

Drafting a Letter with the Motivated Sequence Outline

The following letter exemplifies how the Motivated Sequence Outline was used to draft a letter to attract customers to Elite Travel Agency for vacation planning.

Elite Travel Agency
333 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94111

April 19, 20XX

Ms. Kathleen Atwood
204 London Street
Oakland, CA 94605

Dear Ms. Atwood:

- | | |
|----------------|--|
| (Attention) | If you don't like romance, beautiful places, and friendly people, stop reading now. |
| (Need) | But if you need to get away from the pressures of work ... if you would enjoy the exhilaration of bicycling through green pastures and rustic villages ... if you want to be welcomed with open arms by people known for their warm hospitality ... then a guided bicycle tour through Ireland, one of Europe's most breathtaking countries, is for you. |
| (Satisfaction) | Elite Travel is offering discount prices for folks like you who wish to spend a splendid summer vacation experiencing a new culture in a foreign land—at prices so low you can't afford to pass it up. Prices for 10-day tours begin at only \$3,979, including airfare, bike rentals, three meals a day, and lodging. |

(Visualization) Imagine bicycling on well-maintained trails, stopping at points of historical interest and incredible views, including castles, battlegrounds, and lands where old Irish tales come to life. Each day we'll stop, tired and happy, at favorite bed and breakfast inns for delicious meals, hot baths, and luxuriating sleep.

(Action) If this package sounds good, call us today. Join us for a vacation you will talk about for years. Call toll free at 1-800-555-0900 before this offer ends on April 30. Don't miss out! We are going to have a great summer, and we'd love to have you along.

Sincerely,

Dan Edwards

Manager

Sample #1

Dear Students and Faculty:

Are you tired of eating the same old greasy hamburgers and fries? Or tasteless vending-machine food? Does eating on campus remind you of eating on an airplane? Does "campus food" sound like an oxymoron? Prepare for a change!

Announcing the opening of Campus Cuisine, the first on-campus gourmet café that offers tantalizing tastes for finite finances.

Sample #2

Dear Students and Faculty:

Imagine walking to class and experiencing the aroma of freshly baked breads and hearty, flavorful soups. Picture yourself sitting at a cozy table enjoying a rare roast beef sandwich, or spinach and lentil soup with a fresh sourdough baguette, or grilled swordfish with fennel, capers, and sun-dried tomatoes.

Campus Café is now open—right here on campus—to serve you delicious dishes at just-right prices.

Scrutinizing the Samples

Note how each of the sample openers includes specifics to appeal to students and faculty. Typically, students are on budgets, so mentioning reasonable prices would be a sound strategy to appeal to students who have little money. And if it is true that a wider variety of food, including more exotic fare, would appeal to an older, more sophisticated crowd (such as university faculty), then describing tantalizing foods might pique their interest.

Note, too, the style of each opener. Sample #1 uses a sentence fragment, an incomplete sentence—"Or tasteless vending-machine food?"—to make a point. In most professional writing, complete sentences are more appropriate than fragments. But in a sales letter designed to capture attention, formal writing rules tend to bend a bit.

The second sample includes descriptions that appeal to the senses—"freshly baked," "rare roast beef." Arousing your readers' senses so they can almost see, hear, taste, or smell can be a good attention-getting strategy.

Identifying Communication Styles

Before you begin to write, you must consider your audience. If you have some insight into the personality of your reader, you will have the opportunity to tailor your writing to make it compatible with that personality. What could be more flattering to readers than to receive a letter or memo written with them in mind? The addition of a human element is so often missing in the business world.

Tailoring your writing to specific personality types begins with identifying the four general communication styles, based on Carl Jung's theory. These styles are:

- Sensor/Action Style
- Thinker/Process Style
- Feeler/People Style
- Intuitior/Idea Style

Identifying a person's communication style is not a hard-and-fast method for "figuring them out." Most people will exhibit traits from each of the styles from time to time. Still, one communication style is generally dominant. And it is to this style that you should tailor your business writing. Let's look at each style in more detail.

Sensor/Action Style

People who are strong in this style like action: doing, achieving, getting things done, improving, and solving problems.

Description: action-oriented, results-oriented, task-oriented, workaholic, confident, hard-charging, determined, tough, competitive.

Strengths: pragmatic, assertive, directional, competitive, confident, disciplined in using time, receptive to options.

Weaknesses: domineering, arrogant, status-seeking, emotionally cold, impulsive, autocratic, inattentive, impersonal.

Common jobs: athlete, manager, executive, coach, truck driver, entrepreneur, pilot, doctor.

Opposite style: Intuitor/Idea

Thinker/Process Style

People who are process-oriented like fact-finding, organizing, and setting up strategies and tactics.

Description: analytical, logical, self-controlled, stubborn, detail-oriented, aloof, critical, skeptical, conservative, noncommittal.

Strengths: perfectionist, well-organized, objective, rational, conceptual, persistent, accurate, orderly, hard working.

Weaknesses: indecisive, insensitive, inflexible, slow, judgmental.

Common jobs: accountant, banker, attorney, doctor, scientist, clerk, engineer, computer programmer, teacher.

Opposite style: Feeler/People

Sensor/action and thinker/process styles are both common in the business world. The two styles have different approaches to understanding and appreciating letters. The process style wants thoroughness and detail; the action style wants to know the bottom line. Consider the communication style of your reader in everything you write.

Feeler/People Style

Individuals who are people-oriented like to focus on social processes, interactions, communication, teamwork, social systems, and motivation.

Description: emotional, caring, introspective, melancholic, sympathetic, diplomatic, persuasive, entertaining, warm, friendly, agreeable, dependable, stable.

Strengths: spontaneous, persuasive, empathic, probing, loyal, warm, supportive, dependable, sensitive.

Weaknesses: impulsive, sentimental, procrastinating, subjective, overly sensitive, overly cautious.

Common jobs: nurse, administrator, teacher, social worker, sales associate, psychiatrist, trainer.

Opposite style: Thinker/Process

Intuitor/Idea Style

People with the idea orientation like concepts, theories, idea exchanges, innovation, creativity, and novelty.

Description: creative, reflective, quiet, scholarly, reserved, conceptual, intelligent, enthusiastic, personable, gregarious, impatient, involved, assertive.

Strengths: original, conceptual, warm, approachable, stimulating, adventurous, sensitive, receptive to new ideas, creative, idealistic, flexible.

Weaknesses: unrealistic, devious, impractical, manipulative, undisciplined in use of time, uncontrolled.

Common jobs: scientist, researcher, artist, professor, writer, corporate planner, advertising person, stockbroker.

Opposite style: Sensor/Action

Feeler/people and intuitor/idea styles are becoming more common in the business world. Your letters to readers possessing these traits need to be human. Because so much business writing seems mechanical and computer-generated, the People and Idea styles will appreciate your remembering that writing is a personal transaction between people.

Writing to Specific Styles

In the following examples, the sales letter from pages 63–64 has been adapted to address each style of reader.

Adapting to the Action Style

Emphasize action, doing, achieving, getting things done, improving, and solving problems. Get to the point quickly. Don't waste their time. Be clear and specific.

Elite Travel Agency
333 California Street
San Francisco, CA 94111

April 19, 20XX

Ms. Kathleen Atwood
204 London Street
Oakland, CA 94605

Dear Ms. Atwood:

Get away from the pressures of work. Recharge your batteries. Do it today. Right now.

- Bike through Ireland.
- Stop at castles and battlegrounds.
- Work up an appetite for excellent meals.
- Revel in hot baths and down comforters.
- Gear up for the next day's trek.

Elite travel is offering busy people who like action and luxury—people like you—a travel package that costs so little you won't be able to pass it up.

You can join us for a 10-day tour, including airfare, bike rental, three meals per day, and lodging for only \$3,979.

If this package sounds good, call us today. 1-800-555-0900. This offer expires on April 30. Don't miss out.

You've worked hard. You've earned it.

Sincerely,

Dan Edwards

Approaching the Process Style

Emphasize facts, organizing, and structure. Provide more detail than for other styles. Appeal to logic and reason.

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Oakland, CA 94605

Dear Ms. Atwood:

If saving money and getting away to a place that will recharge your batteries doesn't appeal to you, stop reading now.

On the other hand, if you need to get away from the pressures of work and school and you would enjoy the exhilaration and education of bicycling through the historical wonders of the Irish countryside, then a guided bicycle tour through Ireland may be just for you.

If bicycling sounds too rigorous for a relaxing, restorative vacation, you have the option of signing up for the accompanying bus trip—your choice.

Elite Travel is offering discount prices for people like you—people who would like to vacation in Ireland and experience a new culture at prices so low you can't afford to pass it up. Prices for 10-day tours are \$3,979, including airfare, bike rental or bus fare, three meals per day, and lodging.

You can find all the details about this package in the enclosed brochure. But remember: This offer expires on May 15.

If this sounds good, call us toll free at 1-800-555-0900. We'll be glad to answer all your questions. Don't miss out. Join us for the vacation of a lifetime!

Sincerely,

Dan Edwards

Appealing to the People Style

Emphasize social processes, interactions, communication, and teamwork.

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Oakland, CA 94605

Dear Ms. Atwood:

If you don't like romance, beautiful places, and friendly people, stop reading now.

On the other hand, if you need to get away from the pressures of work, and you would enjoy the exhilaration of bicycling with other enthusiastic travelers through green pastures and rustic villages, if you want to be welcomed with open arms by people known for their warm hospitality, then a guided bicycle tour through Ireland, one of Europe's friendliest and most breathtaking countries, is for you.

Elite Travel is offering discount prices for people like you—people who would like to experience a new culture at unbeatably low prices. Prices for 10-day tours are \$3,979, including airfare, bike rental, three meals a day, and lodging.

Throughout this tour we will bicycle on well-maintained trails, stopping at historical points of interest with incredible views that include castles, battlegrounds, and villages where old Irish tales come to life. Each day we'll stop, tired and happy, at favorite bed and breakfast inns for delicious meals in a family atmosphere, hot baths, and luxuriating sleep.

If this sounds good, call us toll free today at 1-800-555-0900 before this offer expires on April 30. Join us for a vacation that you'll talk about for years. Don't miss out! We're going to have a terrific vacation, and we'd love to have you along.

Sincerely,

Dan Edwards

Enticing the Idea Style

Emphasize theories, exchange of ideas, innovation, creativity, and novelty.

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Imagine...

bicycling on well maintained trails,

stopping at historical battlegrounds,

enjoying incredible views of castles,

visiting villages where old Irish tales come to life.

Each day we'll stop, tired and happy, at favorite bed and breakfast inns for delicious meals, hot baths, and luxuriating sleep.

Elite Travel is offering discount prices for people like you—people who would like to experience an adventure of a lifetime. Prices for 10-day tours are \$3,979, including airfare, bike rental, three meals per day, and lodging.

If this sounds good, call us toll free today at 1-800-555-0900 before this offer expires on April 30. Join us for a vacation that you'll talk about for years. Don't miss out! We're going to have a terrific vacation, and we'd love to have you along.

Sincerely,

Dan Edwards

Ten Techniques for Effective Communication

Working toward better business writing leads in many directions. At first, you may find that old habits are hard to slip out of. You also may find that when you try to improve your writing, it will take you longer to write even routine letters. You still may be tempted to use jargon and clichés. You may become frustrated as you stare at a blank computer screen or as you fill your wastebasket with crumpled paper. Do not despair! Writing is hard work, but the quality of the final product is the key to greater rewards.

The following list is a summary of the most important points discussed in this book. Make it a habit to read through the list to incorporate these techniques whenever you practice writing.

1. Keep your writing clear, concise, and simple.
2. Choose your words carefully.
3. Be natural.
4. Avoid fad words, jargon, and clichés.
5. Use active verbs; avoid passive construction.
6. Take a stand, make a commitment, avoid qualifiers.
7. Use familiar words—plain English.
8. Be specific: avoid vagueness.
9. Eliminate redundant expressions.
10. Keep your audience in mind.

A useful companion book is *Writing Business Proposals and Reports*, by Susan Brock, Crisp Series.