

Communication Skills: Lecture No. 13

Module 5

Lecture 1

LETTER WRITING

Welcome to NPTEL's course on *Communication Skills*. The focus of *Module 5* is business and professional writing. In this first lecture of the module, I am going to discuss *letter writing*.

In this Lecture . . .

You will learn and understand -

The need for writing effective letters

Elements of a business letter

Three Basic Layouts

Elements of a business letter in Detail

Business Letter Writing

You will learn and understand, first of all, *the need for writing effective letters* and then *the elements of a business letter*. You will come to know of the thirteen elements of business letter, followed by *three basic layouts* for structuring a business letter.

Do we really need business letters in the internet era?

I would say ‘certainly, yes’. We definitely need to know, and understand the complexities of writing a business letter in an internet era despite the fact that communication has improved so much that we are able to communicate the same idea through e-mail at a faster pace. Besides, writing comprises both formal and informal aspects. A letter written to a friend is bound to be informal; whereas, while composing a business letter, formal norms of writing should be followed.

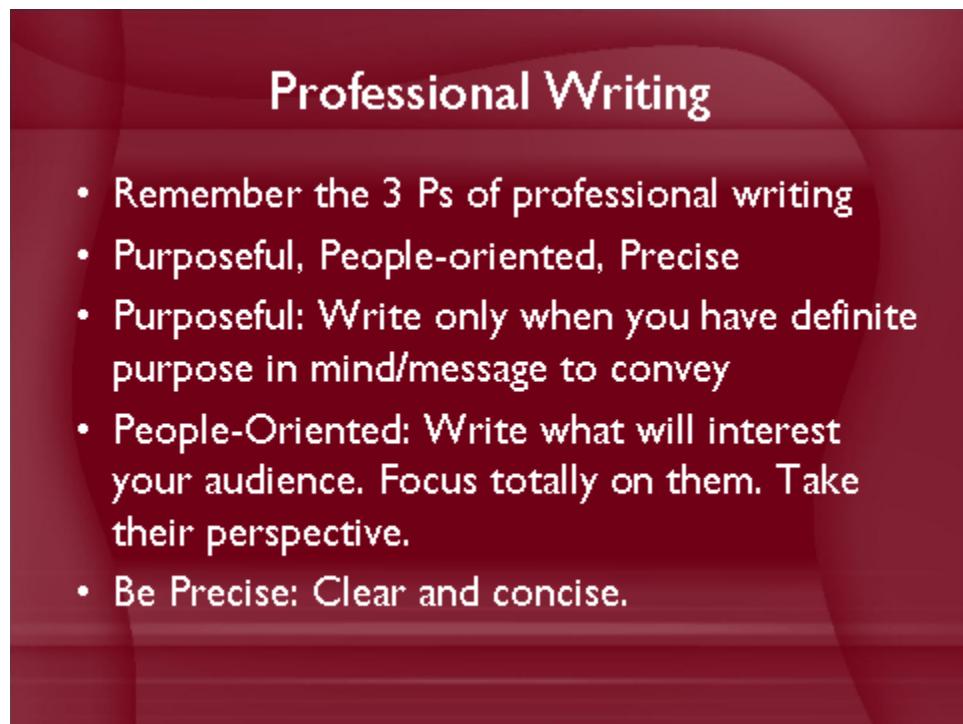
Recording Purpose

Apart from being formal, business correspondence can be recorded or stored for future use. Most of them have legal validity. Some of the highly professional letters are sometimes kept confidential. For instance, letters written by the President of a country during war times are kept secret. And then, when they are made available for the public after many years, they are usually sold out for millions of dollars. So, you can understand the gravity of a formal letter.

Now in its terms of using it in business sense, it also gives you a professional outlook. Now what do you mean of professional outlook?

Professional Outlook

Each letter, however formal it might be, reflects the personality of the person who wrote it, and bears its own character. Nonetheless, in order to give a professional outlook to a letter, one has to follow certain principles. Remember first, the 3 Ps of professional writing:



When it gives a professional outlook, it generates good will for the organization. It also helps in building up the reputation of that organization.

Elements of a Business Letter

Elements of a Business Letter

- | | |
|--|---|
| | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Heading 2. Date 3. Inside Address 4. Reference 5. Subject 6. Attention Line 7. Salutation 8. Body 9. Complimentary Close 10. Signature 11. Identification Marks 12. Enclosure 13. Copy Notation |
|--|---|



Let's look at a basic one first: it starts with the **heading**. Now-a-day's printed *letter heads* are available in corporate offices. When the letter head is not there, then the heading has to be created. This will be followed by **date**. The third element is the **inside address**. While *heading* has the *sender's address*, the *inside address* covers the details of the receiver, this is followed by **reference**, and **subject**. Subject will briefly tell about or give the gist of the letter in the form of a topic or key phrases. The **attention line**, that follows, calls for the attention of that particular person to whom the letter should reach so that he can respond quickly. The next element **salutation** is the informal greeting like 'Dear Sir/Madam.' Next comes the most important part, that is, the **body** of letter. This is followed by **complimentary close**—which connotes a very pleasant way of saying something before concluding the letter with a formal full-hand **signature**. Next comes the last three elements of the letter—**identification marks**, **enclosure** and **copy notation**.

Although the above elements comprise a formal business letter, in modern computerized offices, certain elements such as identification marks and copy notation are done with. That's why, while mentioning the elements above, I had put the optional elements in purple colour and the significant ones in blue colour. So, if you look at it you can easily understand that **heading**, **date**, **inside address**, **salutation**, **body**, **complimentary close** **signature** are the most important elements. Today, when a business letter gets typed and processed in a computer hurriedly, it can serve its

purpose without **reference, subject, attention line, identification marks, enclosure, and copy notation**. However, familiarity with these elements and discreet use of them adds professional outlook to the letter.

Before we get into the details of the elements of a business letter, you should know how to present the letter in the proper layout. The layout tells you as how nicely you can present all the elements. You can choose from the **standard, the right-aligned or the left-aligned formats**.

Layout: Standard

Heading

Date

Inside Address

Reference

Subject

Attention Line

Salutation

Body

Complimentary Close

Signature

Identification Marks

Enclosure

Copy Notation



If you look at the standard format, you will notice that the heading comes in the middle. The date is on the right side, followed by the inside address aligned to the left side. The next five elements—reference, subject, attention line, salutation and body—are aligned to the left. The complimentary close and signature are kept on the right side. Finally, the identification marks, enclosure and the copy notation are brought to the left side.

Now look at the next kind of layout which is called as the right aligned layout. In this one, all the elements are aligned to the right side, as against the standard format, which is actually a mixture of the right aligned, left aligned and the centered one.

Layout: Right Aligned

Heading
Date
Inside Address
Reference
Subject
Attention Line
Salutation
Body
Complimentary Close
Signature
Identification Marks
Enclosure
Copy Notation

Right Aligned

All the elements of a business letter is arranged on the right side. This is very easy to do today using the word document on a computer in which you just have to use the right aligned option, so it automatically goes to the right side. The detailed layout will look as follows:



Left Aligned

The third format is the left aligned format, which perhaps is the most popular one these days. Reason: it's easy to type on a computer and suits the lazy ones! When it is the standard one, you need to indent, push, center unlike the left-aligned where everything—heading, date, inside address, reference, subject, attention line, salutation, body, complimentary close, signature identification marks, and enclosure—can be kept on the left side. As a convention, the left-aligned one is treated as American style of letter writing, while, the standard model is considered the British style.

Layout: Left Aligned

Heading
Date
Inside Address
Reference
Subject
Attention Line
Salutation
Body
Complimentary Close
Signature
Identification Marks
Enclosure
Copy Notation

The detailed layout looks as follows:

Heading

Date

Inside Address

Reference

Subject

Attention Line

Salutation

Body

Complimentary Close

Signature

Identification Marks

Enclosure

Which one of the layouts would you choose? Your choice should depend on the reader of your letter. If you write to an American MNC, you can afford to use the left aligned layout. But if you write to an old, conservative business corporation, then the standard one should be preferred to be on the safe side. The right-aligned layout normally suits an informal company set-up.

Now let us look at the elements in detail:

The **heading** shows the sender/organization's name, full address, telephone, mobile, fax numbers and e-mail id and any other details related to company. Some companies keep their logo/motto and add the hyperlink to their website. They make it readily available in the form of a letter head:

Elements of a Business Letter

- **Heading**
- Also known as **the letterhead**
- Shows the **sender/organization's name, full address, telephone/fax numbers & e-mail id.**

Hi Tech Graphics
613, Circular Road, Bangalore 560001
Serving Your Needs Since 1990

Phone: (080) 2335618 **Fax:** (080) 2335710 **E-mail:** sales@hitechgraphics.com

When a letterhead paper is not used, you either align the heading with the left or the right margin depending on the layout you intend to follow.

Heading

When a letterhead paper is not used, the sender's address is either aligned with the left or the right margin.

**Hi Tech Graphics
613, Circular Road
Bangalore-560001
Phone: (080) 2335618
Fax: (080) 2335710
E-mail: sales@hitechgraphics.com**

Heading

Aligned with the right margin.

**Hi Tech Graphics
613, Circular Road
Bangalore-560001
Phone: (080) 2335618
Fax: (080) 2335710
E-mail: sales@hitechgraphics.com**

Use of Punctuation

An important point to be noted at this stage is the use of punctuation. Today, owing to the popularity of e-mail communication, people have scant regard for punctuation. In fact, many have done away with it. Nonetheless, in a professional environment, punctuations are still used to show

clarity and distinction. Still, one can choose to follow **full** punctuation, or use **internal** punctuation. The conservative business group would follow full punctuation.

Note the comma highlighted in different colours:

Heading

Punctuation: Full

Hi Tech Graphics,
613, Circular Road,
Bangalore-560001.

Punctuation: Internal

Hi Tech Graphics
613, Circular Road
Bangalore-560001

In an informal set-up, you may choose to type without punctuation mark. Nonetheless, you should use space to distinguish various parts of the address.

Heading

NO Punctuation

Hi Tech Graphics
613 Circular Road
Bangalore 560001
Phone (080) 2335618
Fax (080) 2335710
E-mail sales@hitechgraphics.com

Now the next element that we need to know in detail is **Date**.

Date

- ✓ Type the date directly below the heading address
- The day, the month and the year are in the upper right hand corner

25 July, 2014
25 July 2014

Or

July 25, 2014
(American Style)

Avoid:

7/8/2014; 9/11/2011, etc

Date

While writing an informal letter, people even forget to mention the date. However, in a professional environment, date is very important because it helps in storing and retrieving. In the standard

layout, the month and the year are placed in the upper right hand corner. Avoid writing 7/8/2014 because the British and most of the Indians would read it as 7th of August, while the Americans would read it as July 8th. So in order to avoid causing this confusion, it's suggested that either you should write as 7 July 2014 or 8 August 2014.

Inside Address

Actually this is the **receiver's address**.

Inside Address

Receiver's Address:
The General Manager
Lion Industries Limited
No. 3·A, East Patel Nagar
Manasarovar
Mumbai 400001

Ms Christina George
Corporate Communications Inc.
3456 Grant
Chicago, IL 60611
USA

What are the major parts that you should note? Look at the way you begin the inside address. You can see that the first address begins with a designation (the general manager). There is no need to use any title in the designation. Whereas, the second one begins with the name of a person, hence, the title 'Ms' representing 'Miss' or 'Mrs' is used.

Look at the various forms of titles given below:

Inside Address

Titles:

**Mr., Sri., Mrs (misiz), Smt., Miss (mis),
Kum., Ms (miz), Dr, Capt., Prof.,**

Firm: Messers (Ram and Company)

Messers (Lal Chand and Sons)

Note: Bharat Aluminum Limited

Professor (Mrs) Shiela Singh

Professor (Ms) Gayatri Devi

Titles

Appropriate use of title reflects your personality. It can show that you are caring, respectful, sincere, faithful, devoted, dedicated, meticulous, thoughtful, etc. The following titles are used for a male: **Mr., Sri.** (short form of *Sriman*). Various options are available for a female: **Mrs. (misses)** referring to a married person (the Indian equivalent of *Smt. Srimati*), **Miss** indicating an unmarried woman, (**Kum. Kumari**—unmarried woman in an Indian context), **Ms. (pronounced miz)**—a neutral title that does not indicate whether the person is married or unmarried. There are also honorary titles like **Dr., Capt.,** and **Prof.** For a firm run by two or three brothers you can use **Messers** (the plural form of Mr.). E.g.: Messers Lal Chand and Sons.

While typing the inside address, you can align it left. But do not follow the so called *ladder style*.

Inside Address

No Ladder Style!

The General Manager

Lion Industries Limited



No. 3-A, East Patel Nagar



Manasarovar

Mumbai-400001

Ladder style: Space is given in an uneven manner and the entries are arranged to give the look of a ladder. Many people in the past followed it assuming that it looked stylish and some people follow it even today. However, this ladder style does not help in creating a professional impression. Besides, it is not considered as a standard way of writing the address. So you have to avoid this ladder style format.

Use of 'To'

Use 'to' if the address is short, that is about three or four lines. Avoid if the address is going to be five or six lines. Remember not to put a comma after 'To.'

Inside Address

Use of "To"

To

The Director
IIT Kanpur
Kanpur

Avoided if it is too long.

No comma after "To" To,

Only colon in business letters To:

A colon can be kept after 'To' in business contacts.

Reference and Subject

The next important element of a business letter is *Reference* that will be followed by *Subject*.

Reference & Subject

Ref.: Your advt. dated _____ in The Times of India.

Your Ref.: Letter No. AB/46/P494 of August 24, 2010.

Our Ref.: No. CD/69/W6785, September 2, 2010.

Sub.: Order of Packing Boxes.

Sub.: Supply of Packing Boxes.

Sub.: Application for the post of Programme Manager.

The reference is given to indicate the context in which the letter is written. This includes date, reference to previous invitation, correspondence or advertisement number. When a second reference is given by the sender for future communication, it is brought under *our reference*.

There is minor variation in which some people would like to keep the subject at the top and give the reference after it.

The **subject** gives a preview of the main content of the letter. It puts in a nutshell the whole body of the letter in just three words or in a single sentence. Often it looks like a topical sentence.

When you apply for a job, the subject can be simply *Application for the post of program manager*, *Application for the post of assistant professor*, *Application for the post of deputy manager* and so on.

Attention Line

Often people do not realize the importance of attention line, and so, they write without it. However, attention line is important in huge corporate offices as it helps in easily sort out and sending the mail directly to the concerned person.

Attention Line & Salutation

Attention Line:

Attention: The Sales Manager

Attention: Mr. S. K. Gupta

Attention: Mr. Ramesh Kumar,
Incharge, Water Supply

Salutation: Greeting

Honorable Sir, Respected Sir, Dear Sir/s,

Dear Madam, Dear Subscriber, My Dear Sir,

Dear Mr. Aswin Kumar, Dear Mr. Kumar,

Dear Mr. Aswin, Dear Aswin, My dear Aswin,

Dearest Aswin, My dearest Aswin, Aswin,

Formal (use of colon) Dear Mr Gupta:

Salutation

Salutations are pleasant greetings before the beginning of something. It's Just like the way we greet somebody in morning by saying: **Good Morning, Hello**, etc. In professional environment all letters begin with proper salutations before the body of letter. The salutations indicate the status involved in the relationship between the sender and the receiver. It shows whether the relationship is hierarchical, equal, friendly, intimate, formal, business-like, etc. For instance, 'Honorable Sir/Madam', is used for somebody superior like the Justice, the Chief Minister or a very important person. When a person writes to a dignified higher authority, 'Respected Sir/Madam' is used.

Currently, 'Dear Sir/Madam' is the commonly accepted salutation. Plural form (sirs/madams) is used if two or more people are addressed. You should note that the word 'dear' is treated a formal term. So you need not shy away from using it thinking that it is an endearing term. Besides, you can show the level of proximity by appropriate use of salutation. Look at the given example and see how it moves from a formal level to an informal one, and then, to an intimate level: *Dear sir, My dear sir, Dear Mr. Aswin Kumar, Dear Mr. Kumar, Dear Mr. Ashwin, Dear Aswin, My dear Aswin, Dearest Aswin, My dearest Aswin, and Aswin.*

Body of the Letter

The next important element is the body of the letter. We can divide the message in the body of the letter into **three main divisions**. The first paragraph will be **introductory paragraph** and it will have the **statement of purpose**. It will tell, for instance, what the sender wants to **buy, order, sell, receive, replace, complain, etc** on behalf of his/her company. The middle paragraph **details and gives other information surrounding the purpose**. It tells why, for instance, a product is defective, how it might have happened, and explains why it should be changed. This is followed by the final paragraph where the ground is prepared for a polite closing and conclusion with a note of hope. It gives assurance in terms of replacing a defective product or expresses appreciation rendered by the receiver.

Body of the Letter

Body/Message: 3 main divisions

First Paragraph: Introduction and statement of the purpose

Middle Paragraph/s: Details and other information surrounding the purpose

Final Paragraph: Polite closing, expression or appreciation for assistance (even if in advance), and/or statement of follow-up intentions, expected actions

Participial Endings

You should avoid participial endings, that is, adding -ing form as *hoping* and *expecting*.

Body of the Letter

Participial Endings: (*hoping, expecting*)

Sounds very trite and should be avoided as far as possible.

If, however, you close your letter with a phrase containing a present participle, e.g., "Hoping to hear from you soon," you should add "I am" as shown below:

Hoping to hear from you soon,

I remain,
Yours sincerely,
R. K. Shankar Lal

I am,
Yours faithfully,
R. K. Shankar Lal

Complimentary Close

Complimentary Close

A courteous leave-taking—a polite way of ending a letter.

Typed two spaced below the last line of the body of the letter.

The close must agree with the salutation:

The salutation

Sir, Yours faithfully/respectfully/obediently,

Dear Sir/Madam, Yours faithfully/truly,

Dear Mr. Nigam Yours sincerely,

Dear Reader, Yours sincerely,

Neutral & widely accepted closing:

Sincerely,

Cordially,

By using a complimentary close, apart from the **polite way of concluding the letter in the final paragraph**, you take a **courteous departure**. This part of the letter is **separated by giving two spaces** below the last line of the body of the letter. Complimentary close **must agree with the salutation**. For example, if the salutation is *Sir/Madam* it signifies a formal relationship and it goes with: *yours faithfully/respectfully/obediently/truly*. If it is *Dear Mr. Nigam* or *Dear reader*, it goes with *Yours sincerely*. If you wish to use a neutral and widely accepted closing, then you can use *Sincerely yours* or *Cordially yours*. If you are in some doubt, it's safe to use *Sincerely*.

Complimentary Close

**Yours sincerely,
Yours cordially,
Yours faithfully,**

NOT

**Your's sincerely,
Your's cordially,
Your's faithfully,**

Remember: you should not use *yours* with an apostrophe as *your's*. *Yours* is the ‘yours’ is the possessive form of the pronoun ‘you.’

Your's is the wrong form that literally means *your is!*

Signature

Signature is actually the **signed name of the writer**. It is here the sender gives the authenticity to the information that is carried in the letter. Only when it is signed, the information becomes authentic. The signature part includes often the name, the title (especially if the name is likely to leave the reader in doubt) and the position (if already not mentioned in the letter head). Now let's look at some examples:

Signature

Signed name of the writer

It gives authenticity to the information contained in the letter.

Includes often the name, the title (especially if the name is likely to leave the reader in doubt) and the position (if already not mentioned in the letter head)

Cordially,



(Ms. Sheetal Singh)

Senior Executive

Delegated authority by the Power of Attorney

Sincerely,

Per Pro. Sharewell Industries [per pro: on behalf of



(Mrs. Lakshmi Despande)

Sometimes the person will also indicate her marital status by using *Mrs.* or *Miss*. If somebody has delegated authority by the power of attorney, it can be indicated by *Per Pro*.

Identification Marks

Identification marks are important in huge corporate offices where there are many to type/compose a letter. Among five or six typists, it will be easy for the higher authority to identify who type what by looking at the identification marks. So if you find something like TRM/LG, it could be the short form of T. R. Murali or somebody like Ms. Lila Gupta—the person who is responsible for typing the letter.

Identification Marks

Gives information about the person who dictated and the one who typed the letter

Letter dictated by Mr. T. R. Murali and typed by Ms. Lila Gupta

TRM/LG

TRM: LG

If the officer's name is already there

LG

lg

Enclosure

The enclosure or the attachment is attached along with the letter as a **supporting document**. If there is single a single enclosure, you can indicate that by *enclosure: 1* if there are two enclosures you can simply say *enclosures: 2*. Sometimes **if the documents attached are important, then, they are specified**, for example **Enclosure: 1 MOU dated 1 September, 2010.**

Enclosure

Any documents attached to the letter

Encl.: 1

Enclosures: Two

**If the documents attached are important
they are specified:**

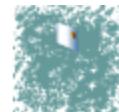
Encls: 1. MOU dated 1 September, 2010.

2. SBI Cheque No. K4876, 4 September 2010.

Copy Notation

This indicates the person who is receiving a courtesy (sometimes also called as carbon) copy (CC). Sometimes it is also written as PC which means photocopy.

Copy Notation



**Indicates the person who is receiving
a courtesy/carbon copy (CC)
or photocopy (PC):**

CC: S. K. Khanna

PC: Julie Andrews

Copy to: Mr. Sanjay Bhatia

C: Rahul Bhatia

After the letter is concluded, in personal letters, an afterthought is included under *P. S.* The short form *P. S.* indicates *post script*, which refers to something that is written after. People even write *P.P.S.* a later thought to an afterthought! It is okay with personal letters but it should be avoided in business letters.

Post Script

P.S.:

P.P.S.:



✓ After thoughts in personal letters

Avoid postscripts in business letters and job application letters.

It conveys an impression of poor planning.

So unlike in personal letters, you should not use post script at all in business letter as well as in job application letters. Using it conveys the impression that the letter is very poorly planned. Remember: a professional letter is very well planned and it is executed in a thoroughly professional manner so that the personality of the company or the person is revealed in it and it generates good will.

To conclude, in this lecture, **you learnt and understood the need for writing effective letters**, especially in the age of internet, e-mail, SMS, and satellite communication. Hopefully, the next time when you apply for a job or write a letter in a professional environment, these tips will be of great help. By following these suggestions, you can not only create good will but also write effective letter that gets you a favorable response.

In this Lecture . . .

You learnt and understood -

The need for writing effective letters

Elements of a business letter

Three Basic Layouts

Elements of a business letter in Detail

References



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