**BUSINESS LETTER STRUCTURE**

Letter-writing is an essential part of business. In business people are guided by first impressions, and the way we write a letter may endanger the chances of success of the most important business deal.

Business letters are generally typed on notepaper bearing a specially designed heading which provides the recipient of the letter with essential information about the organization sending it.

Currently there are several structural parts, that any business letter may consist of. They are:

1 The Heading (the Letter Head) or the Sender’s Address

2 The Reference

3***The Date***

*4 Special Mailing Indications*

*5 Confidential*

**6 *The Inside Address (the Recipient’s Address)***

*7 For the Attention of*

**8 *The Salutation***

*9 The Subject*

*10 The Body of the Letter*

***11 The Close (Complimentary Close)***

*12 The Signature*

*13 Initials of Persons in Charge*

*14 Enclosures*

*15 Copies*

*16 PostScript P.S.*

**1. The Heading** (the Letter Head, **the Sender’s Address)** includes the company’s name and postal address, its telephone numbers and telegraphic address. It’s common for firms to print an emblem, logo or trademark on their stationery. The heading is usually placed at the top, centrally or to the right: name of business, then street number and street, then town and district, postcode (area code) and the country.

There are two possibilities of putting telephone and fax numbers: either beneath business address after a space or below at the bottom of the page.

If the letter is sent by an individual, it should ***never*** contain his or her name; the only place where the name of the sender can be seen is at the bottom of the letter, after the signature.

Addresses must not be translated. Do not use strange abbreviations.

**2. The Reference**

The reference is typed after the **Sender’s address** and is used to help work with business letters.

***Your ref.*** is used when getting a letter, ***Our ref.*** is used when answering a letter.

The reference consists sometimes of the initials of the author and the person who actually signs the letter (JB/AS) or numbers (661/17).

**Why put a reference line?**

One should use a reference line if the recipient has requested specific information, such as a job number or invoice number, or if you’re replying to a letter. This makes it easier for the recipient to get a speedy response to you.

3. **The Date**

The date gives the number of the day, the name of the month and the number of the year. In that order 13 July 2016 is probably the simplest and clearest of all the current forms used in the English-speaking world, but there are alternative ways of writing the date, for example:

*July 19, 2016;*

*July 19 2016;*

*July 19th, 2016;*

*19th July 2016;*

*19 July, 2016.*

You may choose whichever form you like; however, you must continue using it if a date appears within the body of the letter.

No abbreviations can be used here. Firstly, because they may be confusing: 10/9/15 may be September 10th (in the UK) or October 9th (in the USA). Secondly, it is in extreme bad taste to abbreviate months (Nov., Dec.). The year is compulsory in formal letters.

**Why put the date?** It’s standard practice to include the date on which the letter was written. Correspondence is often filed in date order. It makes it much easier for the recipient to send a timely reply, and easier for you to chase up an answer if necessary. Ex.: “In my letter of May 15…”

**4. Special Mailing Indication**

If the letter is not sent by ordinary mail, a special indication is given below the **Date**. For example: *Express Mail*. *Registered Mail*. But quite often it is omitted.

**5. Confidential**

*“Confidential”* indicates that the letter is appointed for a definite person. It is usually written below *“Special Mailing Indication”*

*Personal Confidential Private and Confidential Strictly Confidential*

**6. The Inside (Recipient’s) Address**

For *“the Inside Address”* write the name of the addressee, preceded by the title (*Mr, Miss, Mrs, Ms*). English people give great importance to their titles; if a person has written to you as Dr. Smith or Sir Adam Drown, respect this title.

If you are writing to a woman and you do not know whether she wants you to use *Mrs* or *Miss*, use always *Ms*. It is irrelevant whether she is married or not.

If you do not know the name of the person you are writing to, but know their job title, you can use that: *the Sales Manager, the Finance Director*. You can address your letter to a particular department of the company: *the Sales Department, the Accounts Department*. Finally, if you know nothing about the company and don’t know which person or department your letter should go, you can simply address the letter to the company itself: *Compuvision Ltd, Messrs Clark & Co.*

***Order of the inside address*.** After the name of the person and/or company receiving the letter, the recommended order and style of addresses in the UK is as follows:

*- Name of house or building*

*- Number of building and name of street, road, avenue, etc.*

*- Name of town or city and postcode*

*- Name of country*

In other European countries, the number of the building may be placed after the name of the street. It is also common to substitute the name of the country with an initial before the district code number. The postcode may be written on a separate line; the names of the town and of the country may be in capital letters.

Be very careful with people’s names and addresses; try to spell all words correctly, even if they are in a different language.

7. For the Attention of

*“For the attention of”* indicates that the sender wishes a certain person to get acquainted with the contents of the letter. It is usually written below *“the* ***Inside address”.***

For example:*For the attention of the Production Manager; Attn: Production Manager*

**8. The Salutation**

For “The *Salutation”* you may have the following possibilities:

*Dear Mr, Ms, Mrs, Miss (surname)*, if you know the person's name and title.

*Dear Sir or Madam*, if you are writing to a person whose name you do not know (The Sales Manager, The Staff Secretary)

If you know a person’s name, you must use it: *Dear Mary, Dear Henry.*

*Dear Sirs*, if you are writing to a firm, or a department, and not to a specific person.

In the U.S.A. the most common salutation is *Gentlemen*.

After the salutation, you may use a comma (,) or no punctuation mark, but do not use a colon (:). You may use a colon in American English, but if you do so, ensure that the rest of the letter is in American English (*gotten* instead of *got*, *meter* instead of *metre*, etc.).

When you don’t know the name of a person and cannot find this information out you may write *“To Whom It May Concern”*.

**9. The Subject**

It is frequently adopted to head the letter, immediately after the salutation, with a few words indicating its subject or contents. Sometimes the heading may begin with the word “*Subject”* or the preposition *“re”* {ri:} (regarding). The subject enables the reader to see at once what is to deal with. The letter may accordingly be passed immediately to the person or department interested in it.

For example: *Re Order №12 for “Volga” Cars.*

But nowadays the term *“Re”* is seldom used to introduce the subject, as it is considered old-fashioned.

**10. The Body of the Letter**

The contents of *“the Body of the Letter”* depends upon the particular circumstances, but there are some rules that apply to every business letter.

Try to write no more than three or four paragraphs. The *opening paragraph* often states the subject-matter and the writer’s feelings on the subject. Expressions of pleasure, regret, surprise, gratitude and other feelings are normally conveyed in an opening paragraph: “I hope you …”, “Thank you for …”, “It was a pleasure meeting you …”, “I appreciate …”.

The *second paragraph* should state the action to be taken or what you write the letter for; the *third one* is meant to encourage further contact. The *closing paragraph* should include requests, reminders, and notes on enclosures. Examples:

*We shall be looking forward to your reservations.*

*Enclosed you will find …*

*Feel free to contact me by phone or email.*

Here are some common ways to express unpleasant facts:

*We regret to inform you …*

*After careful consideration we have decided …*

And a few things must be remembered about the style:

*- if you are writing on behalf of a firm, decide whether you will use "I" or "We". The latter is more advisable;*

*- do not use contractions, slang or familiar words or phrasal verbs;*

*- try not to use the verb get. Find a suitable alternative (obtain, receive, collect...);*

*- do not be rude. Do not use imperatives; use sentences like “we would be grateful if you could, it would be very helpful if you could”, etc. Never use must;*

*- do not write excessively long sentences or letters.*

**11. The Close (the Complimentary Close)**

*“The Close”* is typed below the closing paragraph. There are only a few options. Their usage depends on the salutation. If the salutation is *Dear Sirs or Dear Sir*, the complimentary close will be *Yours faithfully* or, less commonly, *Yours truly*. If the correspondent is addressed by his or her name *Dear Mr Brown*, *Dear Miss James*, the complimentary close will take the form *Yours sincerely*. If you know the person you are writing too well, it may be appropriate to insert closing formulae, such as *With very best wishes, Best wishes, Best regards, Warm regards*.

**12. The Signature (the Signature Block)**

In general, signatures in English are handwritten samples of first names, but a formal letter should contain as well full typewritten name (name and surname) which is followed on the next line by the person’s position in the company or by the name of the department he represents.

Traditionally the signature has been typed in the middle of the page, but it is becoming more and more common for firms to place it in the left. It often happens that in a large company it is impossible for the head of the business to deal with all the correspondence and certain employees are authorized to sign for the company; they are said to sign per procurationem (per pro, p.p.) that means “by acting as an agent”. Example:

*A. Smith and Co., Ltd.*

*p.p. D. White*

*Export Department*

**13.** **Initials of Persons in Charge**

Large companies have to keep record of the staff members composing and typing letters. Their initials are typed after the signature. The initials of the persson who composed are capitalised and the operator’s are lower- cased : *MF:af or MF/af.*

**14. Enclosures**

The section *“Enclosures”* is optional: it should only be added if you have enclosed anything else within the envelope (leaflets, price lists, bills, etc.). For example: *Enc: price list*.

If you wish to enclose documents, you can either list all enclosed documents separately or just write the word “Enclosure” below the signature.

**15. Copies**

If you need to send the letter to more than one person make an indication with the abbreviation **c.c.**

c.c.: Dr. Thomas Brake

**16. PostScript (P.S.)**

This sectiongives any additional information.