

Block-Style Business Letters

ACCORDING TO the U.S. Postal Service, more than 22 million pieces of mail are processed every hour. Letters are an important part of doing business. Therefore, understanding how to create and format block-style business letters is an essential skill in the business world.



Objective:



Create a block-style business letter.

Key Terms:



addressee	copy notation	reference initials
addressee notation	delivery notation	salutation
attachment notation	enclosure notation	second-page heading
attention line	inside address	sentence case
blind copy	letterhead	signature block
block style	mixed punctuation	subject line
body	open punctuation	writer's signature
complimentary close	postscript	

Writing a Block-Style Business Letter

Choosing the correct words is one small part of effective communication. Knowing how to follow a form and being familiar with what is expected in certain communications is critical to the communication process.

LETTER COMPONENTS

Various components exist in a block-style business letter. You will read about letterhead, dateline, beginning notations, attention line and salutation, subject line and complimentary close, signatures and initials, ending notations, postscripts and second-page headings.

Letterhead

Letterhead is preprinted stationery that contains the company's name, address, and telephone number. The letterhead may include the company's fax number, logo, slogan, email address, Web site address, advertising message, etc. Business letters are normally written on company letterhead.

Dateline

The first line of a business letter is the dateline. It shows the date on which the letter was written. The month is spelled out with a comma separating the day and year. The dateline should appear at least one blank line below the letterhead or two inches from the top of the paper.

Delivery and Addressee Notations

The next part is the delivery notation and addressee notation. Letters do not always require these components. A **delivery notation** is an indication of how the letter was brought to the intended recipient. For example, the delivery notation may say fax transmission, Federal Express, messenger delivery, or certified mail. An **addressee notation** is essentially directions for the recipient on how to handle the information in the letter. For instance, the addressee notation may say, "confidential information."

The **inside address** (also known as the letter address, mailing address, or recipient's address) is the residential or corporate location of the addressee. The **addressee** is the person receiving the letter. This letter component must be included. Use a courtesy title (e.g., Mr., Ms., Mrs., Dr., or Professor before a person's name). Many women in business prefer Ms., but use the title preferred by the addressee. In some cases, the name of the addressee may be unknown.

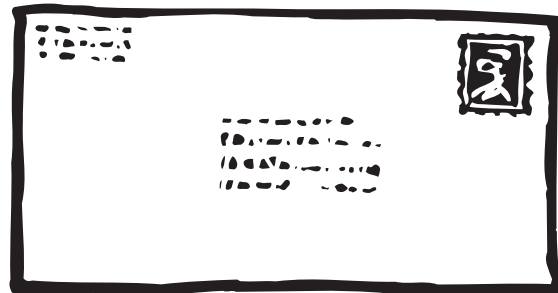


FIGURE 1. Verify all parts of the recipient's address before mailing the letter.

Attention Line and Salutation

The **attention line** is an area used when the letter is called to the attention of a specific department or job title when the name of the addressee is unknown. For example, the line may read, "Attention: Director of Sales." The **salutation** is the greeting that begins with "Dear." If the letter is addressed to an individual, use that person's courtesy title and last name. For instance, the line may read, "Dear Mr. Mason."

Add a colon (not a comma or semicolon) after the salutation. Placing punctuation after the salutation and complimentary close is called **mixed punctuation**. It can be appropriate to omit punctuation at the end of the salutation and complimentary close, which is called **open punctuation**.

Do not use an individual's full name in the salutation unless you are unsure of the gender (e.g., Dear Leslie Lanham). When using an attention line (when you do not know the name of the person but are sending the letter to a department), the correct salutation is "Ladies and Gentlemen" if the message is to be sent to a company's department. "Sir or Madam" may be used if the attention line is addressed to an individual position.

Subject Line and Complimentary Close

The **subject line** identifies the main topic and is an optional letter component. The **body** is the text of the letter. Single-space the paragraphs and double-space between paragraphs. Every letter has body text.

The **complimentary close** is a courtesy line that signifies the end of the writer's message. The close may be formal ("Very truly yours") or informal ("Sincerely" or "Cordially"). Use **sentence case**, which means to capitalize just the first character of the component when typing a complimentary close. Place a comma after the close (mixed punctuation), or leave it without punctuation (open punctuation).

Signatures and Initials

The **signature block** is the writer's typed name and job title. The signature block appears three or four blank lines below the complimentary close. The combination of name, title, and organization information should be arranged to achieve a balanced look. The name and title may appear on the same line separated by a comma or single-spaced on separate lines. A business letter should always include a signature block.

A **writer's signature** is proof that the writer agrees to the letter content. The signature should be written in the same color of ink as the letter. A courtesy title is not included in the signature. Begin the signature below the complimentary close and above the writer's typed name. Make sure the signature is placed in vertical alignment with the left margin of the complimentary close. Also, carefully proof-read the letter's content before signing, especially if someone else typed the letter.



FIGURE 2. Do not forget to sign your business letters.

The **reference initials** are the initials of the typist. If used, the initials of the typist are typed one blank line below the writer's name and title. The reference initials are lowercased and include the first, middle, and last name initial.

Enclosure and Attachment Notation

The **enclosure notation** is a notification used when another document besides the letter is sent in the same envelope. In contrast, an **attachment notation** is a notification used when a document is physically attached to the letter. An enclosure notation reminds the typist to insert the enclosure in the envelope, and it reminds the recipient to look for the enclosed or attached document. The USPS discourages sending stapled or paper-clipped mail because these envelopes may be torn and disfigured. In addition, the USPS equipment can be damaged.

The **copy notation** is a notification that indicates other individuals or organizations have received copies of the correspondence. It is placed one blank line below the reference initials or enclosure notation. A colon following the notation is optional. Use cc for carbon copy (also known as courtesy copy in emails), pc for photocopy, and bc or bcc for **blind copy**, which means the writer does not want the recipient to know the letter has been sent to a third party.

Postscripts and Second-Page Headings

A **postscript** is an optional message added to a letter as the last item on the page. A postscript emphasizes information in the body or adds a personal message to a business letter. It is double-spaced below the reference initials or enclosure notation. Block or indent a postscript to match paragraphs in the body. The postscript abbreviation “P.S.” is not necessary.

A **second-page heading** is a standard format used when a letter exceeds one page. For additional pages, use the same kind of paper as the first page. Identify the second and succeeding pages with a heading that includes the name of the addressee, the page number, and the date. Start one inch from the top of the page followed by two blank lines to separate them from the continuing text. Avoid using a second page if it has only the complimentary close and signature block on that page.

FORMATTING

Now that you have read about business letter components, let's turn our attention to formatting guidelines. This information will explain how to present your business letter. Visit online resources for a visual example of the following information.

Margins and Address Lines

Block style is a format in which all lines begin at the left margin. A business letter has a 2-inch top margin and 1-inch side margins. Type the letter using correct line spacing. For instance, type the date and leave three blank lines. If there is an addressee or delivery notation, type it at this location and leave two blank lines. Type the inside address single-spaced.

Start with the addressee's name or attention line. Type the street address and hit Enter. Then type the city followed by a comma, spacebar, the state abbreviation code (two capital letters), spacebar, and the ZIP code (i.e., Fairfield, IL 62837).



FURTHER EXPLORATION...

ONLINE CONNECTION: Addressing the Envelope

When writing a business letter, successful delivery is important. In some cases, the envelope address may be full of detailed information. For example, the business letter may be addressed to the organization, a building on a large campus, a department within the building, and a specific person within the department. Therefore, writing the address is important to ensure successful delivery. The United States Postal Service (USPS) offers guidelines for arranging the information on the envelope. For example, the USPS recommends writing the "Attention: Mr. Smith" line on top, never below or on a different part of the envelope. Explore the USPS guidelines for addressing a business envelope at <http://pe.usps.com/>

Salutations, Subject Lines, and the Body

Double-space after the inside address, and type the salutation followed by a colon. The letter may be enhanced with a subject line or reference line. Double-space after the salutation. Then type the body. Single-space the paragraphs, but double-space between paragraphs. Double-space after the last paragraph. Next, type a complimentary close followed by a comma.

Signature Line and Attachments

Leave three blank lines after the complimentary close to allow room for the signature. Then type the signature block. Double-space after the signature block, and type the reference initials if the writer is not the typist.

- ◆ If another document is added to the mailing, double-space below the reference initials and type an enclosure notation. A copy notation, if needed, is double-spaced below the reference initials or enclosure notation.
- ◆ A postscript, if needed, is double-spaced below the reference initials or the last notation. A postscript is generally the last item on the page.
- ◆ Perform a spell check, and proofread the letter. Once the letter is proofread again for content, the writer should sign the letter in black ink in the space provided between the complimentary close and signature block.

Summary:



Business letter components are letterhead, a dateline, beginning notations, an attention line and salutation, a subject line and complimentary close, signatures and initials, ending notations, postscripts, and second-page headings. In a block-style format, all lines begin at the left margin. The business letter has a 2-inch top margin and 1-inch side margins. A combination of single- and double-spacing is used to separate the components. A handwritten signature is included in business letters.

Checking Your Knowledge:



1. What is the first line of a business letter?
2. What is the difference between mixed punctuation and open punctuation when writing the salutation?
3. What is the technical term for the letter writer's initials?
4. When would you use bcc?
5. When is the attachment notation used?

Expanding Your Knowledge:



Write a letter to a local business. You might thank the company for its work or ask a question about the organization. Be sure to include the components, and follow the formatting guidelines you learned.

Web Links:



Basic Business Letters

<https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/653/01/>

Example Block-Style Business Letter

http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/BusLetter_Block.html

Writing a Business Letter

<http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/reading-writing/on-line/b-letter.html>

The Importance of Business Letters

<http://yourbusiness.azcentral.com/importance-letters-communication-11337.html>