

Business Letter Writing Guide

A business letter should be aimed at the reader's needs. What are the reader's needs? They are relevant information presented in an easy-to-understand style. So make your letter clear, helpful, and as friendly as the topic allows. The key principles of business letter writing are:

- Keep it short: Cut useless words, needless information, and stale phrases.
 - Keep it simple: Use familiar words, short sentences and paragraphs, and a simple conversational style.
 - Keep it strong: Start subject matter in the first paragraph, use concrete words and examples, and do not stray from the subject.
 - Keep it sincere: Write as if you were talking to the reader, and be as friendly as possible.
- Use active verbs rather than passive verbs. Passive verbs are long-winded, ambiguous and impersonal. Active verbs are simpler, less formal, and more precise.

The start:

Dear Sir or Madam (if you don't know who you are writing to)

Dear Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms (use if you know who you are writing to, and have a formal relationship with)

The finish:

Yours faithfully (if you don't know the name of the person you're writing to)

Yours sincerely or Yours truly (if you know the name of the person you're writing to)

Best wishes or Best regards, (if the person is a close business contact or friend)

Formats:

1. Block

[Recipient's Name]

[Company Name]

[Address]

[Address]

Attention [Recipient's Name]

Dear [Recipient's name]:

[SUBJECT]

The main characteristic of full block business letters is that everything (except a preprinted letterhead) is flush with the left margin. Block letters are formal.

If your letter is only one page, type the complimentary close and optional components as shown below. Otherwise, type them on the last page of your letter.

Sincerely,

[Sign here]

[Your name, title]

[Identification Initials]

Enclosures: [Number]

cc: [Name for Copy]

[Name for Copy]

2. Modified Block

[Your Name]

[Address]

[Address]

[Date today]

Re: [To what this letter refers]

[CERTIFIED MAIL]

[PERSONAL]

[Recipient's Name]

[Company Name]

[Address]
[Address]
Attention [Recipient's Name]
Dear [Recipient's name]:
[SUBJECT]

The main characteristic of modified block business letters is that everything is flush with the left margin, except as shown. Modified block letters are a little less formal than full block letters.

If your letter is only one page, type the complimentary close and optional components as shown below. Otherwise, type them on the last page of your letter.

Sincerely,
[Sign here]

[Your name, title]
[Identification Initials]
Enclosures: [Number]
cc: [Name for Copy]
[Name for Copy]
3. Modified Semi-Block

[Your Name]
[Address]
[Address]
[Date today]
Re: [To what this letter refers]
[CERTIFIED MAIL]
[PERSONAL]
[Recipient's Name]
[Company Name]
[Address]
Attention [Recipient's Name]
Dear [Recipient's name]:
[SUBJECT]

Modified semi-block business letters are the same as modified block letters, except the paragraphs are indented. Modified semi-block letters are a little less formal than full block letters.

If your letter is only one page, type the complimentary close and optional components as shown below. Otherwise, type them on the last page of your letter.

Sincerely,

[Sign here]
[Your name, title]
[Identification Initials]
Enclosures: [Number]

Writing a resume can intimidate anyone. How should I start? What should I write? What points should I include? What format should I use? These are just a few of the questions that can bother anyone. But if you keep a few things in mind, you'll see that it's not really that daunting a task.

Employers receive hundreds of resumes, so the main thing to keep in mind is to try and make your resume stand out and grab the employer's attention at first glance. To be able to do this, it should be visually pleasing as well as well written. There are no set rules to writing a good resume, nor are two resumes ever alike. They cannot be, because each resume is structured around a particular job. The only thing all resumes should be is that they should all be as effective as possible, because remember – a resume is supposed to be a selling tool. The more effectively it is written the better your chances of being selected. For a resume to be really effective, tailor it around the particular job that you are applying for, and address the employer's requirements. So the more you know about the job and the employer, the better you can tailor your resume for that position.

A good resume should include all of the following:

- **Heading** - includes your name, address, telephone number, and e-mail address.
- **Objective** - tells the employer the sort of work you're hoping to do. The rest should be structured around this objective.
- **Education** - tells employers what you've learned.
- **Experience** – this should be built around the employer's requirements.
- **Skills and accomplishments** – this includes special skills and accomplishments like fluency in a foreign language, proficiency in specific computer programs, leadership experience, a listing of honors and awards, activities that relate to the job, etc.

The contents given above should be written clearly keeping the following points in mind:

- Keep it free of grammatical and spelling errors.
- Use bullets and short sentences.
- Use action words to make the resume stand out.
- Highlight your strengths, especially those that the employer is looking for
- Be positive and leave off negative and irrelevant information.
- Be professional in tone, otherwise you won't be taken seriously.

There are two basic types of resumes – *chronological* and *functional*.

The *chronological* format highlights your job titles, places of employment, and dates of tenure by presenting them as headings under which your achievements are listed. This format is used when you are staying in the same field, your work history shows growth, your current position is one you are proud of, and there are no gaps in your work history.

The *functional* format presents your experience under skill headings, so you can list your accomplishments by impact rather than by chronology. In this format, your work history is listed very concisely in a section separate from your

achievements. This format is used when you change careers, you need to emphasize skills or experiences, your most recent position is not impressive, or your job titles don't accurately reflect the level of responsibility you had.

Sometimes the two formats are combined to give what is called a '*combination*' format.

Which format to use depends on your particular situation.

Important: Never send out your resume without a [cover letter](#).

A blue rectangular box with a blurred background image of a computer screen. The word "Resume" is centered in the box in a blue, serif font.

Resume

Following are two resumes that Word-Mart has written for its clients. The names and places have been changed to protect the identity of the clients. These resumes are only meant to give you an idea of how the elements of a resume may be structured, and may not be copied in any way or form.

1. New graduate (functional format):

GEORGE BROWN

123 W Lake View Avenue

Chicago, IL 65432

660-111-2345 * gbrown@abc.com

Professional position in the financial field of a dynamic firm.

Accounting; Financial Analysis; Business Analysis;

Ratio Analysis; Asset Valuation.

Computer skills: Microsoft Office, WordPerfect, PageMaker

Bachelor of Science in Business Administration University of Illinois, Chicago,

May 2003

Major: Finance

Intern, Bay Financial Co., Chicago, IL.

- Balanced ledger accounts
- Performed bank reconciliations
- Handled employee accounting
- Processed loan forms
- Coordinated between customers and personnel

Vice President Finance Club

Secretary Student Council

Member National Leadership Society

2. Experienced (chronological format):

Samuel Johnson

2131 Summer Drive Oakville, IN 43211 (813) 465-0123 samjohn@xyz.com

Objective To contribute my health management skills in a dynamic firm.

Experience Director, Oakville Research Foundation, Oakville, IN, Jan 2000 to Present.

- Managed the Research Foundation's administration
- Overlooked overall research work
- Designed and developed new forms of storing information
- Procured latest state-of-the-art research equipment
- Organized and coordinated international conferences and seminars

Assistant Manager, Public Health Services, Springville, IN,
July 1994 to Dec 1999

- Managed the administration side of the Health Services

- Coordinated between clients and the Services
- Devised new ways of researching and organizing public health related information
- Organized seminars and public health awareness programs

Public Health Representative, Indianapolis Public Health Administration, Indianapolis, IN, Feb 1990 to June 1994.

- Coordinated between public and the Administration
- Handled and organized information gathered by the Administration
- Organized Public Health Awareness Programs
- Assisted Area Manager administer plans and programs

Education Bachelor of Science, Indiana State University, June 1889 Major – Health Sciences

Computer skills: MS Word, MS PowerPoint, MS Excel, MS Access

Honors Dean's List Academic Scholarship Awarded Gold Medal at Graduation

Paraphrasing versus Summarizing

The terms *paraphrasing* and *summarizing* often confuse students of English. This is not surprising since the two mean very similar things with just a slight difference. First off, what are paraphrasing and summarizing?

Paraphrasing and summarizing are both indispensable writing tools. They are both techniques of incorporating other writers' works or ideas into your writing using your own words. Although a writer must always use his/her own ideas when writing, sometimes it becomes necessary to use other writers' thoughts and concepts. This may be due to one or more of the following reasons:

- To provide support to your own ideas
- To give reasons of why you agree or disagree with something
- To give depth to your writing
- To refer to something that led to your ideas
- To give a point of view which is different from yours

These same reasons for paraphrasing and summarizing are the cause of the confusion between the two. So what is the difference then?

Paraphrasing is re-writing another writer's words or ideas in your own words without altering the meaning. The paraphrase is about the same length as the original since the purpose is to rephrase without leaving out anything, and not to shorten. Summarizing, on the other hand, is putting down the main ideas of someone else's work in your own words. A summary is always shorter than the original since the idea is to include only the main points of the original work and to leave out the irrelevant. A summary is usually about one-third the size of the original.

Now when should you paraphrase and when should you summarize?

Paraphrase when:

- You want to use another writer's words without plagiarizing
- You want to use another writer's words without the use of quotes
- The ideas of the other writer are more important than his/her style
- You think that the words of the other writer are too difficult for your readers

Summarize when:

- You want to identify only the main ideas of the writer
- You want to give an overview of the topic (from several sources)
- You want to simplify a complex argument
- You want to condense the matter to suit your requirement

Whether paraphrasing or summarizing, it is very important to always cite the original work in order to give credit to the source.

Formal and Informal Writing

When it comes to writing in English, there are two main styles of writing – formal and informal. Consider these two examples:

Example 1: This is to inform you that your book has been rejected by our publishing company as it was not up to the required standard. In case you would like us to reconsider it, we would suggest that you go over it and make some necessary changes.

Example 2: You know that book I wrote? Well, the publishing company rejected it. They thought it was awful. But hey, I did the best I could, and I think it was great. I'm not gonna redo it the way they said I should.

The difference between the two is obvious. The first one is formal, and the second is informal. But what is it that makes them formal and informal?

It is the style of writing, or the way we use words to say what we want to say. Different situations call for different ways of putting words together. The way we write in academic and scientific settings differs greatly from the way we write to a friend or close one. The tone, vocabulary, and syntax, all change as the occasion changes. This difference in the styles of writing is the difference between formality and informality, or the difference between formal and informal writing.

Here's a list of some of the main differences between informal and formal writing:

Informal: May use colloquial words/expressions (*kids, guy, awesome, a lot, etc.*).

Formal: Avoid using colloquial words/expressions (substitute with *children, man/boy, wonderful, many, etc.*)

Informal: May use contractions (*can't, won't, shouldn't, etc.*).

Formal: Avoid contractions (write out full words – *cannot, will not, should not, etc.*).

Informal: May use first, second, or third person.

Formal: Write in third person (except in business letters where first person may be used).

Informal: May use clichés (*loads of, conspicuous by absence, etc.*)

Formal: Avoid clichés (use *many, was absent, etc.*)

Informal: May address readers using second person pronouns (*you, your, etc.*)

Formal: Avoid addressing readers using second person pronouns (use *one, one's, the reader, the reader's, etc.*)

Informal: May use abbreviated words (*photo, TV, etc.*)

Formal: Avoid using abbreviated words (use full versions – like *photograph, television, etc.*)

Informal: May use imperative voice (e.g. *Remember....*)

Formal: Avoid imperative voice (use *Please refer to....*)

Informal: May use active voice (e.g. *We have noticed that....*)

Formal: Use passive voice (e.g. *It has been noticed that....*)

Informal: May use short and simple sentences.

Formal: Longer and more complex sentences are preferred (short simple sentences reflects poorly on the writer)

Informal: Difficulty of subject may be acknowledged and empathy shown to the reader.

Formal: State your points confidently and offer your argument firm support.

These are just some of the differences between formal and informal writing. The main thing to remember is that both are correct, it is just a matter of tone and setting. Formal English is used mainly in academic writing and business communications, whereas Informal English is casual and is appropriate when communicating with friends and other close ones. Choose the style of writing keeping in mind what you are writing and to whom. But whichever style you write in – formal or informal – be sure to keep it consistent, do not mix the two.