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Short Letters 11

Short paragraphs are an ideal way to ease yourself into a faster dictation, as there is no stress build up. An effective way to prepare is to break down the practising into single sentences. Pick out and drill any new outlines before starting, so that there are no hesitations. Read and remember one sentence, then say it out loud over and again, as you write it in shorthand, filling half a notepad page. Repeat this for the next sentence, filling the next half. It is important to hear the words as you are writing, so that the sound always triggers recall of the outline. I have kept the sentences quite short for this purpose, although one would use longer and more flowing sentences if these were real letters.

Finally, having mastered each sentence individually, read the whole passage out loud from the printed shorthand, recording yourself at the same time. This ensures your reading speed matches your shorthand writing capability. Now is a good time to introduce a rest break, then take down the whole passage from your recording. Swiftly move on to the next passage, to keep things rolling along and to prevent the mind from getting fatigued with the repetition. Delay reading back your take of the whole passage until you have forgotten the text, as this is the real test of whether your shorthand is up to scratch or not.

It is important to take lots of short breaks between practising spurts, walking away from the desk to give fingers, eyes, mind and limbs a rest, even if only for a minute or two. You don't have to calculate what the dictation speed is, all that is necessary is that you are under some pressure to keep up, but can still maintain flowing and readable outlines. Going from stressed scrawl to confident outlines at the same speed is a major achievement in itself. To provide extra stretching, you can increase the speed of the sound file in Audacity, using the Change Tempo setting, or in Express Scribe, which has a speed percentage slider.

Short Letters 11

1 Dear Mr White, We would like to thank you for your recent order with this company. This will be delivered to you on Friday morning of next week. We are working to improve our services to our customers. We have appointed several new area managers. We wish to get to know our clients better. This will enable us to provide an improved service. Your area manager Mr John Black will be contacting you within a few days. He will explain our new Customer Care policy that aims to expand our service. Please let us know if there is any way in which we can help you. Thank you for your valued custom over the years. (115 words)

2 Dear Resident, I am writing to let you know about our new community club. We will be opening at the Green Road Centre on the first of November. We will have lots of activities for everyone in the area. There will be a playgroup twice a week for preschool children. We will be offering after school activities throughout the year. Summer school holiday clubs are planned for next year as well. There are three groups during the week for older people to meet each other. I enclose our flyer giving full details of what is on offer. In the future we plan to increase our schedule to cover the needs of other local groups. I do hope you will be able to come to our opening day. I look forward to welcoming you and showing you our wonderful new facilities. (140 words)

3 Dear Friends, I am delighted to report on the success of our latest Society meeting. This took place on Monday the first of October at the Grand Hotel. The morning opened with a review by the Secretary of the year's activities. Our Treasurer presented a copy of the audited accounts to all present. Mr Brown gave a progress report on the new building work that is now underway. Mrs Gray gave a presentation showing photos and videos of the summer conference. Our new President Mr Greening spoke to us about the society's future plans. The meeting finished just after midday and was followed by a buffet lunch in the hotel restaurant. (111 words)

4 I am writing to enquire if you have any vacancies for a shorthand writer in your company. I understand that you undertake a large amount of court and government work. I am very interested in pursuing this type of career. I have achieved a shorthand speed of 150 words a minute. I have experience of taking notes of meetings, interviews and public speaking events. I also spent seven years working as a freelance reporter. This did include some court work on several high profile national cases. I enclose details of my qualifications and employment history. I would be grateful if you could keep my details on record for the future. I look forward to hearing from you. (117 words)

5 Dear Customer, I hope you will enjoy reading the enclosed catalogue. I am sure you will find many ideas for gifts to give at Christmas. Don't forget that there is a discount on your purchases when you place your order within the next six weeks. Our prices are much cheaper than many of the larger high street stores but at the same quality. You can order with confidence knowing that your items will arrive long before the Christmas rush begins. You can then continue to finish your gift shopping in a more leisurely way. I am confident that our vast range of gift products will give you many ideas for the Christmas season. (113 words)

6 Dear Friends, I hope this letter finds you all well and in good health. I just wanted to thank everyone for their kind wishes and lovely presents on my recent retirement. I shall be thinking of you all each time I see them. My years at the firm have been long and happy, but now is the time for something different. As a family we shall be taking a sailing holiday around the coast of this country. I intend to take up some new hobbies that I have been wanting to start for some time. We will have more time for taking long walks in the countryside. We are considering moving to a village where life will be less busy than here. I will let you know how we get on with all these new activities. The family send their best wishes for the future to you all. (148 words)

7 Dear Students, Here we are at the end of the college term. I hope you have all had a good time learning how to write in shorthand. I am pleased to say that no-one dropped out of the class this year. I am so glad that you have all kept on to the end of the course book. We shall soon be breaking up for Christmas. I would like to encourage you to continue practising over the holidays. If you can read through all the exercises again, that will be of great value. We now have February's exam dates confirmed, which are listed below. I am sure you will all do well if you keep up daily practise. We will spend January on revision and working towards your speed goals. With best wishes for a good holiday break, ready to start again next term with renewed energy to get those shorthand certificates that are now within your reach. (158 words) (Total 1248 words)