

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Writing a Business Letter

Depending on the purpose of your business letter, there are several formats from which you can choose. The most widely used business letter formats are **full block** and **modified block**. You can also use the **memo format**, which is a form of business correspondence used mostly within an organization. Remember, the format of the letter helps to establish its tone and presentation.

COMPONENTS OF A BUSINESS LETTER

- The **heading** includes the date the letter is written. If you do not use letterhead stationery, you need to include your address above the date.
- The **address** above the salutation is the letter recipient's full address. This address should match the address on the envelope.
- The **salutation** is the line that begins "Dear..." Place a **colon** at the end of the salutation. Use Mr. for men and Ms. for women. Try to obtain a name to which you can address your letter. If you cannot obtain a name, you should address the letter to the person's position e.g. "Admissions Officer" as a last resort, you can use "To Whom It May Concern" as a salutation. **You can also include an attention line two spaces down from the recipient's address and a subject line (if necessary).**
- The **body** of your letter contains your message.

The first paragraph of a typical business letter should state the main purpose and/or subject of the letter. Begin with a friendly opening; then quickly transition into the purpose of your letter. Use several sentences to explain your purpose, but do not go into detail until the next paragraph.

The second paragraph states the specific information regarding your purpose. This may take the form of background information, statistics, or first-hand accounts. A few short paragraphs within the body of the letter should be enough to convey your message.

The closing paragraph briefly restates your purpose and why it is important. If the purpose of your letter is employment related, consider ending your letter with your contact information. However, if the purpose is informational, think about closing with gratitude for the reader's time.

- The **complimentary close** should appear two lines below the last line of the body. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word and always end the line with a comma. You can use a variety of closures: **Sincerely**, **Sincerely yours**, **Yours truly**, **Regards**, **Best regards**, or **Best wishes**.
- Your **signature** should be in blue or black ink. Allow four vertical spaces for your signature.
- The **identification** line contains your typed name, and, if you have one, your title, placed below your typed name. Depending on the purpose of the letter, you can position your phone number or email address in place of your title.

- **Enclosure (Encl.)**—attached document(s)—**or Distribution (cc)**—copies sent to another party—is placed two vertical spaces below the identification line.

LETTER FORMATS

Full Block Format (See Sample 1)

In a full block business letter, every component of the letter (heading, address, salutation, body, salutation, signature, identification, enclosures) is aligned to the left. Also, first sentences of paragraphs are not indented.

In Sample 1, you will see that there are two spaces between the address and the date; three spaces between the address and the salutation; two spaces between the salutation and the first body paragraph; two spaces between first, second, and third body paragraphs; two spaces between the body, the complimentary close, the signature line, identification, and enclosures.

Modified Block Format (See Sample 2)

In a modified block business letter, the heading, complimentary close, the signature, and identification are aligned to the right. Address, salutation, the body, and enclosures are aligned to the left. First sentences of paragraphs are indented.

In Sample 2, you will see that there are two spaces between the address and the date; three spaces between the address and the salutation; two spaces between the salutation and the first body paragraph; two spaces between first, second, and closing body paragraphs; two spaces between the body, the complimentary close, the signature line, and identification.

Memo Format (See Sample 3)

In a memo form of business correspondence, every component of the memo is aligned to the left. The following items should appear in the order listed below:

Date:

To: (Name of the recipient)

From: (Your name; initials of sender added in ink)

Subject: (Briefly explains the purpose of the memo)

cc: (If applicable, copies sent to another party)

Text:

Enclosure: (Optional)

In Sample 3, you will notice that there are two spaces between each component listed above. Also, the first four components: **To**, **From**, **Date**, and **Subject** as well as **cc** can appear as above, including the colon, or they can also appear in all caps. You can also make the items prominent by making them **BOLD**, or **CAPS+BOLD**.

It is common to put a solid line across the page below the **Subject** line to separate the heading from the text.

SAMPLE 1: FULL BLOCK FORMAT
(SAMPLE FELLOWSHIP APPLICATION LETTER)

| | |
|--|--|
| HEADING (your address and date) | 20-54 Jackson Avenue Brooklyn, NY 11352 June 28, 2007 |
| ADDRESS (of the person you are writing to) | Ms. Jennifer Esposito John Doe Fellowship 595 Park Avenue New York, NY 10021 |
| SALUTATION | Dear Ms. Esposito: |
| BODY | <p>The John Doe Fellowship has always loomed on the horizon for me. Ever since I decided to major in history, I have wanted to participate in your program. From the research that I have done, I believe that your program provides its participants with an extensively detailed look at the history of the world through hands-on experience with fossils, artifacts, and other remains that compose the blueprint of our existence. I am applying for the John Doe Fellowship because I believe that it would benefit me throughout my career and allow me to further understand the ideas behind history and how it is constructed.</p> <p>I am a very committed and goal-oriented person with excellent interpersonal skills. My background in history involves studying many different eras and time periods. My specialty, though, is the archeological study of the ancient world and its history. During the summer of 2004 and 2005, I interned at the Metropolitan Museum of Art as a tour guide. Both times, I not only utilized my knowledge of art and its history, but I also learned a lot about how that history was constructed. This experience has influenced me to intern as a tour guide at the American Museum of Natural History, where my love for the origins of history and learning from the tactile experience with artifacts increased. In the future, I would like to participate in historical research and eventually become a full-time professor of history.</p> <p>I believe my skills, experience, and goals make me an excellent candidate for your program.</p> <p>Thank you very much for considering me for the John Doe Fellowship. I am looking forward to hearing from you.</p> |
| COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE | Sincerely, |
| IDENTIFICATION LINE TITLE OR PHONE NUMBER | Bill Lurie (419) 352-5425 |
| SIGNATURE | |
| ENCLOSURES OR DISTRIBUTION | Enclosure |

SAMPLE 2: MODIFIED BLOCK FORMAT (SAMPLE CPE APPEAL)

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| HEADING (Your address and date) | 123 Corona Blvd. Flushing, NY 11235 July 3, 2007 |
| ADDRESS (of the person you are writing) | Dr. Steven Serafin, Director Reading/Writing Center Hunter College 695 Park Ave New York, NY 10065 |
| SALUTATION | Dear Dr. Serafin: |
| BODY | <p>My name is Sally Eisner. I am writing this appeal to request a 4th chance to take the CUNY Proficiency Exam in June of 2007. I have taken the exam twice and missed it once. The first time, I feel that I was simply unprepared. I did not realize that I should have attended CPE workshops offered at the Reading/Writing Center. The second time, I attended the workshops and learned more about the exam; however, my Task 2 score was unsatisfactory, so I failed again. Finally, I registered for CPE tutoring at the Reading/Writing Center and studied very hard for the third time. However, on the Saturday of the exam, I had a family emergency, which caused me to miss the date. I had forgotten that I could defer the test date until after I missed it.</p> <p>Now, I am working hard to build on my academic skills. After a consultation with a CPE advisor at the Reading/Writing Center, I have a clear vision of what I should do in order to pass the exam. Again, I have registered for a semester of CPE tutoring at the Writing/Reading Center that I plan to attend weekly.</p> <p>I would really like to have a 4th chance to pass this exam because I am confident that if I work hard, I can do it. Thank you very much for considering my appeal. I hope to hear back from you soon.</p> |
| COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE | |
| SIGNATURE | Sincerely, |
| IDENTIFICATION | Sally Eisner |

SAMPLE 3: MEMO FORMAT (SAMPLE PROJECT PROGRESS UPDATE)

| | |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| HEADING | |
| Date: | Date: July 5, 2007 |
| To: Name of person addressed | To: Sophia Halley, Director, Public Health Engineering (DOHMH) |
| From: Your name | From: Pat Godowsky, Database Manager |
| Subject: the purpose | Subject: Database format changes update |
| TEXT | <hr/> <p>I have made the expected changes to the database. Right now, the problems that the field inspectors experienced when they transferred their observations from their hand-held devices to the database have been resolved.</p> <p>A survey of the new changes shows that the field inspectors are very happy with the new system.</p> <p>Let me know if you need me to make any more corrections to the program.</p> |
| ENCLOSURE | Enclosure |

USAGE AND APPEARANCE OF YOUR LETTER

Remember to proofread your letter for these items:

- Spelling of the receiver's name
- Spelling of the receiver's place of business
- Spelling elsewhere—including your own name and business
- Typing errors
- Correct dates
- Subject-verb agreement
- Pronoun reference and form
- Punctuation

CHECKLIST

- Did you type in a date to validate the letter as a record?
- Did you place a colon after the salutation?
- Did you place a comma after the complimentary close?
- Did you sign the letter below the complimentary close and above your typed name?
- Did you initial or sign the memo to the right of your name?