

## CENTURIES OF ROUGH NOTES

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Devoted to  
INSURANCE AGENCY SALESMANSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

# Rough Notes

## 9 Steps in Better Letter Writing

By ALBERT J. SULLIVAN

**Do** you want to write letters with git-up-and-go? Read Mr. Sullivan's recommended nine steps to keep your letters from having that tired feeling.

**A**NYONE CAN write letters with git-up-and-go in them. You can, too. You can make the reader sit up and take notice. These *Nine steps* will help you do it.

*Step 1: Watch those first five words.*

The hardest five words in a letter to write are—the **FIRST FIVE**. Haven't you ever dictated the "Dear Sir" and then—blank? Stage fright at the letter's beginning accounts for this sort of thing:

We beg to acknowledge receipt of yours of the fifth, *or* Referring to your kind favor of the 12th we wish to advise, *or* In compliance with your request, would advise and so on....

The first five words in the letter are the *big* attention-getters. They're the headline of your message. Use them as such. Make the reader sit up and take notice from the very start. Make him say to himself, "This is a *real* person talking here and saying something worth listening to." Try these five opening gambits in your next five letters.

1. *Find a hook* in the letter you're answering to hang your opening on. Suppose a letter you receive has this:

Yesterday the basket of fruit I ordered was delivered. Most of it was O.K. except for half a dozen grapefruit. These were crushed. Can you do something about it?

That last question is the obvious hook. So jump right in with:

I certainly *can* do something about the grapefruit—and I *have*. Another half-dozen are on their way. And they'll be in perfect shape this time.

2. *Tell the reader* what he wants to know—right away. Start something like this:

Your order of Grim Gadgets was shipped August 2 by parcel post, *or* The Blayer Guarantee protects you against *every* mechanical failure.

3. *Get him on your side*. Especially before you ask him to do something for you or when you have to make a refusal of his written request:

Thanks for sending along those Marrich figures. They certainly opened my eyes, *or* It's a pleasure to be able to say "Yes" to the first part of your request, *or* Jim French suggested that I write, *or* You are right when you say, "Pennies add up these days."

4. *Start in the middle*, especially when you're selling in the letter. Figure out what the reader gets out of buying your product—and *put that up front!* Here's the way it goes:

The Mayer Playpen was made for sturdy children . . . *or* The Lewis Vacuum keeps the dirt right where it belongs—in the bag, *or* The flavor of

Tipton's Coffee is sealed in—you know it's fresh.

5. *The dramatic opener* is always effective. And it's easy. Just make the **OPENING PARAGRAPH** short and sweet—never more than eight words long. Here's how one man (a master letter-writer, by the way) started his answer to my request for restricted information when I had pulled out all the stops to persuade him:

You win! Here it is.

*Step 2: Make your close work for you.*

Don't forget that the last paragraph of your letter is your parting shot. In fact, next to the first five words, the most important part of your letter is the *last five words*.

The close of the letter can do two things: (1) make the reader *act*, or (2) leave a good impression of you,



*Get the reader on your side, especially before you ask him to do something for you or when you have to make a refusal of his written request.*