

# Apology Letter Guidelines

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An apology letter is not to be considered a ‘quick fix’. It is more than simply saying, “I’m sorry”. It is meant to be a sincere, reflective/thoughtful consideration of what happened and what should have happened. It is about taking responsibility for your actions, acknowledging how the other person was affected by your actions, and trying to **repair harm caused**. An apology letter is often only one step in repairing harm, but **it is an important one**. While remorse cannot be forced or demanded, it is our hope that as you work through **all the components** of a full apology, you will be able to say that you are genuinely sorry for the harm you caused. It is especially important to understand that an apology letter benefits both the writer and the receiver. We have found that the **two greatest expressed needs** from persons harmed are a genuine apology and to know **why** the harm happened to him/her. An apology letter, written according to the following guidelines, will help meet both those needs. For the person responsible for causing harm, an apology letter is instrumental in helping further peace and reconciliation.

**A complete apology includes the following components:**

**1. Acknowledgement:**

- a. Acknowledge specifically what you’ve done wrong;
- b. Acknowledge your understanding of how the other person(s) was/were harmed – be **specific** (name the harm, who was impacted, and how were they impacted)
- c. Acknowledge what you should have done differently.

**2. Remorse:**

- a. Express a sincere “I’m sorry” and express **why** you are sorry.

**3. Explanation:**

- a. Tell what you were thinking at the time and what you’ve thought about since the incident;
- b. Explain if your action was intentional, planned ahead, targeted, etc (people want to know ‘why me’). This is NOT about making excuses!!
- c. Do **NOT** use the word “**but**” or **give any excuse for your behaviour**. Taking responsibility is not about making excuses.

**4. Reparation:**

- a. Let the other person know what steps you will take to repair the harm you caused. You may want to ask them what they feel they need to move forward in a positive way (ask this question, only if you are willing to continue to work with the other person to repair the harm).

**5. Next Time:** Explain what you will do different next time.

**6. Lessons Learned:** Explain what you have learned through this experience.

**Other tips:**

- ❖ Try to put yourself in the other person’s position. What do you think he/she needs to move forward and to heal from the harm? Consider these things as you express your apology.

- ❖ The person harmed most often wants to know ‘why’ this happened to him/her – especially if the other person is unknown to you. As much as you can help the other person understand the answer to this question, please do so. A word of caution: do not blame the other person for your behaviour!! You may set the context (e.g. “I was drunk...on drugs...grieving a loss...felt pressured), but regardless of the context, be **VERY** clear that you acknowledge that your behaviour was **YOUR** choice.
- ❖ Ensure that your presentation is neat and legible. Do not quickly scribble down a couple of lines, or submit an apology with spelling mistakes. Have someone read your apology letter and edit it for any errors. If you cannot write legibly, type your letter, but be sure to sign it with your written signature. **It will add more hurt to the person harmed if you submit an apology that appears carelessly written; it will appear that you don’t mean what you are writing.**
- ❖ When you offer an apology, place no pressure on the receiver to accept it. The person harmed may not receive your apology, and he/she has the right to decline it or accept it. Also, the person harmed may not offer anything or any response in return (e.g. the other person may not forgive you). However, these are not good reasons for you not to offer an apology. Offering a genuine apology, regardless of the other person’s response, is a sign of your own maturity, humility and understanding.
- ❖ If it has been suggested in your decision letter that you may want to write an apology letter, **please submit your letter to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs.** Your letter will be reviewed to ensure that it meets the criteria of an appropriate apology. If your letter meets the above guidelines, it will be forwarded to the harmed party. **If your letter is insufficient or inappropriate, you will be contacted and asked to submit a new letter.** Please review the above guidelines to ensure that you have addressed **all six steps** as outlined. If you feel that you are not sorry for your actions and do not wish to apologize, please speak about this with the Student Judicial Affairs Officer.

### **Apology letters should be forwarded to**

Student Judicial Affairs Officer  
Office of Student Judicial Affairs  
Kwantlen Polytechnic University  
Cloverdale Campus  
5500-180<sup>th</sup> St  
Cloverdale, BC V3S 4K5