

Advanced Level Writing a Business Letter



The term "business letter" makes people nervous. Many people with English as a second language worry that their writing is not advanced enough for business writing. This is not the case. An effective letter in business uses short, simple sentences and straightforward vocabulary. The easier a letter is to read, the better. You will need to use smooth transitions so that your sentences do not appear too choppy.

Salutation

First and foremost, make sure that you spell the recipient's name correctly. You should also confirm the gender and proper title. Use Ms. for women and Mr. for men. Use Mrs. if you are 100% sure that a woman is married. Under less formal circumstances, or after a long period of correspondence it may be acceptable to address a person by his or her first name. When you don't know the name of a person and cannot find this information out you may write, "To Whom It May Concern". It is standard to use a comma (colon in North America) after the salutation. It is also possible to use no punctuation mark at all. Here are some common ways to address the recipient:

- Dear Mr Powell,
- Dear Ms Mackenzie,
- Dear Frederick Hanson:
- Dear Editor-in-Chief:
- Dear Valued Customer
- Dear Sir or Madam:
- Dear Madam
- Dear Sir,
- Dear Sirs
- Gentlemen:

First paragraph

In most types of business letter it is common to use a friendly greeting in the first sentence of the letter. Here are some examples:

- I hope you are enjoying a fine summer.
- Thank you for your kind letter of January 5th.
- I came across an ad for your company in *The Star today*.
- It was a pleasure meeting you at the conference this month.
- I appreciate your patience in waiting for a response.
- After your short opening, state the main point of your letter in one or two sentences:
 - I'm writing to enquire about...
 - I'm interested in the job opening posted on your company website.
 - We'd like to invite you to a members only luncheon on April 5th.

Second and third paragraphs

Use a few short paragraphs to go into greater detail about your main point. If one paragraph is all you need, don't write an extra paragraph just to make your letter look longer. If you are including sensitive material, such as rejecting an offer or informing an employee of a layoff period, embed this sentence in the second paragraph rather than opening with it. Here are some common ways to express unpleasant facts:

- We regret to inform you...
- It is with great sadness that we...
- After careful consideration we have decided...

Final paragraph

Your last paragraph should include requests, reminders, and notes on enclosures. If necessary, your contact information should also be in this paragraph. Here are some common phrases used when closing a business letter:

- I look forward to...
- Please respond at your earliest convenience.
- For further details...
- If you require more information...
- Thank you for taking this into consideration.
- I appreciate any feedback you may have.
- Enclosed you will find...
- Feel free to contact me by phone or email.

Closing

Here are some common ways to close a letter. Use a comma between the closing and your handwritten name (or typed in an email). If you do not use a comma or colon in your salutation, leave out the comma after the closing phrase:

- Yours truly,
- Yours sincerely,
- Sincerely,
- Sincerely yours
- Thank you,
- Best wishes
- All the best,
- Best of luck
- Warm regards,

Writing Tips

- Use a conversational tone.
- Ask direct questions.
- Double-check gender and spelling of names.
- Use active voice whenever possible.
- Use polite modals (*would in favour of will*).
- Always refer to yourself as "I".
- Don't use "we" unless it is clear exactly who the pronoun refers to.
- Rewrite any sentence or request that sounds vague.
- Don't forget to include the date. Day-Month-Year is conventional in many countries;
- However, to avoid confusion, write out the month instead of using numbers (e.g. July 5th, 2007)