

# HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER

## Lesson Objective

In this lesson, you will learn some helpful tips for writing business letters. You'll learn how to open and close a formal letter and how to format addresses. You will also learn some useful expressions to include in a variety of types of business letters.

### Did you know...

The suffix "-ness" turns adjectives into nouns. The word "business" is one of the most commonly misspelled words. Think of the adjective busy when you are spelling "business." Remember that the y turns into i before -ness, just like *happy* becomes *happiness*.

## Warm-Up

### A. Writing

Choose one of the following three topics. Write a letter to a manager of a business. Write for five minutes in your notebook or on the back of your paper, or on your electronic device or computer. Do not correct your writing. Just write!

1. A complaint about poor service
2. A question about a product
3. A concern about an employee

### B. Vocabulary Preview

Match these words to their correct definitions.

- |                                 |   |
|---------------------------------|---|
| ___ 1. on behalf of             | a) to make someone aware of, to bring focus to something                  |
| ___ 2. recipient                | b) to review or check three times   |
| ___ 3. letterhead               | c) the part of a letter where you address the recipient (e.g., Dear Sir,) |
| ___ 4. triple-check             | d) stationery with a business name and address printed on it              |
| ___ 5. salutation               | e) as a representative of a group   |
| ___ 6. colleague                | f) relevant, something that applies or is important                       |
| ___ 7. applicable               | g) an investigation into a matter, a question                             |
| ___ 8. inquiry                  | h) the person who receives something                                      |
| ___ 9. resignation              | i) quitting a job by choice   |
| ___ 10. draw one's attention to | j) a person you work with professionally                                  |

## Components of a Business Letter

### A. Sender's Information

Are you using letterhead? Letterhead is stationery with your business name and address already printed on it. If you aren't using letterhead, type your company name and address in the top left corner of your paper.

Standing Desks, Inc.  
44 Wyandotte St. East  
Windsor, ON N8B 2H8

### B. Date

After the sender's information, leave a space. Then write the date using one of the formats below.

#### Date Formats:

- March 2, 2015
- March 2nd, 2015
- Mar 2, 2015
- Monday, March 2, 2015

### C. Recipient's Information

After the date, leave another space. Now add your recipient's name, title, and address. Triple-check that you spelled the name of the company and recipient exactly as it should be.

Mrs. Alley Freeman  
Director of Sales  
Furniture Forever  
88 Front St.  
Toronto, ON M5V 3A9

### Task 1

Look up a local business and write the address properly in the lines below.

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### Task 2

Practice writing some dates:

1. Write today's date.

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2. Write the date of your next birthday.

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3. Write a date six months from today.

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## Components of a Business Letter cont.

### D. Salutation

Leave a space after your recipient's address. Then add your salutation. Make sure that you spell the recipient's name correctly. Punctuation after Mr. or Mrs. is common, but it is also possible without (Mr or Mrs). Use a comma (,) or colon (:) after the salutation.

#### Business Formal

- Dear Mr. Miller,
- Dear Ms. Hampton,
- Dear Mrs. Wu:
- Dear Sir,
- Dear Madam,
- To Whom It May Concern:
- Dear Frederick Carlyle,

#### Business Casual

(between colleagues)

- Good morning,
- Good afternoon,
- Hello,
- Hi Erica,

### E. Body

Leave a space after your salutation, and then start the body of your letter. A business letter should be separated into paragraphs. Each paragraph should be about a single subject. One or two paragraphs may be enough. Use plain text (without indentation). It is common to leave a space between paragraphs.

1. Start with a friendly greeting. Introduce yourself (if it's the first time you've contacted this person). Be cordial (polite) even if it is a letter of complaint.  
[space]
2. Identify your reason for the letter. Use more than one paragraph if necessary.  
[space]
3. Provide any special information. Identify any attachments if it's an electronic letter. If applicable, state exactly what you want or need from the recipient.

### F. Closing

Leave a space after the final body paragraph. Then write a closing phrase (this is optional). Leave another space and write a closing word(s), followed by a comma. On the next line, add your name and title. Add a phone number if you want to be contacted by phone. Sign your name by hand if it's a printed letter. Print your name and title beneath your signature.

#### Closing Phrases (optional)

- I look forward to your reply.
- I apologize for the inconvenience.
- I look forward to meeting you.
- Should you need further assistance, please don't hesitate to ask.
- Thank you for your immediate attention.

#### Closing words

- Sincerely,
- Respectfully,
- Best,
- Best regards,
- Best wishes,
- Warm regards,
- Thank you,
- Sincerely,

#### Example

I look forward to your reply.

Sincerely,



Helen Hayes, Administrator

## Types of Business Letters

Work with a partner. Review some different types of business letters. Which letters have you written or received in the past? Which types of letters are you most likely to write? Can you think of any other types of business letters?

### 1. Inquiry

In this type of letter, you ask a question about a product, service, or policy.

### 2. Resignation

In this type of letter, you notify a supervisor or manager that you are planning on leaving/quitting your job. You may or may not state a reason.

### 3. Cover

This type of letter comes before a resume when you are applying for a job. It is a short letter of introduction that doubles as a thank you note.

### 4. Reference

This is a letter that you write for someone else. You may provide a personal or a business reference. In this letter, you state how long you have known the person and why you recommend him or her. You may include the person's strengths.

### 5. Thank You

There are a variety of reasons why you might need to send a thank you letter in a business situation. You may want to thank a company for good service or you may want to show appreciation for a colleague who has worked with you on a project.

### 6. Complaint

In this type of letter, you state concerns or disappointment about goods, services, or business-related issues. It is important to remain polite. Do not use ALL CAPS or inappropriate language. Don't send a letter of complaint while you are angry. Reread your letter and decide at a later time if you should send it or not.

### 7. Request

There are a variety of things you may need to make a request for in business, including internally (e.g., a deadline extension, a reference letter) or externally (e.g., a contact name, a replacement part).

### 8. Confirmation or Follow-Up

This is a letter to confirm that something has been received. Occasionally email or packages go missing or end up in a spam mailbox. Don't follow up too quickly.

### 9. Sales or Marketing

Businesses send many letters to potential customers or clients to introduce new products or make special announcements. These are often written by a president or CEO of a company.

### 10. Notification

In this type of letter, a company, organization, or individual may provide information about a person's account, membership, or job position. Notifications may be about updates or changes. They may contain good or bad news for the recipient.

## Useful Phrases

Which type of business letter might contain these phrases? Would you find the phrase in an opening line, a middle paragraph, or a closing line? Discuss these questions with a partner, and keep this list handy while you're writing.

- I'm writing to inquire about...
- I'm writing in reference to...
- I'm writing to express my dissatisfaction with...
- I'm interested in learning more about...
- I would be grateful if you could send some information.
- I regret to inform you...
- I am pleased to inform you...
- Should you require further assistance, please contact our office.
- I should also remind you...
- To learn more about our products and services, please visit our website.
- Enclosed, please find the information you requested.
- If we can be of further assistance, please don't hesitate to ask.
- I am writing to confirm that...
- I am writing to congratulate you...
- I am writing in reference to my former colleague, Liz Reece.
- Please accept our sincere apology.
- We deeply regret this error.
- Thank you for your assistance.
- I would like to draw your attention to...
- I would be grateful if...
- I trust that you will look into this matter.
- I appreciate the time you took to ...
- Please respond at your earliest convenience.

### Trim the Fat

Remember, the word "business" comes from "busy." Business people don't have time to read long-winded letters. Your writing must be clear and concise. Trim anything that is unnecessary and avoid wordy sentences. Avoid using emoticons, pictures, abbreviations, or any fancy fonts in a business letter.

## Sample Business Letters

### A. Business Letter

Read the sample letter of complaint. Discuss the letter with a partner. What important features does this letter include? Discuss the formatting, organization, and content of this letter.

Morris Photography  
2-8908 Granville St.  
Vancouver, BC V6P 2G9

March 2, 2015

Mr. Carlson Louis  
Fine Photo Prints  
34 Agnes St.  
New Westminster, BC V3M 3T9

Dear Mr. Louis,

I am a long-term customer of Fine Photo Prints. While I've always appreciated your company's excellent service and products, I'm writing to express dissatisfaction about a recent order.

Firstly, the cost of printing has increased significantly since my last order. I didn't expect to pay \$100 more than usual, and as a result, I have not charged my clients enough to cover my costs. Secondly, my prints weren't of the usual quality. Several images had black streaks in the middle. The envelope was also wet when it arrived in my mailbox.

As a long-term customer, I would appreciate a refund or a reprint (free of charge). My mailing address and order # is attached. If you have any further questions, you can reach me by phone or email. Please respond at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,

*Ella Morris*

Ella Morris, Morris Photography  
(m. 220-779-2000)

## Sample Business Letters cont.

### B. Response

Read the sample response. Discuss the letter with a partner. What important features does this letter include? How does it differ from the first letter?

Fine Photo Prints  
34 Agnes St.  
New Westminster, BC V3M 3T9

March 9, 2015

Ella Morris  
Morris Photography  
2-8908 Granville St.  
Vancouver, BC V6P 2G9

Dear Ms. Morris,

Thank you for your letter regarding your recent order of Fine Photo Prints. We appreciate your business, and we want to make this right for you.

Please find the reprint that you requested enclosed, as well as a 50% off coupon for your next order. I apologize for this inconvenience and hope that you will continue using Fine Photo Prints for your business needs in the future.

If you have any further concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Carlson Louis, Owner  
Fine Photo Prints  
m. 228-990-8765  
e. carlson@fpprints.com

## Business Envelopes

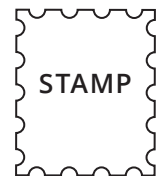
### A. Formatting Tips

Here are some tips for formatting mailing addresses properly in North America:

- Use a plain font.
- Avoid any punctuation (periods, commas).
- Type the addresses or use address labels if possible.
- All caps is the preferred format in North America, but it is not a requirement.
- Spell the recipient's name / company correctly.
- Include a return address (top left corner or back of envelope) in case the mail is undeliverable.
- Include directional words, such as EAST or WEST.
- Place a unit number (suite or apartment) with a hyphen before the street address. Don't use a # symbol to indicate an apartment or suite.
- A PO Box (used instead of a street address) goes on the line before the state/province.
- For a US address, include a numerical ZIP+4 code with a hyphen (60001-6789).
- For a Canadian address, include a postal code (V3M 3T9). Don't use a hyphen.
- If sending internationally, place the country name on the last line of the mailing address (JAPAN).

### B. Sample Envelope

ELLA MORRIS  
2-8908 GRANVILLE ST  
VANCOUVER BC V6P 2G9



CARLSON LOUIS  
FINE PHOTO PRINTS  
34 AGNES ST  
NEW WESTMINSTER BC V3M 3T9



## Business Letter Checklist

### BEFORE SENDING YOUR LETTER

After you write your letter, proofread it. If it is an email, don't send it right away. Leave it in your drafts folder, and come back a little later to open it again. Fix any mistakes you see. Check your spelling! If you are happy with your letter, hit "Send" or "Print." If you're mailing the letter through a postal service, be sure to use proper formatting on the envelope.

- Did I type the recipient's name and address properly?
- Did I include a proper salutation?
- Did I write politely even if it is a complaint or concern?
- Did I trim any unnecessary words or lines?
- Did I close the letter appropriately with my needs clearly stated?
- Did I include contact information for a reply?
- Did I proofread my letter?
- Did I wait a day before sending a letter of complaint?
- Did I format the envelope properly?

## Comprehension Check-In

Work with a partner and answer the following questions based on the lesson so far.

1. What is letterhead?
2. How many types of business letters can you name?
3. What is a cover letter?
4. What is a reference letter?
5. What should NOT be used in a business letter?
6. Which punctuation mark is used after a closing word(s), such as "Warm regards"?
7. How are zip codes and postal codes formatted differently?

## Pair Activity

### A. Write a Business Letter

Write a letter of complaint to a manager of a company that you recently made a purchase from. Express your dissatisfaction with a product in a polite way. Include the sender, recipient, subject, salutation, body, and closing. Be sure to use useful expressions from this lesson. Use this space for your rough draft.

Proofread your letter later today or tomorrow. Refer to the checklist! (You could also type your letter on a computer and print it.) Then write or type an envelope with a fictional address and exchange your letter with your partner.

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### B. Write a Reply

Respond to your partner's letter. Use this space for your rough draft. Be sure to use useful expressions from this lesson. Write or type an envelope using the return address from the envelope you received from your partner. Give your letter of response to your partner.

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