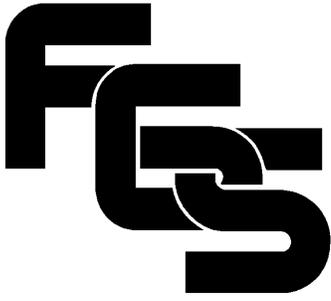
This paper discusses secretarial correspondence, offering guidelines for handling the receipt of society mail and writing correspondence on behalf of the society.

The information on page 4 which directs the interested person on how to obtain copies of this paper is incorrect.

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Set V Strategies for Secretaries Correspondence: General Principles by Betty R. Kaufman

INTRODUCTION

Correspondence with society members and other business associates should do more than merely relay information. Writing letters is one of the most important functions in a society. The effectiveness of letters may mean the difference in obtaining members, keeping or losing accounts, collecting liabilities or losing subscribers.

Every letter from your society is an ambassador that represents the letter writer, the president, and your entire organization. Ideally, the letters you send will come across with the warmth of a handshake. That kind of letter fosters loyalty among your correspondents and a strong image for your society.

The elements of an effective letter are accuracy, attractive appearance, completeness, courtesy and readability. Even when the letter is recounting facts requiring no action or decisions on the part of the recipient, it promotes good will and prompts a favorable reaction, both toward the writer and toward the society represented.

A favorable reaction is achieved when the recipient likes and trusts correspondents and their organizations. Most individuals have confidence in sympathetic listeners, as well as those whom they trust to fulfill obligations—either spoken, written or implied. We trust those with whom we can fully exchange opinions, and have honest differences.

By incorporating a few techniques, you can compose letters that will reach out and shake hands. First, visualize the reader. If the recipient is a stranger, try envisioning a person you know and respect. Direct your letter to a real person and you are likely to set the right tone for the reader you have never met. Second, personalize your correspondence. A good business letter is written from the point of view of the person who is to receive it. Readers are primarily interested in themselves and respond to letters which involve them.

Give the wording some extra thought. For example, “your letter of June 2 has just arrived” implies promptness in responding, and is a better choice than “We have received your letter, but our secretary is out of town.” Use questions. They imply you value the reader's opinion and thus convey a subtle, yet important compliment. “Don't you agree that our 10th anniversary is an occasion worth celebrating?” is a better choice than “Everyone agrees that our 10th anniversary is an occasion worth celebrating.”

Demonstrate your appreciation for the reader. Simply say “thank you” whenever appropriate. Adopt a friendly tone, one that is sincere, informal, but to the point. Inject a personal reference. When the message is sensitive, try turning it around and presenting it from the reader's perspective: “Your concern about the increase in annual dues is

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understandable. You must wish you had been at the meeting to hear the arguments and participate in the decision. I assure you, it was not an easy decision.”

Keep your tone upbeat. A positive outlook projects the right image for the society. People will naturally avoid the unpleasant. If readers encounter something in your letter that causes discomfort, it will not be read properly.

ELEMENTS OF EFFECTIVE LETTERS

Accuracy means perfection in grammar, spelling, punctuation, and typing. All facts and figures, including addresses and dates, must be correct.

A letter with an **attractive appearance** is well balanced, evenly typed, perfectly clean, and neatly folded. It draws favorable attention and creates a positive atmosphere for the message.

The **complete** letter is one most likely to be understood and believed by the recipient. It means answering all questions, giving all the information needed, and clearly specifying any action to be taken. Each letter should have three parts: beginning (or opening); middle (or body); and ending (or closing). The letter is structured to perform five functions:

1. Attract favorable attention.
2. Arouse interest.
3. Create desire.
4. Convince.
5. Stimulate action.

Do not begin your letter with the pronoun “I.” End your letter on an “up” note, so that the recipient will be glad, not disappointed, that you wrote. Avoid phrases such as “Thanking you in advance” and final sentence endings that begin with “I am” or “we are.”

A letter must be **thorough**. Always re-read a letter and be certain all essential facts are included. Ask yourself if you have covered the who, what, where, when, why, and how much. Are times and places specific? Will the reader have questions after he reads your letter?

What **length** should a letter be? A letter can be any length, provided it accomplishes its purpose. Most business leaders write only one page letters. People are busy. If you can't say it on one page, you lose the reader.

Courtesy in your writing requires a little more thought, a little more time, and perhaps a few more words, but it makes the difference between an average letter and an outstanding one. A complaint or an inquiry should be answered swiftly. Every letter should be friendly and tactful.

Readability is critical. Write as you talk. This will help you avoid stilted language and common phrases. Organize the facts and use vocabulary that is easily understood. Long, rambling sentences are hard to read. For normal reading, the average sentence length in a letter should be 14 to 17 words. Short words are usually strong and easy to grasp.

Each paragraph deals with one subject. A rule of thumb is to have at least two lines, but not more than eight, in each paragraph. Avoid one paragraph letters. Each sentence in a paragraph should logically follow the sentence before. Movement between paragraphs should be smooth and logical. Lead the reader from idea to idea or from subject to subject with transitions. Channel his mind in a desired direction using transitional phrases.

Get to the point of the letter quickly. If your letter contains many facts, it is wise to summarize them at the end of the letter.

How should you sign business letters? Possibilities include: Sincerely, Sincerely yours, Very truly yours, With kindest regards. One word, “Sincerely” is simple and therefore the best. Clear communication means simple language.

WHEN WRITING LETTERS, AVOID:

Letters ending in participles such as: “Thanking you in advance.” or “Hoping to see you soon.”

Old-fashioned cliches such as “Replying to yours of...,” “According to our records...,” or “We take the opportunity...”

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Summarizing the letter to which you are responding. Identifying the letter is usually sufficient.

Being over-enthusiastic or too humble.

Using the pronoun “I” excessively. Consider the other person's viewpoint.

Tactlessness. If you are insisting on something unpleasant, first explain why you must. Tactful words in a courteous letter are persuasive and uncritical. Substitute tactless words or phrases for positive expressions.

Instead of: “We fail to understand why you are dissatisfied.”

Say: “Please tell us how we can better serve you.”

Instead of: “We regret that our mistake caused you so much inconvenience.”

Say: “It was a pleasure to adjust this matter to your satisfaction.”

Instead of: “If this information is not sufficient...”

Say: “If you would like further information...”

Instead of: “Your question...”

Say: “Your interesting question...”

Instead of: “Your suggestion...”

Say: “Your constructive suggestion...”

ALSO AVOID a stilted style. Write as you speak. Avoid commonplace, archaic, or “delaying” phrases.

Instead of: “Acknowledge receipt of...”

Say: “Thank you for...”

Instead of: “Note...”

Say: “See or understand...”

Instead of: “Please find enclosed...”

Say: “Here or enclosed...”

Instead of: “As per your...”

Say: “As...”

Instead of: “Has come to hand...”

Say: “Reached us...”

Instead of: “In re:...” Say: “About...”

The term “correspondence” encompasses other forms of written communication such as form letters and transmittals.

FORM LETTERS

Form letters save time. They benefit the recipient, who receives the letter more quickly, and they benefit the writer, who can use the time redeemed to answer additional inquiries and requests. Form letters are often used for acknowledgments, inquiries or orders. They are used for transmittals of checks, reports, and other papers, and for follow-up correspondence of a routine nature.

Form letters fall into two categories: pre-printed, with spaces left for filling in various information, and those completely retyped, with various information incorporated into them for individual recipients.

There is some danger in using form letters. Occasionally, they are sent thoughtlessly when they do not fit a situation or when a personally written letter is called for. One should always double-check to be sure that a form letter is completely appropriate.

An important reason for using form letters is to save time. Time is saved by eliminating many parts of a letter that are usually considered essential. The result need not be unattractive or abrupt, if care is taken in planning the letter's format and wording.

INCOMING CORRESPONDENCE: TRANSMITTALS

Efficient society administration often demands using transmittal forms. A transmittal form logs all incoming correspondence and designates to whom it is to be directed. Items that are simply forwarded to the appropriate officer or chairman require no explanation—simply a copy of the transmittal form to identify the enclosures. Individual transmittal forms might be developed for various routine actions such as dues receipts, books received for

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review, publication orders, periodical exchanges, or mailing list changes. However, since many of these items are mailed, a single “universal” transmittal form will cover most or all of these items. Transmittals are an especially good tool to account for monies received by your society.

Each transmittal form carries a consecutive number and inclusive dates of coverage. Copies sent to various departments provide an accurate record of what was received and a built-in tracking system. The copy in turn becomes an index of transactions in each department. The transmittal number may be used as a form of documentation by the various parties involved in one single transaction.

Transmittals speed distribution of mail while providing the society with various protections. Transmittals may also include a column to indicate the disposition of inquiries. This column is marked “disposition.” When a response is made to an inquiry, the date and signer are noted on the transmittal form.

A well-written letter shows your appreciation for a member of your organization or your business associates. The feeling that such letters deliver reinforces loyalty and good feelings toward the society. When you incorporate the above techniques to give your correspondence the warmth of a handshake, you will be surprised how often the good feelings come back to you.

(NAME OF SOCIETY) TRANSMITTAL # 2000-01 01 January 2000 to 01 February 2000

<u>Received From</u>	<u>Description</u>	<u>Enclosed</u>	<u>Sent To</u>
John Jones (include complete address)	Renewal for 2000 dues \$20.00	Ck. #123 Copy	Treasurer Membership
Donald Smith	Change of Address	Copy Original	Mailing File
Robert Brown	Order Cemetery Book - \$35.00	Ck. #002 Copy	Treasurer Sales

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