

Title:

Business Letters: Do You Really Know What They Are?

Word Count:

930

Summary:

Based on the many requests for business letter help and info that I get at my writing help Web sites, there is a lot of confusion about business letters. The fact is; "business letter" is a very general term that can mean one of many different specific letter types.

Keywords:

business letter, letters, letter sample, letter template, business letter format, letter writing, sample business letter, business letter examples, writing business letters, write business letter

Article Body:

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My two "writing help" Web sites receive well over two million visitors per year looking for information and templates to help them with their writing. With that many visitors I get a pretty accurate idea of exactly what people are looking for in the way of letter writing help. In fact, a significant number of people arrive at my site based on the search phrase "business letter".

Now, at first glance the term "business letter" makes sense. But, just wait a minute here! What exactly do they mean by "business letter"? Well, it turns out that they're not sure. What it boils down to in many cases is that the person doing the search is involved in some kind of "business" (as owner or employee) and they need to write some kind of "letter" related to their business. Hence, their search phrase of "business letter".

I often get e-mails from people asking me if I have any business letter templates, or if I can write them a business letter. Invariably, I have to reply to them asking "what type of business letter, what is the specific purpose"? The fact is; "business letter" is a very general term that can mean one of many different specific letter types.

Accordingly, the rest of this article is going to explain exactly what business letters are.

Despite the widespread use of e-mail in commerce today, traditional business letters are still the main way that the majority of businesses officially communicate with their customers and other businesses.

This is especially true when businesses want to formalize an agreement or an understanding. So far, emails are great for all of the preparatory work, but a formal business letter is still most often needed to "seal the deal".

There are two overall categories of business letters: business-to-business, and business-to-customer.

BUSINESS-TO-BUSINESS LETTERS

Most business-to-business letters are written to confirm things that have already been discussed among officials in meetings, on the telephone, or via e-mail.

Can you imagine the letters that would have to go back and forth to cover all of the questions and possibilities that can be covered in a one-hour meeting, a half-hour phone call, or a few quick e-mails?

The main purpose of a typical business letter is to formalize the details that were arrived at in those discussions, and to provide any additional information that was agreed upon.

Over the years, certain general standards have evolved in the business world that the vast majority of businesses use in drafting their business to business correspondence. The Top 10 business-to-business letters that people search for at my writing help Web sites, in order of popularity, are as follows:

1. thank you letter
2. introduction letter
3. cover letter
4. financial letter
5. marketing letter
6. sales letter
7. project letter
8. invitation letter
9. employee letter
10. congratulations letter

Even though the above terms are much more specific than the general term "business letter" there are multiple types of each of the above letters,

depending on the purpose of the letter. For example, a business-to-business "financial letter" could be: collection letter, credit approval letter, credit refusal letter, invoice, price quotation, etc.

BUSINESS TO CUSTOMER LETTERS

There are many different types of business-to-customer letters. They include: sales and marketing letters, information letters, order acknowledgement letters, order status letters, collection letters, among others.

As with business-to-business letters, over the years certain general standards have evolved in the business world that the vast majority of businesses use in drafting letters to existing and potential customers.

Of course, going in the other direction are customer-to-business letters. These include: order letters, order status inquiry letters, complaint letters, and others.

Since these are customer-generated letters, there is no particular expectation that they follow any particular letter-writing standard. Typically, they are handled just like any other piece of personal correspondence.

The Top 10 business-to-customer letters that people search for at my writing help Web sites, in order of popularity, are as follows:

1. cover letter
2. customer relations letter
3. financial letter
4. credit letter
5. introduction letter
6. order-status letter
7. sales letter
8. marketing letter
9. announcement letter
10. apology letter

Similar to the situation with business-to-business letters covered in the previous section; even though the above business-to-customer letter types are much more specific than the general term "business letter", there are also multiple types of each of the above letters, depending on the purpose of the letter. For example, a business-to-customer "customer relations letter" could be any one of : response to a complaint, follow-up with a new customer, interrupted service notice, letter of acknowledgement, special invitation, welcome to new customers, etc.

BOTTOM-LINE

As you can see from the above, specifying that you are looking for a "business letter" is not very enlightening. You need to be specific and define the purpose of the letter; that is, exactly what is the letter meant to communicate?

It's important not to confuse non-business letters with business letters. For example: job application letters, cv and resume cover letters, employment and college related letters of recommendation, character references, resignation letters, etc. are NOT business letters.

You might be surprised to learn that over 75% of all visitors to my main writing help Web site are searching for information on how to write just the Top 20 letters listed above. In fact, it turns out that a full 90% of the more than 1 million people that visit that site each year looking for letter writing help are looking for help with one of a list of 25 letters.

That's why all of my letter writing toolkits focus on multiple variations of about 40 specific letter types that cover over 95% of ALL letters ever written.