
UNIT 19 SOME KINDS OF FORMAL LETTERS

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19.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit will help you write formal letters required in many different situations from requesting for information to applying for a job. Through examples and activities, this unit will highlight the language and tone of such letters.

19.2 INTRODUCTION: DIFFERENT PURPOSES

Writing, just like speaking, is communication. In our letters and emails we need to express many things: gratitude, dissatisfaction, eagerness, willingness to help etc. Expressing ourselves well and with the correct level of formality is essential in formal or business correspondence. You already know how important it is to speak good English in an international working environment. If you work for a company, you probably will need to read and write a lot of English.

A good letter gets to the point as soon as possible: the purpose for which it is written is made evident to the readers. Look at these openings to letters. Which person is

- a. buying something?
- b. applying for a job?
- c. enquiring about places to stay?
- d. making a complaint?
- e. selling something?

1.

Dear Mr. Bailey,
I saw your advertisement in the Nursing Times for staff nurses in Canada...

2.

Dear Sir/Madam,
I'm writing to ask you for information about accommodation in Majorda Beach Resort for three days...

3.

Dear Ms. Naina,
Thank you for your letter of 15th February enclosing a cheque for Rs. 570.

4.

Dear Sir,
I am writing to you in regard to a fax machine I purchased some time back. I have a Bellawood Systems TFM-33. Almost a week ago...

5.

Sir,
We would like to place an order for ten 12-litre water heaters in your economy Komfort range: product number HT 00818...

Which of these sentences do you think continues each letter?

- i. Unfortunately the book you ordered costs Rs 650 including postage.
- ii. I would like to apply for the job, and am enclosing my curriculum vitae.
- iii. Your letter to us says you can give us a 10% discount on the showroom price.
- iv. The fax machine suddenly stopped working. I took it back to ABC Business Equipment in Dallas, Texas, where I had bought it.
- v. I'm thinking of staying there this summer, probably in a seaside cottage.

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In this unit, we will look at primarily three types of formal letters: (a) request letters (b) good news and good will letters and (c) bad news and complaint letters.

19.3 WRITING REQUEST LETTERS: LETTERS OF ENQUIRY

We write a letter of enquiry when we want to ask for more information concerning a product or service that interests us. We often write such a letter in response to an advertisement that we have seen in the newspaper, a magazine, or a commercial on television. At times, we are interested in buying a product, and want more information before making a decision.

Here is a reply to an enquiry. What letter do you think Mrs. Preeti Mohan wrote got this reply?

To
Mrs. Preeti Mohan
House no. 364/4 C
4th Cross, 3rd Main
Murugesh Palya
Bangalore 560 014

Dear Mrs. Mohan,

This is in response to your letter dated 10.2.2007.

With regards to your query about our product SONY minidisc players **MZ-RH910**, we would like to inform you that this model has been discontinued. This is why you have been unable to find our product in the market. We have replaced it with **SONY MZ-RH1**, which offers the same fine quality as the earlier model but has additional features, and also plays MP3s.

I am enclosing a list of the stores in your area where our products can be purchased, and would like to thank you for choosing our product.

Best wishes,

(Geet Sharma)
Manager, Sony Customer Care
Bangalore

Mrs. Preeti Mohan wanted to know why.....
.....
.....
.....

Letters of enquiry are normally neutral and polite to tone. This is because we generally do not know the person we are writing to. Here are some words and phrases that can be used to ask for information about a product or a service.

- Would (Could) you please send me...
- I would also like to know...
- Could you tell me whether...
- Please tell me how to...

Letters of enquiry can be sent by email too, especially if the advertisement is on a website or a company web page. The email to which you can write is usually given below, along with the company's name.

Check Your Progress 1

Given on the top of the next page is an advertisement for cotton T Shirts. You want to buy one for your brother who loves animals, especially reptiles. Email and find out (a) the sizes and the colours the T shirts are available in (b) the price of the T shirts (c) and the mode of payment.

Bright Eyes – Children’s Lizard T-Shirt

This amazing print actually looks you have a gecko walking up your body, it’s title **Bright Eyes** and is printed on a hand dyed t-shirt by The Ecowear.



Processing Time BEFORE Shipping: 10 – 12 Days - This is a **Special Order Item** and takes longer to be dispatched than our other products.

The Ecowear and other Products

Write to The Ecowear, No.6/1179, Cherooty Road, Calicut. Ph. 4010595, or email us at brighteyes@thecowear.in

19.3.1 Replies to Letters of Enquiry

Read the following letter. It is reply to a letter of enquiry.

NOVELTY SAFETY EQUIPMENT LTD
14th Floor Shun Koo Building
Aberdeen Hong Kong

20 Mar 2007

Mr. Tim Lee
 Manager
 Sun Lee Consultancy Ltd
 198 Fa Yuen Street
 Mongkok
 Kowloon

Enquiry regarding fire extinguishers

Dear Mr. Lee

Thank you for your enquiry regarding our newly released range of fire extinguishers.

You will see from the enclosed catalogue that the range has been extended to include some highly efficient portable extinguishers for use on construction sites.

We are offering to our existing customers a 15% discount on orders of extinguishers from this new range.

We look forward to your increased order at this discount rate.

Yours sincerely,
 Silvia Choi
 Merchandising Manager
 Enc. 1

Acknowledging receipt of an enquiry/request

Giving Reference

Establishing goodwill

Explaining action taken

Making an offer

How to you write replies to letters enquiring about a product or service? You need to

- acknowledge that you have received a request (*Thank you for your letter of ...*)

regarding .../ I refer to your enquiry about.../ I have received your letter of ... requesting information about...)

- give information or explain the action you have taken (*We enclose.../ We send you.../I have checked/looked into/investigated...*)
- give suggestions/recommendations if any (*The best option would be...I suggest that...*)
- apologize for not being able to give information/or be able to help (*Unfortunately, we regret to inform you that...*)
- establish goodwill (*I look forward to.../Please feel free to contact me again.../ Do not hesitate to contact me...*)

✓ **Check Your Progress 2**

Here is a reply to a letter of enquiry. Complete the email using appropriate phrases.

To: Mr. Siddartha Singh
 From: Elizabeth M Kotha
 Subj: Re Reservation

Dear Mr Singh,

.....the availability to a single room for six nights from Monday, 23 April 2007 to Monday, 30 April 2007.

.....we are fully booked during this period. However, I have contacted our sister hotel on Hong Kong Island and they have single rooms available. The room rate is \$1,200 per night.

If you would like me to reserve a room during the period you required, please

.....
 Regards,
 Elizabeth M Kotha
 Accommodation Booking Officer

19.4 WRITING GOODWILL AND GOOD NEWS LETTERS

What are goodwill letters? Unlike other letters we have discussed in this unit, there is no immediate purpose or direct need for writing such letters. We write goodwill letters when we wish to thank someone – for a presentation, for a service, for some information; or congratulate someone – for an award received, a job or a promotion. Through such goodwill letters, we forge personal relationships. Since it is not the ‘duty’ of the letter writer to write on such occasions, but his or her ‘goodwill’ that prompts the letter, such letters often come as a pleasant ‘surprise’ to the reader. They may be somewhat unexpected. Think how surprised and happy you would be

if you receive letter (or a phone call) from your teacher thanking you for helping him out in organizing a seminar or a cultural event. Your relationship with the teacher would change for the better and you would want to help him in future occasions. This is what a 'thank you' letter or 'congratulatory not' does.

19.4.1 Thank You Letters

Thanking someone orally seems to be so much easier! When we have to write, we suddenly realize that we do not have enough to say.

Imagine that you wish to thank guest speaker for a presentation in your college. It is easy to start with a straightforward "Thank you for..." or "I am writing to express my sincere appreciation for..." This works fine; the problem is what to say next... Ten minutes later we're still tinkering with the same three sentences, we are not satisfied with what we have written.

If you want to make you reader feel genuinely appreciated, you should go beyond generalities and offer specific detail. Rather than simply writing "Your presentation was truly first rate/ insightful," explain what is it was about the presentation you found valuable: "Your comments on quality control were especially useful. In fact, one of our team leaders has distributed a summary of your three-step approach."

Do you think the speaker would really believe you if you wrote "Your presentation was the best I've ever heard". Most probably not! It is important that we do not exaggerate and say things which the reader is not likely to believe. Readers usually find it easier to accept a simple thank you, rather than praise they know they do not deserve.

✓ Check Your Progress 3

You had invited Prof. Neena Pashupathi to speak on "Gender Sensitization Programmes" for the March 8 Women's Day Celebration. Write a letter to her thanking her speaking about the laws for women and Acts on gender discrimination. Invent the address and other details.

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19.4.2 Letters of Congratulation

Just as we congratulate people on their birthdays, engagement, marriage, on getting a job, we also need to learn to write good official letters to congratulate a colleague or a team member on opening a new firm, for publishing a book, for getting an award or a scholarship. As we have said earlier, these letters have no direct purpose, but only help in building relationships with people.

What do we include in a letter of congratulation? We begin with the specific occasion that has motivated us to write a congratulation letter, and then go on to express praise and approval in a positive, rather than one which says the same thing in many ways. The impact of the 'good wishes' gets lost in a long letter.

Read these short letters/emails of congratulations and underline the words which are used to praise and congratulate the readers.

1. We are proud to have such an outstanding design team working on our product. You truly deserved the Magma Giants Award for best performance of the years.
2. Many of us did not know that we have a hero in our midst. Josephine, I really admire you for the courage you have shown in rescuing the two children from a sinking boat last Saturday.
3. I just learned that your essay has won the first place in national competition. Congratulations! I know how strongly you felt about the issue, and how long you worked on developing your argument. You are a good example of how commitment and hard work pay off.

Here are some phrases that have been used:

- *We are proud to...*
- *You truly deserved...*
- *I really admire you for the courage...*
- *You are a good example of...*

Here are some phrases we can use in our letters of congratulation:

To being: we were delighted to hear that.../I just learnt of.../I was happy to learn.../I was not surprised to hear...

To talk about the occasion: your outstanding performance.../your outstanding achievement.../the prestigious award.../ a job well done...

To praise: accept my sincere congratulations.../commend you for.../could not imagine a more deserving.../very proud of you.../how much we appreciate...

To congratulate: my heartiest congratulations/I want to tell you.../I would like you to know...

Apart from congratulating people for their personal successes, we often need to thank people in our organization/institution for a job well done, or a promotion, for special initiatives taken in the work place, for getting a degree or award.

✓ Check Your Progress 4

A Complete this letter of congratulation with phrases given above.

June 25, 2006

Gururaja V K

G 15, Bellview Apartments

MG Road

Mangalore

Dear Gururaja:

.....at Deerwood Resorts Ltd,.....on your recent graduation from New York State University with your M.B.A. (Public Relations).

..... to read of your success in our weekly bulleting. Looking at your, it is obvious that you have a wide open future ahead of you. I can only hope that your experience working with us has contributed in some small way to your success.

On behalf of the management and staff a Deerwood Resorts....., whatever they may be.

Yours sincerely,

Prajwal Sahay

President and CEO

B. Your team has really worked hard and has achieved a target 10% increase in sales from the previous month. Write an email congratulating them for their achievement. Invent details wherever necessary.

To:

From:

Subject:

Dear.....

The numbers are in and I am proud to inform you that

.....

Congratulations!

19.5 WRITING BAD NEWS LETTERS

What are bad news letters? Bad news letters are those which provide bad news about products and services, which decline requests for information or help; which decline invitations or requests for favour; or refuse a job application. In this section, we will discuss two kinds of bad news letters: making a complaint and declining a request.

Bad news letters are easier to write when you remember the two formulas for organizing the content of such correspondence. Although the formulas appear to be

only slightly different, the reader is likely to respond to each format in a different way.

Usually, we can follow two approaches to giving someone bad news. Either state the bad news straightaway, without prefacing it, or prepare the reader first for the bad news, then give the bad news. The direct approach can be used as long as the complaint or the refusal doesn't sound abrupt harsh. The indirect approach is at times more appropriate because it helps in preserving relationships under difficult circumstances for both writer and reader.

19.5.1 Letters of Complaint

We write letters of complaint when we are dissatisfied with a product or service. When you make a complaint in writing it can sometimes be difficult to know what to say.

Study the sample letter given below carefully. In the letter some of the words are in bold. Try to say why the highlighted words are inappropriate or ineffective. This will help you to avoid common mistakes in writing letters of complaint.

2 March 2007

The Manager
Woodcraft Ltd.
Grafts Lifestyle, No.C2
Vikrampur
Secunderabad

Dear Sir,

I am really very disappointed by your shop.

I recently bought a sofa and **it just was not right**. It was terribly made and a complete waste of money. When I went back to complain, **a shop assistant was very rude** to me and she said she couldn't deal with the complaint there and then. She said I should write to the manager.

I think that I am entitled to my **money back**, so what I want is a full refund or if you cannot manage that, a credit note for the full amount. **I also want an apology** for being treated so badly.

Thank you for your attention.

One of the reasons for writing a letter of complaint is that we wish the reader to do something about the complaint. The letter above expresses so much anger that is sure to upset or irritate the reader. Let us find out what makes this letter ineffective and badly written.

'I recently bought a sofa and **it just was not right**'. This phrase 'just not right' is quite vague and does not tell the reader the actual problem with the product. It appears to be the customer's personal reaction to the product. If we said "*the sofa is too low and it is painful to sit in it for a long period of time*", the complaint becomes objective.

From the final paragraph it is not clear what the writer is more upset about – the unsuitability of a product, or his treatment at the shop. So the shop manager might choose not to respond to either complaint. "*A shop assistant was very rude to me*"

does not seem to give a picture of what made the complainant think so. It would be better to state a fact, rather than expression an opinion, for example, “*Your shop assistant does not seem to know how to handle complaints*” or that “*my complaint was not attended to, rather I was asked to write to you.*”

“*I also want an apology.*” Though it is quite tempting, we should give the company or the reader chance to explain, and therefore we should never ask for an apology. Also, the person you are writing to (or the person who will be dealing with your complaint) is unlikely to be the person who caused you trouble in the first place. When we are making a complaint, it is always helpful to write to people by name, therefore before writing the letter, we should try to find out or ask for people’s names and proper positions. But this is not always possible!

✓ **Check Your Progress 5**

A. Here is a letter of complaint about the paper hub of a fax machine. Read the underlined parts carefully and identify parts which are not satisfactory and suggest ways of rewriting them.

Dear Sir,

I am writing to you in regard to fax machine I purchased some time back. I have a Bellawood System TFM- 33. Almost a week ago, the maching failed to perform as it should. I then drove to Dallas, Texas, the place of purchase to see about getting either a replacement or a compensation for the defective machine.

One of the salespeople briefly inspected the machine and said the paper hub was worm. Naturally, I asked for a free hub replacement, but the gentleman said that you, the manufacturer, do not guarantee the paper hub for wear and tear. He said I would have to buy a new hub. But I chose not to buy it because I feel I am being cheated and am justified in asking for a replacement hub.

I'm demanding a replacement of the hub from you at no charge. It is difficult to believe that a product you are promoting in such a big way has actually a life cycle of merely six months.

Sincerely,

Robert Bennett

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B. Here is another version of the letter. Compare this version with the previous one, and say which one you think is more polite and why?

Dear Sir,

After many positive reports about the TFM33 fax machine. I bought one on

April 3, 2006, and installed it in my office. The TFM 33's performance was very satisfactory until October 1, 2006. On that day, the fax machine suddenly stopped working. Because it was not feeding paper properly, I took it back to ABC Business Equipment in Dallas, Texas, where I had bought it. Mr. James Dillon, The salesperson there told me that the problem was not caused by a defect but by normal wear and tear of the paper hub, for which the manufacturers provide no warranty.

I wouldn't expect a part in the product to wear out after only six months. Kindly let me know if mine is a general case, or the hub in my machine is defective.

I like the simple operation of the TFM 330 so I'd prefer that you replace the hub. I miss the convenience of the machine, and would like to start using it as soon as possible.

Sincerely,
Robert Bennett

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Letters of complaint are likely to be more successful if we focus on positive wording rather than negative wording or direct criticism. Most people respond more favourably to positive ideas than negative ones.

As we see from the two letters above, a positive wording changes a letter of complaint to a letter of request (for inspection): one asking for information about the expected life of the hub. The creates goodwill with the reader and the company we are complaining to, rather than putting them on the defensive. We know that when we are directly accused of something, our first instinct is to resist, and defend ourselves. This is what happens when we make direct accusations in our letter of complaint. Therefore, though our purpose is that of complaining (about a product or a service) it should come through in a letter as a **neutral** statement of facts and a **request** for some action. This is a better way to get a favourable response.

19.5.2 Answering Letters of Complaint

We know from experience that it is easier to write a letter of complaint than to answer one. The most important thing in answering letters of complaint is not to get defensive and fight back, but to give adequate explanations which will pacify the writer and which would help in straightening the company's or your relationship with the customer. How can this be done?

As readers we are most interested to know what the company/writer CAN DO and WILL DO, rather than what it CANNOT. Compare the examples below. Which would be more likely to get a positive reader response?

- *We cannot ship in lots of less than 12.* (what the company CANNOT DO)
- *To keep down packaging costs and to help customers save on shipping costs, we ship in lots of 12 or more.* (what the company DOES, or CAN DO)

In answering letters of complaint, it is also important that we do not project our company in a bad light. For this, it is important to speak in a positive tone about our product, services or company. This will ensure that the customer comes back to us and does not go to other products in the market.

√ Check Your Progress 6

In the following letter choose the options from within the brackets, that give the letter a positive tone.

Dear Mr Leung,

Ref: Customer Service

I refer to your letter of 6 November, 2006, in which you made several (1) **[complaints / comments]** related to the (2) **[functioning / failure]** of our online registration facility, the (3) **[issue/ lack]** of space at the exhibition venue, the physical safety of the attendees, and the available number of product leaflets. I thank you for your comments, which can help us improve our services in the future. Our online facility was (4) **[not working properly/working slowly]** because (5) **[there were too many/ an unexpectedly high number of]** visitors to that webpage just before the registration deadline, which made the server (6) **[ineffective/slow down]**.

The hotel was (7) **[not the best venue/ unsuitable]** for the large number of attendees due to many visitors registering just before the deadline. These registrations caused the situation in which we booked a place which was (8) **[too small/ less suitable]** for the exhibition.

To state it simply, we were (9) **[overwhelmed by the response of the public/ caught unprepared]**. This resulted in (10) **[uncomfortable/ less than desirable]** conditions because we had underestimated the space required and the security officers were (11) **[busy trying/unable]** to control the visitor flow.

As our resources were (12) **[prepared for a smaller/insufficient for the]** number of visitors, we unfortunately also prepared a small number of information leaflets on the products, which was (13) **[inconvenient for guests/not enough for the large number]**. Online copies of the leaflets are available at the website mentioned in the letterhead.

For next year's exhibition we will prepare for a larger number of visitors. I hope you will come. I look forward to seeing you there.

Yours sincerely,
K K Wong
Administration Officer

(task taken from <http://www.xint.com.hk/soundsystems2004/leaflets.htm>)

19.5.3 Declining a Request

Declining an invitation to a conference, or an event is also a “bad news letter”. Imagine that you wish to work in a Pharmaceutical company for your research project concerning sales promotion. You write to them asking for permission to work in the company for two weeks. This is the response you get from them. How would you react to this letter?

This letter is to inform you that Concordance Pharmaceuticals Ltd, has no interest in taking part in your sales promotion techniques research project. In fact, our company has a policy to keep its projected sales figures confidential and does not allow dissemination of such information to any third party.

Thank you for your interest in our organization. If we can help any other way, please let us know.

This refusal letter is a bit abrupt, and shows little interest in the research or the researcher. Now read the following letter, where the wording and tone makes the letter less offensive.

Thank you for thinking of Concordance Pharmaceuticals Ltd. as a possible contributor to your research.

A supportive and appreciative tone

Each year we receive a number of requests for help in various studies. We have guidelines to decide which requests we can honour. Our sales figures are to be kept within corporate headquarters until they are publicly announced through press releases, so we cannot help you with this year's sales figures.

Company policy explained
Bad news implied not stated

If you wish to use sales and earnings from a previous period, we could send you a copy of the last year's annual report.

The close is friendly,
positive and helpful

Usually official letters are kept short and do not give too many explanations for requests that are not honoured. This is because some of the information may be confidential. However, how to decline a request gently, without hurting the reader's sentiments is quite an art! My teacher remembers a time when she received a letter that was so delicately worded that she also missed the point (that her request had been declined.) The letter read something like this:

It was a pleasure interacting with you... it would be nice to interact along the lines discussed during this meeting...

If we have any particular projects, we will get in touch with you.

To avoid such confusion, it is always advisable to make it clear that a request is being declined!

19.7 LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we will look at primarily three types of formal letters: (a) request letters (b) good news and good will letters and (c) bad news and complaint letters. We discussed the language and the tone used in different kinds of letters. Through tasks and activities we wished to show that the language and style of letters depend on the purpose, context and the audience.

19.8 FURTHER READING

Poe, F. W. (1993). *McGraw-Hill Handbook of Business Letter Writing*. New York; McGraw-Hill.

19.9 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

Check Your Progress 1

To: brighteyes@thecowear.in
 From: vandanapte@yahoo.com
 Subject: Enquiry about T shirts

Dear Sir:

I am interested to buy a Bright Eyes T shirt. I want to find out whether

- you have an XXL size
- you have a T shirt (with a picture of a reptile) in black colour.

I would also like to know the price of a T-shirt in XXL size?

I am not comfortable using my credit card on the net, can I send you a demand draft? If it is possible, please let me know whom should I draw it in favour of?

Regards,
 Vandana Apte

Check Your Progress 2

This refers to your letter inquiring about the availability of a single room for six nights from Monday, 23 April 2007 to Monday, 30 April 2007. Unfortunately, we are fully booked during this period. However, I have contacted our sister hotel on Hong Kong Island and they have single rooms available. The room rate is \$1,200 per night.

If you would like me to reserve a room during the period you requested, please contact us at 040 22367859.

Check Your Progress 3

Dear Prof. Pashupathi,

Thank you for speaking to us on our Woman's Day Celebration.

Your talk on 'Gender Sensitization' clarified some basic concepts on gender, the factors and causes of gender discrimination, and gender roles and gender stereotyping. We were so inspired by your talk, that we have requested our Principal to give us permission to start a Gender Training Centre at our college. I will definitely require your guidance in this.

This you once again for the time you took from your busy schedule to share your experiences with us.

Sincerely,

Sushma Prakash
 President, Women's Day Celebrations
 St. Pious College

Check Your Progress 4

A.

Dear Gururaja:

We, the Management team at Deerwood Resorts Ltd. express our hearty congratulations to you on your recent graduation from New York State University with your M.B.A. (Public Relations).

We were not surprised/ We were delighted to read of your success in our weekly bulletin. Looking at your relentless work ethic and commitment to quality customer service/ sincerity and ability to make good decisions/ hard work and commitment, it is obvious that you have a wide-open future ahead of you. I can only hope that your experience working with us has contributed in some small way to your success.

On behalf of the management and staff at Deerwood Resorts we wish you all the best on your future endeavours/ we wish you luck for your future endeavours, whatever they may be.

Yours sincerely,
Prajwal Sahay
President and CEO

B.

To: teamapel@magnet.ac.in
FROM milindsalve@magnet.ac.in
SUBJECT: Congratulations!

Dear Team members,

The numbers are in and I am proud to inform you that our total sales for the period of April 15th through May 15th amount to Rs. 35,889.66, which represents a 10% increase over our sales for the preceding period.

You have achieved the goal we had decided on, and you are all to be highly commended for your achievement.

Congratulations!
Milind Salve

Check Your Progress 5

- (1) The second letter starts on a positive note
- (2) 'Failed to perform as it should' does not give the exact problem whereas 'it was not feeding paper properly' does.
- (3) 'The gentleman said..' sounds rude.
- (4) 'you, the manufacturer' is too personal; a simple 'the manufacturers' is neutral and formal
- (5) 'I feel I am being cheated' is a direct accusation.
- (6) The second letter gives the writer a chance to explain, whereas the first letter takes it for granted that the manufacturers are at fault.
- (7) "I wouldn't expect a part of the product..." is a positive comment while "It is difficult to believe that..." is a criticism.
- (8) The letter ends on a positive note rather than a criticism.

Check Your Progress 6

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|------------------------------------|---|
| (1) comments | (8) less suitable |
| (2) functioning | (9) overwhelmed by the response of the public |
| (3) issue | (10) less than desirable |
| (4) working slowly | (11) busy trying/unable |
| (5) an unexpectedly high number of | (12) prepared for a smaller |
| (6) slow down | (13) not enough for the large number |
| (7) not the best venue | |