**Format of a Business Letter**

*(Retrieved 6th September, 2016, from:* [*http://macquarie.vic.edu.au/formatletter*](http://macquarie.vic.edu.au/formatletter)*)*

Although many organisations use their own style when creating business letters, there are a number of formatting rules that are usually followed.

The list below summarises the points that are normally incorporated in business letters. Their exact location on the page will depend on the specific style preferred by your organisation.

* **Letterhead**
  + The letterhead incorporates the name of the company and may include the company's address, the telephone number, the facsimile (fax) number and an email address.
  + Most companies use pre-printed stationery, which includes the letterhead, for business correspondence.
  + The letterhead quickly identifies the company to the recipient and presents a professional image. Any drafts you create can be done on plain paper, but the final copy should be created using the letterhead paper.
* **Date**
  + Business letters should always include the date on which they have been written.
  + It is usual to use the day, month, year style. For example, 28 March 2009 rather than 28.3.2009.
* **The sender's reference number (Our ref)**
  + If the letter is referring to an existing matter then a reference number should be included. A reference number will help you relate the letter to a specific matter and will help you file the letter appropriately.
* **The receiver's reference number (Your ref)**
  + If the recipient of the letter has already provided you with their reference number then you should always quote this number when corresponding.
  + This reference number helps the recipient relate the letter to the appropriate matter.
* **Your company's address**
  + In most cases your company's address will appear in the letterhead or on the pre-printed stationery.
  + If your company's address is not included in the letterhead or on the pre-printed stationery then you must ensure that it appears somewhere on the letter.
  + Depending on the style preferred by your company, the address can appear either on the left hand side of the page above the inside address (block form), or on the right hand side (indented form).
  + Some companies choose to have their address at the bottom of the page.
* **Inside address**
  + The inside address is the address of the individual to whom the letter is being sent.
  + The inside address should begin with the name and title of the recipient and then continue with the company name and the address.
  + It is very important that you use the correct title for an individual.
* **Greeting (salutation)**
  + The greeting is the first line of the letter.
  + The greeting should always start with 'Dear' and be followed by the recipient's name, for example: Dear Mr Smith.
  + If you do not know the recipient's name then you should use 'Dear Sir/Madam'.
* **Subject line**
  + On most occasions a subject line will be included.
  + The subject line appears between the greeting and the introduction.
  + The subject line is used to easily identify the subject matter of the letter.
* **Introduction**
  + An introduction explains the purpose of the letter.
  + It is very important that the introduction clearly states what the letter is about.
  + The introduction should be brief and to the point.
* **Main body**
  + The main body of the letter contains the detailed information that you wish to convey.
  + The first sentence of each paragraph should introduce the main point covered in that paragraph and each paragraph should cover only one point.
* **Conclusion**
  + The conclusion summarises the main points of the letter and indicates if any further action needs to be taken.
* **Complimentary close**
  + The style of a letter is reflected by the greeting (salutation) used, for example: if the greeting is 'Dear Sir/Madam' then close with 'Yours faithfully'.
  + If the greeting is 'Dear Mr Smith' then close with 'Yours sincerely'.
* **Signature**
  + A generous space should be left for the appropriate person to sign their name.

Are there different types of business letters?

There are different types of business letters. They can include:

* **Recommendation**

You would write this letter if you were recommending someone for a particular position, placement or award. If one of your friends was being considered for election to the student council, you might write a letter to your principal describing why they would be suited to a leadership position.

* **Acknowledgement**

In an acknowledgement letter you might be expressing thanks for something that someone has done, achieved or contributed.

* **Appreciation**

An appreciation letter is a formal version of a thank you letter. You would send a letter of appreciation to someone in a senior position, such as your principal or the chairperson of a company.

* **Enquiry**

You might also call this type of letter a letter of interest. Perhaps you have heard about a fun holiday program and would like to find out more about it.

* **Application**

If you were writing a job application, you might describe your personal qualities, your educational qualifications and why you would be suited to the position.

* **Reference**

In a reference letter you describe someone's characteristics or skills in order to help them get a job, placement or position.

* **Announcement**

You write this type of letter to announce something. You might receive one saying that a teacher is leaving your school, a new teacher is arriving, or perhaps announcing an engagement, wedding or birth.

* **Political campaign or lobbying**

These are likely to arrive in the period leading up to election times. Politicians release statements and leaflets describing why you should vote for them. Your household might sometimes receive letters from your local council alerting you to something happening in your suburb or community.

(Retrieved 6th September, 2016, from: <http://auspost.com.au/education/letterwriting/students/business-letters.html>)

Tips for writing business letters

Keep the person you are writing to in mind. If you are writing to someone official, such as a chairperson or a member of parliament, remember to be respectful and use formal language. Most importantly, make sure that their title is correct. You do not want to get off on the wrong foot by accidentally calling a "Mrs" a "Mr"!

* Address your letter to "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam" if you do not have the person's name.
* Include your address if you would like a reply – and don't forget the date!
* Include a title or heading line that tells your reader what your letter is about.
* Keep your letter clear, simple and to the point. Business letters should never be too long. If someone is busy they may not have the time to read the whole of your letter.
* "Yours faithfully" is a polite way of finishing a business letter to someone you don't know (if you have used "Dear Madam" or "Dear Sir"). If you know the person's name, "Yours sincerely" is appropriate.
* Always keep a copy of the letter as a record of having sent it.
* Write a draft or a plan of your letter first.
* Remember that if you do not know the recipient, your letter will be their first impression of you. Be polite and respectful, just as you would be if you were meeting them in person.
* Remember that postscripts are not used in business letters.
* Lastly, it is best to type a business letter, so that the reader does not have to interpret any messy handwriting or muddled words. It also looks more professional if you are writing a job application, or a letter to your local council.

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