

Writing a Formal Letter

A formal letter (or business letter) is a piece of formal correspondence and has a very specific format. It should be within one page and be fully blocked (everything is lined up to the left and between every section is a double space). There are a number of sections. They include:

1. **Heading.** This includes the return address (the writer's address) and should be two or three lines. Include the postal code. If the letter is being written from a company, the company's letterhead may serve as the heading, if the address is already printed on it.
2. **Date.** There should be double spacing above and below the date.
3. **Inside Address.** This is the address of the person you are writing to. Include the name and position of the person if you know it, followed by the address.
4. **Greeting (also called Salutation).** The greeting in a formal letter is always formal and usually starts with the word "Dear" followed by the person's family name or job position (Dear Mr. Smith / Dear Human Resources Director). The greeting ends in a colon.
5. **Body (the paragraphs).** This part of the letter is the text. Each paragraph should be separated by double spaces. Also there should be double space between the greeting and the body. It could be three to five paragraphs, but not usually more than five. Indenting is not necessary.
6. **Complimentary Close.** This is the short, polite closing that ends with a comma. A common complimentary close is Best regards. There is a double space between this and the body and between this and the signature line.
7. **Signature Line.** This is your signature (usually for printed letters). It is possible to put a digital signature here, your name in blue or just your name in black. If your name is in blue or in the form of a digital signature, your name is required in black at the bottom. Otherwise, just your name in black is printed (unsigned) if the letter is not on paper.

A formal letter should not contain post scripts (PS).