

Overview Form of the Business Letter

A business letter must incorporate Standard English conventions and look professional. All business letters must be typed. Please print on white paper.

I. Letter-Writing Guidelines

- Use a consistent style: semi-block or full block.
- Avoid defective printers.
- Use margins left and right, top and bottom. Use 1" frame.
- Center the letter vertically (top to bottom) on the page.
- Present your information completely and in the correct order, so that your reader can file or reply to the letter easily.

II. Parts of the Business Letter

- A. The **heading** gives the writer's complete address, either in the letterhead (company stationery) or typed out, plus the date.
- B. The **inside address** gives the reader's name and address.
 - If you are not sure who to address the letter or how to spell a person's name, contact the company for the correct information.
 - If the person's title is a single word, place it after the name and a comma. A longer title goes on a separate line.
- C. The **salutation** begins with *Dear* and ends with a colon, not a comma.
 - Use Mr. and Ms. plus the person's last name, unless you are well acquainted. Do not guess at Miss or Mrs. Use Ms. if in doubt.
 - If you can't get the person's name, replace the salutation with *Dear* or *Attention:* plus the title of an appropriate reader, such as *Customer Service Department, Sales Manager, or Personal Manager*. DO NOT use *Dear Sir or Gentlemen*.
- D. The **body** should consist of single-spaced paragraphs with double-spacing between paragraphs. (Do not indent the paragraphs.)
 - NEVER write a business letter that exceeds one page.
- E. For the **complimentary closing**, use *Sincerely, Yours sincerely, or Respectfully*, followed by a comma. Capitalize only the first word.
- F. The **signature** includes the writer's handwritten name plus the typed name.
 - When someone types the letter for the writer, that person's initials appear (in lowercase) beside the writer's initials (in capitals).
 - If a document (brochure, form, copy, etc.) is enclosed with the letter, the word *Enclosure or Encl.* appears below the initials.
 - If a copy of the letter is sent elsewhere, type the letter *cc:* plus the person's or department's name beneath the enclosure line.

III. Proofreading a Business letter

A. Organization

1. The letter states its purpose clearly, right away.
2. The explanation gives the reader complete and accurate details.
3. The letter clearly states what you want the reader to do.

B. Wording and Tone

4. The letter avoids expressions that are wordy, clichéd, vague, or sexist.
5. The letter begins, continues, and ends with a courteous tone.

C. Form and Appearance

6. The letter follows consistently either Semi-block or Full-block format.
7. The letter is neatly typed and printed with no smudges or other imperfections.
8. The margins are correct and even, spacing is correct, and the message is centered on the page.
9. The letter is signed in blue or black ink, and the signature is readable.

D. Punctuation

10. A comma separates the city and state, but not the state and ZIP code.
11. A colon is used after the salutation and a comma after the complimentary close.

E. Capitalization

12. The names of streets, cities, and people are capitalized.
13. The month in the heading is capitalized.
14. The title of the reader, the name of the department, and the company in the inside address are capitalized.
15. The word Dear and all nouns in the salutation are capitalized, but only the first word of the complimentary close is capitalized.

F. Spelling

16. The reader's name is spelled correctly in both the inside address and the salutation.
17. The numbered street names from one to ten are spelled out, but Arabic numbers are used for higher numbers.
18. The names of cities, streets, and months are spelled out. Avoid abbreviations.

IV. Folding the letter

An 8 ½" by 11" letter should be mailed in a standard-sized 4 ⅛" by 9 ½" business envelope

- Fold the bottom edge so that the paper is divided into thirds.
- Fold the top third of the letter down and crease the edges firmly.
- Insert the letter (with the open end at the top) into the envelope.

V. Addressing the Business Envelope

Address the letter correctly so it can be delivered promptly. Make sure that the destination and return addresses match the heading and inside address on the letter. The return address goes in the upper left corner, the destination address in the center.

Sample address 1:

ATTN MANAGER TRAINING
C/O MCDONALDS CORPORATION
1 MCDONALDS PLAZA
OAKBROOK ILLINOIS 60521-1900

Sample address 2:

MS TERESA CHANG
C/O GOODWILL INDUSTRIES OF AMERICA
9200 WISCONSIN AVENUE
BETHESDA MARYLAND 20814-3896

VI. Official USPS Envelope Guidelines

1. Capitalize everything in the address and leave out all punctuation.
2. Avoid using abbreviations.
3. If you know the ZIP + 4-code, use it. You can get ZIP + 4 information by phoning your local post office or by going online.