

BASICS OF BUSINESS LETTER WRITING

8 December 2015

Traditional letter writing might be a waning art, but it is by no means dead.

If you don't believe me, get a quote for the writing of a lawyers' letter! And even though the medium has changed, emails and other methods of fast, asynchronous communication are still forms of letter writing.



As with most things in life, a little planning goes a long way. This doesn't take long to do, so before pouncing on the keyboard, ask yourself these questions:

- What is the purpose of this letter?
- Who is my audience?
- How can I structure my message to get to the point quickly and accurately?

As with all forms of communication, the four pillars of effective business writing are applicable:

- Active voice
- Clear and concise
- Positive and specific
- Proper spelling and grammar.

Specifically related to business letter, there are various elements that are needed:

Letterhead	company name names of directors registered office address postal address telephone (& fax) number website (& email address)
Name and address of recipient	The recipient's position in the company should be written above the address. The recipient's address must be written on the left hand side, without punctuation.
Date	Written on the right hand side: 8 December 2015 (<i>begin with the day, no comma</i>) December 8, 2015 (<i>begin with the month, use a comma</i>) Avoid using old fashioned superscript (<i>st, nd, rd</i>). Don't abbreviate the months.

Salutation	Wherever possible, address the letter to a specific person, referred to by name or by title: If you know the individual's name, use it. If you know the position of the person you are writing to, but don't know the person's name, write to the position. If you know neither the individual nor the position of the individual, write to the company.
Introduction, body, and summary	The letter must have a subject line / heading: for quick reference five to six words maximum should be <u>underlined</u> or be in CAPITAL LETTERS comes after the salutation old fashioned to have RE or Re in front of it
Closing	The most common closing is "Sincerely". Follow this with a comma. Leave sufficient lines after the closing for your ink signature. Type your full name, and then sign in the space above.

Some business letter may also include:

Reference initials	These initials are designed to serve as a reference regarding the writer of the letter, the signer and the typist.
Enclosure line	Used to introduce a listing of material included with the basic letter
Copy notation	A list of people that ought to receive a copy of the letter. It is a reminder that other people, besides the addressed recipient, have an interest in the letter

Whichever country you may be writing to, gender-neutral terms are mandatory in business writing. You do not want to blow your career by addressing Adriana Huffington or Christine Lagarde as "Dear Sir". You can achieve this by:

using **gender-neutral** words and phrases eg "Dear Owner", "Dear Customer", "Dear Sir or Madam", "To whom it may concern".

using **gender-equal** words and phrases eg "Mr James Wilson" = "Ms Jane Wilson", and "James Wilson" = "Jane Wison".

eliminating / combining pronouns eg

plurals – "Each manager will check his employees' time cards" = "Managers will check employee time cards."

omit pronouns – "The employee who keeps risks to himself can jeopardise the company" = "The employee who refrains from communicating risks can jeopardise the company".

hey "you" – "Anyone can change his medical aid plan during the enrolment period" = "You can change your medical aid plan during the enrolment period".

combine – "Any employee can purchase company stock a year after his hire date" = "Any employee can purchase company stock a year after his or her hire date".