

## Writing a Business Letter

You will use business letters often, probably more often than you think. Cover letters, complaint letters, and even letters to legislators use business letter format. The better you are at writing these types of letters the more successful you will be.

### Guidelines for Writing a Business Letter

- **Get to the Point:** business people have a limited amount of time, so one page is more than enough for most business letters. Two is acceptable if the information is really, really important.
- **Include All Relevant Information:** provide the specific information your reader will need to make an immediate decision.
- **Find the Right Person:** it's highly unlikely that your letter will be passed on; a letter to the wrong person is a waste of paper, postage, and time.
- **Be Formal:** your tone and diction should be formal, but not overly-academic or wordy.
- **Avoid Errors:** nothing is more destructive to your credibility than careless spelling and grammar.

### Formatting the Introduction

- Include your name and contact information at the top of the document.
- Provide the date.
- Send the letter to an actual person, not "to whom it may concern".
- If the person is a woman, use 'Ms.," unless you *know* she's married and prefers "Mrs.," or she uses an honorary title like "Dr." or "Prof."
- Nothing is abbreviated except personal titles (Dr., Ms.) and the postal abbreviation of the state
- Always mail the letter on the same day it is dated.

### A Sample Introduction:

## Charles Bukowski

1211 Pointview Terrace, Los Angeles, CA 90110 • (213) 443-0445 • Charles.Bukowski@factotum.com

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12 September, 2008

Dr. Maria Bellow  
Valencia Health Clinic  
8800 Valencia Boulevard, Suite A  
San Francisco, CA, 90014

Dear Dr. Bellow:

# UCD WRITING CENTER

*We empower writers*

## The Body Paragraphs

- **Use Block Format:**
  - Paragraphs are single-spaced and left-justified.
  - Don't tab in for paragraph breaks.
  - There is one line-space between paragraphs.
- **Opening Paragraph**
  - Introduce yourself if you don't know the person to whom you're writing.
  - Outline the purpose of your letter: the Who, What, When, Where, and Why.
- **Central Paragraphs**
  - Provide information to back up the claims made in your opening paragraph.
  - Don't assume your reader knows all the facts and figures.
  - Explain and justify your conclusions.
  - Disarm obstacles and opposing arguments.
  - Avoid industry jargon (unless you know your reader is familiar with it).
- **Closing Paragraph/Call to Action**
  - Ask directly for what you want.
  - Tell the addressee exactly what they need to do to fulfill your request.
  - Explain what your part in the action will be.
  - Include contact information (even though it's in your letterhead).
  - Thank them for their attention.

## The Closing

- Use a formal-sounding closer like "Sincerely," "Best," "Thank you," or "Regards."
- Capitalize first word only and use a comma afterward.
- Leave four spaces below the closing, and then type your name and, if applicable, your title.

## Additional Information

- Include a reference to any enclosures you might have included.
- Indicate "CCs," additional persons to whom the letter will be sent.
- Don't use a postscript (p.s.); if you have something more to say, go back and say it in the letter.