

## Types of Business Letters

Letter writing is a prized skill in the world of work. The higher you advance in your career, the more you will need to write letters. Letters are more formal and official than other types of business communication. They offer personal, verifiable authorization. Unlike e-mail, letters often must be routed through channels before they are sent out. Letters are the expected medium through which important documents such as contracts and proposals are sent to readers.

There are four basic types of business letters: inquiry letters, special request letters, sales letters, and customer relations letters. Business letters can be further classified as positive, neutral, or negative. Inquiry and special request letters are neutral, sales letters are positive, and customer relations letters can be positive or negative.

### **Inquiry Letters**

An inquiry letter asks for information about a product, service, or procedure. Businesses frequently exchange inquiry letters, and customers frequently send them to businesses. Three basic rules for an effective inquiry letter are to state exactly what information you want, indicate clearly why you must have this information, and specify exactly when you must have it.

### **Special Request Letters**

Special request letters make a special demand, not a routine inquiry. The way you present your request is crucial, since your reader is not obliged to give you anything. When asking for information in a special request letter, state who you are, why you are writing, precisely what information you need, and exactly when you need the information (allow sufficient time). If you are asking for information to include in a report or other document, offer to forward a copy of the finished document as a courtesy. State that you will keep the information confidential, if that is appropriate. Finally, thank the recipient for helping you.

### **Sales Letters**

A sales letter is written to persuade the reader to buy a product, try a service, support a cause, or participate in an activity. No matter what profession you are in, writing sales letters is a valuable skill.

To write an effective sales letter, follow these guidelines:

- (1) Identify and limit your audience.
- (2) Use reader psychology. Appeal to readers' emotions, pocketbook, comfort, and so on by focusing on the right issues.
- (3) Don't boast or be a bore. Don't gush about your company or make elaborate explanations about a product.
- (4) Use words that appeal to readers' senses.
- (5) Be ethical.

The "four A's" of sales letters are *attention*, *appeal*, *application*, and *action*. First, get the reader's attention. Next, highlight your product's appeal. Then, show the reader the product's application. Finally, end with a specific request for action.

In the first part of your sales letter, get the reader's attention by asking a question, using a "how to" statement, complimenting the reader, offering a free gift, introducing a comparison, or announcing a change. In the second part, highlight your product's allure by appealing to the reader's intellect, emotions, or both. Don't lose the momentum you have gained with your introduction by boring the reader with petty details, flat descriptions, elaborate inventories, or trivial boasts. In the third part of your sales letter, supply evidence of the value of what

you are selling. Focus on the prospective customer, not on your company. Mention the cost of your product or service, if necessary, by relating it to the benefits to the customer. In the final section, tell readers exactly what you want them to do, and by what time. "Respond and be rewarded" is the basic message of the last section of a sales letter.

### **Customer Relations Letters**

These deal with establishing and maintaining good working relationships. They deliver good news or bad news, acceptances or refusals. If you are writing an acceptance letter, use the direct approach-tell readers the good news up front. If you are writing a refusal letter, do not open the letter with your bad news; be indirect.

*Follow-up Letters.* A follow-up letter is sent to thank a customer for buying a product or service and to encourage the customer to buy more in the future. As such it is a combination thank-you note and sales letter. Begin with a brief expression of gratitude. Next, discuss the benefits already known to the customer, and stress the company's dedication to its customers. Then extend this discussion into a new or continuing sales area, and end with a specific request for future business.

*Complaint Letters.* These require delicacy. The right tone will increase your chances of getting what you want. Adopt the "you" attitude. Begin with a detailed description of the product or service you are complaining about. Include the model and serial numbers, size, quantity, and colour. Next, state exactly what is wrong with the product or service. Briefly describe the inconvenience you have experienced. Indicate precisely what you want done (you want your money back, you want a new model, you want an apology, and so on). Finally, ask for prompt handling of your claim.

*Adjustment Letters.* Adjustment letters respond to complaint letters. For an adjustment letter that tells the customer "Yes," start with your good news. Admit immediately that the complaint was justified. State precisely what you are going to do to correct the problem. Offer an explanation for the inconvenience the customer suffered. End on a friendly, positive note. For adjustment letters that deny a claim, avoid blaming or scolding the customer. Thank the customer for writing. Stress that you understand the complaint. Provide a factual explanation to show customers they're being treated fairly. Give your decision without hedging or apologizing. (Indecision will infuriate customers who believe they have presented a convincing case.) Leave the door open for better and continued business in the future.

*Refusal of Credit Letters.* Begin on a positive note. Express gratitude for the applicant for wanting to do business with you. Cite appropriate reasons for refusing to grant the customer credit: lack of business experience or prior credit, current unfavourable or unstable financial conditions, and so on. End on a positive note. Encourage the reader to reapply later when his or her circumstances have changed.