**Business Letter**

Business Letters remain one of the top forms of communication in the workplace, and all business professionals are required to have more than a passing knowledge of how to write a business letter. While the purpose of letters will differ, the formatting for every business letter remains the same. To write a sound business letter, you must follow the correct formatting formula, follow the writing process, follow the conventions of writing, and follow the etiquette of workplace communication. Of course, the audience and purpose will determine your tone and your style. When in doubt about the tone, always write using a professional and formal tone.

- **Courtesy** is an expected workplace behavior. Even if you are writing a letter of complaint, do not be rude, sarcastic, or disrespectful.

- **Conventional Format:** There are two types of conventional formatting for a letter: Block and Modified Block.
  - **Block formatting:** You will align all of your text to the left margin. You never indent for paragraphs; instead, you will double-space between paragraphs.
  - **Modified Block:** You will align the address, return address, date, closing, and signature on the right. Again, you will not indent paragraphs but will double space between paragraphs.

**Elements of a Business Letter:**

- Letter Head (Your information/company’s information)
- Date
- Inside Address (Recipient)
- Attention Line
- Subject Line
- Reference Line
- Salutation
- Body
- Complimentary Closing
- Signature
- Typed Name and Position
- Enclosure Notice
- Distribution Notice
- Typist’s initials
Details of the Business Letter:

➢ **Heading:** The heading contains the information of the sender. Most companies have their own letterhead, and in that event, you could center the sender’s information under the company letterhead. The information in a heading should contain the following:

- Company Name.
- Company Address (Do not abbreviate street or avenue) Use the US Postal Services two-letter abbreviation for the state.
- Company Phone number.
- Company Website.
- Company Fax number.
- Date (Type the date out in long form: January 1, 2012 or 1 January 2012.

*Note: If you are using blank paper, you will include your address only: don not put your name in the letterhead. Also, use the letterhead for the first page and do not number. Each consecutive page after page one will be left blank, or you will reference to whom the letter is addressed, page 2, and the date.*

➢ **Inside Address:** The inside address includes the company and individual to whom the letter is intended. The required information is as follows:

- Addressee’s title: Dr., Professor, Honorable, Mr. or Ms. Note Dr. is abbreviated while Professor is written out. Do not abbreviate titles unless they are acceptable abbreviations: Mr. Mrs. Ms. Miss or Dr. *When writing correspondences to people in other countries, learn the correct correspondence titles.*
- Include the full name.
- Address—complete mailing address, street, city, state, zip code. *Other countries’ addresses may look differently than to what you are accustomed.*

*Note: Separate the city from the state by a comma. Also, the abbreviated state does not require a period and the letters of the abbreviation are always capitalized.*

➢ **Attention Line:** Use the attention line to route the letter.

- Use the attention line if you are not certain of the name of the person who holds the position that you are writing too. (You might write: Attention Department of Accounting).
Always, make an effort to find out the name of the person to whom you are writing.

**Subject Line and Reference Line:** References the topic or subject of the letter. You can have one or the other and can even have both.

- Can be placed above or below the Salutation and usually is begun with Re or RE followed by a colon (Re: or RE: or you may write: Subject: and reference what the letter is about or in response to. This is important because your reader will need to know why he or she is reading this letter).
- Project number will be written on this line.
- Allows your correspondence or his or her secretary to find the file that the letter is in reference.
- Using a Reference Line eliminates the clumsy introduction that would, otherwise, need to announce the reason for the letter.
- If no project number, use a brief phrase to describe what the letter is about or in reference to
- Subject line is created by writing Subject: Note the colon. The subject line identifies the subject of the letter.

**Note:** Subject and or Reference lines allow for the receiver to quickly retrieve any other correspondences that have been passed back and forth as well as a reference for future correspondences. Never assume your receiver will remember what you are writing him or her about. Also, a letter may have both a Subject and a Reference line.

**Salutation:** Gives greeting to the receiver from the sender.

- The Salutation is placed two lines below the inside address (if there are no subject or reference lines). Otherwise, it is two lines below the last element.
- Traditional salutation is Dear. Dear is part of a long standing convention, so don’t try and be creative in order to avoid writing Dear to a stranger. **Do not omit the Dear.**
- The title of the person and name of the person: Dear Dr. Doe: Dear Professor Smith: Dear Mr. Smith:
- Follow the name with a colon. **DO NOT USE A COMMA.**

**Note:** If you do not know the name of the person you are writing, make every effort to find out. In the event that you cannot find out, it can be acceptable to write Dear Credit Department: Or Dear Sir or Madam:

**Body:** Contains your message.

- At least three paragraphs:
1. Introductory paragraph—provides a brief introduction, if the recipient doesn’t know you, and some type of introduction to the material you are writing about.
2. Body paragraph/s—Keep the sentences and paragraphs short.
3. Conclusion.
   - Double space between paragraphs.
   - Single space the text within the paragraph.
   - Do not indent the paragraphs in full block formatting.
   - Modified Block calls for paragraph indentions.
   - Keep paragraphs and sentences short.
   - Whenever possible, if you have multiple items in a series or sentences with multiple clauses or phrases, bullet.

Note: Communicate clearly and correctly: use proper grammar, punctuation, and usage. Maintain formality at all times and project the “you attitude.” Avoid clichés, slang words, colloquial words and phrases, and lofty speech. Above all, be honest.

- **Complimentary Closing:**
  - Conventional closings:
    1. People you do not know.
       a) Sincerely,
       b) Sincerely yours,
    2. People you have some relationship.
       a) Warm regards,
       b) With best wishes,
  - Capitalize only the first word of the Complimentary closing.
  - Follow the closing with a comma.

- **Writer’s Signature:**
  - Sign your name below the Complimentary closing and above your typed name. Use your legal name and write legibly (Sign in ink).

- **Writer’s Typed Name and Title:**
  - Type your name four spaces below the Complimentary closing.
  - A woman without a title may include (Mrs. Ms.) in parenthesis to the left of her name.
  - Below the typed name, include your title.

- **Enclosure Notice:** This line alerts your reader to enclosed documents.
  - Enclosure: For more than one enclosure, include the number in parenthesis. Do not count the page numbers but the number of documents enclosed.
- Enclosure: Medical examination form.

- **Distribution Notice:** You use a distribution or copy line to inform your reader that you have sent copies to other recipients.
  - Copy: John Smith, Jan Doe, and John Doe.
  - C: John Smith, Jan Doe, and John Doe.

- **Identification of Typist:** Use this line if someone typed the letter for you.
  - Usually the writer’s initials are upper case and the typist’s initials are lower case.
    JIW:mjs.

**Note:** If the letter contains more than one page, place the following information in the upper left corner: Page 2 and under that the date. You may write above Page 2 Letter to John Doe.