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## Formatting the Business Letter

Business letters remain one of the top forms of communication in the work place, and all business professionals are required to have more than a passing knowledge of how to write a business letter.

### 1. Important Considerations:

- A. Courtesy is expected in all business communications.
- B. Conventional Format: There are two types of conventional formatting for a letter: Block and Modified Block.
  - I. Block formatting: Align all text to the left margin. Never indent for paragraphs; instead, double-space between paragraphs.
  - II. Modified Block formatting: Align the address, return address, date, closing, and signature on the right. It is optional to indent paragraphs.

### 2. Components:

- A. Heading: The heading contains the information of the sender. Most companies have their own letterhead, and in that event, center the sender's information under the company letterhead. When using blank paper, include your address only—do not put your name in the letterhead. Use the letterhead for the first page and then leave the heading blank. The information in the heading should contain the following:
  - I. Company name.
  - II. Company address—do not abbreviate street or avenue. Use the US Postal Service's two-letter abbreviation for the state.
  - III. Company phone number.
  - IV. Company website.
  - V. Company fax number.
  - VI. Date—type the date out in long form: January 1, 2012 or 1 January 2012.
- B. Inside Address: The inside address includes the company and individual to whom the letter is intended. The required information is as follows:
  - I. Recipient's title and full name—Dr., Professor, Honorable, Mr., or Ms. When writing correspondences to people in other countries, learn the correct correspondence titles.
  - II. Recipient's complete mailing address—street, city, state, and zip code. Follow the formatting of addresses exactly as they are specified in each country.
- C. Attention Line: The attention line routes the letter.
  - I. Use the attention line if you are not certain of the name of the person to whom you are writing. (You might write, "Attention: Department of Accounting".)
  - II. Make an effort to find out the name of the person to whom you are writing.
- D. Subject Line and Reference Line: You may have either a subject line or a reference line, and you may have both a subject line and a reference line.



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- I. A reference line refers to information requested by the recipient, and may include specific project, invoice, or identification numbers—i.e., “RE: Invoice 1234.”
  - II. A subject line states the topic or subject of the letter—i.e., “Subject: Invoices.”
  - III. This eliminates the clumsy introduction that would, otherwise, need to announce the reason for the letter.
  - IV. Use a brief phrase in absence of a subject or reference line that will describe what the letter is about.
- E. Salutation: The salutation is where you greet the receiver of the letter.
- I. The salutation is placed two lines below the last element—either the inside address or the subject or reference line.
  - II. The traditional salutation is “Dear,” which is part of a long standing convention.
  - III. Include the title and name of the recipient.
  - IV. Follow the name with a colon (“Dear Dr. Smith:”).
- F. Body: The body contains the content of your message.
- I. Includes at least three paragraphs:
    - a) Introductory paragraph—Introduce yourself and the purpose of the letter.
    - b) Body paragraph/s—Keep the sentences and paragraphs short.
    - c) Conclusion—Always end with goodwill and gratitude.
  - II. Double-space between paragraphs.
  - III. Single-space the text within each paragraph.
  - IV. Use bullets if you have multiple items in a series or sentences with multiple clauses.
- G. Complimentary Closing: The complimentary closing comes before the signature and closes the letter with a sense of goodwill.
- I. Conventional closings:
    - a) People you do not know:
      - i. “Sincerely,”
      - ii. “Sincerely yours,”
    - b) People with whom you have some relationship:
      - i. “Warm regards,”
      - ii. “With best wishes,”
  - II. Only capitalize the first word of the complimentary closing.
  - III. Follow the closing with a comma.
- H. Writer’s Signature:
- I. Sign your name below the complimentary closing and above your typed name.
  - II. Use your legal name and write legibly.
  - III. Sign in ink.
- I. Writer’s Typed Name and Title: Type your name and title four spaces below the complimentary closing.
- J. Enclosure Notice:



- I. This line alerts your reader to enclosed documents (“Enclosure: Medical Release Form”).
- II. For more than one enclosure, include the number in parenthesis. Do not count the page numbers but the number of documents enclosed.
- K. Distribution Notice: You use a distribution or copy line to inform your reader that you have sent copies to other recipients.
  - I. “Copy: John Smith, Jan Doe, and John Doe”
  - II. “C: John Smith, Jan Doe, and John Doe”
- L. Identification of Typist: Use this line if someone typed the letter for you.
  - I. Usually the writer’s initials are upper-case and the typist’s initials are lower-case (JIW:mjs”).