

# English Lesson 10

## Business Letter

### Basic Rules

There may be some modification or improvisation about writing business letter, but even so, it is better to follow established practice, which is convenient if only because it provides a standard to which the business world has become accustomed. Using the custom of mechanical structure can avoid confusion and waste of time for both sender and receiver.

### Letter Style

Although formality in business letter-writing is rapidly giving way to a less conventional and more friendly style, the lay out or mechanical structure of the letter as it is called still follows a more or less set pattern determined by custom and not resulting from any deliberate plan. Choice of lay out is a matter of individual taste, and while departures from customary form may not be wrong, they may reflect to disadvantage of those who indulge in them, in much the same way as peculiarities of dress and conduct reflect upon those who practice them.

There are three types of lay out: blocked letter style, indented letter style, and semi-blocked letter style.

#### 1. Blocked letter Style

The practice of displaying letters in the blocked style saves typing time and is now firmly established. Its outstanding feature is the commencement of all typing lines, including those for the date, inside name and address, salutation, subheadings, and complimentary close at the left hand margin of the paper. The loss of clarity occasioned by the absence of indentations may be made good by increasing number of separate line-spacings between paragraph from two to three as shown in fig.1. With this style it is customary to use "open" punctuation, the style of punctuation that omits all but essential punctuation marks outside the body of the letter, e.g from the inside name and address, the salutation and the complimentary close. This again saves typing times, since it restricts punctuation to its essential purpose of making meaning clear.

#### 2. Indented letter style

This style is the first line of each paragraph of the letter, usually five spaces for pica type, and six for elite, though deeper indentations are sometimes preferred. Use of the blocked style for the inside name and address help to give the letter a tidy appearance as shown in fig 2. The effect of indenting is to throw into relief the thought-form of the letter and this helps the reader. Traditionally, such items as heading, complimentary closures and designations are centered in relation to the length of the typing line and full, i.e. "closed" punctuation is used throughout. Criticism of the indented style is that it involves much extra work, especially where a word-processing typewriter is not used.

#### 3. Semi-blocked letter style

The blocked style suffers from the disadvantage that placement of the date and reference data on the left hand side of the paper causes inconvenience when particular letters are required from the files. Because of this, many businesses prefer to modify the blocked style by placing date and reference data on the extreme right of the paper, thus making particular letters more readily identifiable in the filing system. Other variations of the blocked style are sometimes adopted and create a particular form of "house-style", for example placement of the complimentary close and designation of signatory in blocked form in the middle of the typing line.

## **SEVEN PARTS IN THE BUSINESS LETTER**

The style of display adopted is determined by personal taste or by a firm's preferred house-style, but whichever style is used, the business letter consists of seven parts.

1. The letter head
2. The reference and date
3. The inside name and address
4. The salutations
5. The message
6. The subscription or complimentary close
7. The writer's signature and designation.

A common fault is to type the letter too high on the paper. It should be neither too high nor too low, but nicely placed to preserve an appearance of balance and dignity. Another fault is to leave too little space for the signature. For this, not less than 4 cm should be allowed between the complimentary close and the writer's designation. However faultless a business letter may be in matter, style and tone, it will not only create a bad impression but also weaken its effect if it is not attractively displayed.

## **SALUTATION**

Whether you are writing a formal business letter to other companies, clients, vendors, government agencies, and/or customers, the format and tone of the letter has to sound professional. You need to sound polite and show respect to the person you are sending the letter to. Business letter is looked upon as a means of communication where organizations and/or individuals pass essential messages to one another. Now, these letters can be sent for various reasons like inquiry about products, job application, thank you letter, follow up letter, etc.; the point is that as there can be hundreds of reasons why someone would send a formal business letter to an organization or customer, there are certain etiquette that should be adopted. And that is the purpose of this article. We will go over some important business letter salutation etiquette everyone should be aware of.

### **Different Types of Business Letter Salutations**

Apart from keeping a close eye on the word choices and the format of your letters, proper salutation styles need to be given top priority. The salutation is generally at the beginning of any letter and is the first thing a recipient would notice. So, depending on who you are sending a letter to, follow the correct business letter salutation etiquette mentioned below.

#### **When the Recipient is Unknown**

If you have never met the recipient before, are unaware of his/her name, and/or don't know their gender, you need to be very careful as to how to salute them. The best bet is to write Dear Sir, Dear Madam, or Dear Sir or Madam. On the other hand, when the gender of the recipient is unknown, then go with the old time favorite To Whom It May Concern. This covers both the sexes and sounds very formal, and that's the tone you want in your letter.

### **When You Know the Recipient**

At times, after communicating with a certain client, customer, or organization, you two might know each others' first names. In this case, even though a formal business letter is being written, the salutation etiquette will change just a bit. In such cases, you can use the salutations like Dear John/Jane, Dear Mr. John, or Dear Ms. Jane. On the other hand, if your relationship with the recipient isn't that friendly and open, then play it safe and forget about including his/her first name. However, you don't want to say Dear Sir/Madam or To Whom It May Concern either. Here, you can opt to use their last name and write Dear Mr. Smith or Dear Ms. Smith. If it is a female recipient and you may or may not be aware if she is married or a single, the salutation with "Ms." is perfect; generally, the salutation of "Miss" is not favored.

### **Proper Punctuation Usage**

Now that you know what the different salutation types are, let's now move on to the punctuation use for these formal business letters. After you have decided which salutation to use for the recipient, using the correct punctuation matters too. I know that there is a lot of to remember and follow for writing just 2 to 3 words in the beginning of a letter, but as I said earlier, it matters a lot. Your professionalism and attitude towards the recipient shows with what and how you write a letter. For American English, after the name of the recipient, use a (:) colon; for example, you will write Dear Mr. Williams:. On the other hand, for British English, after the name of the recipient, use a (,) comma; for example, you will write Dear Ms Williams,. These punctuations are supposed to be used for formal business letters.

### **Closing Salutations**

After you have finished your letter, the closing salutation has to be included as well. This is very simple as there aren't that many confusing factors like gender, formal, informal, etc. For closing a letter, simply write Sincerely, Faithfully yours, Yours truly, or Yours sincerely. However, if you would like to sound a little less formal in your closing salutation, then use Kind regards or Best regards. These business letter salutations and endings mentioned in the article can be used for email and actual letters. Follow the proper business letter salutation etiquette as the tone in the letters play a huge role.

### **The Body of the Letter**

We must take care not only to set out our letters attractively and unmistakable clearness but also to express them in terms our reader can readily understand.

- a. Write simply, clearly, courteously, grammatically, and to the point.
- b. Paragraph correctly, confining each paragraph to one topic.
- c. Avoid stereotyped phrases and commercialese.

If there has been previous correspondence the place to refer to it is the opening paragraph. The paragraphs that follow will contain further details, and the closing paragraph a statement of our intentions, hopes, or expectations concerning the next step. If we decide to start our closing paragraph with a

participle, be careful to add I am, We are, or some similar expression beginning with a pronoun, otherwise we will commit the common fault of the unrelated participle. Hoping to hear from you not by I or We I quite wrong. It is better to avoid the participial closure if we can and to say quite simply, for example, I hope to hear from you soon. It is, and sounds, much better.

### **The Subscription, or Complimentary Close**

The complimentary close is merely a polite way of ending a letter. Just as the use of Dear Sir, etc., is purely conventional, so is the use of Yours faithfully, Yours truly, and similar expressions. Neither salutation nor closure can be logically defended. There is nothing faithful about a failure to deliver goods on time, or true about a mistake in sending the wrong goods; yet the letters explaining these things would be signed faithfully or truly. Used in this way the terms are meaningless; nevertheless, convention imposes these fashions on us, and for the expressions used must be appropriate to the occasion, and that salutation and closure must be in keeping. A list of salutations arranged with their appropriate closures is given below.

<i>Salutation</i>	<i>Suitable closure</i>	<i>Comments on closure</i>
Dear Sir(s) Dear Madam Mesdames	Yours faithfully  Yours very faithfully	This is the standard closure for business letters. Like all other complimentary terms, it must always be typed in full, and never as <i>f'fly</i> . This form of closure should never be used.
Dear Sir(s) Dear Madam Mesdames	Yours truly	Now somewhat old-fashioned and little used in business. Being a little less formal than <i>Yours faithfully</i> it is sometimes used between persons acquainted with each other, or where a personal relationship exist, as with solicitors, bankers, and doctors.
Dear Sir My Dear Sir Dear Madam My Dear Madam	Yours very truly	Expresses rather more feeling than <i>Yours truly</i> , and would be suitably used, for example, when acknowledging a favour.
Sir Gentlemen Madam Mesdames	Yours respectfully	Appropriate only in letters to superiors, but is now no longer fashionable and is best avoided.
Sir Gentlemen Madam Mesdames	I am, Sir (etc.) Yours obediently OR I am, Sir (etc.) Yours obedient servant	Except in the Civil Service this form of closure has now disappeared. Nor is it now often used in the Civil Service, having been replaced by the standard form <i>Yours faithfully</i> .
Dear Mr Shaw	Yours sincerely	For private letter between persons known to each other, though it has now become fashionable in

business between persons well known to each other, or where there is a wish to shed formality and establish a warmer and more personal note in the letter. Indeed, when the salutation mentions the addressee by name, *Yours sincerely* is now the preferred closure.

Dear Mr Shaw My Dear Mr Shaw	Yours very sincerely	Expresses a little warmer feeling than <i>Yours sincerely</i> . (As when refusing a request without wishing to cause offence.)
Dear Trevor	Sincerely	Less formal than <i>yours sincerely</i> . Used only between close friends.
Dear Janet	Kind regards	Gives the letter a friendly personal touch. Used between persons well known to each other.
Dear Shaw My Dear Shaw Dear William	Yours ever As ever	Used between close friends.
Dear William My Dear William	Yours affectionately	Used between intimate friends.

Avoid the following:

- a. Inverted forms like Faithfully, Truly or Sincerely yours, or Cordially yours (common in the United States). They are somewhat forced and artificial.
- b. Yours, etc. To use this form of closure is in bad taste.
- c. I (We) remain. The closures in the above table serve all occasions.

With the blocked form of layout, the complimentary close, the name of the firm or company, and the writer's designation or title of office all begin at the left-hand trying margin.

Yours faithfully

for MACDONALD & EVANS (Publications) LTD



Jeanne d'Arc

Managing Director

Blocked. This fully blocked style is that favoured by the Civil Service and most business organizations today. In conventional (indented) layout the complimentary close may occupy either of two positions in relation to the typing line.

- a. *Towards the right*, starting at the middle of the typing line, e.g. at 40 on the scale with pica type, and margins at 10 and 70; or at 45 on the scale with elite type, and margins at 10 and 80.

Yours faithfully  
for MACDONALD & EVANS (Publications) LTD



Jeanne d'Arc  
Managing Director

*Indented.* This is style of closure to use with the indented form of inside name and address. It helps you give the letter an appearance of balance.

- b. *In the middle*, in which case the words are typed to fall evenly on each side of the middle of the typing line.

Yours faithfully  
for MACDONALD & EVANS (Publications) LTD



Jeanne d'Arc  
Managing Director

Centred. Some like to use this centred style of closure with the blocked form of inside name and address as an alternative to the indented style illustrated in.

The name of the firm or company, if included, is centred on the line immediately following the complimentary close. Note that only the first word of the complimentary close takes a capital letter. The designation, or title of office, is typed as shown in the example, and in the middle in example.

Five line-spacings will usually leave enough room for the writer's signature, but it may be necessary to allow more if the signature is a bold one.

The complimentary close must never be separated from the substance faulty judgment this becomes necessary the letter must be scrapped and retyped, with some portion of the subject-matter carried over to the next sheet.

Like salutation, the complimentary close is omitted from postcards, formal invitations, branch and departmental letters, and office memoranda.

#### The Signature

The signature is the signed name or mark of the person writing the letter or that of the firm he represents. It is written in ink immediately below the complimentary close. Because a signature is the distinguishing mark of the one who uses it, the same style must always be adopted. For example, M A Webb, Maurice A Webb, M Arthur Webb, Maurice Webb, and Arthur Webb must not be used indiscriminately for the same person. If your correspondent signs as M A Webb you must address him as such.

#### Illegible signatures

An illegible signature is not, as some suppose, an indication of high office; rather it is an indication of inconsiderateness and bad manners. Nevertheless, many modern signatures are illegible and it is now common practice to type the name of signer above his designation if he has one. The actual signature is then placed immediately above



ZaziKeren  
Personnel Manager

The signature as written and the signature as typed must correspond exactly. Thus, in the above example the written signature must be ZaziKeren and not Z Keren.

It should never be necessary for typists to have to repeat the signature in type, but the practice has now become so firmly established that it is adopted even where signatures are quite legible, and it is unlikely that any general improvement in writing signatures will now change it.

The only justification for the practice is that it avoids the embarrassment and annoyance that sometimes result from a misreading of badly written signatures.

#### Incorporated bodies

An official signing for a registered company or other incorporated body adds to his signature the title of the office he holds and, notwithstanding the use of headed paper, frequently repeats above his signature the name of the organization for which he signs; if his letter is written in the plural we, he must do so. The Secretary of a company may, for example, be found to sign in any of the following ways:

Yours faithfully



F A Mubarak  
Secretary

Yours faithfully  
WHARFE & HUGHES LTD



F A Mubarak  
Secretary

Yours faithfully  
for WHARFE & HUGHES LTD



F A Mubarak  
Secretary

Yours faithfully  
on behalf of WHARFE & HUGHES  
LTD



F A Mubarak  
Secretary