



# Discipline Specific Writing Business Letters

When writing a business letter, your goal is to communicate your message clearly and concisely while creating a positive impression of yourself and your organization. Here are some tips to help you make a strong impression with your business letter.

## Basic Letter Format

- **Margins**

Set margins at the left and right, top and bottom, at 1 to 1.5 inches.

- **Paragraphs**

Single-space within paragraphs; double-space between paragraphs. Do not indent the first line of the paragraph.

- **Justification**

Use left justification and leave the right margin ragged (uneven).

## Basic Letter Details

- **Heading**

The heading provides the reader with a return address. Type the address (do not include the writer's name) at the top of the letter. The address should be aligned on the left side of the page. Spell out words such as *Road*, *Street*, and *West*. If you are using letterhead stationery (stationery with the sender's name and contact information already printed on it), omit the address.

- **Date**

The date shows when the letter was written. It appears directly below the heading. Write the date as *month, day, year* with a single comma (ex: August 3, 2006). Do not abbreviate the month (ex: Aug.) or use a number in its place.

5 Hill Street  
Madison, WI 53700  
March 7, 2006

1403 South Queen Street  
Honolulu, HI 96819-5912  
June 17, 2004

- **Inside address**

The inside address gives the name and complete mailing address of the person to whom the letter is being sent. Type it flush left and include as many details as necessary, in this order:

- Reader's courtesy title, name, and job title (if the job title is one word)
- Reader's job title (if two or more words)
- Office or department
- Organization name

- Street address/PO box/suite/room (comma precedes Northeast or other directional)
- City, state, ZIP code (or city, province, postal code)
- Country (if not the United States)

Ms. Abigail Brown, Manager  
Rena's Restaurant  
3706 Chamberlain Avenue, Southeast  
Bar Harbor, ME 04609

Dr. Willard R. Moss  
Vice President  
Empire Check Printing  
200 Renaissance Drive  
Detroit, MI 40610

- **Salutation**

The salutation personalizes the message. Capitalize all first letters and place a colon after the name.

Dear Ms. Brown:

Dear Dr. Moss:

- **Body**

Each paragraph should be single-spaced and left-justified. Do not indent at the beginning of your paragraphs. Skip a line between paragraphs. Organize the body of your letter into three parts.

- Opening: State the situation (reason for writing, background information)
- Middle: Give the full explanation, supporting points and details. If your message is good or neutral news, make your key point early. For bad news or a persuasive message, build up to the main point.
- Closing: End with a call for action (what should happen next) and, if appropriate, mention future contact.

The claim of your client, Mr. Kevin A. Murphy, for \$850 to replace the golf clubs that were stolen from him in Scottsdale is covered under his homeowner's policy.

To process Mr. Murphy's claim, we must have a copy of the police report filed at the time of the theft. Please contact the police agency handling the theft report and have the agency forward us a copy addressed to my attention.

As soon as we receive the police report, Mr. Murphy's check will be sent to your office.

The first paragraph states the situation and provides the purpose for writing. The second paragraph gives the reader details he or she needs, and the final paragraph tells the reader what should happen next.

- **Complimentary closing**

The closing provides a polite word or phrase to end the message. Use closings such as *Yours sincerely* or *Best wishes*. Capitalize only the first word and add a comma after the closing. Skip a line between the final paragraph and the closing.

- **Signature block**

The signature block contains the writer's name and job title. Skip 4-6 lines between the closing and the signature block. On your final draft, sign your name by hand in the blank space.

## Optional Additions to the Business Letter

- **Enclosure note**

Use an enclosure note when you enclose something with the letter (for example, a manuscript or a check). This note goes below the signature block at the left margin. Type *Enclosure(s)* or *Enc(s)*. Then indicate the number of enclosures or list them by name with the names stacked vertically.

Enclosures:      Check for \$375                      Enclosures (2)  
                                 Copy of invoice A2814

- **Postscript**

A postscript contains a personal or final note. Type P.S. (with periods but no colon) followed by the message.

Before you send your letter, review your ideas, organization, voice and mechanics.

- Are all names, dates and details accurate? Are explanations clear?
- Is information presented in a logical order?
- Do you use a friendly but professional tone that is tuned into the reader's perspective?
- Do you have correct grammar, punctuation, usage and mechanics?
- Have you spelled everything correctly (Especially company's and people's names)
- Would your sentences pass the 'read aloud' test? Are they smooth and concise?

## Example Business Letter

101 East Street  
Durham, NH 03824  
July 21, 2008

Mr. James Jones, President  
Speed-E Delivery Services  
4321 State Avenue  
Detroit, MI 40610

Dear Mr. Jones:

Recently, I used your company's services to ship homemade cookies to my aunt, who lives in California. I was dismayed when my aunt called to say the cookies had arrived moldy and crumbly. They also arrived a week late.

I am writing to request a refund for the shipping and handling charges. I have included a receipt for the shipping and handling charges to assist you in processing my request. I hope the request will be processed as quickly as possible.

I have used your services many times before for shipping my homemade treats, and they have always arrived fresh and in a timely manner. I sincerely hope this is an isolated incident and that my future shipments of baked goods will not meet similar fates.

Yours sincerely,

Clara Whittle

Enclosures (1)

**This handout was modified from:** *The Business Writer*, edited by John VanRys, Verne Meyer, and Pat Sebranek. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2006 and *A Writing Handbook for University of New Hampshire: Whittemore School of Business and Economics*, edited by James L. Clark and Lyn R. Clark. United States: Thomson, 2004.