

# Anatomy of a Business Letter

By Linda Elizabeth Alexander

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Business letters have many purposes and recipients. Despite variations in tone and style, the basic parts of a business letter remain standard throughout most business correspondence. This article outlines the elements found in standard business letters today, in order, as well as their modern format.

## 1. Heading.

Assuming you are using company letterhead, your full address will already be on the page. Add the date two spaces below the last line of printed copy. If you are using blank paper, add your full address and the date in the heading. Align the heading, and all paragraphs, with the left margin (which should be at least one inch wide).

Example:

21 Carson Parkway  
Boulder, CO 80111  
December 3, 2006

## 2. Inside address.

Include the recipient's full name, title, and address two spaces below the date. Align it with the left

margin.

Example:

Conner T. Walker  
2345 Sunrise Avenue  
Denver, CO 80555

### 3. Salutation.

Two spaces below the inside address, and also aligned with the left margin, place your salutation, or greeting. If you are on a first name basis with the recipient, use her/his first name followed by a colon. If you are writing a more formal letter, use a personal title (Ms., Mr., or Dr.) followed by the person's last name and a colon. Use Mr. for men, and Ms. for women. Never use Mrs. or Miss unless a woman has specifically expressed a preference. If you are not sure if the recipient is male or female, use a salutation that is appropriate to the letter context.

Examples:

Mr. Yates:

Ms. Dickinson:

Dear Customer:

Dear Publishing Manager:

### 4. Body

The body of the letter should begin two spaces below the salutation; all paragraphs should be aligned to the left margin. Single space within paragraphs and double space between them.

If your letter continues onto a second (or higher) page, leave at least two lines of text on the next page before the closing. Do not go onto another page just for the closing; this is bad form. If necessary, change the font size or margin width to make it fit onto one page.

### 5. Closing

Place the closing two spaces below the last line of the body. Use a standard closing such as Sincerely or Best regards. Capitalize only the first word, and follow the closing with a comma. Four spaces below, type your full name, also aligned with the closing at the left margin. Finally, sign your name in the space between the closing expression and your typed name.

### 6. Additional Information

Sometimes a business letter requires you to add the typist's initials, an enclosure notification, or a note that other people are receiving the same letter. Any of this information goes two spaces below the last line of the closing in a long letter, four spaces below in a

very short letter.

The typist's initials follow the writer's initials, separated by a slash. The writer's initials go in capital letters, while the typist's are lowercase.

Example: LEA/lak or LEA/ald

If the writer and the typist are the same person, no initials are needed.

If you are sending material along with the letter, such as an invoice or report, indicate this with an enclosure notification. When you use this, you must refer to the enclosures in your letter. Abbreviate or describe the enclosure(s).

Examples:

Enc.

Encs.

Enclosure: Report findings

Lastly, if you are sending the same letter to more than one person, notify your recipients with a copy notation. This is abbreviated "cc:" and followed by the recipients' names.

Example:

cc: Linda Alexander  
Janna Bree Smith  
Emily Lane

## 7. Formatting.

Finally, format your letter so it is easy to scan. Center the letter on the page both vertically and horizontally so that plenty of white space surrounds your text. When using your company's letterhead, remember to format your margins inside the printed material.

If a letter is very short, consider double spacing the entire letter. Also, you may add spaces between paragraphs, the salutation, etc., if it provides for a fuller appearance and enhances the overall "look" of the letter.

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Linda Elizabeth Alexander writes marketing copy for nonprofits and other businesses. Contact her today to get your free consultation!

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