**PRINCIPAL RULES OF WRITING BUSINESS LETTERS**

Letter-writing is an essential part of business. Letters are written from **the sender** to **the recipient**: business – business, business – consumer, job applicant – company, citizen – government official, employer – employee, staff member – staff member, etc.

There are many reasons to write business letters: to inform, to request, to remind, to express thanks, to apologize, to congratulate, to invite or welcome, etc.

**Length, order and sequence**

All correspondence should be long enough to explain exactly what the sender needs to say and the receiver needs to know. You must decide how much information you put in the letter. Your style and the kind of language you use can also affect the length.

Your letter should make all the necessary points in a logical sequence, with each idea or piece of information linking up with the previous one.

**Planning**

The way to make sure you include the right amount of information, and in the right order, is by planning. Ask yourself what the purpose of the letter is, and what response you would like to receive. To whom and why are you writing this letter? Are there specific details you need to include? Do you require a response? Note down everything you want to include before you start writing, then read your notes to check that you have included all the necessary information, and that you have put it in the right order.

**Style and language**

*Simplicity*. Commercial correspondence often suffers from an old-fashioned style of English which complicates the message and gives readers the feeling that they are reading something written in an unfamiliar language. You should get the right (neutral) tone in your letter, avoiding pompous language on the one hand and language which is too informal or colloquial on the other. You may set the wrong tone by using the wrong vocabulary or idioms, or using short forms inappropriately.

**Clarity**

*Abbreviations* can be useful because they are quick to write and easy to read. But both correspondents need to know what the abbreviations stand for.

*Numerical expressions* can also cause confusion. For example, the decimal point in British and American usage is a full stop, but a comma is used in most continental European countries, so that a British or American person would write 4.255 where a French person would write 4,255 (which to a British or American person would mean four thousand two hundred and fifty-five).

**Accuracy**

*Spelling, punctuation, and grammar* should all be checked carefully. Many people have come to rely on the spellchecker in their computers to ensure that there are no spelling mistakes. But a word spelt incorrectly may form a completely different word. So you should always proofread a business letter before sending it.

*Enclosures and attachments.* Always check that you have actually enclosed the documents you have mentioned in your letter / email. When ordering, make sure you quote the order number correctly, especially in international trade where mistakes can be very expensive in both time and money.

**Formatting Business Letters**

Currently there are several ways of setting out a business letter in Britain and policy in this respect differs from company to company. The form in which a business letter appears has not been standardized in the United Kingdom to the extent it has in the U.S.A. and most European countries, and many British firms still indent the first line of each paragraph and use more punctuation in the inside name and address and in the date. Nevertheless there is a growing tendency in Britain, due largely to foreign influences to use block paragraphing and begin every line at the left-hand margin and to dispense with unnecessary punctuation in the date and the name and address of the person or organization written to.

**There are three main layouts in business writing.**

**1. Full** **Block format** is the most common format used in business today. With this format, nothing is centered. The sender's address, the recipient's address, the date, all paragraphs and in general all structural elements begin at the left margin. It is the easiest of the formats as everything is left-justified.

**2.** **Modified Block format** is quite common in business letters too. It is traditional and quite popular.

Modified block business letters use a slightly different format from the [Full Block business letters](http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/BlockBizLetter.html). In the modified block style the [sender’s address](http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/BlockBizLetter.html#Letterhead), the [date](http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/BlockBizLetter.html#Date), the [complementary closing](http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/BlockBizLetter.html#Complimentary Close) and the signature are slightly to the right of the center of the paper.

**3.** **The Indented/Semi-Block style** of business letters is very similar to the [Modified Block](http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/ModifiedBlockBizLetter.html) format. The only difference between the two is that the semi-block letter's paragraphs are indented.

**Tips for writing good business letters**

Business letters must be written with care.

1) Think carefully about exactly what you need to say before you write.

2) Give your letter a heading so that the person you are writing to can see at a glance what it is about.

3) Use a conversational tone, short sentences and short words that everyone can understand.

4) Decide on order of importance and put each idea into a separate paragraph.

5) Ask direct questions.

6) Double-check gender and spelling of names.

7) Use active voice whenever possible, and polite modals (*would* in favour of *will*).

8) Refer to yourself as “I”; don’t use “we” unless it is clear who the pronoun refers to.

9) Don’t write the month of the date in figures.

10) Check your letter after you have written it. You should always proofread a business letter before sending it. If possible, ask another person to double-check your letter.

**British layout versus American layout**

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|  | **American Style** | **British Style** |
| **Heading** | According to the format but usually aligned to the left. | The heading is usually placed in the top right corner of the letter (sometimes centred). |
| **Date** | October 19, 2015 (month-day-year) According to the format but usually aligned to the left two lines below or above the heading. | 19 October 2015 (day-month-year) It is usually placed directly below the heading. |
| **Salutation** | Dear Mr./Ms. Smith:Dear Sir or Madam:Gentlemen:After the salutation there is a colon (:) or no punctuation mark. | Dear Mr./Ms. Smith,Dear Sir or Madam,Dear Sirs,After the salutation there is a comma (,) or no punctuation mark. |
| **Complimentary close** | Sincerely,Sincerely yours,Yours sincerely,Yours truly,Very truly yours. | Sincerely,Sincerely yours,Yours sincerely,Yours faithfully,Faithfully yours,Faithfully. |