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Semester: Autumn 2026

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Course: Business Communication (457/1416/5409/9412) • Level: BA/BS

Semester: Autumn 2026

Assignment No. 1 (Units 1–5)

Total Marks: 100 • Pass Marks (BA): 40 • Pass Marks (BS): 50

SOLVED ASSIGNMENT GUIDE

(For Study & Reference)

Note: This guide is prepared for study and reference purposes. Students are advised to read the relevant units of the course book, understand the concepts, and write the assignment in their own words.

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Question 1: Components of the Communication Process and the Problem of Noise (20 Marks)

Explain the major components of the communication process; evaluate how breakdown or "noise" at any stage or part of this process could lead to miscommunication and what that might entail for a business setting.

Introduction

Communication is the lifeblood of an organisation. Managers spend the greater part of their working day giving and receiving instructions, attending meetings, writing letters and reports, answering telephones and emails, and negotiating with customers, suppliers and colleagues. Yet communication is not a simple act of "speaking" or "sending"; it is a process made up of several connected components, each of which must work properly if the meaning in the mind

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of the sender is to be reproduced accurately in the mind of the receiver. This answer first explains the major components of the communication process — sender, encoding, message, channel, receiver, decoding, feedback and context — and then evaluates how "noise", meaning any disturbance or breakdown at any stage, distorts the process. Finally, it examines what such miscommunication can cost a business in money, time, goodwill and safety.

The Major Components of the Communication Process

1. The Sender (Communicator)

The process begins with the sender, the person or group who has an idea, fact, order, request or feeling to convey. The sender may be a managing director announcing a new policy, a supervisor assigning work, a salesperson describing a product, or a customer lodging a complaint. The quality of communication depends heavily on the sender: on the clarity of his purpose, his knowledge of the subject, his attitude towards the receiver, and his skill in expressing himself. A sender who is himself confused about what he wants to say cannot expect the receiver to be clear about it.

2. Encoding

Encoding is the process of putting the idea into a symbolic form — words, figures, pictures, gestures or signals — that the receiver can understand. A manager who wants a report by Friday encodes this wish in a sentence; an accountant encodes financial information in a table; an engineer encodes a design in a drawing. Encoding is successful only when the sender chooses symbols that carry the same meaning for the receiver as they do for himself. Jargon, ambiguous words and unfamiliar abbreviations are common encoding failures.

3. The Message

The message is the encoded idea itself: the letter, memorandum, speech, email, notice or gesture that actually travels from sender to receiver. A good message is complete, clear, correct, concise and courteous. It has both a content (the facts and ideas) and an emotional tone, and the two must agree; a message whose words are polite but whose tone is sarcastic will be believed at the level of tone, not of words.

4. The Channel and Medium

The channel is the route by which the message travels — face-to-face conversation, a meeting, the telephone, a written letter, email, a notice board, or a video conference. Closely related is the medium or form chosen. Channels differ in richness: face-to-face talk allows immediate questions and non-verbal signals, while a written circular is one-way but provides a permanent record. Choosing the wrong channel — for example, dismissing an employee by a text message, or conveying complex figures by a brief phone call — can destroy an otherwise sound message.

5. The Receiver

The receiver is the person or group for whom the message is intended: subordinates, colleagues, customers, shareholders or the public. Receivers are not passive; they interpret messages through their own knowledge, experience, expectations, attitudes and emotional state. The same announcement of a “restructuring” may be heard by one employee as an opportunity and by another as a threat of dismissal.

6. Decoding

Decoding is the mirror image of encoding: the receiver translates the symbols back into meaning. Decoding is where most misunderstanding occurs, because no two people share exactly the same frame of reference. Differences of language, education, culture, professional background and even mood cause the decoded meaning to differ from the encoded meaning.

7. Feedback

Feedback is the receiver's response, which tells the sender whether the message was received and understood as intended. Feedback may be verbal (questions, replies, reports of action taken), written (a returned form, an email acknowledgement) or non-verbal (a nod, a puzzled frown, silence). Feedback turns one-way communication into a two-way process and gives the sender the chance to correct errors. Communication without feedback is like shooting in the dark.

8. Context and Environment

Surrounding all these components is the context: the organisational culture, the relationship between the parties, the physical setting, and the social and cultural environment. A remark that is acceptable in an informal team meeting may be out of place in a board meeting; a direct style valued in one culture may appear rude in another. Context decides how messages are framed and how they are received.

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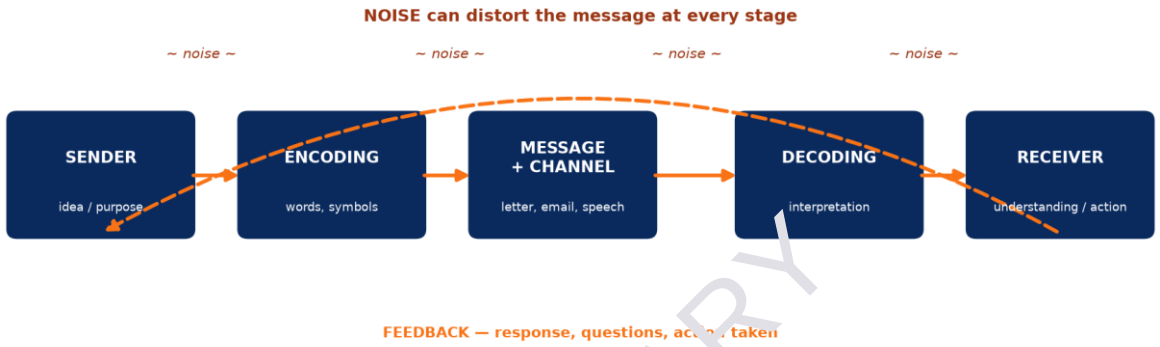

Figure 1: The communication process — sender, encoding, message and channel, decoding and receiver, with feedback returning to the sender and noise threatening every stage.

Noise: Breakdown at Any Stage

In communication theory, "noise" means anything that distorts the message or prevents it from reaching the receiver in its intended form. The term originally described physical interference on a telephone line, but it now covers every kind of barrier. Noise can enter at every component of the process, and its effects multiply as the message moves along the chain.

- Physical noise: literal disturbances — a faulty telephone line, a noisy factory floor, poor printing, a weak internet connection, or illegible handwriting — which make the message partly or wholly inaudible or unreadable.
- Semantic noise: problems of language and meaning, such as technical jargon used before a lay audience, words with two meanings ("The shipment will be executed"), poor translation, or vague expressions like "as soon as possible" and "a large quantity", which each party interprets differently.

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- Psychological noise: the internal state of sender or receiver — anger, anxiety, prejudice, distrust, over-confidence or simple preoccupation — which filters what is sent and what is heard. A worker who fears his supervisor hears a request for information as an accusation.
- Physiological noise: illness, fatigue, hearing or sight defects, or a speech difficulty, which reduce a person's capacity to send or receive accurately.
- Organisational and channel noise: messages that are lost in a long chain of command, distorted at each level, delayed by bureaucracy, buried under an overload of emails, or sent through an inappropriate channel.

The crucial point is that noise at any single stage corrupts the whole process. If encoding is faulty, perfect transmission delivers a faulty message faithfully. If decoding is faulty, a perfect message still produces a wrong action. If feedback is absent, the sender never learns of the failure at all. Miscommunication is therefore not an accident but the natural result of neglecting any one component.

What Miscommunication Entails for a Business

In a business setting the consequences of such breakdowns are concrete and costly. First, there is operational loss: wrong quantities produced, deliveries sent to the wrong address, deadlines missed because "next Monday" meant different dates to the two parties, and work done twice — once wrongly and once correctly. Second, there is financial loss: a misread quotation, an ambiguous contract term or a misunderstood discount figure can cost an organisation large sums and lead to legal disputes. Third, there is damage to relationships and morale: employees who receive unclear or contradictory instructions lose confidence in management; customers

who receive a carelessly worded letter take their business elsewhere; rumours flourish wherever official communication fails. Fourth, in industries such as construction, transport, health and manufacturing, miscommunication is a safety hazard: a misunderstood instruction around machinery, dosage or load can cause injury or death. Finally, persistent miscommunication corrodes the organisation's reputation because every external message is evidence by which the public judges the firm's competence.

The remedies follow directly from the analysis. Senders should plan messages carefully, use language matched to the receiver, choose channels appropriate to the importance and complexity of the message, build in feedback (by asking for confirmation, summaries or read-backs of critical instructions), repeat vital information through more than one channel, and listen actively to detect noise early. Organisations can help by shortening communication chains, standardising formats and training staff in communication skills.

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Conclusion

To conclude, communication is a chain of interdependent components — sender, encoding, message, channel, receiver, decoding, feedback and context — and it is only as strong as its weakest link. Noise, whether physical, semantic, psychological, physiological or organisational, can enter at any point and convert an intended meaning into a different, sometimes dangerous, one. For a business, the price of that distortion is paid in errors, rework, lost customers, low morale, legal exposure and damaged reputation. Effective organisations therefore treat communication not as a casual activity but as a managed process, deliberately designed, checked by feedback and protected against noise at every stage.

Question 2: Verbal and Non-Verbal Factors of Effective Speaking (20 Marks)

Discuss the verbal and non-verbal factors of effective speaking and evaluate how an improper use or breakdown in any of these could be fatal for a speaker; identify the ideal means to be found in each case.

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Introduction

Speaking is the most frequently used form of business communication: interviews, meetings, presentations, negotiations, briefings and telephone calls all depend on it. Yet a speech is never made of words alone. Listeners judge a speaker by two intertwined sets of factors — the verbal factors, concerning what is said and the language in which it is said, and the non-verbal factors, concerning how the speaker's voice and body carry the message. Research on communication repeatedly shows that when words and body language disagree, listeners believe the body. This answer discusses both sets of factors, evaluates how the misuse or breakdown of any one of them can be fatal to a speaker's purpose, and identifies the ideal middle course — the balanced, appropriate use — that should be found in each case.

Verbal Factors of Effective Speaking

1. Clarity and Simplicity of Language

The first verbal requirement is that the audience must understand. Effective speakers use simple, direct words, short sentences and familiar expressions, and they explain unavoidable technical terms. The ideal is language matched to the audience: precise enough for experts,

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plain enough for laypeople. The opposite faults are both fatal — jargon and pretentious "big words" exclude and irritate listeners, while language that is too casual or slang-ridden before a formal audience destroys the speaker's credibility. A sales manager who describes a machine to farmers in engineering abbreviations will sell nothing, however excellent the machine.

2. Organisation and Structure

A speech must be built, not merely uttered. The effective speaker plans an opening that wins attention, a body in which points follow a logical order (chronological, topical or problem–solution), and a conclusion that summarises and fixes the main point in memory. Signposting — "first", "secondly", "in short" — keeps listeners oriented. A disorganised talk, however rich its material, leaves the audience confused about what was actually proposed, and confusion in business usually means no decision and no action.

3. Correctness and Precision

Facts, figures, names and grammar must be right. One wrong statistic, one mispronounced name of the client's firm, or a string of grammatical errors can discredit everything else the speaker says, because listeners reason that a careless speaker is probably a careless worker. Precision also means avoiding vague words — "soon", "many", "a good price" — where the audience needs quantities and dates. The ideal is exactness without pedantry: correct in substance and in form.

4. Brevity with Completeness

Effective speaking respects the audience's time. The ideal is the shortest treatment that still covers the subject completely. A speaker who rambles, repeats himself and wanders into

irrelevant detail trains his audience to stop listening, so that even his important points are missed; a speaker who is so brief that he omits essential information leaves dangerous gaps that listeners fill with guesswork. In meetings, the rambling speaker is doubly harmful: he wastes the time of everyone present and delays the decision the meeting was called to make.

5. Courtesy, Tact and Audience Adaptation

Words carry attitudes. Courteous, tactful language — "you"-centred rather than accusatory, firm without being rude — keeps listeners receptive, while sarcasm, blame and arrogance close minds even to a good proposal. The speaker must also adapt content to the audience's knowledge, interests and concerns, answering the listener's silent question: "What does this mean for me?" Examples, illustrations and stories drawn from the audience's world make abstract points concrete and memorable.

Non-Verbal Factors of Effective Speaking

1. Voice: Volume, Pitch, Pace, Pause and Articulation

The voice is the speaker's instrument. Volume must be audible at the back of the room without shouting at the front; pitch should vary, because a monotone flattens meaning and invites sleep; pace should be moderate — fast enough to hold energy, slow enough to be followed — with deliberate pauses before and after important points so that they can sink in. Clear articulation (pronouncing words distinctly, not mumbling or swallowing endings) is essential, especially on the telephone, where the voice carries the entire message. Every fault here can be fatal: the inaudible speaker is simply not heard; the monotonous speaker is not attended to; the racing speaker is not understood; the shouting speaker is resented.

2. Eye Contact

Eye contact binds speaker and audience. Looking at listeners — moving the gaze naturally around the room or group — signals honesty, confidence and interest, and lets the speaker read feedback from faces. The speaker who reads from a paper with his eyes down, stares at the ceiling, or fixes on one person loses the audience's trust and misses signs of confusion or disagreement. The ideal is steady, inclusive eye contact: neither a stare nor avoidance.

3. Facial Expression

The face should match the message. A smile of welcome, a serious expression for a serious report, and expressions that change with the content make the speaker appear sincere and engaged. A face that contradicts the words — announcing good news with a scowl, or discussing a colleague's bereavement with a grin — creates distrust, because listeners believe the face. A permanently blank face is equally damaging: it suggests indifference to both subject and audience.

4. Gestures and Posture

Gestures emphasise, illustrate and enumerate: a raised hand can pause a meeting, fingers can count off points, and open palms suggest openness. The ideal is natural, purposeful movement in proportion to the size of the audience. Faults are fatal in both directions — the speaker who waves his arms theatrically distracts attention from his message, while the speaker who stands rigid, hands locked, fidgeting with keys or swaying, communicates nervousness and undermines confidence in his competence. Posture speaks too: standing or sitting upright conveys alertness and respect; slouching conveys carelessness.

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5. Appearance and Use of Space and Time

Dress and grooming are silent opening statements: appearance appropriate to the occasion tells the audience the speaker takes them seriously, while slovenly or wildly inappropriate dress distracts and offends. Proxemics — the distance kept from listeners — must respect comfort and culture: crowding a listener feels aggressive, and retreating too far feels cold. Finally, punctuality and keeping to the allotted time are non-verbal messages about the speaker's discipline and respect for others; the speaker who overruns steals time and goodwill.

Evaluation: Why Breakdown Can Be Fatal

These factors are "fatal" when they fail because speaking is judged as a whole and first impressions are stubborn. A brilliant proposal delivered inaudibly, in a monotone, to the floor, by a speaker whose gestures contradict his words, will be rejected — not on its merits, which the audience never truly received, but on the performance that buried them. In an interview, such a breakdown costs the candidate the job; in a negotiation, it costs the firm the contract; in a safety briefing, it can cost far more. The general law is that of the balanced mean: in every factor the ideal lies between two faults — between jargon and slang, monotony and shouting, rigidity and theatrics, brevity that starves and length that drowns. Effective speaking is the disciplined habit of finding that mean, factor by factor, audience by audience.

Conclusion

To conclude, effective speaking rests on verbal factors — clear and simple language, logical organisation, correctness, completeness with brevity, and courteous audience adaptation — working together with non-verbal factors: a controlled and varied voice, honest eye contact,

congruent facial expression, natural gestures and posture, and appropriate appearance, distance and timing. Because listeners receive the two streams as one message, a serious breakdown in any single factor can be fatal to the speaker's purpose. The remedy is not talent but preparation: plan the words, rehearse the delivery, obtain feedback, and in each factor deliberately seek the balanced ideal between excess and deficiency.

Question 3: The Listening Process and Active Listening (20 Marks)

Effective listening requires purposeful engagement; it is an active process. Identify the major steps involved in the listening process and discuss the measures that might be adopted to ensure we are able to effectively engage in "active" listening during our discussions.

Introduction

Of the four language skills, listening is the one used most and taught least. Managers, salespeople, teachers, doctors and customer-service staff all spend a large share of their working day listening, and most errors attributed to "miscommunication" are in fact failures of listening rather than of speaking. Hearing and listening are not the same: hearing is the passive, physical reception of sound, whereas listening is an active, purposeful process in which the receiver concentrates, interprets, evaluates and responds. This answer first identifies the major steps of the listening process, and then discusses the measures — mental, verbal and environmental — by which a person can practise genuine "active" listening during discussions.

The Major Steps in the Listening Process

Step 1: Receiving (Hearing)

The process begins when sound waves reach the ear and are converted into signals the brain can process. Though physical, this step is already selective: in a noisy office or meeting, the listener must choose to attend to the speaker's voice rather than to the traffic outside, the ringing telephone or his own thoughts. Anything that degrades reception — distance, noise, a hearing difficulty, a poor phone connection — weakens every later step.

Step 2: Attending and Concentrating

Attention is the gateway of listening. The listener focuses on the speaker, sets aside competing concerns, and sustains that focus for the length of the message. This step is demanding because the brain processes words much faster than a speaker produces them, leaving spare capacity that easily wanders into daydreaming, planning a reply, or judging the speaker's appearance. Most listening failure happens here: the sounds were received, but the mind was elsewhere.

Step 3: Understanding (Interpreting)

The listener now assigns meaning to what was heard: decoding words, following the structure of the argument, noting tone and non-verbal signals, and relating the message to what he already knows. Understanding is tested not by the feeling of familiarity but by the ability to restate the message accurately in one's own words. Vocabulary gaps, jargon, accents, and differences of culture or experience all threaten this step.

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Step 4: Evaluating

Listening is not swallowing. The listener weighs the message: Are the facts supported? Is the reasoning sound? What is fact and what is opinion or emotion? What is the speaker's purpose and possible bias? Evaluation must be timed correctly — the good listener understands fully before judging, whereas the poor listener evaluates the first sentence and spends the rest of the speech composing a rebuttal, hearing nothing further.

Step 5: Remembering

What is understood and judged valuable must be retained, because business listening usually serves a later purpose: carrying out an instruction, reporting a meeting, or acting on a customer's complaint. Memory is strengthened by identifying main points, linking them to existing knowledge, and, where the matter is important, taking brief notes of decisions, figures and deadlines rather than attempting a verbatim record.

Step 6: Responding (Feedback)

The process completes itself in response: the listener gives the speaker evidence of listening — nods, brief acknowledgements, questions, a summary of what was understood, or the action the message required. Feedback confirms understanding, corrects misunderstanding while it is still cheap to correct, and encourages the speaker. Without it, listening remains invisible and unverifiable.

Table 1: The steps of the listening process and the main danger at each step

Step	What the listener does	Main danger
1. Receiving	Hears the sounds of the message	Noise, distance, poor connection
2. Attending	Focuses and sustains attention	Distraction, wandering mind

3. Understanding	Interprets words, tone and structure	Jargon, ambiguity, accent, assumptions
4. Evaluating	Weighs evidence, logic and purpose	Premature judgement, bias
5. Remembering	Retains points for later use	Overload, no notes, no structure
6. Responding	Gives feedback and acts	Silence that hides misunderstanding

Measures for Effective "Active" Listening

1. Prepare and Decide to Listen

Active listening begins before a word is spoken. The listener prepares by learning the background of the topic and the agenda of the meeting, and by making a conscious decision that the speaker is worth hearing. A customer complaint, a junior employee's suggestion and a long technical briefing all repay attention, but only for the listener who arrives intending to find value rather than to endure a formality.

2. Remove Physical and Mental Distractions

The environment should be arranged for listening: choose a quiet place where possible, silence the mobile phone, close unrelated files and notifications, and face the speaker. Mental distractions require equal discipline — personal worries, pending tasks and prejudices about the speaker must be deliberately parked. A listener who checks messages during a discussion is performing listening, not practising it, and speakers unfailingly notice the difference.

3. Give Full Non-Verbal Attention

The body should say what the mind intends: sit or stand facing the speaker, maintain comfortable eye contact, nod at intervals, and let facial expression show interest and

understanding. These signals are not mere politeness; they feed back to the speaker, who speaks more clearly to an visibly attentive audience, and they anchor the listener's own attention, which is harder to lose when the body is engaged.

4. Do Not Interrupt; Listen to the End

Interruption is the commonest destroyer of listening. The active listener lets the speaker finish, tolerates pauses without rushing to fill them, and resists the urge to correct, argue or finish sentences. Many messages reverse their apparent meaning in their final clause — "The design is excellent, but the cost…" — and the interrupter acts on a meaning the speaker never held.

5. Listen for Main Ideas, Not Only Facts

Facts are the bricks; the listener's task is to perceive the building. Active listeners ask themselves continuously: What is the speaker's main point? What evidence supports it? What is he asking me to do or decide? Grasping structure in this way aids both understanding and memory, and prevents the familiar failure of remembering every detail of a meeting except what was decided.

6. Ask Questions and Paraphrase

The defining techniques of active listening are clarifying questions and paraphrasing. Questions such as "When you say the deadline is tight, do you mean the design stage or the printing stage?" expose ambiguity while it can still be resolved. Paraphrasing — restating the speaker's message in one's own words, "So, if I understand you correctly, you want delivery moved to the 15th because the raw material arrives on the 10th" — verifies understanding, shows respect, and gives the speaker the chance to correct errors. Reflecting feelings as well as facts ("You

seem worried about the budget") completes understanding where emotion is part of the message.

7. Control Emotions and Delay Judgement

A single provocative word can make a listener stop hearing and start defending. Active listeners notice their own emotional reactions, suspend judgement until the message is complete, and evaluate the argument rather than the person. In negotiations and grievance discussions this discipline is decisive: the party who listens fully learns the other side's real concerns, which is the raw material of any durable agreement.

8. Take Notes and Summarise

For discussions of consequence, brief notes of main points, figures, decisions and responsibilities support memory, and a closing summary — spoken by the listener or agreed with the speaker — fixes a shared record of what was settled. Summarising at the end of a meeting ("We have agreed three things: first…") is active listening made public, and it prevents the classic outcome in which every participant leaves with a different meeting in mind.

9. Respond Appropriately and Act

Listening is proved by response. The listener should answer what was actually asked, acknowledge feelings as well as content, and, above all, do what the message required — deliver the report, make the call, correct the error. Speakers quickly learn whose listening leads to action, and they route their trust, their information and their business accordingly.

Conclusion

To conclude, listening is a six-step active process — receiving, attending, understanding, evaluating, remembering and responding — and it fails if any step is treated as automatic. Active listening is the deliberate management of all six steps: preparing to listen, clearing distractions, attending with the whole body, refusing to interrupt, seeking main ideas, verifying meaning through questions and paraphrase, delaying judgement, noting and summarising, and responding in action. In business, the rewards are fewer errors, faster and better decisions, stronger relationships and earlier warning of problems; in discussion, the active listener is not the silent party but the one who makes genuine communication possible.

Question 4: Business Letters versus Personal Letters, with a Draft Complaint Letter (20 Marks)

Business letters differ in form and purpose from personal letters. Discuss the importance of business letters for an organisation and how they are different from personal ones. Afterwards, draft a formal letter for any ONE of the following situations: (i) a complaint letter to an office equipment supplier about a conference table received worn out, with scratches, mentioning the receipt/order number and the date of purchase; or (ii) a request letter to a manager seeking more time for a task due next Monday, reporting progress, giving reasons for the delay and proposing an extended due date.

Introduction

Despite email, messaging and social media, the formal letter remains a central instrument of business. Organisations buy, sell, appoint, complain, claim, invite and commit themselves through letters, and a letter on an organisation's letterhead is often the first — and sometimes the only — evidence by which outsiders judge its competence and character. Business letters, however, are a distinct species of writing: they differ from personal letters in purpose, form, language and effect. This answer discusses the importance of business letters for an organisation, sets out their differences from personal letters, and then drafts a formal complaint letter for the first of the two situations given in the question.

The Importance of Business Letters for an Organisation

- Permanent written record: A letter preserves exactly what was offered, ordered, promised or decided, with dates and signatures. Unlike a telephone call, it can be filed, retrieved and produced years later — in an audit, a dispute or a court — as evidence of the organisation's position.
- Legal and contractual value: Quotations, orders, acceptances, appointment letters, notices and agreements take effect through letters. Precise written terms protect the organisation against misunderstanding and fraud, and bind it honourably to its own commitments.
- Reach and economy: A letter reaches any person anywhere, crosses time zones without requiring both parties to be present, and does so at trivial cost compared with travel or meetings. The same standard letter can serve hundreds of customers while still addressing each by name.

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- Building goodwill and image: A courteous, well-written letter is a silent ambassador. Prompt replies, graceful reminders for payment, tactful refusals and sincere apologies retain customers and build the reputation for professionalism on which future business depends; a sloppy letter advertises a sloppy firm.
- Formal communication inside and outside: Letters carry the organisation's official voice — to customers, suppliers, banks, government departments and its own branches — in matters too important, too formal or too permanent for informal channels.
- Clarity and accountability: Because writing forces thought, a letter compels the sender to define exactly what he means, and its signature fixes responsibility on an identifiable officer of the organisation.

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How Business Letters Differ from Personal Letters

Table 1: Business letters compared with personal letters

Point of difference	Business letter	Personal letter
Purpose	To transact official business: enquire, order, sell, complain, claim, appoint or inform	To maintain personal relations: news, affection, congratulations, sympathy
Parties	Written on behalf of an organisation to another organisation or individual in an official capacity	Written by one individual to another in a private capacity
Form and layout	Fixed formal structure: letterhead, reference, date, inside address, subject, salutation, body, complimentary close, signature and designation	Free and flexible form; structure follows the writer's wish
Language and tone	Formal, precise, courteous and impersonal; no slang, no familiarity; "you"-centred but official	Informal, warm and personal; idioms, humour and emotion are welcome
Length	Concise and to the point; every sentence serves the business	May be long and discursive; digression is part of the

	purpose	pleasure
Subject line and references	Carries reference numbers, subject headings and enclosures for filing and reply	Rarely has any of these
Effect	Creates records and obligations with legal and commercial consequences	Creates no official obligation; private and without legal effect

In short, the personal letter expresses a relationship, while the business letter performs a function. The business writer therefore subordinates personality to purpose: the reader's need, the organisation's interest and the permanence of the written record govern every choice of word and every element of layout

Qualities of an Effective Business Letter

Because business letters carry so much weight, experienced writers judge them by a set of recognised qualities, often called the Cs of business writing. The letter must be clear, so that the reader grasps the message in one reading and cannot reasonably misunderstand it; complete, containing every fact the reader needs — dates, quantities, references and the action requested — so that no second letter is needed to supply omissions; concise, saying what must be said in the fewest words consistent with clarity and courtesy; correct, in facts, figures, spelling and grammar, since a single error invites doubt about the whole firm; courteous, because courtesy costs nothing and preserves goodwill even in complaints and refusals; and concrete, preferring exact particulars to vague generalities — "Rs. 185,000, Receipt No. 88413, dated 19 October 2026" rather than "a large amount paid recently". A letter that satisfies these tests performs all the functions listed above; a letter that fails them creates the very misunderstandings, delays and disputes that written communication exists to prevent.

Draft Letter: Complaint to an Office Equipment Supplier

(The letter below follows the full-block formal layout. Names, order details and dates are those of the situation as set in the question.)

BRIGHTLINE TRADING (PVT) LTD.

14-B Main Boulevard, Gulberg III, Lahore

Tel: 042-3577 0000 | Email: admin@brightlinetrading.pk

Ref: BLT/PUR/2026/118

Date: 26 October 2026

To

The Sales Manager,

OfficeComfort Furniture & Equipment,

22 Industrial Estate Road, Karachi.

Subject: COMPLAINT REGARDING DAMAGED CONFERENCE TABLE RECEIVED AGAINST ORDER No. OC-4521 (RECEIPT No. 88413, DATED 19 OCTOBER 2026)

Dear Sir/Madam,

We placed an order with your firm, Order No. OC-4521 dated 12 October 2026, for one executive conference table (Model CT-900, walnut finish) for our boardroom, against your Receipt No. 88413 dated 19 October 2026, for a total paid amount of Rs. 185,000. The table was delivered to our office on 24 October 2026.

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We regret to inform you that, on unpacking and inspection, the table was found to be in an unsatisfactory and worn-out condition. The tabletop bears deep scratches at several places, the polish is faded and patchy along the edges, and one corner is visibly chipped. The piece appears to be used or shop-soiled stock rather than the new item invoiced to us. In this condition the table is unfit for the purpose for which it was purchased and cannot be placed in a boardroom used for client meetings.

We therefore request you to kindly arrange, at your earliest convenience and in any case within seven working days, either (a) replacement of the table with a new, defect-free piece of the same model, or (b) a full refund of Rs. 185,000 against return of the table, which we shall keep ready for collection by your representative. Photographs of the damage are enclosed for your reference.

We have been purchasing office equipment from your firm for the past three years and have valued this business relationship. We trust that this complaint will be settled promptly and amicably, and that greater care will be taken with quality inspection before dispatch in future.

We look forward to your confirmation of the action you propose.

Yours faithfully,

(Signature)

Ahmed Raza

Administration Manager

Brightline Trading (Pvt) Ltd.

Encl: Photographs of the damaged table (3)

Copy to: Accounts Department

The draft illustrates the principles discussed above: it is written on the firm's behalf in formal layout, states the facts precisely (order number OC-4521, Receipt No. 88413, purchase date 19 October 2026, amount paid), describes the defect objectively without abuse, states a clear and reasonable remedy with a time limit, and closes courteously so that the commercial relationship survives the complaint.

Conclusion

To conclude, business letters matter because they create permanent records, carry legal weight, travel cheaply anywhere, and build or destroy an organisation's goodwill with every dispatch. They differ from personal letters in every essential: official purpose, fixed form, formal and precise language, concise length and consequential effect. The complaint letter drafted above shows those principles in practice — firm on facts and remedy, faultless in courtesy — which is exactly the combination that gets complaints settled and keeps suppliers cooperative.

Question 5: The Role of the Meeting Chair and the Dangers of a Careless Chair (20 Marks)

Examine the role of the meeting chair in making sure the discussion remains on track and everything goes smoothly. Discuss the potential problems that might arise, both in terms of

conflict management, favouritism, and decision manipulation, and in terms of time consumption and wastage, if the chair is not careful with regard to his / her role.

Introduction

A meeting is one of the most expensive forms of business communication: it gathers several salaried people in one room for a common purpose, and its value depends almost entirely on how well it is led. The person who leads it — the chair (chairperson) — is the difference between a meeting that produces decisions and a meeting that produces only fatigue. This answer examines the chair's role in keeping discussion on track and ensuring that proceedings run smoothly, and then discusses the problems that arise when the chair is careless with that role: unmanaged conflict, favouritism and manipulated decisions on the one hand, and wasted time on the other.

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The Role of the Chair

1. Before the Meeting: Preparation and Agenda

The chair's work begins before anyone enters the room. He or she confirms that a meeting is genuinely necessary, fixes its purpose, prepares or approves a clear agenda circulated in advance, ensures that papers and figures reach members in time to be read, and sees that the right people — and only the right people — are invited. A meeting with a stated purpose and a realistic agenda is already half chaired.

2. Opening the Meeting

The chair starts on time (thereby teaching punctuality by example), welcomes members, states the purpose of the meeting and the decisions required, confirms the agenda and the time available, and sets the ground rules: one speaker at a time, contributions through the chair, and discussion confined to the item under consideration. A firm, courteous opening creates the discipline within which free discussion can safely occur.

3. Guiding and Controlling the Discussion

During discussion the chair acts as a neutral conductor. He introduces each item, invites contributions, draws out quiet members whose knowledge is needed, restrains the talkative, redirects wandering speakers back to the point ("That belongs to item four; on item two, what is your view?"), asks clarifying questions, and summarises progress at intervals so that the meeting always knows where it stands. He protects minorities and juniors from interruption and ridicule, because the best information in a meeting often belongs to the least powerful person present.

4. Managing Conflict

Disagreement in a meeting is not a defect; it is how weak proposals are detected. The chair's task is to keep conflict attached to issues and detached from persons: allowing forceful criticism of a proposal while instantly stopping personal attacks, sarcasm and raised voices; separating the people from the problem; and, where tempers rise, summarising both positions fairly, calling a short break, or deferring the item until facts can be checked. Handled this way, conflict improves decisions; the chair converts opponents into joint examiners of the problem.

5. Bringing the Meeting to Decisions

Discussion that does not end in decision is conversation, not business. The chair tests for agreement, formulates the decision in precise words, calls a vote where the rules require one, and ensures that every decision is recorded with an owner and a deadline: who will do what, by when. Before closing, he summarises all decisions and action points, confirms the date of the next meeting, and thanks members. Afterwards he approves the minutes promptly, so that the record is settled while memory is fresh.

6. Impartiality and Integrity

Underlying all these duties is a quality rather than a task: the chair must be, and be seen to be, impartial. He gives the floor fairly, represents views he personally opposes as carefully as his own, declares any personal interest in an item, and never uses the powers of the chair — agenda, recognition of speakers, summary and vote — to engineer a predetermined result. The authority of the chair rests on the members' belief that the process is honest.

Problems When the Chair Is Careless

1. Conflict Escapes Management

A chair who does not actively manage disagreement allows the two opposite failures. In the first, conflict is suppressed: members learn that dissent is unwelcome, stop offering it, and the meeting ratifies weak decisions unanimously while real doubts go underground, to reappear later as passive resistance and quiet sabotage. In the second, conflict explodes: arguments become personal, factions form, voices rise, and the meeting degenerates into a contest of status. Either way, the organisation loses the benefit of honest examination, decisions are

made on incomplete information, and working relationships are damaged in ways that outlast the meeting itself.

2. Favouritism

A careless or partial chair recognises his allies first and longest, lets favoured members interrupt and dominate, cuts short those he dislikes, and conducts side-conversations with a favoured few. The consequences are corrosive: unfavoured members stop contributing — taking their knowledge and their warnings with them — effort shifts from the merits of proposals to the politics of pleasing the chair, and every decision becomes suspect, because even a sound decision reached by a visibly biased process will not command genuine commitment.

3. Decision Manipulation

The powers of the chair can be abused to manufacture consent: placing a favoured item where a tired meeting will wave it through, framing summaries so that the chair's preference appears to be the meeting's consensus, calling a vote when opponents are absent, suppressing or "losing" a dissenting paper, or recording in the minutes a decision stronger than the one actually taken. Manipulated decisions are worse than no decisions, because they carry a false stamp of collective approval; when the manipulation is discovered — as it usually is — trust in the chair, and often in management itself, collapses, and every subsequent decision, however honest, is met with suspicion.

4. Time Consumption and Wastage

Time is the most visible casualty of careless chairing. Meetings that start late teach everyone to arrive late; agendas without time limits allow the first item to consume the hour and the important items to be rushed or postponed; a chair who permits rambling, repetition and off-agenda anecdotes multiplies the cost, because the wage cost of a meeting is the combined salary of everyone in the room. The damage spreads beyond the meeting itself: decisions deferred to "the next meeting" delay projects, members begin to dread and evade meetings, preparation declines (why prepare for a meeting that decides nothing?), and the organisation drifts into the condition in which meetings are where work is talked about instead of done. Chronic time wastage also has a subtler cost — it signals that leadership does not value employees' time, which is a reliable destroyer of morale.

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Conclusion

To conclude, the chair is the meeting's planner, conductor, referee, timekeeper and guardian of fairness: he prepares the agenda, opens with purpose, guides discussion impartially, keeps conflict on issues rather than persons, brings the meeting to recorded decisions with owners and deadlines, and protects the integrity of the whole process. A careless chair reverses every one of these goods — conflict is either smothered or inflamed, favouritism silences honest contribution, the powers of the chair are turned to manipulating decisions, and hours of collective time are wasted. Organisations that value their decisions therefore choose and train their chairs carefully, for the quality of a meeting is seldom better than the quality of its chairing.