

Letters

Letters are brief messages sent to recipients that are often outside the organization.^[121] They are often printed on letterhead paper, and represent the business or organization in one or two pages. Shorter messages may include e-mails or memos, either hard copy or electronic, while reports tend to be three or more pages in length.

While e-mail and text messages may be used more frequently today, the effective business letter remains a common form of written communication. It can serve to introduce you to a potential employer, announce a product or service, or even serve to communicate feelings and emotions. We'll examine the basic outline of a letter and then focus on specific products or writing assignments.

All writing assignments have expectations in terms of language and format. The audience or reader may have their own idea of what constitutes a specific type of letter, and your organization may have its own format and requirements. This chapter outlines common elements across letters, and attention should be directed to the expectations associated with your particular writing assignment. There are many types of letters, and many adaptations in terms of form and content, but in this chapter, we discuss the fifteen elements of a traditional block-style letter.

Letters may serve to introduce your skills and qualifications to prospective employers, deliver important or specific information, or serve as documentation of an event or decision. Regardless of the type of letter you need to write, it can contain up to fifteen elements in five areas. While you may not use all the elements in every case or context, they are listed in [Table 9.1](#), "Elements of a Business Letter".

Table 9.1. Elements of a Business Letter

Content	Guidelines
1. Return Address	This is your address where someone could send a reply. If your letter includes a letterhead with this information, either in the header (across the top of the page) or the footer (along the bottom of the page), you do not need to include it before the date.
2. Date	The date should be placed at the top, right or left justified, five lines from the top of the page or letterhead logo.
3. Reference (Re:)	Like a subject line in an e-mail, this is where you indicate what the letter is in reference to, the subject or purpose of the document.
4. Delivery (Optional)	Sometimes you want to indicate on the letter itself how it was delivered. This can make it clear to a third party that the letter was delivered via a specific method, such as certified mail (a legal requirement for some types of documents).
5. Recipient Note (Optional)	This is where you can indicate if the letter is personal or confidential.

Content	Guidelines
6. Salutation	A common salutation may be "Dear Mr. (full name)." But if you are unsure about titles (i.e., Mrs., Ms., Dr.), you may simply write the recipient's name (e.g., "Dear Cameron Rai") followed by a colon. A comma after the salutation is correct for personal letters, but a colon should be used in business. The salutation "To whom it may concern" is appropriate for letters of recommendation or other letters that are intended to be read by any and all individuals. If this is not the case with your letter, but you are unsure of how to address your recipient, make every effort to find out to whom the letter should be specifically addressed. For many, there is no sweeter sound than

	<p>that of their name, and to spell it incorrectly runs the risk of alienating the reader before your letter has even been read. Avoid the use of impersonal salutations like "Dear Prospective Customer," as the lack of personalization can alienate a future client.</p>
7. Introduction	<p>This is your opening paragraph, and may include an attention statement, a reference to the purpose of the document, or an introduction of the person or topic depending on the type of letter. An emphatic opening involves using the most significant or important element of the letter in the introduction. Readers tend to pay attention to openings, and it makes sense to outline the expectations for the reader up front. Just as you would preview your topic in a speech, the clear opening in your introductions establishes context and facilitates comprehension.</p>
8. Body	<p>If you have a list of points, a series of facts, or a number of questions, they belong in the body of your letter. You may choose organizational devices to draw attention, such as a bullet list, or simply number them. Readers may skip over information in the body of your letter, so make sure you emphasize the key points clearly. This is your core content, where you can outline and support several key points. Brevity is important, but so is clear support for main point(s). Specific, meaningful information needs to be clear, concise, and accurate.</p>
9. Conclusion	<p>An emphatic closing mirrors your introduction with the added element of tying the main points together, clearly demonstrating their relationship. The conclusion can serve to remind the reader, but should not introduce new information. A clear summary sentence will strengthen your writing and enhance your effectiveness. If your letter requests or implies action, the conclusion needs to make clear what you expect to happen. It is usually courteous to conclude by thanking the recipient for his or her attention, and to invite them to contact you if you can be of help or if they have questions. This</p>

	paragraph reiterates the main points and their relationship to each other, reinforcing the main point or purpose.
10. Close	"Sincerely" or "Cordially" are standard business closing statements. ("Love," "Yours Truly," and "BFF" are closing statements suitable for personal correspondence, but not for business.) Closing statements are normally placed one or two lines under the conclusion and include a hanging comma, as in Sincerely,
11. Signature	Five lines after the close, you should type your name (required) and, on the line below it, your title (optional).
12. Preparation Line	If the letter was prepared, or word-processed, by someone other than the signatory (you), then inclusion of initials is common, as in MJD or abc.
13. Enclosures/Attachments	Just like an e-mail with an attachment, the letter sometimes has additional documents that are delivered with it. This line indicates what the reader can look for in terms of documents included with the letter, such as brochures, reports, or related business documents.
14. Courtesy Copies or "CC"	The abbreviation "CC" once stood for carbon copies but now refers to courtesy copies. Just like a "CC" option in an e-mail, it indicates the relevant parties that will also receive a copy of the document.
15. Logo/Contact Information	A formal business letter normally includes a logo or contact information for the organization in the header (top of page) or footer (bottom of page).

Strategies for Effective Letters

Remember that a letter has five main areas:

1. The heading, which establishes the sender, often including address and date
2. The introduction, which establishes the purpose

3. The body, which articulates the message
4. The conclusion, which restates the main point and may include a call to action
5. The signature line, which sometimes includes the contact information

A sample letter is shown in [Figure 9.5, "Sample Business Letter"](#).

(1 inch margins on all sides of the letter)

1. **Return Address:** (if not in letterhead logo)

2. **Date:** 01/01/201X

3. **Reference—Re:** How to write a letter

4. **Delivery** (optional): USPS Certified Mail #123456789

5. **Recipient Note** (optional): Confidential

6. **Salutation:** Dear Student X:

7. **Introduction:** This letter is to inform you that the myth of a paperless office, where you will not be required to produce hard copy letters on letterhead, is a myth.

8. **Body:** While e-mail has largely replaced letter writing for many applications, there remain several reasons for producing a hard copy letter. The first reason is that you are required to write it for this class, as many employers still produce letters as a normal part of business communication, including documentation. Next, we must consider that paper sales in business have increased across the last decade, showing no signs of the decrease we would associate with the transition to the paperless office. Finally, business letters serve many functions, and your proficiency in their efficient and effective production will contribute to your personal and professional success.

9. **Conclusion:** Letter writing is a skill that will continue to be required in the business environment of today and tomorrow.

10. **Close:** Sincerely,

11. **Signature Line:** Scott McLean

12. **Preparation Line:** GSM/ep

13. **Enclosures:** (optional, if needed)

14. **Courtesy Copies:** cc: Jenn Yee

15. **Logo/Contact Information:**



13 N. Mill Street
Nyack, NY 10960

Letter writing

A business letter

Here is an example of a typical business letter, showing how you arrange the different parts on the page.

Manesty Clothes Ltd

15 Clifton Court
Manchester MR3 5PY
England
UK
Tel: +44 (0)161 932 2628
Fax: +44 (0)161 932 2884
Email: enquiries@manesty.co.uk

Production Manager
Suntrek Fabrics
Box 167
Brown Street PO
Singapore

2nd January 2003

Dear Sir or Madam

Re: Visit to Singapore

I am now planning my next trip to South East Asia, and would be very pleased if we could meet to discuss our production requirements for next year.

I hope to be in Singapore on May 3 or 4. Would it be convenient to visit you on May 3 at 10.30am? I would be grateful if you could tell me exactly where your offices are located.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours faithfully

Christine Burrows

C. Burrows
Senior Buyer

This is the **letterhead**. It can go on the left, right or in the centre. In the US, it is often on the left.

This is the **salutation**. You do not need to put a comma here. In US letters, you should use a colon.

This is the **subject heading**, a summary of the contents of the letter. It helps the reader to quickly understand what the letter is about.

There is no space here when you start a new paragraph.

You do not need to put commas after **Dear Sir or Madam** or **Yours faithfully**. Be consistent: if you put a comma after **Dear Sir or Madam**, put one after **Yours faithfully**.

Common phrases used in formal and informal letters

Formal

Thank you for your letter of
22 January concerning...
I am writing to inquire about...
I am writing to inform you that...
I am pleased to inform you that...
I regret to inform you that...
I hope this information has been of use.
Please give my regards to Peter Hogan.
Thank you for all you have done.
I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Informal

Thank you for your letter about...
I'm writing to ask about...
I'm writing to say that...
I'm pleased to say...
I'm sorry to tell you that...
I hope this has been useful.
Regards to Peter.
Thanks for all your help.
Hope to hear from you soon

An example of an informal letter

4th Feb 2009

Dear Jo,

Just a quick word to thank you for a brilliant weekend. It was lovely to see you again, and the kids really enjoyed going round London – hope we didn't tire you out too much!

It would be great to see you up in Liverpool some time – it's ages since you've been. We'll be celebrating Jim's fortieth (!) in September, and it would be great if you could come. Anyway, let me know nearer the time if you can make it.

Take care, hope to see you soon.

Love,

(Clare xxx

Notes:

- In an informal letter you usually do not write your address but you write the date.
- The style is very much like speech. You can use short forms each as **didn't**. In a formal letter you would not use these.