

BUSINESS LETTERS

THE BASICS

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Memos, email, customer correspondence, and complaints.

Note: Many computer word processing software programs contain files that can automatically format letters in some or all of the first two sections below. If you use these, you can skip immediately to the body of this chart containing tips, suggestions, and styles.

All business correspondence contains the following items, listed in the order in which they will appear in the letter. Those marked with an asterisk(*) may be omitted on occasions when they are either unknown or unnecessary.

A. Letterhead/Return Address

1. Name of the company/individual sending the letter. Often the company logo.
2. Address/phone, email, fax number(s), etc.
For stylistic reasons, this information may appear either directly below name, at the bottom of the page, or in some other variant.
3. If you don't have printed letterhead, type this information in the appropriate place (*see: Letter Formats*).

B. Date: This is the date the letter is written, regardless of the date of mailing.

C. Inside Address: This is the full address to which the letter is being sent, exactly as it will appear on the envelope.

1. Name, title of individual to whom you are writing*
2. Company name
3. Department name*
4. Street address, including suite/office/room numbers, etc.
5. City, state, zip code

Note: Some authorities on business writing take great pains to discuss when, where, and if abbreviations should be used in the letter for designations, such as street (st., ave.), state names (Missouri vs. MO), room designations (suite vs. ste., room vs. rm., department vs. dept.), etc. They insist on consistency throughout. Others lean towards letting the "look" of the letter determine this.

D. Attention:*

1. Used when you want your letter immediately directed to a specific individual/department (see: C, 1 & 3 above).
2. The differences between using the complete address and using "attention" are subtle, but important.
 - a. When using the full address, you are writing to a specific individual because you feel he/she should be aware of the content of the letter and should be the primary actor on whatever information the letter contains.
 - b. The "attention" line indicates that you believe the matters discussed are full company matters, but ones which the "attention" addressee should be first to know about.
 - c. The difference can also affect the impression of importance of the letter. For example: Your company has discovered a mistake in billing. Your first letter to correct this may be addressed: Attention: Accounting Department. If, however, the matter is not straightened out to your satisfaction, subsequent letters may be addressed to "John Jones, Accounting Department Manager," or even the CEO of the company.
 - i. This, in essence, is saying, quite specifically, "I expected you, personally, to solve this problem."
 - ii. "Attention" lines should draw attention by full capitalization, underlining, or other highlighting.

E. Salutation

1. Where your correspondent's name is known, use Dear (Mr. Ford, Ms. Pinckney, etc.).
 - a. Use first name salutations (Dear John/Lucy) only when you are already on a "first name" basis with the correspondent and wish to convey a sense of cordiality.
 - b. Avoid the use of "Dear Sir," "Dear Madam," etc. While these may be formally correct, they tend to indicate aloofness and even anger.
 - c. Avoid using just the correspondent's name (no "Dear") unless trying to convey a sense of urgency or great intimacy.
 - d. In instances where you are unsure of your level of familiarity with the correspondent, or when faced with an ambiguous name and no further details ("Reply to J.L. Mallard"), it is permissible to use the full name after "Dear" (e.g. "Dear Lucretia Pinckney," "Dear J.L. Mallard").
2. Where the correspondent's name is unknown, "Gentlemen" may be used, although "Gentlemen and Ladies" is considered more correct.
 - a. Avoid the archaic: "Dear Sir, or Madam, whichever the case may be."
3. Other variants can include: Dear (Title), i.e. "Dear Accounting Manager"; Dear (Department), i.e. "Dear Accounting Department"; or "To Whom It May Concern." These, however, are awkward, may be counterproductive, and should only be used if all other salutations are unavailable.

F. Re: (Regarding)

1. An encapsulation of the general reason for the letter. For example, "Re: Billing Errors by Accounting Department," not "Re: The Total Intransigence of your Accounting Department in Solving Billing Errors."
2. This, too, should be highlighted by CAPS, underlining, or other. If using both "Attention" and "Re:" lines, highlight them differently (e.g. CAPS for ATTENTION, Underlining for Subject).

G. The Body of the Letter: The letter itself (see: individual areas below).

H. Closing

1. Generally should be polite and formal.
2. "Yours truly," "Sincerely," "Respectfully," etc.
 - a. Some guides recommend "... yours" after "Sincerely" or "Respectfully." Others consider this old-fashioned.
 - b. Some guides differentiate between these, saying that "sincerely" should be used when you have, indeed, made a sincere (i.e. impassioned) statement, and "respectfully" when trying to impress the receiver with the fact that you have turned to him/her because he/she is uniquely able to deal with the problem.
3. Personal closings ranging from "Regards" to "Best Wishes" to "Fondly," etc. should be avoided even when writing to someone you know well, unless either the letter itself is of a more personal nature, or you are actively trying to use that personal relationship to achieve the letter's goals.

I. Typed/Printed Name/Title of Writer

1. Leave about four lines between this and closing for a handwritten signature.
2. If writing on behalf of the company itself, the company name should appear just after closing and before you space for signature.
For example: A request for payment of an overdue bill may be written by The Jones Company to The Smith Company. You, as vice president, are merely the "vessel" through which it is being delivered.

J. Transcriber's Initials

1. If someone else actually types the letter, his/her initials should appear in the lower-left corner, after yours, in lower case, preceded by a backslash. SB (author of letter)/ka (initials of typist).
2. This determines if any errors, omissions or addenda were initiated by the author or typist.

K. Enclosure (Encl.)

1. Used to alert the recipient that there is more being mailed than just the letter.
2. Anything that is not the letter itself, no matter how big/small, significant/insignificant, is considered an enclosure.
3. When there is more than one enclosure, the letter should state, at the very least, "enclosures" (encls.). However, the specific number of enclosures is preferable.
4. Each separate item is considered a separate enclosure.

L. Copies (CC)

1. Lists the name/title of all others to whom you are sending the letter. (Although the days of "carbon copies" are past, the abbreviation "CC" remains.)

M. Blind Copies (BCC)

1. You may wish to send copies to someone without alerting your correspondent to this fact. He/she receives "blind copies."
2. This notation should not appear on the letter you send, but only on copies you keep for your file.

THE MAILING ENVELOPE

A. Return address (or letterhead/company logo) in upper-left corner.

It is also permissible to place this on the back flap of the envelope.

B. Addressee should appear exactly as it does on **inside address** above.

1. Exceptions: If one has chosen to spell out such words as "street," "room," "suite," etc. in the letter, one may abbreviate these on the envelope, or vice versa.
2. State abbreviations should *always* conform to postal abbreviations, which allows for speedier handling of mail within the postal service.

C. Attention line(s) may appear directly under company name, but for emphasis should appear either directly below address (capitalized or with a space in between last "address" line – for emphasis), or in the lower-left hand corner.

D. Any special handling instructions/information (*Contains Photos-Do Not Bend; Urgent; Immediate Reply Requested; etc.*) should also appear in lower-left, under **Attention** line.

E. Always use the proper size envelope. (*Note: In all instances below, we are assuming materials in standard 8 1/2" x 11" format*)

1. A single letter, no matter the length, can be folded in three and go in a standard (#10) envelope.
2. Letters accompanied by other *text* material, such as contracts, price lists, letters of recommendation, resumes, etc., may be sent as above. However, if the accompanying material is extensive and will cause the envelope to bulge, or if the envelope contains materials that will be read by numerous people, is likely to be filed, or may be subject to copying/faxing/scanning, etc., it should be sent *unfolded* in an 8 1/2" x 11" envelope. This will preserve its readability.
3. Naturally, such items as catalogues, photographs, etc. *must* be sent this way. (*Note: Always enclose a stiff cardboard into envelopes containing materials that should not be bent.*)
4. Avoid, if possible, using envelopes larger than necessary (e.g. 11" x 14" envelope for 8"x10" material). If the proper envelope is *not* available, it is preferable to use a larger one than to cram materials into a smaller one.
5. Typed or printed addresses are preferable. If you must handprint an address (except on personal or one-to-one correspondence), use **BLOCK LETTERS** for clarity.

TYPES OF CORRESPONDENCE

INFORMATIONAL LETTER

Note: In the examples that follow, we are concerned solely with the body text unless otherwise indicated. (See: Letter Formats)

Dear Ms. Pinckney:

In reply to your letter of March 21st, I am pleased to send you the following:

We have been publishing full-color, laminated guides in academic, business, home and computer areas for almost a decade and are continually expanding our areas of expertise to meet the needs of our clients. (See encl.)

We use only the finest talents in each area covered by our guides to assure that the information they contain is accurate, up-to-date, and presented in an exciting, easy-to-understand manner. Our graphics department then makes each presentation both abundantly clear and enticing to the eye. Thanks to state-of-the-art printing and production methods, we can usually promise shipment of any order, of any title, new or old, within 48 hours of receipt.

We also offer customized guides (minimum order 5,000 copies) that can put your logo, or other desired information, on the guide at no extra cost, and in minimum "turn-around" time.

We can further tailor any guide to your needs by adding/removing material which may be desired for your individual purposes, or provide an entirely new guide to meet your individual needs. Naturally, the cost/time factor on such a project will be negotiated, but we can assure you that it will be the lowest cost, fastest time available within the industry. I am enclosing a complete catalogue, containing price lists, shipping costs, delivery information, etc., as well as some sample guides, for your perusal.

Thank you for your interest in (name of company) and I look forward to hearing from you soon.

- A. Most likely generated in reply to a request, but can be self-initiated to inform potential/current clients.

In reply to your letter of March 21st...

1. Immediately inform correspondent of the specific matter to which you are responding.
 2. Always include the specific date. Not "...your letter of the other day," or "...yesterday's phone call."
- ... I am pleased to send you the following:
3. Get directly, but politely, to the purpose of the mailing.
 4. If the mailing is not in response to an inquiry, etc., a variation of "I am pleased" can be the opener.

Note: For effectiveness or "advertising" purposes, this second type of opening should be somewhat stronger, e.g. "I want to call your attention to an important new policy we have adopted." Note "buzz words" attention, important, new.

We have been publishing full-color, laminated guides in academic, business, home and computer areas for almost a decade and are continually expanding our areas of expertise to meet the needs of our clients. (See encl.)

5. May or may not be in specific response to an inquiry, but establishes the credibility of the sender.
6. (See encl.) If applicable, would refer to letters of commendation, advertising materials, or other materials that affirm the "pride." **We use only the finest talents in each area covered by our guides to assure that the information they contain is accurate, up-to-date, and presented in an exciting, easy-to-understand manner. Our graphics department then makes each presentation both abundantly clear and enticing to the eye. Thanks to state-of-the-art printing and production methods, we can usually promise shipment of any order, of any title, new or old, within 48 hours of receipt.**
7. Remember, every letter you send, no matter how basic, is always an advertisement for your company.
8. This paragraph tells the client that you have a complete, in-house team to meet any need. But it also tells them that you are proud of their skills and that they are the best in their field!

We also offer customized guides (minimum order 5,000 copies) that can put your logo, or other desired information, on the guide at no extra cost, and in minimum "turnaround" time.

9. When offering specialized service, always place any restrictions, in this case the "minimum order," up front. This eliminates any misunderstanding.
10. This is additional information that shows the scope and ability of your company.
11. If, however, any of the above information blocks were the subject of the client inquiry, that portion, with appropriate changes, should lead. *Always answer the client's query first!* Searching through the letter for that answer causes frustration.

I am enclosing a complete catalogue, containing price lists, shipping costs, delivery information, etc., as well as some sample guides, for your perusal.

12. Give the client as much information as possible, *but*
13. Do not include the same information with subsequent mailings. This only leads to excessive paper and client annoyance.
14. Polite closure combined with a spur to action.
15. Tells client the next step is his/hers, but leaves open the possibility of follow-up by you.

REQUEST FOR INFORMATION LETTER

Usually falls into one of three broad categories:

- A. Request for readily available information, such as company's catalogue, price list, etc.
1. Can be simple and direct: "Dear BarCharts: Please send me your latest catalogue and price list. Thank you."
 2. There is no need to personalize or to go into detail as to why you are requesting information.
 3. Obvious as this may be, in this and all letters, be sure your return address is stated clearly and completely. Be sure to include any office or suite numbers, etc.
- B. Request for readily available information that you need, culled to meet a *specific* need.

BarCharts, Inc.
(inner address)

Dear Mr. Taylor,

Please send us your current list of computer guides and your latest price list. We are interested in distributing these to our employees and would need a minimum of 5,000 copies of any chart we purchase. Please advise us of:

1. Any discounts for bulk purchases and quantities involved.
2. Specific turn-around time required on such purchases.
3. The possibility of personalizing these charts with our company logo.
4. Cost, quantity, time, parameters on (3).
5. Any other information you deem important to our needs.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter.

Yours truly,

1. Useful when you don't wish to be inundated with a lot of extraneous information, or when you have a specific need to be addressed.
2. Since you are now asking for some effort on the part of recipient, it is a good idea to personalize this request if possible, and itemize your specific needs.

Mr. Dan Taylor, Corporate Sales Manager

3. Writer has clearly identified specific areas of interest without committing to any specific plan.
 4. In 1-4 above, the writer has clearly laid out areas to be discussed.
 5. In 5, the writer flatters the recipient by implying his expertise and asks for additional facts without *extraneous* material.
 6. All other segments of letter simply conform to basics.
- C. Request for specific information that may not be readily available and requires both a very specific response and a devotion of time and resources on the part of the recipient.

Mr. Evan Samuels
Colossal Pictures
(Inner address)

Dear Mr. Samuels:

I am a film student at Florida Atlantic University, and I am writing a paper on "Politics and its Effect on Films of the '40s."

I wish to include an unbiased overview of the events involving your friend and mentor, Director Darryl Arnold.

I would be extremely grateful for any information that you can provide that will help present a fully rounded portrait of Mr. Arnold during those times.

Be assured that any parameters you may wish to place around the use of any information (e.g. "background," "not for attribution," etc.) will be honored to the fullest.

I eagerly look forward to your reply. Thank you.

Sincerely,

I am a film student at Florida Atlantic University, and I am writing a paper on "Politics and its Effect on Films of the '40s."

1. *Before* asking for any information, the writer has generally established the reason for what follows.

I wish to include an unbiased overview of the events involving your friend and mentor, Director Darryl Arnold.

2. In this one sentence, the writer establishes a number of salient points.
 - a. That he/she will be fair about a matter of apparent controversy.
 - b. That the person to whom he/she is writing has specialized knowledge.
 - c. That he/she wants only very limited information (i.e. "Arnold" and the "controversy") about what could be a very broad subject ("Arnold's" life as a whole, his films, etc.).

I would be extremely grateful for any information that you can provide that will help present a fully rounded portrait of Mr. Arnold during those times.

3. Again, several points are being covered.
 - a. The specific request for information.
 - b. The writer's desire to be unbiased.
 - c. The implication that the writer already has some information, but fears it may be biased.

Be assured that any parameters you may wish to place around the use of any information (e.g. "background," "not for attribution," etc.) will be honored to the fullest.

4. While the terminology of the above, with such phrases as "not for attribution," are specific to the trade of journalism, it is important to assure your correspondent that the information will not be misused.
5. Nevertheless, the phrasing of the above ("you may wish to place") allows correspondent to place no restrictions and does *not* emphasize the need to do so.
6. **I eagerly look forward to your reply. Thank you.** *Always "assume" the reply will be positive.*

TYPES OF CORRESPONDENCE

MEMOS

Memos are interoffice correspondence used to briefly tell/ask about a single subject in an informal manner.

A. This statement, based on information contained in several sources on letter-writing, contains at least three misleading ideas.

1. Primarily due to the rise of **email** as a prime means of communication, the memo format is now widely used in correspondence in any number of instances beyond interoffice communication.
2. While a memo *should* be as brief as *possible*, it is often necessary to go into details that may expand it considerably.
3. Informal should not be taken to mean unimportant. They are informal *only* in the sense that they do away with some of the formalities of letter writing, such as internal address, formal openings/closings, etc.

B. Purposes of Memos

1. Urgency
 - a. Memos contain important or time-sensitive material that cannot wait for regular channels.
 - b. They contain material that will be diluted in formal letter format.
2. Brevity—no matter their length, their conversational tone and informal layout allow for less cumbersome sentence structure than letters.
3. They leave a written record of material/events. Phone calls and conversations can be misunderstood, incorrectly remembered, or denied. Memos are there in black-and-white.
4. Similar to (3), they clarify points made in discussion so both sides can see what the other person heard, thought they heard, or misheard.

Basic Memo Information

A. To:

1. Name of the specific person or persons to whom the memo is addressed.
 - a. Not to be confused with people being copied (See: CC, below).
2. Department or title, or title & department.
3. Company name, if going outside of sender's own company.
4. Phone number/ext. and/or email/fax number.

B. From: (As above)

C. Date: (In certain cases, it is also useful to note the Time sent.)

D. Regarding (Re):

1. Wherever possible, one or two words pointing to material to be discussed.
2. Do not try to sum up contents of memo, e.g. Staff meeting, not Staff meeting to discuss the current economic picture and plans for the future.

E. Text of Memo - no signature is required.

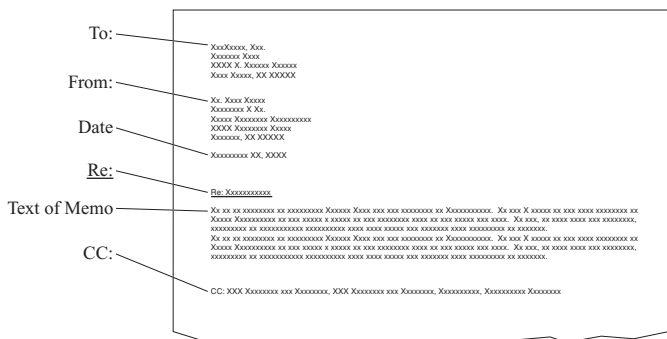
F. CC:

1. Those not directly involved in the actions of the memo, but who should be informed of its contents.
2. If you wish John, Joe, and Dennis to attend the meeting, they appear in "To." If you want Sheila to know about the meeting, she is "CC."

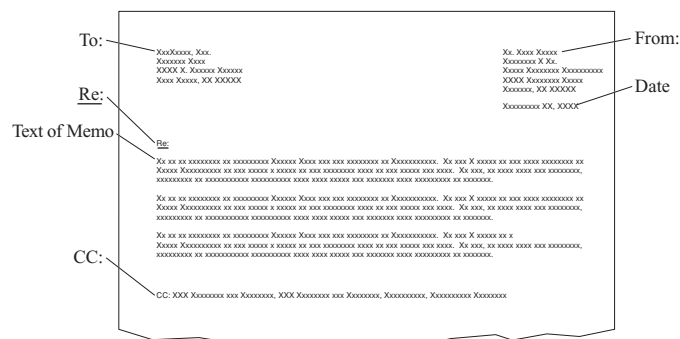
G. BCC: (Blind Copies)

1. For *your* records, only!
2. If you want Sheila to know about the meeting, but don't want John, Joe, and Dennis to know that she has been alerted, *BCC* Sheila.

Basic Memo Formats



May be linear (as above) or may be "Squared" (as below):



LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

A. Issued to employees leaving the company as an aid to gaining future employment.

B. There are two kinds of letters of recommendation.

1. *Specific:* Employee is being recommended to a known employer for a specific position.
 - a. Standard letter format is used.
 - b. Goes into detail as to what employee will bring to new position.

It is my pleasure to recommend Arnold Gale for the position of comptroller.

In the 3 years he has been employed by Jones Publishing he has shown a grasp of his position that is far above the norm.

He has, on more than one occasion, initiated or implemented procedures that have saved the company many thousands of dollars.

Moreover, he has always shown great team spirit and willingness to participate in endeavors that go far beyond the routine requirements of his position.

We at Jones Publishing will sorely miss him and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.

It is my pleasure to recommend Arnold Gale for the position of comptroller.

1. Get immediately to the purpose of the letter.

In the 3 years he has been employed by Jones Publishing, he has shown a grasp of his position that is far above the norm.
 2. Overview of length of employment, accompanied by a general appraisal of his work.

He has, on more than one occasion, initiated or implemented procedures that have saved the company many thousands of dollars.
 3. Instance(s) of his using skills to benefit his employer.

Moreover, he has always shown great team spirit and willingness to participate in endeavors that go far beyond the routine requirements of his position.
 4. General statement designed to show that he "fits in."

We at Jones Publishing will sorely miss him and wish him all the best in his future endeavors.
 5. Since the thrust of any letter of recommendation is that the employee is extremely valuable, it can be questioned as to why he/she is leaving. The above is usable when the employee is leaving of his/her own volition.
 - vi. If this is not the case, a statement such as in the *general* letter is better.
2. General: Employee can take to any future employer.
- a. Letter is addressed "To Whom It May Concern."
 - b. Concentrates on the employee's overall qualities and work habits, rather than talents that may relate to the job being left, but not be relevant to job being sought.

Date

To Whom It May Concern:

Arnold Gale has been employed by Jones Publishing for the past three years. During that time he not only performed each and every task in the fullest and most professional of manners, he has demonstrated innovative ability and dedication that goes far beyond the norm. It is solely due to the downsizing of our company and the closing of Arnold's department that we are forced to end our relationship.

I know that he will prove a valuable asset to any employer, and I write this recommendation of both his skills and his personality, most wholeheartedly.

1. The letter is more concerned with the *values* of the employee, not *specifics* of job performance.
2. While the employee may be seeking a job similar to the one previously held, that is not necessarily the case.

Suggested Solution for an Awkward Situation

A. One may be confronted with writing a letter of recommendation for an employee one doesn't, in fact, wish to recommend.

1. This may be for legal reasons.
2. This may be because it is easier to do so than refuse.

To Whom it May Concern:

Arnold Gale has been employed by Jones Publishing for the past six months.

Although this is a relatively short time, I realized quite early the qualities and job performance we could expect from Mr. Gale, and he has lived up to or exceeded every expectation.

I am confident that, in the proper position, Mr. Gale would prove an asset to any company, and that, in any position he will make his skills and abilities known quickly.

B. One doesn't want to mislead future employers, nor anger the employee.

To Whom it May Concern:

Arnold Gale has been employed by Jones Publishing for the past six months.

1. Simple statement of fact.

Although this is a relatively short time, I realized quite early the qualities and job performance we could expect from Mr. Gale, and he has lived up to or exceeded every expectation.
2. This sounds positive. But it never states what was expected from Mr. Gale after they got to know him.
3. Can be read by the discerning eye as: "We knew early on we had made a mistake, and Mr. Gale did nothing to disprove our opinion."

I am confident that, in the proper position, Mr. Gale would prove an asset to any company,
4. Note "in the proper position..." (This one wasn't it!)

and that, in any position, he will make his skills and abilities known quickly.
5. If you make the same mistake we did, you'll know it soon enough.

COVER LETTERS

- Cover letters introduce the material they cover.
- Material may be resumes, sales brochures, manuscripts, products, pictures, etc.
- The important point to remember is that the *material the cover letter* accompanies is the important part of the mailing.
- Therefore, the cover letter should be as brief as possible.
 - Resumes, sales brochures, etc., are documents that have been designed to present the best possible picture. These are what you want the recipient to read. If you spend time in your cover letter itemizing the contents of that resume or sales brochure, you will not do it as well, and you negate the need to read the piece itself.
 - If the materials sent are extensive, or not self-evident (a large catalogue, information/material on a CD-rom, etc.), you can highlight key points.

Example (1)

I am extremely pleased to send you the enclosed resume, which I know you will find meets all your requirements.

I would be most interested in working with one of the pre-eminent companies in the field, and I know my experience and expertise would be a great asset to you.

"As you will see from the enclosed...."
"I felt you were more than deserving of the Flaffner Award in 1998."

I look forward to hearing from you in the near future so that we may get together and discuss the matter in greater detail.

I am extremely pleased to send you the enclosed resume,

- Always open with a statement of what the cover letter is covering. If answering an ad, open with a variant on:
"In regards to your ad in today's paper for an (repeat exact wording of ad). Then, "I am extremely..."
.... which I know you will find meets all your requirements.
- Aside from adding flow to the opening sentence, the key word is "know." Never "think," "believe" or "hope." If you aren't sure, why should the reader be? **I would be most interested in working with one of the pre-eminent companies in the field, and I know my experience and expertise would be a great asset to you.**
- In the example, we are general. In the letter, you would, of course, name the company and the area of your experience and expertise.
- Do not go into the details of the experience/expertise. Let the resume do it. A good rule of thumb: If you find yourself writing something like:
"As you will see from the enclosed...." STOP! If they're going to see it, let them!
- You can embellish on any knowledge you may have of the company.
 - E.g. after "...pre-eminent company..." "I felt you were more than deserving of the Flaffner Award in 1998."
 - Companies, like people, love to hear praise.
- I look forward to hearing from you in the near future so that we may get together and discuss the matter in greater detail.**
- You've said what you needed to say. You've enclosed your strength (the resume, etc.). Close politely.

Example (2)

We are extremely pleased to send you the enclosed BarCharts 2001 catalogue, containing a complete listing of all our study guides.

While we know you will find much of interest throughout, we specifically want to call your attention to pages 31-35, our Science Series, which we feel will be of particular help in meeting the needs you have described.

We look forward to hearing from you soon, and to working with you in the future.

We are extremely pleased to send you the enclosed BarCharts 2001 catalogue, containing a complete listing of all our study guides.

- Similar to the opening of Example (1).
While we know you will find much of interest throughout, we specifically want to call your attention to pages 31-35, our Science Series, which we feel will be of particular help in meeting the needs you have described.
- This type of phrase is the only relevant change from (1). You either know, or have reason to believe, that one part of an extensive mailing is of more interest to your correspondent. You want them to see the totality of your presentation, yet not be frustrated in finding that specific section.
We look forward to hearing from you soon, and to working with you in the future.
- Again, don't overload the cover letter. Let the enclosure speak.

SOME NOTES ON EMAIL

- Most email formats appear in memo form (i.e. "To," "From," etc.). This is due to necessities of the system. The email itself need not conform to the above and can be any type of correspondence one chooses, from a memo to a formal letter, etc.
- Most emails have a reply box that most respondees will *automatically use*. The email reply address received by the recipient is not necessarily the address of the sender.
- There are no "enclosures" (encl.) in email. Rather, there are "attachments," which are the same thing.

LETTERS OF COMPLAINT

- There are several different types of complaint letters.
- Unlike most letters in this guide, complaint letters may contain considerable emotion; usually anger.
 - The writer has the right to be angry at poor performance.
 - However, keep anger in check, or it may turn a possibility for redress into a tirade that causes the recipient to stonewall.
- We will examine the following:
 - Faulty product/service complaints from one company to another.
 - Faulty product/service complaints from individual to company.
 - Job performance complaints to employees.
 - Job complaints from employees to management.

Company to Company Letter

Note: Always on company letterhead, as there is a chance that this may become a legal document if the complaint goes uncorrected and/or has ramifications that may impact upon your company.

I am writing to you on behalf of our Production Manager Bill Spear in regard to the problem of defective widgets received from your company on Dec. 8th of this year.

As you have been informed on several occasions, they arrived at our plant over a week late and in a damaged condition.

Unless we receive replacements for this shipment within 5 (five) working days of receipt of this letter, we will be forced to take further action.

Since this delay, combined with the condition of the widgets, caused us to lose an important sale, I feel restitution must be made by your company. I expect to hear from you within 5 (five) working days of receipt of this letter so that we may discuss a fair resolution of this matter.

Yours truly,

I am writing to you on behalf of our Production Manager Bill Spear in regard to the problem of defective widgets received from your company on Dec. 8th of this year.

- Companies have hierarchies. Departments have certain responsibilities. The person writing will, often, be different from the person who suffered the problem.
- Needless to say, if the writer is the one directly impacted, leave out the phrase "... on behalf of..." etc.
- State immediately the specific problem. Whereas with individual complaints (below), it is necessary to establish one's position, in cross-company complaints, your position vis-a-vis the other company should be in place.
As you have been informed on several occasions, they arrived at our plant over a week late and in a damaged condition.
- Now, go into greater detail as to the specifics of the problem.
- "As you have been..." The formal letter is almost always a last resort. It is inconceivable that Bill Spear hasn't complained about the problem previously.
- In any event, assume this to be the case and, unless this becomes a full legal proceeding, you need not document such prior contact.
Unless we receive replacements for this shipment within 5 (five) working days of receipt of this letter, we will be forced to take further action.
Since this delay, combined with the condition of the widgets, caused us to lose an important sale, I feel restitution must be made by your company. I expect to hear from you within 5 (five) working days of receipt of this letter so that we may discuss a fair resolution of this matter.
- This is the "action" statement.
 - What you say here depends on the results you want.
 - Always state a specific time frame in which to receive those results.
 - Always state the results you want in the affirmative, and in the form of a statement, not a question. Never in terms such as "What do you plan to do about this?"
- Yours truly,**
- Brief, succinct, to the point.
- This type of letter is not the place for "chit-chat" or mending fences, etc.

Individual Complaint to Company Letter**To Whom It May Concern: or Dear Customer Service Manager or**

Dear Customer Service Manager:

I have been a customer of Neversure Airlines for many years ("Do we arrive on time? We're Neversure!").

I have always been pleased with your exceptional service, and have recommended you to many of my friends and colleagues.

Therefore you can imagine how angry and dismayed I was at the appalling events I encountered on flight 1017 on January 19th, from Los Angeles to New York.

The plane was scheduled to leave LAX at 10 a.m. (PST). It did not leave until 12:45. At no time were passengers offered any explanation for the delay. Indeed, on several occasions when I asked for one, I was rudely rebuffed and told to "be patient."

The plane did, finally, take off. Upon arrival in New York, I went to claim my baggage, which did not arrive for more than 35 minutes after my arrival at baggage claim. When my bag finally came down, it was in a ripped and filthy condition. I immediately complained and was accused of trying to file a false damage claim! Your employees made it clear that they thought I had boarded the plane with luggage in this sorry state, and was merely trying to "milk" the company for new luggage.

I have submitted a claim for the damage done to my luggage, and I expect it to be honored completely and quickly. If I have not heard from your company regarding this within 30 days of this mailing, I shall be forced to take further appropriate measures.

Dear Mr.(Ms.) Name of Senior Officer:

- Salutations are listed in *ascending* order of whom to address for best results.
- Some companies treat every complaint seriously. Some do not. Therefore, it is best to address the letter to the most likely source of action.
 - If you know the name and address of a major corporate officer, he/she will be more likely to get action for you than an overworked lower employee.
 - If that is not possible, get your letter to the appropriate department head or you risk it being lost in the labyrinth of corporate structure.
- I have been a customer of Neversure Airlines for many years ("Do we arrive on time? We're Neversure!").**
- Two important points are made in this statement.

COMPLAINT LETTERS

- Mention of the name of the company, along with its slogan, reinforces what will follow.
- Unlike the *company letter* (see: *previous page*), the individual is not known to the company, so identification as a long-term customer adds weight.

I have always been pleased with your exceptional service, and have recommended you to many of my friends and colleagues.
- Further "identification" of the writer.
- Explanation of why he/she has used service (product).
- His/her displeasure has ramifications ("... friends and colleagues.")

Therefore, you can imagine how angry and dismayed I was at the appalling events I encountered on flight 1017 on January 19th, from Los Angeles to New York.
- Gets to the reason for the letter in strong terms conveying one's emotions.
- Sets up the specifics surrounding complaint.

The plane was scheduled to leave LAX at 10 a.m. (PST). It did not leave until 12:45. At no time were passengers offered any explanation for the delay. Indeed, on several occasions when I asked for one, I was rudely rebuffed and told to "be patient." The plane did, finally, take off. Upon arrival in New York, I went to claim my baggage, which did not arrive for more than 35 minutes after my arrival at baggage claim. When my bag finally came down, it was in a ripped and filthy condition. I immediately complained and was accused of trying to file a false damage claim! Your employees made it clear that they thought I had boarded the plane with luggage in this sorry state, and was merely trying to "milk" the company for new luggage.
- Do not hold back on any aspect of the complaint that is valid.
- Key descriptive words, such as (in their appropriate place) "rudely rebuffed," "immediately," "made it clear," heighten the situation.

However, do not go off on tangents such as "I have never been treated this way," or "I am an upstanding citizen who has never had so much as a parking ticket." This self-justification is both time-consuming and irrelevant. If one feels a company is at fault, it does not matter if the fault befalls the Pope or Jack the Ripper. There is no mitigation of responsibility (or enhanced responsibility) based on the character of the customer.

I have submitted a claim for the damage done to my luggage, and I expect it to be honored completely and quickly. If I have not heard from your company regarding this within 30 days of this mailing, I shall be forced to take further appropriate measures.

- This is the action statement:

Since you will probably be unaware of all company procedures regarding such a matter, it is unwise to put too restrictive a burden on them for full satisfaction. You can, however, give them a deadline for *some* appropriate response.
- Enclose *copies* of any materials you feel are relevant, such as ticket stubs, claim checks, etc.

In short, the bulk of the letter (statement of complaint, expectations of results) is similar to the company letter. The major difference is in the introduction, which tells the recipient who you are.

Job Performance Complaint Letter

- Usually in memo form and interoffice, even if employee is at another location.
- Copied to appropriate personnel, but kept confidential from all others.
- Contains all relevant complaints, but only those for which you have a firm basis of knowledge. For example, a phrase such as: "You spend far too much time thinking about non-job related business" is weak. You cannot know what someone else is thinking. However, "You appear to spend too much time..." is o.k., if based on observations.

Confidential

Recently, a number of matters have come to our attention that we feel have a serious impact on your job performance and the performance of the company.

They are as follows:

- You have on more than one occasion arrived more than 10 minutes late for work.
- You have taken well over your allotted hour for lunch on numerous occasions.
- Your work has, on one or more occasions, been late, incomplete, and sloppy.
- You have been rude to fellow employees and customers.
- You have kept others from their assigned tasks through disruptive or counterproductive behavior.

If these matters aren't addressed and corrected immediately, we will have to take further action.

I think we should meet and discuss this in-depth. Call me to set up an appointment at your earliest convenience.

Confidential

- The memo (or mailing) is confidential. State this for the record.

Recently, a number of matters have come to our attention that we feel have a serious impact on your job performance and the performance of the company.
- This memo will have a negative impact on the employee, and his/her relationship with the company.
- The tone of the memo will either reinforce or mitigate that negativity.
- Neither result is, in and of itself, either good or bad. It depends on the result you want.
- The severity of the infractions and (tentative) conclusions drawn from them (see: *next column*) dictate tone.
- In the opening, we have chosen a brisk, no-nonsense, corporate opening.

- This could be softened by, for example, use of the employee's name (Mary; Recently, a number of...), and by the personal "I," instead of the corporate "we."

They are as follows:

 - You have on more than one occasion arrived more than 10 minutes late for work.**
 - You have taken well over your allotted hour for lunch on numerous occasions.**
 - Your work has, on one or more occasions, been late, incomplete, and sloppy.**
 - You have been rude to fellow employees and customers.**
 - You have kept others from their assigned tasks through disruptive or counterproductive behavior.**
- The body of the memo should, and must, cover all of the problems to document the totality of your complaint, without going into such specific detail as to make the memo unwieldy or seem either more important than it is (excessive length adds import), or less so (too general a statement; "you haven't been performing up to par," makes it seem less important).

Note: You should maintain, in your files, a full accounting of each charge, including as many names, dates, etc., as possible. This is for official records, for use in discussion with the employee, and/or to justify subsequent actions.

If these matters aren't addressed and corrected immediately, we will have to take further action.
- This is the penultimate conclusion to the memo which, in the above, is left vague.
- This can vary to the stronger "If these matters...immediately, it can (will) result in your dismissal (reassignment)" or "If these matters aren't resolved by the end of work on Friday, Aug. 19th, we will be forced to ask for your resignation," etc.
- It can also be weaker, e.g. "Please try to see what you can do about this."

I think we should meet and discuss this in-depth. Call me to set up an appointment at your earliest convenience.
- You must offer the employee an opportunity to both hear the details of the complaint(s), and respond to them.
- This is true even if you both know they are valid.
- This can also be strengthened to:

I will meet with you on Thursday, August 18th at 4 P.M. to discuss this.
- If you have already met with the employee on these same matters, this step can be ignored. *But that must be addressed in the memo.*

We have discussed this on numerous occasions and see no reason to rehash it (No signature).
- But, again in keeping with the tone you wish to set, you can lighten that tone with a personal "Parker," or strengthen it with a formal "Parker Plaise."

Employee Complaint Letter

- This may be the trickiest letter of all to write.
 - You want to express yourself in the strongest terms to achieve the result desired.
 - You *do not* want to ruffle feathers to make an enemy within the company.
 - You do not want to lose your job, or have your employers think you are looking to leave, if this is not the case.
 - If directing a complaint to immediate supervisors or within your own general office/district area, a memo is preferable.
 - If, however, you are employed within, say, a branch of a large national/multinational corporation, and feel the need to direct a complaint to a CEO or other(s) at an office outside your own, a formal letter should be used.
 - Always a last resort, after all other avenues of redress are closed.
- G. Memo/Formal Letter Opening.

Dear Ms. Antropi

I have been an office manager with Mercutio, Inc. for over three years and value that experience highly. I have grown with the company, and sincerely hope to continue to do so for many years to come.

In all that time, I have been proud of the organization and of the part I have played in its success. However, in recent weeks I have seen certain trends and policies developing which I feel are detrimental both to my own position, and the future of the company, as well. As you are aware, it has been the policy of our company to promote managers from within. Personally, I began as a clerk, was promoted to secretary, then assistant manager, and then to my current position of office manager. I did so due to my own abilities and hard work and, especially, thanks to the company's recognition of same. Indeed, it is that recognition that has been the mainstay of both my own loyalty and that of many of my fellow employees.

Recently, however, I was passed over for a promotion, when my district manager hired someone from outside of our organization to fill this post. Of course, I felt personally betrayed because I believe I had proven myself worthy of the position due to my job performance, and because I had been led to believe that the position would be mine by that very same district manager. Moreover, I have reason to believe that others feel this to be a reversal of company policy and a threat to their own security and advancement potential.

I hasten to add, that I have absolutely no question about the ability or professionalism of the person hired for the position. Although I know very little about him at this time, I am sure he meets the highest standards. Nor, do I believe, as others have suggested, that he was hired because he is the son of a long-time friend of the district manager.

I'm sure he was hired on his merit, and in a different situation would prove a valued employee to this, or any other, company. However, in this instance, I cannot help but feel that this matter, if not addressed immediately, will have a detrimental effect on the company as a whole, and possibly on my performance in particular.

As I said at the outset, I love this company. I love working for it. I would hate to see anything weaken that feeling, as I know you would. I hope to be able to talk with you in the near future to discuss a resolution to the problem, before it is too late to make things right for all concerned.

Sincerely

LETTER FORMATS

LETTER FORMATS

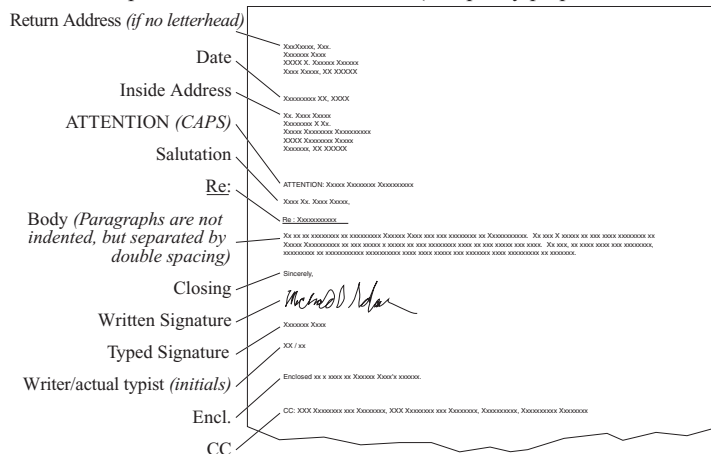
Dear Bob/Dear Ms. Antropi

- This is a formal, serious, message. Whether in memo or letter form, it should open formally.
I have been an office manager with Mercutio, Inc. for over three years and value that experience highly. I have grown with the company, and sincerely hope to continue to do so for many years to come.
- Immediately** state, for the record, your basic credentials (time within organization, title, etc.) and that you expect to remain within the organization.
- This allows the recipient to read the complaint without expecting it to be a letter of resignation or without forming an intention of removing the complainant.
In all that time, I have been proud of the organization and of the part I have played in its success.
- Reinforcement of above.
However, in recent weeks I have seen certain trends and policies developing which I feel are detrimental both to my own position, and the future of the company, as well.
- Introduction of the complaint. Ties what follows to a personal concern, and one that impacts beyond self-interest.
As you are aware, it has been the policy of our company to promote managers from within. Personally, I began as a clerk, was promoted to secretary, then assistant manager, and then to my current position of office manager. I did so due to my own abilities and hard work and, especially, thanks to the company's recognition of same. Indeed, it is that recognition that has been the mainstay of both my own loyalty and that of many of my fellow employees.
- Introduction of the specific problem on a personal and company level.
Recently, however, I was passed over for a promotion, when my district manager hired someone from outside of our organization to fill this post.
- The ostensible problem.
Of course, I felt personally betrayed because I believe I had proven myself worthy of the position due to my job performance, and because I had been led to believe that the position would be mine by that very same district manager.
- The real problem.
Moreover, I have reason to believe that others feel this to be a reversal of company policy and a threat to their own security and advancement potential.
- Again, tie your personal problem into the big picture if possible.
- Do not, however, mention the specifics (names, etc.) of other people within the company who may agree/disagree with your position. This is your problem.
I hasten to add, that I have absolutely no question about the ability or professionalism of the person hired for the position. Although I know very little about him at this time, I am sure he meets the highest standards.
- This is a moral, and *morale*, complaint. Keep it above personalities.
- You may have to work with this person after all.
- If, however, you feel that you *do* have sufficiently superior skills to make this an issue, use it!
"... highest standards, even though he has just graduated from college; has never worked in our field; or, indeed, held any position of responsibility in the past."
This is known as the positive-negative. By listing the deficiencies or negative attributes of your rival as things you would never consider, you put yourself above the fray, while getting the information out, anyway.
Nor, do I believe, as others have suggested, that he was hired because he is the son of a longtime friend of the district manager.
- More of the same
I'm sure he was hired on his merit, and in a different situation would prove a valued employee to this, or any other, company.
- But... ("...in a *different* situation...")
However, in this instance, I cannot help but feel that this matter, if not addressed immediately, will have a detrimental effect on the company as a whole, and possibly on my performance in particular.
- Remember, unless you are committed to the idea that you will leave unless the matter is resolved in your favor, keep your options open.
As I said at the outset, I love this company. I love working for it. I would hate to see anything weaken that feeling, as I know you would. I hope to be able to talk with you in the near future to discuss a resolution of the problem, before it is too late to make things right for all concerned.
- Keep the options open. Make the "threat" real.
Sincerely
- Better than:
"Yours truly," because you *are* sincere.

There are several different formats that are acceptable. Your organization may have a preferred format that should be adhered to. Otherwise, any of the following are acceptable.

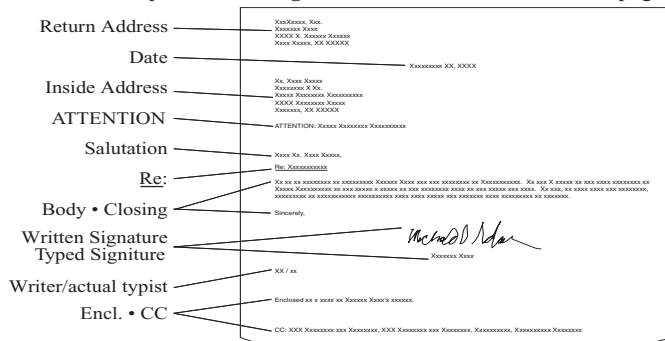
Full-Blocked Letter

All written parts of the letter are flush left (except any preprinted letterhead).



Blocked Letter (Modified Blocked)

As above, except Date and Signature lines are centered on the page.



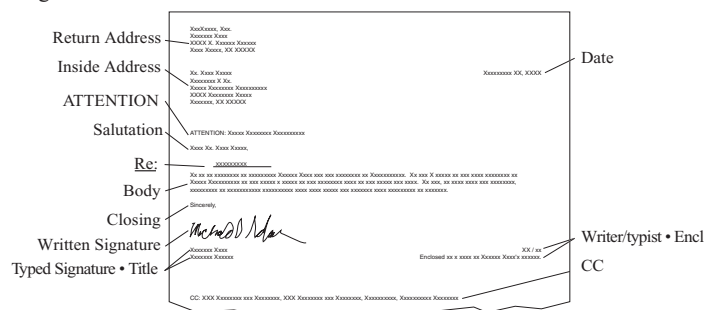
Semi-Blocked Letter (Modified Block w/ indented paragraphs)

As above, except each paragraph is set off not only by double-spacing, but by indentation of 5 or 10 spaces.

- This was *the* standard for *all* writing when handwritten material was prevalent and typing was, by current standards, primitive.
- Today, when computers are the norm, and typewriters are state of the art, the differentiation between paragraphs can be made clear without this contrivance. Nevertheless, many people still adhere to it for comfort or tradition.

Square Letter

- Used *only* to conserve space.
- Same as Full-Blocked, except: Date appears on same line as start of inside address (Flush right), and Ref/init., encl. appear on same line(s) as typed signature/title.



Simplified Letter

- Essentially a cross between a letter and a memo (q.v.), generally used to convey sense of speed, urgency, etc.
- Uses Full-Block style but:
 - No Salutation.
 - Requires a "Regarding" line (ALL CAPS), but does not state "Re."
 - No Closing ("Sincerely") or written signature.
 - PRINTED SIGNATURE, TITLE (All Caps) required.

Note: In all of the above, any direct quotations, lists, or similar material should be indented to set them apart. Typing this material in full-blocked form will highlight it best. However, in the case of quotations, one can also enter them as they appear in the original.

NOTE: This QuickStudy® chart is an outline of basic Business Letter writing principles. Due to its condensed nature, we recommend you use it as a guide, but not as a replacement for expert, in-depth advice.

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