

## **Parts of a Business Letter**

### **Sender's Address:**

Typically, the sender's address is included in the letterhead. When a letterhead is not used, the sender's address is placed at the top of the letter one line above the date. The sender's name and title are NOT included because they are written in the letter's closing. Include the street address, city, and zip code.

Ex) 1400 Pinto Dr., Waco, TX 76701

### **Date:**

Indicating the date the letter was written (the date of completion if the letter is written over a number of days), the date line is two inches below the top of the page. Depending on the format used for the letter, the date is either left justified, or tab to the center and then type the date. When writing to a company in the USA, write the date in American date format with the month written out followed by the day and year (for example: July 12, 2016).

### **Inside Address:**

The inside address is the address of the letter's recipient and is placed either one line below the sender's address, or one inch below the date and is always left justified. It is best to write to a specific individual, so, if you do not know the person's name, call the company or talk to some employees from the company to find out.

Include a personal title like Ms., Mrs., Mr., or Dr. If the recipient is a woman respect her preference to be addressed as Miss, Ms., or Mrs. If you do not know her preference, use Ms. If the person may be a Dr. or have some other title, use that title. People usually do not mind being addressed by a higher title than they actually possess.

Use the U.S. Post Office Format to write the address. If the letter is to an international address, then type the name of the country in all-capital letters on the last line. (see example below)

Mr. James Person  
1480 Crinshaw Ave  
Littleton, CO 80165

### **Salutation:**

The salutation is placed one line below the Inside Address and uses the same name and personal title. If you know the person and usually address them by their first name, it is acceptable to use only the first name (such as: Dear James:). However, in all other cases the salutation should be the personal title and last/family name of the recipient followed by a colon. If the recipient's gender is unknown use non-gendered salutation such as their job title followed by the recipient's

name. Another way to address the recipient when gender is unknown is to use the recipient's full name (for example: Dear Chris Simmons: if you do not know Chris' gender). Leave on line blank after the salutation.

### **Body:**

For both Block and Modified Block formats, each paragraph should be single spaced and left justified in the body of the letter. For Semi-Block format indent the first line of each paragraph. Leave on line of blank space between every paragraph.

Business letters should be clear and direct, stating information concisely without extra information or fancy syntax. The first paragraph should contain a friendly opening followed by a statement of the main point. A justification of the importance of the main point should appear in the next paragraph. Use the next few paragraphs to continue justification, supplying background information and supporting details. The closing paragraph includes a restatement of the purpose of the letter as well as any requests for action that may be necessary.

### **Closing:**

The closing begins at the same vertical position as the date line. It is placed one line after the final body paragraph. Only the first word is capitalized (for instance: Thank you) and four lines of space are left between the closing and the sender's name to leave space for the signature. If the salutation was followed by a colon, a comma follows the closing, but in all other cases there is no punctuation following the closing.

### **Enclosure:**

If any documents were enclosed with the letter, like a resume, this is indicated by typing the word "Enclosures" one line below the closing. You may choose to list the name of each document included. This is a particularly good idea if multiple documents are enclosed, especially if you need to be sure that the recipient is aware of each document.

### **Typist initials:**

The typist initials indicate who typed the letter. If you are the person who typed the letter, then omit the typist initials.

## **A Note About Format and Font**

Different organizations require different formats for professional communication. The examples provided are common elements in basic business letters, so the format of your business letter may need to be flexible. These examples are merely guides.

### **Block Format:**

The most common layout of a business letter is block format. For this format the entire letter is left justified and single spaced except for a double space in between paragraphs.

**Modified Block:**

While not as common as block, modified block format is also widely used. The body of the letter and the recipient's address are left justified and single spaced with a double space between paragraphs. For the date and closing, tab to the center point and begin typing.

**Semi-Block:**

The least used style is semi-block format. Like modified block, the body of the letter and the recipient's address are left justified and single spaced with a double space between paragraphs, and the date and closing are typed after tabbing to the center point. In addition, each paragraph is indented.

**Font:**

The font of the letter is important. The generally accepted font is Times New Roman, size 12. Other fonts like Arial may be used. Consider the audience when choosing a font. If the company you are writing to is conservative, it may be a good idea to use Times New Roman; however, when writing to a more liberal company, you have more freedom choosing your font.

**Punctuation:**

For punctuation after the salutation and closing there are two options. The most common is to use a colon(:) after the salutation – never use a comma after the salutation – and a comma (,) after the closing. In some cases you may use a less common format called open punctuation. In this case there is no punctuation after the salutation and closing.

Adapted from Purdue Owl: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/653/01/>