

Chapter

1 Letter Format

The appearance of your business letter makes the first impression on the reader. Good quality paper and a well-designed or embossed letterhead for your stationery can create a strong image about your company and make the recipient form a favourable attitude before reading even one word of the content. A good appearance also indicates that the employee who composed it is a competent, alert and accurate individual.

Therefore, your letter must be clear and well-organised. There must be ample margin of white space surrounding the message. Brief letters should preferably not begin too high on the page. Paragraphs should also be well-spaced, without errors and of approximately equal length, while the print should always look clear, neat and dark. Black ink is always easier to read.

The Layout of a Business Letter

Although big companies adopt their own arrangement style, used by their employees, in company-to-company and company-to-customer communication, there is a list of parts appearing in a specific order in most business letters.

1 Letterhead

This is printed on the company's stationery, in one or more colours and gives

much information about the company. In two-page letters the letterhead appears only on the first page. It is usually printed in the middle, the top left hand or right hand corner (BE) and includes the company's logo, full legal name, followed by its full address, telephone, fax or telex number and email address (if available). (At the end of this section Figure 2-1, p. 26 shows a letter with all the parts). The type of company is printed after its name. In the UK, the most common company abbreviations are: a) PLC, indicating a Public Limited Company; b) Ltd, indicating a private limited liability company; c) & Co, indicating a partnership between two or more people; d) Son/s, Bros (brothers), Daughter/s indicating that the company is a family concern. In the USA INC (incorporated) is the abbreviation used for a limited liability company.

2 Date

Business letters should have a dateline. It appears on a single line two to eight lines below the letterhead. The date typed should be the one which the letter was dictated irrespective of the date it was mailed. In BE the abbreviations -st, -nd, -th are acceptable and the date and month can be transposed. For example, one could write July 24 2008 or 24 July 2008. What is important is to avoid writing the month in figures as this can be interpreted differently in various parts of the world. For instance, 10.7.08 means 10 July 2008 in BE and 7 October 2008 in AE where the sequence is month-day-year. Sometimes, in AE, a comma can be put before the year, e.g. September 1, 2008.

A company can choose whatever convention it prefers provided it is consistent throughout its correspondence.

3 Inside address

This is the recipient's address, written on the left-hand side of the paper, a few lines below the date. It should be typed as it appears on the envelope and must contain: name, job title, street address, city, zip/post code and country.

The recipient's name, if known, is written on the first line of the inside address including his/her initials or first given name, e.g. Mr R.C. Brown or Mr Robin Brown.

Mailing or in-house notations. These can be placed two lines below the date to indicate whether the letter is certified mail, registered mail etc, or personal, confidential respectively.

The most common courtesy titles used in addresses are as follows:

- *Mr* (Mister) is the title used for a man.
- *Mrs* is used for a married woman.
- *Miss* is used for an unmarried woman.
- *Ms* is used for both married and unmarried women and tends to be the most prevalent title to address a woman.
- *Messrs* refers to a list of men's names and more commonly forms part of the name of a business firm.

It must be noted that in AE there is a full stop after the above titles, whereas in BE the full stop is used if abbreviations take the form of the first few letters of the word, e.g. Prof. (Professor).

The job title can be written next to the name, separated by a comma, or if it is too lengthy on the following line.

e.g. Mr R.C. Brown, President
or Mr P. Groom
Managing Director

If the recipient's name is unknown, we can write his/her job title, e.g. The Personnel Manager, in the inside address. If that is unknown too, we can address our letter to a department, e.g. The Research and Development Department, or to the company itself, e.g. Messrs Partridge, Bex & Co.

4 Attention line

This is used when you address your letter directly to a company, but you want the letter to be dealt with by a specific person or directed to a particular department. The attention line is typed two lines below the inside address and two lines above the salutation.

5 Salutation

The salutation is placed two lines below the inside address or attention line (if there is one). The standard and best way of beginning a letter is *Dear* (with capital D). When you do not know the name or sex of the addressee *Dear Sir/Madam* is used instead. *Dear Sirs* is used to address a company in formal BE

while in AE such a letter opens with *Ladies and Gentlemen*. When you know the name of the recipient, the salutation is *Dear* followed by the person's courtesy title and surname, e.g. *Dear Mr Cornish*. The addressee's first name can be used if s/he is a business associate or person you know well. In British correspondence a comma can be used after the salutation, e.g. *Dear Mr Cornish*, whereas in American English a comma is used when you address people informally, e.g. *Dear John*, and a colon when you address them formally, e.g. *Dear Mr Johnson*:

6 Subject title/line

The subject title/line is not always required. Like the attention line it is placed two lines below the salutation and it is either printed in capitals or in bold type, or underlined. It states the purpose of the letter and draws the reader's attention to the topic. Sometimes when the subject title/line is used, there is no need to introduce the subject in the first paragraph.

7 Opening paragraph

The opening paragraph is mostly used to state the date of the letter being answered, the subject matter and the writer's feeling on the subject, such as regret, pleasure, surprise etc. It is advisable to start with a short opening sentence which attracts greater attention than a longer one.

8 Body of the letter

This includes the main message of the letter and constitutes its longest part. It elaborates on the subject stated in the opening paragraph. It consists of short paragraphs which enable the reader to comprehend the matter easily. Spacing should be single within paragraphs and double between paragraphs. If the letter is very short double-spacing can be used within paragraphs.

9 Closing paragraph

This paragraph exists in many business letters and serves as a summary of the points raised before, recapitulating the message and giving the final shot.

10 Complimentary close/closing

The complimentary close is a polite way of ending your letter and must be included in all business letters. It is placed two lines below the last line of the body or closing paragraph.

The choice of the proper complimentary close depends on the degree of formality of the letter. In British English, a standard form for informal correspondence is *Best wishes*, for a formal letter beginning with a personal name, e.g. *Dear Ms Morris*, *Yours Sincerely* and for a letter beginning *Dear sir/madam* etc. *Yours faithfully*.

The Americans tend to use: a) *Yours truly*, *Yours very truly*, *Respectfully yours* for formal correspondence, b) *Sincerely yours*, *Sincerely*, *Cordially yours*, *Cordially*, *Most cordially* for less formal letters and c) *Regards*, *Best regards*, *Kind(est) regards*, *As ever*, *As always* etc. for friendly letters.

The complimentary close is often placed on the left hand and can be followed by a comma. The first letter of only the first word should be capitalised.

11 Signature Block/Signer's identification

The name of the communicator along with any titles is typed a few lines, usually four, below the complimentary close. If the writer's title is short enough, it can be written on the same line as the name after a comma, e.g. *Mary Lee, Director*. Otherwise it is typed single-spaced beneath the printed name, e.g. *Antony Perk, Chief Buyer*.

It is advisable to include your courtesy title in the signature block in order for your correspondent to identify your sex and address you correctly when s/he replies, e.g. (Ms) *K. Hope*. Academic Degrees (e.g. *M.A.*, *M.B.A.*, *Ph.D.*) or professional designations (e.g. *C.E.O.*, *C.L.U.*)* follow the printed name and are separated by a comma, e.g. *C. Collins, Ph.D.*

In formal letter writing, if there is no letterhead, the company name must be typed in capital letters two lines below the complimentary close. Directly below there should be the signature and a few lines further down the writer's name.

e.g. Yours sincerely
RACHEL LEVI COMPANY

John Morris

John Morris, Director

* Certified Life Underwriter

If an employee signs the letter for someone else s/he must initial to the right of the signature, e.g. *John Morris ck.*

If an assistant signs his/her name on behalf of someone else, s/he must type his/her name and title below the signature.

Yours sincerely

e.g. *Karen Hope*

Karen Hope

Assistant to John Morris

In BE the abbreviation P.P. (per pro*), meaning for and on behalf, appears in the signature block.

12 Reference initials

Reference initials are an optional addition to any letter and can be used to identify the writer and the typist. They may appear at the top or bottom of the page and are indicated by the signer's initials in capitals, followed by a slash (/) or colon (:), and the lowercase initials of the employee who prepared the letter.

e.g. John Green
Sales manager
JG/lk

13 Enclosures

If there are any documents enclosed with the letter, they may appear in the bottom left hand corner of the page, two lines below the signature block or the reference initials (if any). More specifically, if there is one document, this can be listed, e.g. *Enclosure* (or *Enc.* or *Encl.* with capital or lower case *e*), whereas if there are a number of documents they can be listed, e.g. *Enclosures* (or *encs.*, often followed by the numbers of documents in a parenthesis).

e.g. *Enclosure: Invoice DL 2523*

or

Enc: Bank draft No. 245278 for € 10,000

* Latin: per procurationem

- Enclosures (3)*
1. Irrevocable Credit No. 3/154/17
 2. Invoice copies (2)
 3. Purchase order No. 1224

or

- encs (2)*
1. Purchase order No.
 2. Cheque No.

If the letter is sent via email, the word *Attachment* should be used instead and the same rules as those for the enclosures should be followed.

Enclosures function as a reminder to the reader of the list of items included in the envelope that must not be discarded.

14 Copies/Copy notation

When a letter is sent to a person other than the recipient the *c.c./cc* notation (carbon copy)* is added directly below the enclosures or reference initials to inform the reader of the people who have received a copy of the letter. If we do not want the named recipient to know that a third party has been forwarded a copy, *b.c.* (blind copy) or *b.c.c.* (blind carbon copy) is added on the copies themselves, not on the original.

* cc = carbon or courtesy copy

FIGURE 2-1 *Parts of a Business Letter.*

1 Levin Shoes Ltd
10 Willow Street Canterbury
Kent SR3 2PX
Telephone: +44(0)1303 485224
Fax: +44(0)1303485932
Email: mgordon@levinshoes.com

2 2 March 20...

3 Major's Department store
23 Earlham Road
London WE51DR

4 ATTENTION: MR JOHN COLLINS/for the attention of the Sales Manager

5 Dear Mr. Brown,

6 SUBJECT: Summer shoes catalogue and price list

7 Thank you for your letter of 20 February asking for details and prices of 'Levin Summer Shoes' collection.

8 Enclosed you will find our illustrated catalogue, together with our price list and full details of our terms and conditions of sale.

As you will notice our shoes are superior to any other on the market and our prices highly competitive.

We must also point out that many orders have been received even at this time of the year, and if you wish to ensure delivery by the end of April, you must place your order now.

9 We trust that our quality and prices are of interest to you and we look forward to receiving your order.

10 Yours sincerely

11 Mary Gordon
Sales Manager

12 MG/ws

13 Enclosure: price-list

14 c.c. Mrs Kelly Norman

Postscripts

In a carefully-organised and well-written business letter there appears no postscript. When it is used, however, it is placed two lines below the last notation. It is arranged as the other paragraphs in the letter and may be preceded by *P.S.* or *PS*:

A point worth mentioning is that studies have shown that postscripts attract the reader's attention and are easily remembered, especially when hand-written. That's why they are of value in sales letters when a special offer or a special point is to be made.

The Envelope

The address written on the envelope should coincide with the inside address. Its elements should be aligned and single-spaced. The name of the city and country should be preferably written in capital letters and on different lines. The post code can also appear on a line by itself or one space after the city.

Messrs G. Willows & Co
24 Cressent Road
Norwich
NR2 7LX
UK

The phrase private and confidential or any special mailing notations (e.g. registered mail) are typed in all capital letters directly below the stamp.

Various Arrangement Styles for Letter Writing

The format for a letter is mostly determined by the writer. A number of companies have their own house style in which their business letters must be written. Despite the preferred arrangement style a company is eligible to use, there are five formats upon which letter writing is based.

Full Block (Figure 2-2): In this format all the lines of the letter start at the left margin. It is very popular in the business world and efficient since it is time-saving and simplifies the paperwork of modern business.

Block (Figure 2-3): The block format differs from the full-block in the position of the date, complimentary close and signature block which are typed slightly to the right of the centre. The block style has been widely used and most of the business people feel very comfortable with it.

Semi-block (Figure 2-4): It is similar to the block style. The only difference is that the paragraphs are indented (one tab stop or five spaces).

Square-block (Figure 2-5): It is quite similar to the full-block style. The key differences are: a) the date which is written at the right margin on the same line as the start of the inside address, b) the reference initials and enclosures are written on the same line as the signature and signer's identification at the right margin. This square arrangement is space-saving and as a result advisable for lengthy letters.

Simplified (Figure 2-6): It is designed by the Administrative Management Society and is mostly used to address an unknown audience. It is impersonal and has no salutation and complimentary close. A subject line is always included, typed in capital letters. The signature block is also typed in all capitals, while enclosures or lists are indented.

Special paragraphing (Figure 2-7): When a business letter contains long quotations or any special data, they should be written in a special paragraph, single-spaced, indented five spaces on both sides. When you want to call attention to certain items you can use a bulleted list, while if you want to prioritise the items you can use a numbered list.

FIGURE 2-2*Full-blocked Letter Style*

Barclays Bank PLC
1 Churchill Place,
London E14 5HP
6 June 20. . .

Ms P. Georgiou
Pindou 3
Metamorfosi 14452
Athens
Hellas

Dear Ms Georgiou,

SUBJECT: Confirmation of Personal Reserve

I am pleased to confirm your Reserve amount for your current account, which is effective from 18 August 20... .

This service is in addition to any overdraft that we may have agreed to make available to you.

You will be charged a Reserved Usage Fee when you make use of your Reserve.

The Reserve is intended for short term use only. If you use the Reserve continuously for more than a few weeks, we may contact you and we may seek to reduce or restrict the Reserve.

The Reserve is repayable on demand or may be reduced or restricted by written notice to you if we consider the conduct of your account or your financial position makes this appropriate. Further details of the Personal Reserve service and fees that apply to it are enclosed and are contained in our leaflet entitled "Our Bank Charges Explained".

If you would like further assistance, please telephone us at . . . or call into a branch where a member of staff will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Harris
Head of Current Accounts

AH/bm

Enc.

FIGURE 2-3

Blocked Letter Style

Barclays Bank PLC
1 Churchill Place, London E14 5HP
6 June 20... .

Ms P. Georgiou
Pindou 3
Metamorfosi 14452
Athens
Hellas

Dear Ms Georgiou,

Subject: Confirmation of Personal Reserve

I am pleased to confirm your Reserve amount for your current account, which is effective from 18 August 20... .

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If you would like further assistance, please telephone us on . . . or call into a branch where a member of staff will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Harris
Head of Current Accounts

AH/bm

Enc.

Barclays Bank PLC
1 Churchill Place, London E14 5HP

6 June 20. . .

Ms P. Georgiou
Pindou 3
Metamorfosi 14452
Athens
Hellas

Dear Ms Georgiou,

Subject: Confirmation of Personal Reserve

I am pleased to confirm your Reserve amount for your current account, which is effective from 18 August 20... .

This service is in addition to any overdraft that we may have agreed to make available to you.

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If you would like further assistance, please telephone us at . . . or call into a branch where a member of staff will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Harris
Head of Current Accounts

AH/bm

Enc.

FIGURE 2-5*Square-Blocked Letter Style*

Barclays Bank PLC
1 Churchill Place, London E14 5HP

Ms P. Georgiou
Pindou 3
Metamorfosi 14452
Athens
Hellas

6 June 20. . .

Dear Ms Georgiou,

SUBJECT: Confirmation of Personal Reserve

I am pleased to confirm your Reserve amount for your current account, which is effective from 18 August 20. . . .

This service is in addition to any overdraft that we may have agreed to make available to you.

You will be charged a Reserved Usage Fee when you make use of your Reserve.

The Reserve is intended for short term use only. If you use the Reserve continuously for more than a few weeks, we may contact you and we may seek to reduce or restrict the Reserve.

The Reserve is repayable on demand or may be reduced or restricted by written notice to you if we consider the conduct of your account or your financial position makes this appropriate. Further details of the Personal Reserve service and fees that apply to it are enclosed and are contained in our leaflet entitled "Our Bank Charges Explained".

If you would like further assistance, please telephone us at . . . or call into a branch where a member of staff will be happy to help.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Harris
Head of Current Accounts

AH/bm
Enc.

FIGURE 2-6*Simplified Letter Style*

Barclays Bank PLC
1 Churchill Place, London E14 5HP

6 June 20. . .

Ms P. Georgiou
Pindou 3
Metamorfosi 14452
Athens
Hellas

CONFIRMATION OF PERSONAL RESERVE

I am pleased to confirm your Reserve amount for your current account, which is effective from 18 August 20. . . .

This service is in addition to any overdraft that we may have agreed to make available to you.

You will be charged a Reserved Usage Fee when you make use of your Reserve.

The Reserve is intended for short term use only. If you use the Reserve continuously for more than a few weeks, we may contact you and we may seek to reduce or restrict the Reserve.

The Reserve is repayable on demand or may be reduced or restricted by written notice to you if we consider the conduct of your account or your financial position makes this appropriate. Further details of the Personal Reserve service and fees that apply to it are enclosed and are contained in our leaflet entitled "Our Bank Charges Explained".

If you would like further assistance, please telephone us at . . . or call into a branch where a member of staff will be happy to help.

ANDREW HARRIS, HEAD OF CURRENT ACCOUNTS

AH/bm
Enc.

Homemakers Ltd
54 Clivendon Road
Cardiff
CF 5 2PX
Telephone: +44160923885
Fax: +44160923885
Email: smoston@homemakers.com

20 May 20...

John Collins
22 Burgen Street
York
Yorkshire
YT2 76Z

Dear Mr Collins,

We appreciate your interest in Homemakers furniture and we are happy to send you the prices of the items you requested:

1 brown leather sofa 3 m × 1.80 m costs £2,000.

2 armchairs of the same material are £350 each.

4 kitchen chairs are £50 each, with the purchase of 6 the price is reduced to £40 each due to larger volume.

1 kitchen table costs £100.

All items are protected against knocks and scratches by corrugated paper wrapping and packing in strong cardboard boxes.

Should you decide to place an order, call our 24-hour-toll free number (...) to ensure prompt delivery.

Yours sincerely,

Steve Moston
Customer Service Manager

SM/jc

Style for an Effective Business Letter

Grammatical correctness and accuracy make your letter appear and sound professional. Your message should get across clearly and concisely. Wordiness, old fashioned English (phrases such as herein, herewith, we remain yours faithfully) and pompous style make your correspondence stilted and unnatural, and can bar communication with your reader.

Irrespective of whether the tone of the letter is formal or informal, it must convey credibility for data etc. and must aim for precision. All thoughts should be organised and stated simply and explicitly. The goals should be made clear at the start and restated or expanded in a following paragraph. All the facts should be carefully checked and reported accurately.

Moreover, it is important that the tone of any business letter remains courteous and tactful throughout. Simple words or phrases such as *please* or *thank you*, *We appreciate*, *We regret* can establish good rapport and build good business relations.

A successful business letter should be reader oriented. Readers who feel that the letter was written to them are encouraged to respond favourably. In other words, you should adopt the so called *you approach*, or *you attitude* to show that you focus attention on the person, the *you* to whom you are writing. Therefore, you must know your target audience, their needs, interests and viewpoints on the issues you address in your letter.

On the other hand, your reader also wants to have some knowledge about you. Always reflect your personality in your letters, just sound like you to make the reader feel that a real person is behind the letters.

Brevity should always be a key element in writing. Ideas should not be reiterated or messages prolonged in order to fill the letter out. Business people who receive a lot of correspondence are unlikely to respond positively to lengthy letters. You should know when to finish.

In order to avoid bothering the reader with unnecessary details the writer must outline the most important ideas or facts s/he wants to convey, stick to them and express them in a logical order.

Sexist Language

An issue that has been raised in the workplace the last decades is that of the use of gender-neutral language. Since more and more women assume large responsibilities in the world of business, the need for words that describe their job

position is apparent. Thus, when referring to a female staff member, it is better to use the word *chairwoman*, *saleswoman*, etc. than the masculine equivalents of *chairman* or *salesman*, or opt for sexually neutral words of *chairperson*, *salesperson*, respectively.

The third person singular pronouns *he*, *she*, *him*, *her* present a problem as well, which can either be avoided by the use of a slash, e.g. *s/he*, *him/her* or to avoid distracting the reader, by the use of a third person plural pronoun:

A manager relies on his secretary for his business meetings.
Managers rely on their secretaries for their business meetings.

Whatever the personal preferences of workers, they must respect the policy that their company has regarding the issue.

British and American English

Apart from their main difference in accent, British English (BE) and American English (AE) vary in a number of written forms.

Spelling Differences

Words ending in *-re* in BE are written with *-er* in AE.
e.g. centre - center, metre - meter, theatre - theater

Cluster *-our* in BE is *-or* in AE.
e.g. labour - labor, favour - favor, colour - color, humour - humor.

Certain verbs ending in *-se* in BE are written with *-ze* in AE.
e.g. organise - organize, analyse - analyze, criticise - criticize

Cluster *-ogue* in BE is often *-og* in AE.
e.g. catalogue - catalog, epilogue - epilog, dialogue - dialog