

Business Letters at a Glance

1 | Look at the sample business letter and discuss the questions below.

- 1. Identify and discuss the function of each part of the letter.
- 2. Discuss how a business letter is different from a personal letter.
- 3. In what situations have you written business letters?
- 4. What types of business letters have you received recently?

Date

Inside Address

Salutation

Reference Line

Complimentary Closings

Enclosure Notation

Copy Notation

FUTURA ENTERPRISES
1000 Main St. Unit 402, Vancouver BC V6A 2W1

April 27, 2010

Ms. Theresa Dixon
53 Erb St.
Waterloo, ON
N2J 1L7

Dear Ms. Dixon:

Reference: 10-028

I would like to thank you for your letter dated March 28, 2010. I am writing to inform you of the progress we are making towards resolving your concerns.

I understand from your letter that you have already been in contact with our service department by telephone, and that your concerns were not addressed. At this time, our legal department is investigating your claim, a copy of which is enclosed for your reference.

Please be assured that we value our customers and take their concerns very seriously. We look forward to a timely and mutually agreeable resolution to this matter.

Yours sincerely,
J. McAdams
Jason McAdams
V.P. Sales and Service

Encl: copy of claim
Cc: Bill Davies, Manager, Futura Enterprises

Letterhead
(or return address)

Introductory Paragraph

Body

Closing Paragraph

A Quick Guide to Business Letter Writing

1 | Read the text below and answer the questions.

Parts of a Business Letter

The Return Address or Letterhead

The return address is the sender's address. It does not include the sender's name. If a letter is sent by a company, it is usually on letterhead, which includes the name and address of the company.

The Date

The date is written in a specific format. It includes the month, day and year, usually in that order.

The Inside Address

The inside address is the address of the person or company to whom you are sending your letter. It should include the name and title of the recipient and the full address.

The Salutation

The salutation usually begins with *Dear* and ends with a colon. If you know the name of the person you are writing to, the last name is preceded by a title (e.g., Mr., Mrs., Ms.). If you do not know the name, choose a salutation that includes both genders. For example, instead of *Dear Sir* you can use *Dear Sir or Madam* or *To Whom it May Concern*.

The Reference

The reference alerts the reader to the subject of the letter. It can also refer to a specific file number, previous correspondence or a person's name. It is brief and takes the form of a phrase rather than a sentence.

The Opening Paragraph

The first paragraph should state the purpose of the letter. Make it clear why you are writing the letter. Are you writing to complain about something, to make a request, to inform someone of something? Sentence openers, such as *This letter is to complain about ...*; *I am writing to apply for the position of ...* are used to state the purpose of your letter.

The Body of the Letter

The body of the letter gives details or background information related to the purpose of the letter. A good business letter states information clearly and concisely. Sentences should not be too long. The entire letter should fit easily on one page.

The Concluding Paragraph

The end of the letter sometimes states the action you want the reader to take (or the action you will take), for example: *Please do not hesitate to call me if you need more information*. It can also include a reference to future contact with the reader, for example: *I look forward to meeting with you to discuss this matter in greater detail*; *I look forward to hearing from you in the near future*. When making a complaint, a business letter often ends with a request, for example: *Please give this matter your immediate attention*.

The Complimentary Closing

The complimentary closing adds a polite end to the letter. It begins with a capital letter and ends with a comma (e.g., *Yours sincerely,*). It is followed by the your signature and name. Under it, you can include your contact information (name, email, phone number) for quick reference.

Spelling and Grammar

You should always spell- and grammar-check your letter before sending it. Remember that the spell-check feature on your computer will not help if you spell the word correctly but use it incorrectly. Use a dictionary or a thesaurus if you are unsure how a word is used.

Reread your letter carefully. You may be surprised at the number of errors you find. It can be helpful to read the letter out loud to yourself to check for tone and the length of sentences. You can also ask someone else to proof read your letter before sending it out.

2 | Circle True or False.

1. A letter written by an employee of a company will probably be written on letterhead. **T F**
2. The reference is a sentence that states the purpose of the letter. **T F**
3. The inside address is the address of the person writing the letter. **T F**
4. The salutation should always end in a colon. **T F**
5. The salutation should never include a person's title. **T F**
6. If you are writing to complain about something, it is best not to state this in the opening paragraph. **T F**
7. The concluding paragraph can include a reference to future contact with the reader. **T F**
8. When you are writing a letter of complaint, the final paragraph should tell the reader what you want them to do. **T F**

3 | Discuss the following questions.

1. Why do you think a business letter should be no longer than a page in length?
2. Why is it important to state your purpose at the beginning of the letter?
3. How are business letter writing conventions in Canada different from those in other countries?

The Opening Paragraph

The opening paragraph of a business letter begins by telling the reader the reason for writing. It is usually stated directly and clearly. For example:

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|
| • <i>I am writing to ...</i> | } | <i>apologize for ...</i> |
| • <i>I would like to ...</i> | | <i>inform you about ...</i> |
| • <i>This letter is to ...</i> | | <i>complain about ...</i> |
| • <i>This is to ...</i> | | <i>apply for ...</i> |

1 | Imagine you are writing letters for the following situations. Decide who you will address the letter to. Write a salutation and an opening sentence that states your reason for writing.

1. You were charged for telephone calls you didn't make.
2. You are an insurance agent and made a mistake on a client's policy.
3. You want information about a company's services.
4. You want to ask a professor for a reference.
5. You are applying for a job.
6. You want to complain about a policy being implemented by the company you work for.
7. You want to cancel your Internet service.
8. You want to confirm the conditions of a verbal agreement that you have with a client.

2 | Think of three other situations in which you would write a letter. Then write opening sentences that state your purpose.

Grammar in Context: Prepositional Collocations

When stating the purpose of a letter, we often use verbs or adjectives followed by one or more prepositions. These are called prepositional collocations.

For example: *I am writing to inform you about decisions made at the last board meeting.*

- 1** Complete the sentences below with the correct verb or adjective followed by an appropriate preposition (e.g., *for*, *to*, *with*, *about*). Then write six sentences of your own using prepositional collocations.

thank	apply	inform	respond
inquire	upset	interested	complain
invite	sorry	concerned	apologize

1. I would like to _____ my absence at the meeting.
2. I am _____ the lack of supervision in the playground.
3. I am writing to _____ the poor service I received at your store.
4. I am very _____ not being able to meet the deadline.
5. We would like to _____ you _____ the ABC Company's open house on Saturday, June 16 at 1:00 p.m.
6. I am writing to _____ you _____ the new budget proposal.
7. I would like to take this opportunity to _____ you _____ being a loyal customer over the years.
8. I am _____ finding out about the training programs that you offer.
9. I am very _____ the way I was treated by one of your admin staff.
10. I am writing to _____ the position you have available.
11. I am _____ your advertisement in the *Globe and Mail* on June 3, 2009.
12. I would like to _____ the position of Sales Manager that was advertised in the *Kingston Whig Standard* on September 31, 2010.

Expressions for Letter Writing

Here are some common expressions used in business writing:

- *I/we regret to inform you that ...*
- *I am writing to request that ...*
- *I would be delighted/pleased/delighted/happy to ...*
- *Please find enclosed ...*
- *I am afraid that ...*
- *I wish to inform you that ...*
- *I would appreciate it if you could ...*
- *I am writing to confirm our telephone conversation of [date].*
- *Could you please ...?*
- *Unfortunately ...*
- *I look forward to hearing from you soon ...*
- *I would be grateful if you could ...*
- *Please be advised that ...*
- *I would appreciate your immediate attention to this matter.*

1 | Write expressions you could use for the following situations:

1. Giving bad news:

2. Making a request:

3. Stating the purpose of a letter:

4. Offering to do something:

5. Referring to a future contact:

6. Including an additional document with a letter:

Letter Closings

Here are some common expressions used at the end of a business letter:

Closing Remarks

- *Thank you for your assistance in this matter*
- *I look forward to hearing from you soon/meeting with you next week*
- *Thank you for your help*
- *Please look into this matter*
- *Please contact me/us at your earliest convenience*
- *Please contact us again if we can help in any way/if there are any problems/if you have any questions*

Complimentary Closings

- *Yours truly*
 - *Yours sincerely*
 - *Sincerely*
- *Thank you*
 - *Thanks*
- *Best wishes*
 - *All the best*
 - *Best of luck*
- *Warm regards*
 - *Best regards*

1

Write appropriate closing remarks and complimentary closings for each situation.

Situation	Closing Remarks	Complimentary Closings
1. A letter to your Member of Parliament thanking him/her for help getting a visa for a family member		
2. A letter asking Revenue Canada to review your income tax return because you think there was a mistake		
3. A letter to your financial advisor to thank her for her service		
4. A letter to a client offering to give more information if he/she needs it		
5. A letter to a customer advising him/her that a payment is overdue		
6. A letter of complaint requesting that some action be taken		

Gender-neutral Language

It is important to use neutral language in business writing. Gender-neutral language means not referring to a person's gender or making assumptions about their marital status. For example:

In the salutation

- We use the neutral title *Ms.* instead of *Mrs.* or *Miss* to avoid assumptions about a woman's marital status.
- We use *Dear Sir/Madam* rather than *Dear Sir* if we don't know the name or gender of the reader.

In the body of the letter

- We use gender-neutral pronouns when we don't know the person being referred to in the letter. For example, we would say *A client can choose his/her own program* instead of *A client can choose his own program*.
- For job titles, we use *chairperson*, *salesperson* or *sales associate* instead of *chairman* or *salesman*.
- We avoid referring to gender when gender is not relevant. For example, we would say *staff members* instead of *the girls/women in the office*.

1 

Search the Internet for other examples of neutral language. Create a list of the examples you find. Compare and share your list with classmates.

Possible search terms: *neutral language; gender-neutral language; non-discriminatory language*

2

With a partner, discuss what may be wrong with each of the sentences below. If necessary, change the sentence so that it uses gender-neutral language.

1. You are invited to our annual Open House on February 28. We would like to extend this invitation to your wife as well.
2. I am writing to complain about one of the salesmen in your show room.
3. A manager should treat his staff fairly.
4. The male nurse who took care of me was very helpful.
5. Each student is expected to bring a notebook to class with him.
6. The mailman left the mail at the side door and it got all wet.
7. Dear Mrs. Jones:
8. The girl answering the phone in your office was very rude to me.

Errors in Letter-writing Conventions

1

This letter has nine errors relating to proper business letter conventions. Circle and correct them. Re-write the letter so that it is correct.

Mrs. Lucinda Minto, Manager
Bright Star Lighting Store
11 Glendale Ave.
Oshawa, ON L1H 8K9

Monday September 12, 2009

Dear Lucinda;

On August 25, 2009, I bought a floor lamp in your store. Unfortunately, I wasn't able to use it because it did not work properly. Every time I switched it on, it switched off by itself after about 30 minutes. I took the lamp back to the store but the salesgirl refused to give me my money back. I had a telephone conversation with you about it and you confirmed that your store's policy is to exchange faulty merchandise rather than refund the money. Unfortunately, the lamp that I want is no longer available at your store. Given these circumstances, I would like to request that you refund my money.

I want to hear from you soon.

Cheers,

Marisa Romer

2

Answer the questions.

1. What is the purpose of the letter?
2. What is the problem?
3. What is the customer requesting?
4. Is it a reasonable request? Why?

Letter Editing

- 1
- The letter below has seven errors in the use of verb tenses. Underline the errors and re-write the letter so that it is correct.

February 16, 2010

Zakir Khan, Patient Relations Officer
Pineview Hospital
99 Jupiter Road
Sault Ste Marie, ON P6G 1V9

Dear Mr. Khan:

I write on behalf of my mother who is a patient in the Intensive Care Unit at Pineview Hospital from February 2nd to February 10th of this year. While she stayed in the hospital, one of the cleaning staff accidently threw her hearing aid in the garbage. The nurse manager in ICU was telling me that I should contact you about getting the hearing aid replaced. The nurse manager also has told me that the hospital would pay for the replacement.

Please send me the necessary forms so that I can begin this process as soon as possible because my mother will have great difficulty hearing without her hearing aid.

Sincerely,

Thomas Rhiner

- 2
- Are the statements below true or false? Circle your answer.

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1. This is a letter of complaint. | T | F |
| 2. The actual patient is not writing the letter. | T | F |
| 3. The cleaning staff didn't intend to throw the hearing aid in the garbage. | T | F |
| 4. The hospital will not pay for a new hearing aid. | T | F |
| 5. The hospital will complete the forms. | T | F |
| 6. The man has difficulty hearing. | T | F |

- 3
- Discuss the following.

- How can errors in verb tenses confuse the reader?
- Which errors in the letter above are particularly confusing? Why?

Letter Editing Checklist

- 1
- The following is a list of things to look for when proofreading your letters. It might be helpful to proofread in two stages.

Stage 1: look for errors in style and content

Stage 2: look for errors in grammar, punctuation and spelling

Stage 1

Content

The purpose of the letter is clear to the reader.

All the necessary details are included in the letter.

The overall message is clear to the reader.

Expressions appropriate to a business letter are used.

There is neutral language in the letter.

The letter has the appropriate level of formality.

Letter-writing Conventions

The letter includes the sender’s address.

The date is written in the proper format.

The letter includes the name and address of the reader.

The letter includes an appropriate salutation.

The opening sentence states the purpose of the letter.

The body of the letter has all the information the reader needs.

The letter includes an appropriate closing sentence.

The letter includes an appropriate complimentary closing.

Stage 2

Grammar

Verb tenses are used correctly.

There is subject-verb agreement in all sentences.

Prepositions and articles are used correctly.

Pronouns are used correctly.

Punctuation

There is a colon after the opening salutation.

There are capital letters at the beginning of every sentence and proper names.

There are periods at the end of sentences.

There are commas where necessary (including after the complimentary closing).

Spelling

All words are spelled correctly.