

ADVANCED ENGLISH COMPOSITION
FOR JAPANESE BUSINESSPEOPLE:
EFFECTIVE LETTERS
AND DR. LEON F. KENMAN

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ABSTRACT

For the last few years I have endeavored to offer textbooks on effective business writing, as well as glossaries and dictionaries of English for business and finance. (Hashimoto, 1994a) On the problem of effective business writing I have summarized the teaching methodology and techniques of my Japanese colleagues and myself and compared them with those of native English teachers in Japan. (Hashimoto, 1994b)

In the second paper I have exemplified different approaches undertaken by native and non-native English teachers. Yet I must continue to investigate proper texts of business communication, especially for non-native users of English. As one of the steps of my endeavor, I will publish shortly a completely revised and updated Japanese edition of *Effective Letters—A Program for Self-Instruction* (Reid, James M., Jr., and Wendlinger, Robert M., 1978) with an introductory remark by Dr. Leon F. Kenman on “Advanced English Composition for Japanese Businesspeople.”

INTRODUCTION

In 1989, I spent several hot summer months at the American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird) based in Arizona, U. S. A. There I took a course on Advanced English

Composition and Introductory Business Communications under the guidance of Dr. Leon F. Kenman. The class met three times a week and used *Effective Letters* as the text. It is characterized by a programmed study of step by step self-instruction.

The book abounds in quizzes which the reader can attempt, if he or she has understood the contents of the corresponding chapter. Of course, the guidance of the instructor is generally sought for. In this connection, Dr. Kenman says: "the quizzes are extremely important to help you develop an expertise in and a sensitivity to the intricacies of English writing." (Kenman, 1989) Ever since I took the course, I have been thinking of introducing this textbook into Japan for our students and businesspeople, with the assistance of Dr. Kenman who had used the book for years.

The Teaching of English to Non-native Speakers of English

In Japan teaching English to non-native speakers of English is more or less equivalent to teaching English as a foreign language. This tendency is established by native Japanese teachers of English who teach students or businesspeople in an environment where English is not used daily.

Target learners of intermediate/advanced level English composition in Japan is, in most cases, young businesspeople and a large percentage of university students. The latter are learning low intermediate to intermediate level English composition and may be considered mostly as future businesspeople. For the sake of brevity, I will treat university students as future businesspeople in this paper without expressly mentioning it each time.

Dr. Kenman states that teaching second English (English as a second or foreign language) tends to diverge dangerously from teaching first or native English (rhetoric, creative writing, literary criticism, linguistics, etc.) to native speakers. This fictitious construct presents a simplified version of the language and maintains a barrier to the intermediate and advanced level learner that's artificial and

detrimental; first English isn't readily attainable to these students. (Kenman, 1991a)

Granted that all the above statements are true, they do not offer any actual solution in a non-English speaking country. The English learning situation in Japan cannot easily be remedied. Japan is quite different from such western European countries as France and Germany where people can readily access first English, or from some Asian countries like India, Singapore, Hongkong and the Philippines where English can be said to be another national language.

Japanese students can now read countless books translated into the Japanese language on practically any subjects they want to investigate. With the exception of some professionals engaged in the study of linguistics or English and American literature, for most Japanese English is nothing more than a means or an instrument of communication. (Hashimoto, 1991)

Actually, however, throughout middle school and high school periods, few lessons are taught by native English speakers in Japan. Universities hire only a small number of British or American teachers who offer spoken English and writing courses for freshmen and sophomores. These teachers usually lack the knowledge of Japanese which is the language of instruction in Japan. Therefore, they tend to rewrite the student's composition, without correcting and revising it according to the Japanese text. (Hashimoto, 1994a)

Furthermore, there are currently very few full-time foreign professors who teach English for Business Communication, English for Foreign Trade, English for Banking and Finance, or English for Science and Technology.

Despite these limitations Japanese students are doing fairly well. In addition to class instruction they employ audio-visual aids and occasionally attend English conversation schools. Recently I administered a TOEFL institutional testing program for the School of Business students who are wishing to study at the University of

Victoria, B. C., Canada for a three and a half months period. The results were as follows:

	TOEFL-ITP (Score Record)			Total Score
	Section 1	Section 2	Section 3	
	Listening Comprehension	Structure and Written Expression	Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary	
A (Male, Senior)	45	55	56	520
B (Male, Senior)	47	54	54	516
C (Male, Senior)	46	46	46	460
D (Female, Junior)	45	50	49	480
E (Female, Senior)	51	37	45	443
F (Female, Senior)	42	47	43	440

It is interesting to find that their scores were varied, possibly a reflection of their different practices and experiences. Their overseas exposures, if any, extend over just a month or so. The students' listening comprehension abilities were generally poor, with the exception of one sample. However, I can confidently say that a few candidates have the capacity to pursue undergraduate-level studies in English without much trouble.

The above scores, I believe, eloquently speak of the status quo of English education in Japan in general, since these students are the School of Business students, not the School of English students who are majoring in the study of the English language.

English and English as a Second Language at Thunderbird

According to Dr. Kenman, English as a second language (ESL) at

the American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird) is taught at a rather high level, one that starts at an intermediate TOEFL 450-500 and blends into the instruction of ordinary English. (Kenman, 1991b)

He further states that the minimum TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) score for its entering students is somewhere between 450 and 500, a bit low for most American graduate schools, but quite reasonable considering that the weaker students are given some 300 hours in relevant ESL instruction at Thunderbird before they start taking courses in the Department of World Business, courses in the Department of International Studies, and business communication courses in the Department of Modern Languages.

While the lower level courses (3000-4010) are ESL in thrust, the more advanced courses (4050-5000) are English in nature. I took ES4050 Advanced English Composition and Introductory Business Communications under Dr. Kenman in the summer of 1989. I also audited EN5000 Advanced Business Communications for Executives offered to native English speakers as well. The course was structured to help students "improve their skills in communicating effectively in business."

Although the class met three times a week, I was able to attend the course twice weekly due to a conflict of schedules. I did however benefit a great deal from the course together with the several near-native level English users from western Europe.

According to Dr. Kenman, Advanced English Composition and Introductory Business Communications course is a writing class preparing its students to write good letters, memos, and reports, often better than their native-speaker counterparts. This was not so much an ESL course but one that taught the subtleties of tone and style in American business writing.

The class used as the textbook *Effective Letters—A Program for Self-Instruction* (Reid, James M., Jr., and Wendlinger, Robert M.,

1978) All through the course, I found the textbook very useful, as it offered a new dimension of self-instruction in English composition.

Characteristics of Japanese Students at Thunderbird

In the early eighties, according to Dr. Kenman, there were relatively few Japanese students at American Graduate School of International Management (Thunderbird). Now, out of a student body of about 1,500, there are some 400 foreigners from over 50 countries. Of that group, the largest group by far is the Japanese with about 60. The second largest foreign group is around 15, and there are several at that number. There are many Japanese students with varied personalities, degrees of preparation, and levels of motivation. And now, many are women.

Dr. Kenman has observed that, as do many other ethnic groups at Thunderbird, the Japanese frequently associate exclusively with one another avoiding Americans as well as members of other nationalities. It's the rare member of this collective who declares his independence and attempts to absorb much of American culture. Thus most of them miss so much of importance by isolating themselves from the mainstream.

I first visited the Thunderbird campus in January of 1989 and was in direct contact with the school until August 1992, after which I spent most of the time in the school's Japan center. During that period more and more male students began to come on their own, some with strong objectives to open up a new career and some without any definite goals in mind.

Different from most of their western counterparts, the majority of Japanese students were sent from large corporations for which they worked. These students were generally very diligent as they had to report to their employers regularly, and are likely to flock together to help each other. Female students usually get financial aid from their parents and spend a freer life than male students on average.

Most Japanese students at Thunderbird have about three to five

years of work experience before coming to the campus, so they may represent young Japanese businesspeople with certain aspiration for future social distinction. Their English language proficiency is usually on a level that requires one to two courses in English, some requiring a full semester of intensive English training and two courses in English in the following semester.

With a long years' experience in teaching those Japanese students, Dr. Kenman, I believe, is in a unique position to guide promising Japanese businesspeople through his expertise in English composition.

Dr. Kenman's Teaching Methodology for Advanced English Composition

Dr. Kenman asserts that "few teachers know both first English and second English beyond the basic skill level. Those that can teach first English seldom have the sensitivity and insight to deal with foreign students on a proper level and in an appropriate manner. Those that understand the limitations of second English are themselves generally weak in first English skills, notably reading and writing, so they could never instruct more than simple notions except in speaking." (Kenman, 1991a)

ES4050 at Thunderbird is Advanced English Composition and Introductory Business Communications. According to the school's course descriptions, this course is designed to improve the writing skills the students need for taking examinations and writing research papers. In addition, the course instructs the students in the fundamentals of effective business letter writing. Emphasis is placed on individual error analysis, major areas of grammar difficulties, forceful and concise writing, and on the linear development of ideas.

This is a course both for English composition and business communications. Dr. Kenman, in his course syllabus (Kenman, 1989), designated *Effective Letters* as the textbook, and defined its objectives as "to communicate successfully in writing: to learn to write by

writing, editing, rewriting, reediting, and rewriting again—using a word processor.” He further states: “you are learning to write to business personnel; write assignments for a person in a real-world situation; your written work must sound real; facts must be correct; arguments must be convincing.”

His explanation goes on: “since this course teaches writing, all aspects of writing—from the smallest like spacing to the largest like organization and format—will be scrutinized. Writing is a skill; and like acquiring other skills, a great deal of regular practice is essential for gaining proficiency; here, written communication competence. Also in class, you’ll take quizzes on chapters in *Effective Letters*”. I concur with him in the point that quizzes are very effective especially in a self-instruction type of programs, with the instructor’s proper guidance in class or in correspondence courses.

He further states: “the target is to write letters that contain informative, clear, pleasant, and errorless messages. Actual letter samples and the students’ assignments are reviewed in point of organization, content, tone and style, and mechanics. Organization is the way you order your writing; content is the message; tone is empathy you show for your reader; style is the way you handle the language, beyond mechanics; and mechanics includes areas like grammar, spelling, and punctuation.”

Effective Letters—A Program for Self-Instruction

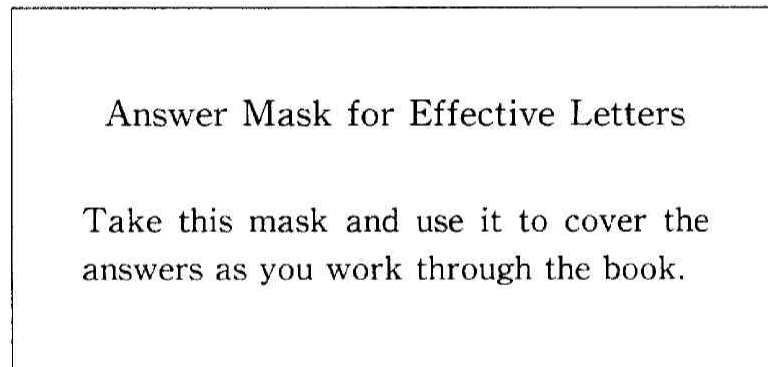
The textbook, *Effective Letters*, which Dr. Kenman used in his class, according to the publishers, is a revision of the highly successful business letter writing program developed jointly by McGraw-Hill and the New York Life Insurance Company. The programmed method of instruction requires the student to respond in writing while going through the text and thus actively practice the skills and techniques being taught.

They also mention that among the new features are a variety of types of business letters, a chapter on sales, collection, and applica-

tion letters, a quiz for each of the eighteen chapters, an appendix on business letter layout and other matters of form and mechanics, and an index. The student exercises have been varied to increase the interest level of the program, and class testers of the revised manuscript report a marked increase in student enthusiasm.

This book is different from a conventional textbook in that it has a programmed instruction format. The material is presented to you (the user) in small steps, called *frames*. Each frame gives you some information and then requires you to answer a question or practice a writing skill. After you have written your answer, you can uncover the correct answer and learn whether or not you were right. It is a method of teaching which includes self-testing.

This book provides an answer mask shown below for the reader to cover the answers appearing on a given page, although any paper will serve its purpose.



Dr. Kenman (Kenman, 1991d) comments that this programmed textbook, *Effective Letters* deals mainly and competently with tone and style, additionally a little with grammar and organization. The appendix on the mechanics of business letters is too short and flawed to be a serious and reliable aid.

He goes on to say that the programmed layout of the book, while done properly, isn't well suited for the skill it presents. Specifically, a possible correct answers to any problems are limited. On the other hand, when, for example, the student is asked to make a verbose

sentence concise, one of the many possible reasonable solutions may not have been predicted and, consequently, provided by the writers. As a result, the students can be frustrated because his correct answer may not be one of those listed.

Part One, containing the first ten chapters, is entitled "Writing That Is Easy to Understand." It deals with stylistic problems such as wordiness, passive voice, oversubordination, and others. The following chapters deal with pleasant tone (Part Two), and planning and writing letters (Part Three). "Appendix: Mechanics of Business Letters and Quizzes" has been already touched upon. Dr. Kenman comments that the first ten chapters are well thought out. The discussion, exercises, and quizzes capably present the material. He says that he hasn't found another wieldy book doing as thorough a job.

But there are many errors, some typographical others not. One omission which needs to be rectified is the lack of explanation of punctuation. Commas, especially, have to be covered. These are some of the remaining comments. Dr. Kenman has already produced annotations to each page of the text and added necessary revisions. He tried a couple of times to get permission from the publishers to revise *Effective Letters* but was only able to get an answer that the authors hadn't replied to their query. I have learned that this textbook is not currently in use at Thunderbird, presumably because it had not been updated.

Considering the usefulness of the book, I decided to publish a new Japanese edition of the book sometime ago. I negotiated with the Japan office of McGraw-Hill which confirmed translation and publication rights with their main office in New York. My idea is to publish an updated Japanese version of *Effective Letters* embodying Dr. Kenman's annotations for the reading public. Translation work is in progress. Recently, The Japan Times agreed to take on the project and secured Japanese translation rights from McGraw-Hill.

CONCLUSION

Like many other teachers I have been in constant search of some appropriate methodologies for teaching business writing in English. (Hashimoto, 1994b). It is quite natural for non-native English teachers trying hard to enhance their own English abilities while teaching students. Therefore, I am most anxious to introduce the methodology of self-instruction in business writing into Japan. I am sure that this approach will give a boost to Japan's English educational circles, which are so often blamed for being weak in regular English as well as in English teaching skills.

Native English teachers are undoubtedly facing different kinds of difficulties in teaching incoming foreign students. According to Dr. Kenman, the (native) teacher must steadily insist on the simple American style. At some point, most students realize and appreciate the communicative advantage of directness and personalness. (Kenman, 1993) This is the area where native English teachers excel. They are, so to speak, on their own ground against far weaker foreign students. Likewise, native English teachers are apparently not on a level playing field with non-native English teachers.

Seeing that Thunderbird discontinued using *Effective Letters*, it would be advisable to take advantage of Dr. Kenman's resources in compiling a new book. I think the English portion of the book will prove to be most valuable to those wishing to go abroad for post-graduate study, as it will incorporate the expertise of Dr. Kenman as well as my own experience as a graduate student. I also believe that the book will benefit all the readers immeasurably, in particular the present and future businesspeople.

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