

Overview: Business Letters are written to give and to obtain information. The business letter is a substitute for oral communication, it provides a written record of business transactions, and most importantly conveys information from the writer to the intended reader.

Modern business letters are preferably typed, however they may also be hand written. Letters should be neat, clean, grammatically correct, well punctuated and well ordered; and presented on good quality A4 or letter size paper, normally white in color. How a letters' contents are received by the reader, is influenced by its tone, and its presentation. A good letter should have a clearly defined and stated purpose; and deliver information in as concise, clear and complete a manner possible. Rarely should a letter take longer than 1- 1 ½ minutes to read.

Business letter Structure

1. Letter Head and/or Senders Address
2. Date
3. Name & Address of intended recipient
4. Salutation e.g. Dear.. Sir; Madam; Sir/Madam; Mr. Johnson
5. Introductory sentence or paragraph – It introduces the writer and the reason for writing
6. The body – sets out the information being conveyed
7. Closing paragraph or sentence – sets out
8. Complimentary Close/Closing line i.e. Yours sincerely, Yours faithfully, Yours truly
9. Sender's Signature
10. Senders' Name.. printed
11. Enclosure (Enc.), Attachment (att.) and copy notices

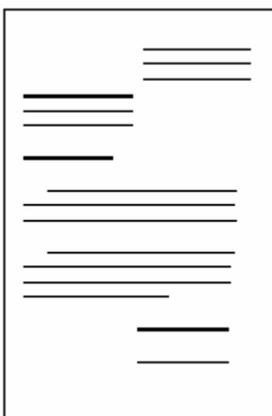
Business Letter Layout Styles: (see fig.1)

Semi-Blocked - This style is carries the senders address & date aligned to the right of the page, as well as the complimentary close and signature block. Paragraphs in the body have their first lines indented, usually five spaces.

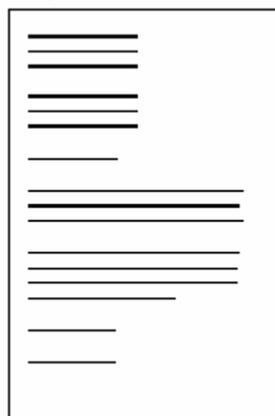
Fully Blocked – The preferred modern style, all text is flushed unto the left hand side, simple, effective.

Simplified Blocked - This style is similar to the fully blocked except the date of the letter, the closing line and the senders name and address are on the right of the page. Paragraphs in the body have their first lines indented, usually five spaces.

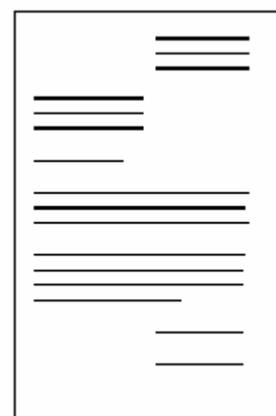
Semi – Blocked



Fully Blocked



Modified Block



It is standard practice for business letters to be mailed in white envelopes e.g. a No.10 (4.5 x 9.5). The address of the intended recipient is printed on the front of the envelope blocked and centered. The address of the sender may be placed at the Top left hand corner at the front.

Standard Structure

Fig. 1

Letter Head/Address...	OnCall Ltd Home Ground St. Peter	OnCall Ltd Home Ground St. Peter	OnCall Ltd Home Ground St. Peter
Date.....	May 15, 2001	May 15, 2001	May 15, 2001
Addressee.....	Mr. Bobby Brown First Financial Center Suit 1 The Office St. Michael Barbados	Mr. Bobby Brown First Financial Center Suit 1 The Office St. Michael Barbados	Mr. Bobby Brown First Financial Center Suit 1 The Office St. Michael Barbados
Salutation.....	Dear Mr. Brown,	Dear Mr Brown	Dear Mr. Brown,
Opening Introduction..	I have received your letter dated May 07, 2001, requesting a catalog of our cellular phones.	I have received your letter dated May 07, 2001, requesting a catalog of our cellular phones.	I have received your letter dated May 07, 2001, requesting a catalog of our cellular phones.
Body.....	I am pleased to inform you that in addition to receiving our May catalog, you are eligible to receive a 15% discount on your first order, placed before June 1, 2001.	I am pleased to inform you that in addition to receiving our May catalog, you are eligible to receive a 15% discount on your first order, placed before June 1, 2001.	I am pleased to inform you that in addition to receiving our May catalog, you are eligible to receive a 15% discount on your first order, placed before June 1, 2001.
Closing.....	Thank you for your interest in our products.	Thank you for your interest in our products.	Thank you for your interest in our products.
Complimentary Close..	Yours truly, JamesBrown James Brown OnCall Ltd.	JamesBrown James Brown OnCall Ltd.	Yours truly, JamesBrown James Brown OnCall Ltd.

Types of Business Letters

There are several types of letters with differing functions, the following are some of the six most common. Keep in mind that the purpose and audience of your business letter effects which form you choose.

Order Letter

This is the most common form of business communication, and it is written for a manufacturer, wholesaler, or retailer. When writing an order letter, include all the information the reader will need to identify the merchandise, such as:

- quantity
- model number
- dimensions
- capacity
- material
- price

Inquiry Letter

The purpose of this form is to obtain information from the reader. If the reader is expecting the letter, your task is easy. If the reader is not expecting your letter, then it is more difficult. Follow these guidelines: A) State your

purpose B) List your questions or requested action C) Offer something in return to encourage action D) Follow up with a thank you note, e-mail, or phone call to the person who helped you with your request

Response to an Inquiry Letter

When you receive an inquiry letter, answer the questions as clearly and as concisely as possible. If you cannot answer the questions, explain the reasons and offer to assist with alternate methods.

Sales Letter

When writing a sales letter, it is important to have a good attitude in order to sell your product or service, because the reader will want to know why they should spend their valuable time reading the letter. Therefore, you need to provide clear, specific information that will explain to the reader why they should be interested in buying your product or service. Sales letters usually have a four-part strategy:

(A) Catch the reader's eye: it is very crucial in a sales letter to attract the reader's attention or else you will probably fail to sell your product or service (B) Describe the product or service you are trying to sell; (C) Convince your reader that your claims are accurate: back up your comments with research and facts. (D) Give the reader opportunities to learn more about your product or service: provide the reader with a phone number, a Web site address, or some way for them to seek out information on their own

Claim/Complaint Letter

The purpose of the claim letter is to convince the reader that you have a legitimate complaint that deserves a desired response. Generally states the issue at hand, details the problem & how its effects you, & seek resolution.

Approach:

- Identify the product or service
- Explain the problem
- Propose a solution
- End the letter respectfully

Adjustment Letter

Here you respond to a claim letter and tell the customer how you plan to handle the situation. Regardless of what your final decision is, your purpose remains the same: show that you value the customer's business and concerns, and that your company is fair and reasonable.

If the customer's complaint can be resolved, simply express your regret about the situation, state the correction you will make, and end on a positive note by encouraging future business with your company.

If you cannot solve the customer's problem, then the letter becomes more difficult. In this situation, the letter will have four parts:

- attempt to meet the customer: consider an expression of regret but not an apology, perhaps even thanking the customer for bringing it to your attention
- explain why your company is not at fault: explain the steps that led to the dissatisfaction clearly and concisely
- clearly state that your company is denying the request, and supply reasons in the letter for this denial: make this statement at the end, because if it is at the beginning, the customer may not finish the letter
- try to create goodwill for future business transactions: offer a special discount on a future transaction

Letters of Application

The application letter is very important; it introduces the applicant to a prospective employer. As a result presentation, organization and expression of the applicants' information is critical. It highlights what the applicant has to offer the employer, outlining experience, qualifications and gives an idea of his personality, organization and expression. If your application letter is poor, it is unlikely the applicant will be granted an interview. There are two types of application letters, solicited (these is usually in response to an advertisement in the media) and unsolicited.

- State purpose of letter e.g. I wish to apply for the position of junior printer
- Background Information i.e. sketch skills, experience, knowledge,

- Request for Interview

Effective Writing

Even though no one formula exists for a perfect business letter, some basic guidelines will help you, regardless of the form, purpose, and audience of the document. Remember the written document is preferred over other forms of communication, because the document can serve as a contract, the facts will be on record in writing, and one does not have to rely on memory.

This is why it is important to write a good business Letter, and the principles below will help you do so.

Empathy

Empathy means to care about someone's feelings or ideas. A well-written business letter will convey the feeling that the writer does care about the reader and is genuinely interested in working together to solve a problem or discuss a concept.

Place yourself in the reader's shoes and try to anticipate the reader's reaction to your comments.

Persuasion

Every business letter is in some degree a sales letter, because you are always requesting a response or course of action. Therefore, the following principles of persuasion will help you compose an efficient and effective Business Letter:

- plan according to the reader's reaction
- write with the "you" attitude- the state of mind where you always emphasize the benefits to the reader and subordinate your interests. This can be accomplished by using empathy and the words "you" and "your" often
- adjust the language to the reader and use terms and concepts that the reader is familiar with
- write positively and with confidence

Tone

Tone is the use of accent and inflection to express a mood or emotion in speaking or writing. Many times it is not what you say in a business letter, but how you say it. It is a good idea to always consider your tone so that you do not risk upsetting the reader, thereby lessening the chances your requests and comments will be respected.

You can avoid making mistakes with tone by using the following techniques:

- avoid the "I" attitude by having more emphasis on the reader and not yourself
- avoid extreme cases of humility, flattery, and modesty
- avoid sounding condescending
- avoid preaching your ideas

Service Perspective

It is important to understand the service perspective when writing a business letter. The organization that uses a service attitude in letters shows its concern extends beyond purely profit objectives, and readers appreciate a genuine desire on the part of a company that cares about their needs.