

How
to
Say It®

HOW TO SAY IT®

*Choice Words, Phrases,
Sentences, and Paragraphs
for Every Situation*

*Revised
and
Expanded*

Rosalie Maggio

How to Say It[®]

REVISED & EXPANDED

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for Every Situation

ROSALIE MAGGIO

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TO DAVID

Liz, Katie, Matt, Nora

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Introduction

All that is requisite to become proficient in any Art, is to know what to do and how to do it; and the Art of Letter-writing is no exception to this general rule.

—F.M. PAYNE, *Payne's Business Letter Writer and Book of Commercial Forms* (1884)

How to Say It® is a practical, easy-to-use book that tells you what to say and how to say it. Its flexible approach helps you fashion compelling letters in little more time than it takes to handwrite or type them.

Although an impressive amount of business and social interaction takes place today over the telephone and fax, by e-mail, or in person, the well-written letter remains a staple of business success and one of the strongest connecting links between human beings.

Most of us are capable of writing a satisfactory letter, but few of us have the time and mental energy to deal with the countless letters that life today seems to demand of us—especially since all of them should have been written yesterday.

How to Say It® features comprehensive, versatile lists of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs that allow you to express yourself on any subject in your own voice and style.

Thesaurus-like, these lists provide you with terms relating to your topic. Whether you want to sound formal or casual, traditional or contemporary, businesslike or lighthearted, distant or intimate, you'll find here the words for every letterwriting occasion—from powerful, cogent business letters to warm, sensitive personal letters.

An important message of this book, delivered indirectly in its pages, is that there is rarely “one right way” to write a letter. You may follow, adapt, or ignore the guidelines given here; after all, you know more about your message and your reader than any letterwriting manual. Except for someone like Napoleon, who apparently wrote more than 50,000 letters in his lifetime (and nobody ever said to him, “Get a life!”), almost everyone can use this book to write letters with increased speed, individuality, success—and enjoyment!

How to Use This Book

Begin by skimming the table of contents to familiarize yourself with the fifty letter topics available to you (for example, sales letters, thank-you notes, references, apologies, acknowledgments, letters dealing with employment).

Next, flip through the Appendixes so that you know what kind of help waits for you there: Appendix I deals with the mechanics of letter-writing (what kind of stationery to use, how to address an envelope, the four most common ways of setting up a letter on the page) while Appendix II deals with the content of your letter (writing tips, grammar and usage, frequently misspelled or confused words, redundant words and phrases, correct forms of address).

To find advice about the letter you want to write, either turn to the chapter that deals with that kind of letter or check the index in the back of the book. Its one thousand entries ensure that you will find the help you need.

Each chapter includes a brief introduction, a list of occasions for writing that type of letter, what to include in each letter, what not to say, comments on special situations, and what format to use.

At the heart of each chapter are the lists of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs you can use to construct your letter. Sample letters are also given.

The lists “prime the pump”—they start you thinking along the lines of that letter topic. They also provide those who want to compose their own letter with a number of appropriate words, or they allow those using the sample letters as guides to substitute words that fit their needs.

To compose a letter:

- Read through the “How to Say It” section, note the elements your letter should include, and personalize them to reflect your situation.
- Choose from the lists of words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs those terms that are useful to you.
- Study the sample letters to see if one can serve as a model.
- Combine your checked-off words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs to produce a letter that says what you need it to say.
- Check your rough draft against the list of what not to say. Have you written something inappropriate? At this point, you may have a question about format or grammar or a social title. Check the Index to locate the answer in one of the Appendixes.

After writing your first few letters using this book, you may find that

it is not, after all, so difficult or time-consuming to write your share of the billions of letters mailed each year.

Acceptances

The mind gives us thousands of ways to say no, but there's only one way to say yes, and that's from the heart.

—SUZE ORMAN

Once you decide to accept an invitation or grant a request, simply say so; this is one of the easiest letters to write.

A “yes” that doesn’t come from the heart results in an unenthusiastic acceptance and you may even find yourself backing out later. Writing the acceptance is not as difficult as being sure you want to say “yes” in the first place.

Write Acceptances for

- admissions requests: schools/clubs/organizations
- franchise applications
- invitations: dinner/meeting/party/luncheon/hospitality
- job offers
- membership offers: board/commission/organization
- proposals
- requests: contributions/favors/help
- speaking invitations: conference/workshop/banquet
- wedding invitations (see WEDDINGS)

How to Say It

- Express your pleasure in accepting the invitation/offer/proposal/bid or agreeing to do what was asked.
- Repeat the details of what you are accepting (meeting date and time, amount of the bid or of your contribution, the precise nature of your assistance, the duties you agree to assume).
- Inquire about particular needs: receipt for a tax-deductible contribution, directions to your host’s home, wheelchair accessibility, equipment for your speech, list of other organizers.
- Close with an expression of pleasure to come (seeing the person, working for the company, being part of the group) or of future action

(what you want to accomplish, actions you intend to take, a reciprocal invitation).

What Not to Say

- Avoid ungracious amplifications: you are busy but you suppose you can manage it; you have two other events on the calendar that evening but you will try to stop by; you probably won't be a good speaker but, sure, you'll try. Let your "yes" be a simple "yes." If you have reservations about your acceptance, it may be better to decline.

Tips on Writing

- Send acceptances as soon as possible. If you are late, apologize, but do not dwell on it.
- Acceptances are brief and generally deal only with the acceptance.
- Noted usage expert Rudolf Flesch says, "If your answer to an inquiry is yes, it's a good idea to make yes the first word of your letter."
- Be enthusiastic. It is entirely proper to simply state your acceptance and repeat the details of the invitation, but your stock with hosts, employers, or friends will go up if you add a sentence saying something personal, cheerful, or lively.
- When your invitation is issued in the name of more than one person, mention all of them in your reply. Mail your reply either to the person listed under the R.S.V.P. or to the first name given.
- Always respond promptly to an invitation marked "R.S.V.P." or "Please reply." This is mandatory, obligatory, required, compulsory, imperative, and essential.

Special Situations

- When offered a position you want, write an acceptance letter that expresses your enthusiasm and pleasure and that confirms the details of your employment.
- When writing to offer a job to an applicant, include: a congratulatory remark about being chosen and something complimentary about the person's credentials, experience, or interview; information about the job—duties, salary, supervisors name, starting date; the name and telephone number of someone who can answer questions; an expression of goodwill about the person's employment with the company. Highlight some of the advantages of working for the company to influence the person's decision to accept the offer.
- In some situations (large weddings, for example), one of a couple