

Parts of a Business Letter

The Heading

The heading contains the writer's address and the date of the letter. The writer's name is not included and only a date is needed in headings on letterhead stationery.

EXAMPLE July 1, 2001
 128 North Clark Street
 Pittsburgh, PA 16107

The Inside Address

This lists the person's name and business address that you are writing to. The inside address appears after the date on the left-hand side of the page. It should follow this format:

- Name
- Title (if applicable)
- Name of business or company
- Street or postal address
- City or town, state or province, zip code or postal code
- Country name (if applicable)

EXAMPLE Ms Carol Romito
 Vice President
 Genesis Financial Group
 4025 Main Street
 Pittsburgh, PA 19103

The Salutation

The salutation directly addresses the recipient of the letter and is followed by a colon (except when a friendly, familiar, sociable tone is intended, in which case a comma is used).

EXAMPLE Dear Mr. Farmer: (formal)
 Dear Sir(s): or Madame: (if the person's name is not known)

If you don't know whether the recipient is a man or woman, the traditional practice has been to write "Dear Sir" or "Dear Sirs" — but that's sexist! The best solution is to make a quick, anonymous phone call to the organization and ask for a name; or, address the salutation to a department name, committee name, or a position name. Information about the company can often be found by doing a Google Search online.

EXAMPLE Dear Personnel Department
 Dear Recruitment Committee
 Dear Chairperson

Body of the Message

State the main business, purpose, or subject matter right away. Let the reader know from the very first sentence what your letter is about. Remember that when business people open a letter, their first concern is to know what the letter is about, what its purpose is, and why they must spend their time reading it. Therefore, avoid roundabout beginnings. If you are writing to apply for a job, begin with something like this: "I am writing to apply for the position you currently have open...."

The Complimentary Close

This is where you end the letter. Make sure to have an appropriate sign-off. The complimentary close differs between formal letters and informal letters. Notice that only the first letter is capitalized, and is always followed by a comma.

EXAMPLE Formal basis: Sincerely, Yours sincerely, Yours truly
 Informal basis: Best regards, Best wishes, Cordially
 Higher officials: Respectfully yours

The Signature Block

Usually, you type your name four lines below the complimentary close, and sign your name in between. Whenever possible, include your title or the name of the position you hold just below your name

EXAMPLE Personally signed name
 Ms April Moore
 Your name typed
 Ms April Moore
 Your title typed
 Director of Human Resources

End notations

Just below the signature block are often several abbreviations or phrases that have important functions.

Initials

The initials in all capital letters are those of the writer of the letter, and the ones in lower case letters just after the colon are those of the typist.

Enclosures

To make sure that the recipient knows that items accompany the letter in the same envelope, use such indications as "Enclosure," "Encl.," "Enclosures (2)." For example, if you send a resume and writing sample with your application letter, you'd do this: "Encl.: Resume and Writing Sample." If the enclosure is lost, the recipient will know.

Copies

If you send copies of a letter to others, indicate this fact among the end notations also. If, for example, you were upset by a local merchant's handling of your repair problems and were sending a copy of your letter to the Better Business Bureau, you'd write this: "cc: Better Business Bureau." If you plan to send a copy to your lawyer, write something like this: "cc: Mr. Raymond Mason, Attorney."