

The Writing Center

HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER

Consider the format:

- ✓ Regardless of content, follow business standards regarding the appearance of the letter.
- ✓ Business letters should be typed and composed in a common font such as Arial or Times New Roman.
- ✓ Employ block paragraphing - i.e., to start a new paragraph, hit "enter" twice and don't use an indent.
- ✓ If you're printing the letter to send, consider using company letterhead. This looks professional and provides your company's logo and contact information. If you do use letterhead, avoid using "we" in the text, as what you say represents the company, not just you.
- ✓ An emailed business letter should also be composed in a common font.
- ✓ Generally, use black lettering on white background in a business letter or email.

Include some information about your company:

- ✓ List your company name and the company address, with each part of the address written on a different line.
- ✓ If you're self-employed or an independent contractor, add your name either in place of the company name or above it.

NOTE: If your company has pre-designed letterhead, you can use this instead of typing out your company and address. See above.

- ✓ If you're typing out the address, it should appear either right or left justified at the top of the page, depending on you and your company's preference.

Include the date:

- ✓ Writing out the full date is the most professional choice. For example, write either "April 1, 2014" or "1 April 2014." This should appear left justified a few lines below the sender's address.

Add recipient information:

- ✓ Write out the recipient's full name, title (if applicable), company name, and address in that order, with each piece of information on a separate line. If necessary, include a reference number. The recipient's information should be left justified a few lines below the date.

Choose a salutation:

- ✓ The salutation is an important indicator of respect. The salutation you choose will depend on whether you know the person to whom you're writing, how well you know him/her, and the level of formality in your relationship.
- ✓ Some options:
 - Employ "To Whom It May Concern:" *only* if you don't know whom, specifically, you're addressing.
 - If you do not know the recipient well, "Dear Sir/Madam" is a safe choice.
 - You may also use the recipient's title and last name, e.g. "Dear Dr. Smith."
 - If you know the recipient well and enjoy an informal relationship with him or her, you may consider using a first name, e.g. "Dear Susan."
 - If you are unsure of the recipient's gender, simply type the whole name, e.g. "Dear Kris Smith."
 - Remember to use a comma after a salutation or a colon after "To Whom It May Concern."

Tone & Style:

- ✓ Be brief, courteous, and professional. Make your letter a quick read by diving straight into the matter. For instance, you can always start with "I am writing you regarding..." and go from there.
- ✓ Avoid flowery transitions, big words, or lengthy sentences - your intent should be to communicate what needs to be said as quickly and cleanly as possible.
- ✓ Avoid passive voice and try not to editorialize.
- ✓ Write clearly and concisely. Let your reader know exactly what you are trying to say. In particular, if you want some specific result or action from your letter, state what it is.
- ✓ Explain your position in as few words as possible.
- ✓ Be conversational when appropriate.
- ✓ Avoid form letters if possible - you cannot build a relationship with canned impersonal letters. However, stay away from colloquial language or slang such as "you know," "I mean," or "wanna/gonna."
- ✓ Keep the tone businesslike, but be friendly and helpful.
- ✓ If you know the recipient well, it's fine to include a friendly line sending good wishes.
- ✓ Use your judgment when determining how much personality to reveal. Sometimes adding a little humor is actually helpful in a business setting, but err on the side of caution before making a joke.
- ✓ Most likely the purpose of your letter is persuasive: to change someone's mind, correct a problem, collect money, or take action. Make your case.

Wrap it up:

- ✓ In the last paragraph, summarize your points and clearly outline either your planned course of action or what you expect from the recipient.
- ✓ Note that the recipient may contact you with questions or concerns, and say thank you for his or her attention to the letter/matter at hand.

In closing:

- ✓ The closing, like the salutation, is an indicator of respect and formality. "Yours sincerely" or "Sincerely" is generally a safe bet
- ✓ Also consider "Cordially," "Respectfully," "Regards" and "Yours Truly."
- ✓ Slightly less formal but still professional closings include "All the best," "Best wishes," "Warm regards," and "Thank you."
- ✓ Use a comma after your closing.

Sign the letter:

- ✓ Leave about four lines empty for your signature.
- ✓ Sign the letter after you've printed it, or, if you're sending it via email, scan an image of your signature and affix it to this part of the letter.
- ✓ Use blue or black ink for your signature
- ✓ Beneath your signature, type your name, phone number, email, and other contact information.

If necessary, include "Enclosures:"

- ✓ If you've enclosed additional documents for review, note this a few lines beneath your contact info by listing the number and type of documents, e.g. "Enclosures (2): resume, brochure."

Be sure to edit before you send the letter.

Sample Business Letter

3519 Front Street
Mount Celebres, CA 65286

October 5, 2004

Ms. Betty Johnson
Accounts Payable
The Cooking Store
765 Berliner Plaza
Industrial Point, CA 68534

Dear Ms Johnson:

It has come to my attention that your company, The Cooking Store has been late with paying their invoices for the past three months. In order to encourage our customers to pay for their invoices before the due ate, we have implemented a discount model where we'll give you 2% off your invoice if you pay us within 10 days of receiving the invoice.

I hope that everything is going well for you and your company. You are one of our biggest customers, and we appreciate your business. If you have any questions, you can feel free to contact me at (555) 555-5555.

Sincerely,

Signature

Bob Powers
Accounts Receivable

Sample Business Letter #2

23 Winner's Road
New Employee Town, PA 12345

March 16, 2001

Ernie English
1234 Writing Lab Lane
Write City, IN 12345

Dear Mr. English:

The first paragraph of a typical business letter is used to state the main point of the letter. Begin with a friendly opening; then quickly transition into the purpose of your letter. Use a couple of sentences to explain the purpose, but do not go in to detail until the next paragraph.

Beginning with the second paragraph, state the supporting details to justify your purpose. These may take the form of background information, statistics or first-hand accounts. A few short paragraphs within the body of the letter should be enough to support your reasoning.

Finally, in the closing paragraph, briefly restate your purpose and why it is important. If the purpose of your letter is employment related, consider ending your letter with your contact information. However, if the purpose is informational, think about closing with gratitude for the reader's time.

Sincerely,

Lucy Letter

Adapted from "How to Write a Business Letter" wikihow.com and Purdue Owl "Sample Business Letters"

