

## Structure and Layout of Letters

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**Session Objectives:**

- Factors that make a letter attractive
- Punctuation styles and Letter formats
- Standard Letter Parts
- Special Letter Parts
- Memorandum Formats

**Factors that make a letter attractive**

The appearance of a letter helps the reader create an impression about the writer. In order to attract the attention of the reader, the following factors have to be taken into consideration while writing a letter:

- **Paper:** Good quality Bond paper should be used for writing the letter to prevent it from yellowing fast. Although, the general practice is to use white paper, some businesses use paper in gray and other pastel colors.
- **Personalization:** The use of a letterhead makes a letter more personalized. Letterheads contain the name of the company, its address, telephone and fax number, e-mail address, etc. The information on a letterhead is usually center-aligned at the top of the page but it may also be aligned to the left or the right corner of the page. The information is placed at the bottom of the page in letterheads of some companies. The letterhead should be unique, but not flashy.
- **Appearance:** Proper spacing and punctuation gives a neat appearance to a letter. The width of the margins should depend on the length of the letter with short letters having wide margins than long letters.

**Punctuation Styles**

The two commonly used punctuation styles in business letters are standard or mixed punctuation and open punctuation.

**Standard or mixed punctuation:** It is the traditional style of punctuation. In this style of business letters, a colon comes after the salutation and a comma comes after the complimentary close.

**Open punctuation:** In this style of writing, neither the salutation nor the complimentary close is followed by a punctuation.

**Letter Formats**

There are three formats of business letters:

- **Block:** In a letter of block format, all the lines in the letter begin at the left margin.
- **Modified block:** This is the traditional style of letter format and is still used in many companies. In this letter format, except for the date line, complimentary close, and signature block, which begin at or near the center of the page, all other lines in the letter begin at the left margin.
- **Simplified block:** In a simplified block format also, all the lines in the letter begin at the left margin. The letter doesn't have a salutation and a complimentary close. However, it has a subject line which is placed a double space below the inside address and a double space above the body of the letter.

**Standard letter parts**

**Heading and Date:** The heading of the letter contains the address of the writer. If the letter is on a letterhead, the date comes two to six lines below the last line of the writer's address. The date may start at the left margin, or it may be centrally aligned, or it may end at the right margin of the letter.

The date should be written in a format that avoids confusion by spelling out the month rather than mentioning the entire date in numerals.

**Example:** Writing the date as 12.07.2002 can lead to confusion regarding the month. Hence, to avoid confusion, the date should be written as 12 July 2002, or as July 12, 2002.

**Inside address:** The inside address contains the name of the person to whom the letter is being sent, his/her title and designation, the name of the company to which he/she belongs and its complete address. The inside address is located four lines below the date in the letter.

**Example:** Mrs Linda Godfrey, General Manager  
Human Resource Department  
British Airways  
Kowarki Building  
New Delhi – 110 001.

**Salutation**

A salutation is a greeting that precedes the body of the letter. It is located a double space below the inside address. There are different ways of writing salutations. If the letter is addressed to a specific person, the individual's name may be used in the salutation along with the title of the person, and if the writer is on a first name basis with the reader, the salutation can be informal and contain only the person's name.

**Example:** Dear Rekha (Informal salutation)  
Dear Professor Rekha (Formal salutation)

Another commonly used format is the use of a salutopening. In this format, the word 'Dear' is omitted from the salutation, but the name is mentioned in the first or second line of the body.

**Example:** Congratulation Mrs Venus! (Salutopening)  
Your promotion is well deserved (Body)

**Body:** The body of the letter contains the message being communicated. It is located a double space below the salutation. The first and the last paragraph of the body should be small in length to retain the reader's interest and should not consist of more than four or five lines. The other paragraphs of the body can consist of 8 to 10 lines. The text in the body should be single-line spaced and the paragraphs should be separated by double spacing.

**Complimentary Close:** Complimentary close is the phrase that closes the letter and is positioned a double space below the body of the letter. It reflects the writer's relationship with the reader. 'Sincerely', 'Yours truly', 'Cordially', 'Cordially yours' and 'Sincerely yours' are neutral sounding complimentary closes and are most commonly used in business letters. In a simplified block letter format, salutation as well as a complimentary close are absent.

**Signature Block:**

This part of the letter is placed four spaces below the complimentary close and contains the name and title of the writer, and the name of the company if the writer is writing on behalf of a company. Space is provided for the signature of the person in the signature block. The title may be placed in the same line as the writer's name or it may be placed a line below the writer's name. In a simplified block letter format, the signature block is located below the body due to the absence of a complimentary close.

**Example:** Cordially,

Mrs Latha Raman

CEO

Wipro technologies

Or

Cordially,

Mrs Latha Raman, CEO

Wipro technologies

**Reference initials:** This part of the letter contains the initials of the person who has typed the letter. It is given in lower case a double space below the signature block. The purpose of providing the reference initials is to be able to identify the person who has typed the letter in the event of a litigation.

### Special Letter Parts

**Mailing notation:** The mailing notation indicates how a letter is to be delivered (ordinary post, registered post, etc.) and how it is to be handled (personal, confidential, etc.) The mailing notation is placed at the top or the bottom of the letter in capital letters.

**Attention line:** The attention line is written to direct the letter at a specific person, a position, or to a department in the company. The attention line is generally followed by the inside address.

**Example:** Attention Mr. Vinayak Jaiswal

Vigilant Systems Ltd.,

Mumbai-Pune Road,

Pune – 411 045.

Or

Attention Dean,

Globus Hospital,

Vile-Parle Road,

Mumbai – 400 005.

**Reference line:** As the name indicates, the reference line directs the reader to the source files or documents. It thus assists in easy reference. It is usually placed a double space below the inside address.

**Example: RE:** Order No. IC 2002/08

**Subject line:** The purpose of the subject line in the letter is to indicate to the reader what the letter is about. It is placed a double space below the salutation. The subject line is generally used in the

simplified block letter format. In the other letter formats, the presence of a subject line is optional.

**Example:** Subject: Non-delivery of consignment

**Second-page heading:** A second-page heading is given when the letter consists of more than one page. In such cases, a heading is given on the second page and successive pages to indicate that it is a continuation of the first page.

A second-page heading consists of the name of the person or company to whom the letter is sent, the page number and the date.

**Example:** Vigilant Systems Ltd.

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February 12, 2003.

**Enclosure notation:** An enclosure notation is used when papers or documents such as brochures, forms, etc. are sent along with the letter in the same envelope. It conveys to the reader information about the documents that have been sent along with the letter.

It is placed a double space below the reference initials.

**Example: Enclosures:**

1. Medical Reimbursement form
2. Medical expense bills

**Copy notation:** Copy notation is used to indicate to the reader that a copy of the same letter has been sent to the persons mentioned. The copy notation is placed two lines below the reference initials or enclosure notation.

**Postscript:** The postscript was earlier used to mention information that was omitted while writing the letter. But with the simplification of editing with the help of word-processing software, the use of postscripts is no longer relevant. Presently, postscript is used to emphasize a point covered in the letter.

The postscript is placed a double space below the last notation or below the signature block in the absence of notations.

## Memorandum Formats

Memos are messages sent to individuals within the organization. They may be written on plain paper, letterheads or on a memorandum form.

A memo consists of four parts: heading, body, authentication and page identification.

**Heading:** The heading consists of the date, name of the sender and the subject of the memo.

**Body:** The body of a memo consists of a communication of facts and therefore, does not have an opening or a closing. The text that constitutes the body of a memo is presented as paragraphs in single space. Each paragraph is separated from the others by a blank line. Key words or important phrases in the body are underlined to convey the main ideas of the memo to the reader.

**Authentication:** In this part of the letter, the writer authenticates the letter by putting his signature or his initials on it. The authentication of the letter is done at the top left portion of the letter, next to the writer's name, on the upper right-hand corner or below the last sentence in the memo.

While informal letters require only the initials or the first name of the writer as authentication, formal letters require the full signature of the writer.

**Page Identification:** When memos consist of more than one page, they should be numbered. The subject and the date of the memo is mentioned in the top left hand margin of every page.

### Summary

Business letters to look attractive should be written on good quality paper, personalized and have a neat appearance. Block, modified block, and simplified block are the three formats for business letters. Business letters have certain standard letter parts which are generally found in most of them.

"Business letters have special letter parts which need not necessarily be present in all letters. These include the mailing notation, attention line, reference line, subject line, second-page heading, enclosure notation, copy notation and postscript