

The Right Way to Write Letters

By Sherwin Cody

Author of the Cody System of How to Write Letters That Pull.

HOW TO MAKE A LETTER SHORT, YET STRONG.

There is a wide impression on the part of business men that letters must be very short if they are to be read instead of thrown in the wastebasket; and as a consequence they are often made so short that the reader does not know what they are about, and the important points that should be impressed on his mind are not made at all. The short letter may be read more widely, but still it may convince fewer in the end than a long letter that is read by only a very few, but really convinces them.

The secret of making a letter short, yet strong, lies in selecting representative points—one point that will give the effect of half a dozen. It is a matter of judgment as to what will have most effect, what is really typical and representative of the case. The man who knows his business thoroughly has a mass of facts from which he must select. He should take those which are simplest, most direct, and most closely related to the ordinary habit of thought of the person who is to read the letter or advertisement.

For example, a man came into my office the other day with a baking powder which he wished to make compete in his own immediate vicinity with a well-known brand. I asked him if he had any unique features in the manufacture which he thought made his powder better than the other. He mentioned half a dozen minor technical points in the manufacture, and finally said: "Of course we deliver baking powder fresh every day, while the other is made six months in advance." We immediately recognized a simple point which every one would see, and which would be sufficient as far as manufacture was concerned. More would be accomplished by emphasizing this point strongly and letting the others go than trying to cover all. Stating one typical point and then referring briefly to "scores of others," is the right way to produce conviction. But the one point must be a good one. Sometimes two, three, or even four points may be stated. In general, there should be one point for each feature or phase of the case.

HOW FAR APART IN TIME SHOULD LETTERS GO?

The time between follow-up letters is very important. Lists of names will not stand infinite continuous working. They wear out and time must be allowed to lapse before another letter will pull properly. When time has passed, letters will begin to pull again.

At the same time, when a first attempt is being made, letters should usually be very close together, so as to concentrate the blows and try to get some advantage from the succession, and from taking advantage of interest while it is aroused. It often happens that two or three letters coming right on top of each other will accomplish what no one letter alone would accomplish, but in that case the letters should be very close together, not over a week apart, and sometimes only three or four days apart.

In other cases more time should be allowed to elapse, a month being a common period, and then three months, or even four months. In the end one letter a year may be all that will pay.

Usually this is about the proper arrangement:

A large list made up from Dun or Bradstreet's is taken up to be worked for inquiries. A postal card inquiry comes back, and the inquiries are followed up closely with long, hard letters.

The answer to the inquiry will be as full a letter as can be written. It should be a long and strong letter. Within a week the inquiry should have a second letter, and ten days later a third, perhaps, with a fourth a month later, and then follow-up letters at intervals of two or three months. Others require six or eight letters one after the other in quick succession.

As the inquiries are cleaned up through getting some answer they are checked off, and there will be a certain residuum of names from which it is impossible to get anything at all. They are usually dead ones and should be thrown out altogether.

Those that replied and show they are alive may be put in a special list by themselves and given a special follow-up from time to time indefinitely. But everything depends on the returns.

FOLLOW-UP LETTERS.

There is a sort of fetch attached to the term "follow-up letters" by many persons, who have an impression that there is something magic about them. Others think you will get orders if you keep after people long enough and hard enough, just as the book agent gets orders from people who pay to get rid of the agent.

Letters cannot be used to worry anybody into anything. It is too easy to throw the letter in the wastebasket. The only possible hope is to excite interest.

The idea that you will get an order if you keep at it long enough is, therefore, also fallacious. The first letter may not close an order, if the amount involved is large. One letter will not sell a piano or a threshing machine. But the first letter is most likely to excite interest and get a re-

ply. If the first letter does not develop interest, one can safely conclude that something is the matter with the letter and a better one must be found. If the first letter does not do something, none of the ordinary follow-up letters are likely to.

It happens, however, that the first letter usually gets some favorable result if the business amounts to anything in itself. The case is stated fully and fairly in that first letter, and those who are interested respond.

In planning letters to follow up a good first letter, the first thing that the average man does is to ask if the first letter has been received and to express surprise that nothing has resulted.

Nothing could be more foolish. As I said at the beginning, people cannot be worried into doing business through nagging letters.

The only fair way is simply to conclude that the first letter made no impression, and was thrown away and forgotten. Make the following letter as complete a soliciting letter as the first one. Try all over again, restating the entire case, sending circular, and the like. The second letter should attack a customer from a new point of view, that is all. There should be no direct reference whatever (in most cases) to any preceding letter. If a catalogue has been sent, inclose a small circular in the second letter, and offer to send another copy of the catalogue if the first one sent is not on hand. Never worry or imagine the first letter has been carefully laid away. Start fresh each time.

HOW TO FOLLOW UP BY LETTER.

The correct principle for arranging follow-up letters is to consider that a certain letter in a certain vein, from a certain point of view, will interest a certain percentage of the entire list, and make very little or no impression on the rest of the list.

The first follow-up letter should be made to appeal to another class, and be arranged from a different point of view, but otherwise should cover the same ground substantially as the first letter. All the important elements of a sales letter should be present in this follow-up.

The main thing is to keep all the elements well in hand in every letter instead of considering that the customer will have in mind what you wrote before. He will either have forgotten it, or he never paid any attention to it, or it remains so vague in his mind you do not get your complete effect unless you restate all the salient principles.

Yet of course the follow-up letter must be really a fresh one. If a man looks it over and says: "Why, I saw that before!" he is likely to throw it in the wastebasket without reading it. If it is fresh he may take interest in seeing what more you have to say, but it is more the new manner of saying it than the substance that affects him. Driving the old points home is not objectionable to a man if the manner is fresh.

When circumstances are such that the previous letters must be referred to, this should be done as briefly as possible and wholly without worrying the customer or seeming to find fault with him for not having responded.

There should always, if possible, be some fresh circular matter to go with each new letter, and when practicable the stationary and wording on the letterhead should be changed so as to make the outer appearance as attractive as possible, and as fresh-looking.

The essential thought should be the same, but the dress should be fresh. The old arguments should be put in in new form. That is the important element.

HOW TO ADVERTISE A SPECIALTY

There are probably very few business men who do not at some time or other have some little thing of their own invention or conception, or something that somebody else has invented or conceived, which they would like to advertise if they knew how.

A certain druggist I know has a tasteless castor oil. Everybody would rather castor oil didn't taste so bitter when it has to be taken; but how shall the news be distributed? A farmer has an improved pick, or an ax handle. Each and all dream of a fortune if they can get their discovery upon the market, and usually they look as far away from home as possible. They think of

HOW ARTIST GETS SUBJECTS

Unpatented Device That Noted Writer Suggested Might Be Useful to Authors.

"But, of course, it happens with everyone that the brain is sluggish sometimes, and I have invented a little spur for such occasions. Will you just help yourself to that square of cardboard on that chair over there—that's it."

"You see, I have two dials set side by side. On one of them is printed, in round robin form, a list of subjects for paintings: Windmill, old church, hay meadows, stone steps at Capri, Alhambra, Coney Island, Notre Dame, and so forth. On the other dial is printed a list of weather or time conditions, like moonlight, sunrise, haze, snowstorm, windy day, June clouds, and so forth. You'll notice that

much as you did at its age, going by the looks of you."

The man in gray wriggled uneasily under the general scrutiny.

"Baby, see the ugly man?" pursued the infuriated female, pointing at him.

"See the monkey-ponkey, gorilla man, what might take a first prize at a beauty show for the horriblemest face? Baby, hush, or the ugly monkey man will—"

SHOULD HAVE KNOWN BETTER

Fate of Unhappy Man Who Aroused Ire of Young Mother.

The baby in arms was screaming lustily and the man in the gray suit could not hide his irritability.

"What on earth, madam, he spluttered, 'do you mean by bringing such a howling brat into a public vehicle?'"

"It isn't a brat," retorted the mother, with natural indignation. "And, if I'm any judge, it doesn't howl half as

a small advertisement in a big magazine, inquiries by mail, or sales to large dealers through clever letters setting forth the merits of the article.

Those who succeed with these specialties, and there are many who do succeed and make small fortunes, nearly always begin very near at home. The man with the improved pick goes to every contractor in his immediate neighborhood and tries to interest him. If he can't interest a man he can see and talk to, he can't interest those far away, to whom he can only write. When he has got a lot of his neighbors to using his pick, he finds he is beginning to make a little profit out of his sales, though the article is not known 50 miles away and the big country has never been touched. But the enthusiastic indorsement of his near-by friends he puts into a neatly printed circular, and writes a strong, enthusiastic personal letter to those who are so far away he can't go to see them. He gets only three orders from a hundred letters, but that is enough to show a profit on the first sales, and he knows that future sales will pay him handsomely. And so the enthusiasm of his first customer grows until it reaches far and big interests take him up and help him to carry the good news everywhere, in return for a liberal share in the profits.

The druggist first tells his own patrons about his tasteless castor oil. They are so much pleased that he writes to a number of druggist friends in other towns, and because they are his friends they try his discovery. The merits of the thing create enthusiasm in each of these points, testimonials come in of their own accord, and the spontaneous enthusiasm of those who are pleased is little by little spread farther and farther. He doesn't bankrupt himself by trying to do too much, he feels his way step by step and letter by letter. He tries over and over again to tell his story till he has found the best way, and after a while the volume of orders coming in every day shows a fine profit.

HOW MANY FOLLOW-UP LETTERS SHOULD BE SENT.

There is an impression that about three follow-up letters is right in most cases. So a series of three is put into operation and the names dropped when these are exhausted.

This series of three is arranged to refer back from the second and third to the first letter, and I have already shown the folly of this. But there is no magic in the number three.

In some businesses the first letter cleans up everything that it will pay to go after. Returns from any follow-up letters must be closely watched, and if the results do not pay, of course they should be dropped.

As long as letters can be made to pay there is no reason why they should stop at all. I know of one case where follow-up letters were sent out at intervals for six years, with a total of over fifty, and yet each letter paid its one per cent. to five per cent. Results were watched, and each letter was worked on till it was demonstrated that it would pay. When it was proved to be a payer it was sent out widely. In a drug business I know a series of ten letters (to dealers) is used, and every one is known to be a payer. Many others have been tried and found to bring no business.

There is absolutely no magic number of follow-up letters. Unless a letter shows some results immediately, or within thirty days, it ought to be looked on as a dead one and cut out. As long as the letter writer can see a way of making up a letter that on test shows orders he should continue his series.

When one argument is given in one letter, and then the next letter takes up some other phase of the matter, it is clear that soon all sides of the case will have been covered. But when every letter is made to cover the whole argument, and effort is directed toward getting a new dress or setting for the old arguments, it is largely a matter of the writer's command of language and illustration, or the development of new points in the progress of the business.

Every new big or special order might be the occasion for a new letter. Every specially good testimonial, every improvement in the quality, every change in the price, and changes in the special premium offers or discounts give new excuses for new versions of the single perfect sales letter.

(Copyright, 1909, by Joseph B. Bowles.)

Only one subject at a time is shown through the little slit that I have cut in the paper that covers my dials. Now turn the left-hand dial."

I turned it and came on "Oxford."

"Now spin the other one for the atmospheric conditions."

This brought me "June clouds."

"You see, Oxford, in June. Very easy to paint Magdalen gardens under June clouds—and so it goes. But I seldom have to use my machine, as my mind is full of places I have seen."

Wonderful man! If men had never humored their laziness we would have had no great inventions. Why could not authors have a plot dial and a character dial? It might change the style of stories now current.—Charles Battell Loomis, in Success Magazine.

But the sentence remained unfinished, for the man in the gray suit had bolted.

No Effect on Flowers?

A writer in a German paper says that every caterpillar and slug has disappeared from his garden since he allowed his boy to ride a motor bicycle round the garden. He is convinced that the exhaust fumes from the engine acted as a caterpillar destroyer and he has never seen his garden with such a show of fruit and flowers.

RAISING BEEF IN CORN BELT FOR THE MARKET

Greatest Discretion Must Be Exercised in Selection of Stock and Proper Combinations of Feeds.

—By J. B. Burriss.

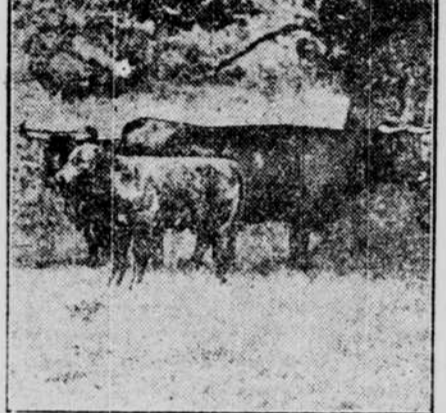


A Herd of Fat Stock Ready for Market.

The present era of high prices for all forms of feeding products makes it imperative to exercise the greatest discretion in feeding beef cattle for market. This condition must give emphasis to the three fundamentals of beef production, viz: The selection of the feeding steer, the proper combination of feeds, the feeding period and conserving the manure, writes J. B. Burriss in the Orange Judd Farmer.

I believe that on \$100 per acre land in the corn belt that feeding cattle cannot be practiced at a profit unless one has a well-bred herd of milking shorthorns and has a good, reliable market for the surplus milk. Then also must the calf lose none of its milk fat, but be pushed to a finish as baby beef, and never carried through more than one winter.

It costs on high-priced land about \$24 to keep a cow a year, and to this



Prize-Winning Youngsters.

must be added the cost and keep of a sire, quite an expense in itself, in order to produce a calf that could be bought in the open market for \$20. From this evidence I am inclined to believe that for the most part feeding cattle of any age having fair quality can be purchased more cheaply than when grown on the corn belt farm. If cattle can be purchased

near the place of finishing so much the better. One of the most serious problems in this regard is to obtain cattle of good quality.

Those districts which are not essentially dairy regions have such a mixture of varying degrees of worthlessness that it is almost an impossibility to obtain a fair grade of feeding cattle. This necessitates going to Kansas City or other western markets for feeders. A steer in fair flesh weighing 1,000 to 1,100 pounds, and known in market parlance as a native, would be my choice. As to breeds I should not be especially partial. Any one of the three recognized beef types will give good returns if selected carefully. Cattle of this kind if put in the feed lot the last half of November can be made into good beef in from 120 to 150 days. Corn, clover hay, silage, shredded stover and cottonseed meal should be used. The cattle should be made to consume as much roughage as possible from the point of economy, and thus utilize all the corn plant. If the feed lot is covered, and it should be by all means, the amount of manure saved will be quite an item on the credit side of the transaction.

By a judicious combination of the above-mentioned feeds there is no reason why a price cannot be obtained for the feed consumed equivalent to that obtained on the market. But this may not appear as profit. The average corn belt farmer can feed the products of his farm as cheaply as to haul them to market. If these products are fed on concrete floors under shelter fully three-fourths of their plant food value can be returned to the farm. Even if only the market value of the feeds is obtained and the feeder did not receive any net profit from the feeding proposition as far as the cattle are concerned, there would still be a profit.

Besides the feeding farmer is gradually but surely adding to the material value of his farm. The conservation of soil fertility is unquestionably the greatest consideration in American agriculture.

PIN MONEY FOR FARMER'S WIFE

Various Ways for the Women to Earn a Penny.

In advising a farmer's wife or daughter to earn money most people will say "hena," "garden truck" or "bees." Now, if you live on a farm, you know that hena and garden truck don't thrive to a very great extent on the same farm. And if they did the family and hired help would play hob with the profits of either, for the first will uniformly go to pay the grocer, and the second fill the inner man. But I believe bees can be profitably kept if you know how and are not afraid of them. Now, I don't know and am afraid of them, so will leave that to some abler pen to explain, says the Agricultural Epitomist.

One way to earn a penny is to start tomatoes and cabbage plants in the house early; put only one plant in each tin can; that is unsold and tied together with a string; keep them growing, and if they are ready to blossom by the time all danger of frost is past, so much the better. Dig a hole where you want to set them, wet the dirt in the can thoroughly, until your string, slip a knife around the can and slip your tomato into the hole; press the dirt around it and it will never know it has been transplanted, and you can sell tomatoes at 15 cents a dozen before your neighbors' vines are in bloom.

Cabbage and melons and cucumbers can be treated the same way, and are all a paying crop, while lettuce and radishes can be grown ready for market in the bay window or upstairs if your house is reasonably warm.

Breeders' Notice.

There is one valuable fact which students and practical breeders of trotting stock has learned half a century ago. It is this: The most successful of sires produce speed with greater uniformity from mares that are bred in some particular line than they do from other mares that are apparently better individuals bred in other lines. All breeders know that Rysdyk's Hambletonian produced what was extreme trotting speed, at that early day, with greater uniformity from daughters of Seely's America. Star than he got from mares possessing any other blood inheritance.

Shelter for Geese.

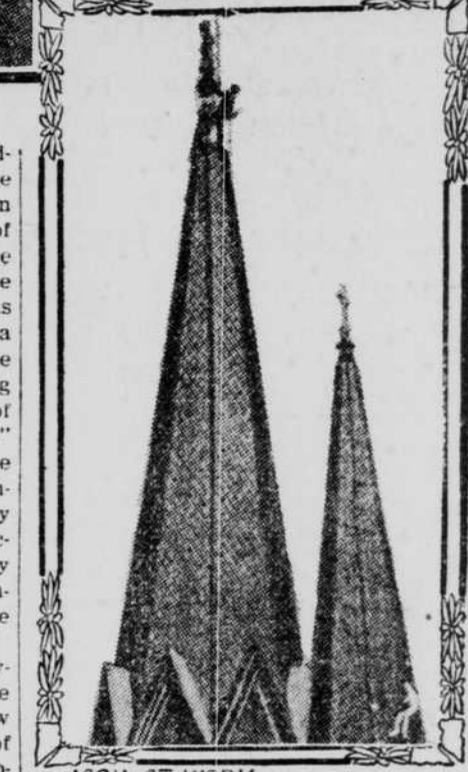
Old geese thrive in all kinds of weather if given a shed shelter closed on the windward side. Better a shed to themselves than the cow barn, because they are safe from being stepped on. A pasture too poor for other stock will still do for geese.

Every year in which the garden is fertilized and the ground worked it becomes richer and more capable of growing crops.

PERILS OF A STEEPLE JACK



GILDING CROSSES



JACK AT WORK

An object of unusual interest to residents and visitors in Troy, a "steeple Jack" has for several weeks past been swinging daily about the steeples of St. Joseph's Provincial seminary, the famous "Towers of Troy," as they have come to be called, occupied, with as much nonchalance as though on terra firma, in the task of making extensive repairs to those steeples and placing an eight-foot gilded cross on each of the four spires. The "Towers of Troy," from their elevated position on the crest of the hill overlooking the center of the city, form a landmark easily recognized for many miles in all directions, and like stalwart sentinels they have stood guard over the busy commercial section of the city below these 30 years or more.

Weakened by age, a high wind several months ago carried away the pinnacle of one of the spires and drew attention to a general weakening of the others, so the Sisters of St. Joseph, who hold the seminary property, recently awarded a contract for strengthening the steeples and placing a large gilded cross upon each. George Ferguson of Albany, a famous "steeple Jack," was selected for the hazardous undertaking, and for the last six weeks he has been engaged with two assistants in performing the work.

A few minutes of observation of the painstaking, methodical movements of the "steeple Jack" is sufficient to convince the observer that his is no easy task. Beside being a sort of mechanical engineer, the "steeple Jack," to be a success, must be a master of several trades. To observe a man seated

in his boatman's chair anchored against the side of a spire may give the impression that the work is easy, but imagine standing in a coil of rope and sawing off a section of tower above one's head weighing nearly half a ton. Yet that was what was done on these towers. The old final ornaments, placed at the top of the spires when the building was erected back in the '70's as a Methodist university, were each 14 feet high and nearly four feet in diameter, and in their decayed condition considerable skill was required to prevent them falling the wrong way and causing damage to the building.

Mr. Ferguson declares that the only part of the work which may be called easy is the actual climbing. This is accomplished in a novel manner, for the steeples, rising 75 or more feet in the

air, present nothing upon which a hold may be secured, and yet he climbs without scaffolding. Patiently—it may seem tediously—the steeple is climbed by means of two ropes securely wound around the tower, leaving a loop to slip over the body. Alternating from the lower to the upper loop, similar to hitching up a pole, the "steeple Jack" gradually works up to the very top, carrying tackle and swing chair, from which he proceeds to repair or paint as required.

Mr. Ferguson inherited his profession of steeple-climbing from his father, who followed that business for more than 32 years, climbing the highest spires throughout the eastern states and finally meeting his end by a fall of 20 feet at the Albany penitentiary building in 1891. A decayed wall, capped by stone, gave way while he was painting it, and he was killed instantly. The son was serving at the time as an apprentice in the navy, a calling which presents some similar situations, and when he received his discharge in 1892 he succeeded to his father's business. Of modest but jovial disposition, he credits the fact that he has had no accidents to his athletic build and temperate habits, for, as he strongly declares, drinking intoxicants and steeple-climbing "do not mix."

The illustration gives an idea of the size of the crosses being gilded before placed.

RURAL AUCTIONEER DREADED CHARACTER

Last Act of Tragedy Is Where He Plays the Leading Part—Novel Sights on the Day of the Sale as Old Farm Is Delivered Into the Hands of Strangers.

The most conspicuous character in the last act of the humber tragedy of the abandoned farm is very often the rural auctioneer, says Collier. He it is who rings the curtain down with careless quip and boisterous jest. Perhaps his burly presence has been menacing the household through long years of gripping struggle with adversity. The land has been becoming poorer, the ambitious men of the family have gone away to seek their fortunes elsewhere, and on the heels of misfortune has followed the chattel mortgage. Unsuaging heroism, incredible economies, toil unceasing, have not sufficed to check the steady decadence of the farm and its affairs. Some day, when the ultimate disaster can no longer be held at arm's length, a printed bill, announcing the sale at auction of stock, tools, and household, is posted in the village store and the postoffice.

The idlers scan the bill with curious interest, but with no marked symptoms of surprise. The auction has been a foregone conclusion for some time. The storekeeper remarks to his leisurely customers: "Old Jonathan Woodman has been

livin' alone on the farm for years and years. He's the last of 'em. All petered out, ain't they? He's going to live with his grand-daughter in Newmarket, so they tell me. Hung on longer than I expected, the old man did. Too old to do much farming and no money to hire help."

On the morning of the sale the roads leading toward the Woodman place are populous with vehicles more servicable than elegant—concoats, democrats, buggies, carriages and rattling wagons. An auction is a diversion, a mild excitement, and the women folk forsake their spicy kitchens to enjoy a day's outing, with the bulging dinner basket tucked under the front seat. Long before the auctioneer is ready to begin his task the Woodman house, dooryard and barn are overrun by a curious, shrewdly calculating crowd discussing the family history and the values of its goods and chattels.

Peculiarities in Pavement.

The resistance to traction in dry weather is smallest on brick pavements and in wet weather on bituminous pavements.

The Julep of Old Virginia

Old-Fashioned Host Explains How It Should Be Made, and Demonstrates.

"Virginia may be dry in spots, but this is not one of them," said the old-fashioned Virginia host, sniffing the mint he had just brought in from his garden.

"Sit there and I'll show you how to make a genuine old-time Virginia mint julep, like father used to make."

"First, you see, I pound my ice. I always steal one of my wife's best dinner napkins to pound it in. It gives it a flavor that beats this shaving concern they use for ice nowadays."

"Well, sir, having pounded your ice, fill a tall thin glass full of it and put it into the refrigerator. What for? I'll show you later. Now, in another glass I mix my whisky—small the bouquet of that, sir. Fine, isn't it? My mint which I crush—yes, sir, crush is the word I used—and a little sugar. Water? What do you want with water in a mint julep? This is the old-fashion-

ed way I'm showing you.

"Now, then, I pour the mixture into the tall glass; it melts the ice a little, you see; that's all the water you need. Then I fill it up with more ice, dash it with the best old French brandy, trim it with a little shenaf of mint on the side—like the what-you-may-call 'em on the new hats, insert one strawberry or a cherry to give it color—and, taste that, sir. Isn't that the nectar of the gods? A straw? Upon my word! Do you think you are at a soda fountain? What do you want with a straw when you can bury your nose in mint like that? Fragrance and flavor, that's what."

"How do I get the frost on the glass? Well, partly by chilling it in the ice box and partly by pouring into the chilled glass the warm mixture. I thought you would say it was the best you ever had. Try another for old time's sake."

Reduces Price of Telegrams.

Spain has reduced the cost of telegrams to America 50 per cent.