

FORMAT OF BUSINESS LETTERS

Make the outward appearance of your business letters show that you respect the people you are writing to and that you want them to take your business seriously. Whenever you can, type your letter. Do a letter over when smudges or erasures are likely to make a poor impression.

Study the elements of the conventional business letter:

- 1. RETURN ADDRESS AND DATE:** Write your return address at the top of the page, on the right. (On printed business stationery, the return address is usually part of the specially designed letterhead.) Be sure to put a comma between city and state: Tacoma, Washington. Put a comma between the day of the month and the year if the day *follows* the month: November 12, 1982 (but 12 November 1982).

return address

287 South Fourth Street
San Jose, California 06126
February 7, 1985

- 2. INSIDE ADDRESS AND GREETING:** Drop down four or five spaces and write the address of the person or firm you are writing to. Put it in the conventional three-line or four-line block, flush left. Put periods after *Mr.*, *Ms.*, *Mrs.* (but not *Miss*), *M.D.* Put a comma between title and office if they appear on the same line: Manager, Parts Division. Drop down a space and put the greeting flush left, followed by a colon.

Ms. Joan P. Hansen
12 Wilshire Boulevard, N.E.
Atlanta, Georgia 30312

inside address

Sometimes you will be writing to a firm, office, or department without knowing the name of the person in charge. Here are some possible greetings:

Ladies and Gentlemen:
Gentlemen:
Ladies:

Dear Madam:
Dear Sir:
Dear Madam or Sir:

- 3. BODY OF THE LETTER:** Drop down one space below the greeting and start the main body of your letter. Single-space each paragraph of a typed letter. Use double spacing between paragraphs. Many modern business letters now use a block format. Each paragraph starts flush left--it is not indented. But many people still prefer indented paragraphs, as in other kinds of writing. Allow about a one-inch margin on both sides of your sheet of paper.

Dear Mr. Byrd:

message —

Thank you for your inquiry about letter form. In this kind of semiblocked letter, the first line of each paragraph is indented—usually five spaces. This style has been in general use. The semiblocked letter is still popular because of its traditional appearance. The indented paragraphs give this style a distinctive look.

Though other, more recent styles are now coming into use, many people are very comfortable with this traditional letter format. Please feel free to consult us again when you have questions about the form and content of modern business correspondence.

- 4. **CLOSING AND SIGNATURE:** The concluding greeting is called the **complimentary closing**. Use "Sincerely," or "Sincerely yours," (note the comma at the end of the greeting). Type or print your name below your signature. A representation of a firm or group will often include a title or a position below the name. A woman may put (*Ms.*) or (*Mrs.*) in parenthesis before her typed name to show how she prefers to be addressed in return correspondence.

Very truly yours, ————— closing

initials of
writer and
typist —

NHF:vrs

carbon — cc: Ms. J. Gernick
copies Dr. T. Fedona

Nancy H. Filbert
Managing Editor

signer's name
and title

- 5. **THE ENVELOPE:** Put your complete address on the envelope in the left-hand corner. Put the receiver's address on the right half of the envelope, about halfway down. Use the conventional block format. Check names and addresses here and in the letter itself carefully. Make sure there are no misspellings or mistakes.