

# Block-Style Business Letter Types

**P**ROFESSIONAL business letters are used in an assortment of ways to connect with employees and customers. People grow familiar with how business letters look; and this helps create trust, credibility, and a level of comfort for customers and employees. This lesson covers formatting rules for three block-style letters. Once you have learned these styles, you are ready to create business letters! When people see your letters, they will know you are a professional.



## Objective:



Create block-style, modified block-style, and simplified block-style business letters using appropriate formatting rules.

## Key Terms:



block-style letter  
body  
closing elements  
elements

margin  
modified block-style  
letters  
opening elements

salutation  
simplified block-style  
letters  
signature area

## Learning Popular Styles for Writing Business Letters

As you move from high school into college and then into the workforce, there are certain basic skills you need to assure your success. One such skill is understanding how to format formal business letters. For example, you may write a college application letter or a cover letter when applying for a job. Hence, it is important to learn the basic formatting rules for writing

professional business letters. Business professionals find these letter styles easy to read and it saves them from wasting time or being confused with other varieties of formatting.

## ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A BUSINESS LETTER

As you may have read about in another e-unit in this library, there are essential elements that act as the building blocks for writing a business letter. **Elements** refer to the different parts or sections of a business letter. Standard business letters contain the following elements: sender's address, date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary close, sender's typed and handwritten signatures, sender's job title, typist initials, enclosure notation, and indication of copies sent to others.

### Opening Elements

**Opening elements** refer to information contained in the upper part of the letter, before the body of the letter. Opening elements consist of sender's address, date, inside address, and salutation.

The sender's address contains street address, city, state, and zip code. The date reflects when the letter was written. Write out the month, day, and year.

Inside address is another way of saying the recipient's address. It contains the courtesy title (Mr., Mrs., Ms., or Dr.), first and last name, and job title of the person to whom the letter is written. The information also includes company name, street address, city, state, and zip code.

The **salutation** is the opening greeting line of the letter.



FIGURE 1. Think of the opening like starting a race.

### Body

The **body** is the part of the letter that articulates the substantive content of the letter. The first paragraph tells the reader the reason for the letter. The next paragraph provides detailed information that includes background information and the bottom line message or purpose or desired actions or outcome.

### Closing Elements

**Closing elements** refer to additional details and authentication practices that tie up the communication with professional closure. The first closing element is called the complimen-

tary close. The complimentary close includes a respectful phrase such as “sincerely; or respectfully yours”. Under the complimentary close is the signature area. The **signature area** is the place on the letter where the author signs his or her name to add authenticity and credibility to the letter. Under the signature area is the typed name of sender and job title. The typist’s initials can be placed under the sender’s name.

An attachment/enclosure notation can be included at the bottom of the letter if there are accompanying materials. If the letter was sent to other people, then “cc:” with the names of those copied on the letter can also be listed at the bottom of the letter.



FIGURE 2. The closing is crossing the finish line.

## BLOCK-STYLE FORMATTING

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A **block-style letter** is a type of letter that features all of the business letter elements presented in this e-unit along with distinct left margin alignment. Block-style formatting includes the following formatting rules: left margin alignment; top, bottom, left, and right side margin settings; and line spacing.

### *Left Margin Alignment*

Elements of a block-style letter are aligned on the left margin. All of the opening, body, and closing elements start at the same place on the left margin. When looking at a block-style letter, the information is perfectly aligned straight down the left margin and there are no indents. It forms a perfect visual line down the left margin of the page; hence it looks like the side of a block.

### *Top, Bottom, Left-, and Right-Side Margin Settings*

**Margin** refers to how far the text begins in relation to the edges of the page. The top margin setting is 2 inches. The bottom margin setting is 1 inch. Both left- and right-side margins are also set at 1 inch.

### *Line Spacing*

In the body of the letter, use single space with no additional spacing before or after paragraphs. Besides single spacing the body, there are other special spacing rules. First, after the sender’s address in the opening, use a double space (hit “enter” key twice) before writing the

date. After the date, use a quadruple space (hit “enter” key four times) before writing the inside address. (Note: you may see examples where there is only a double space after the date. You may find some variation in conventions in spacing, depending on how long the letter is. Either way, the information must be spaced greater than single space in order to give some visual separation of the information. Do not worry too much about small differences such as whether to double or quadruple-space. Choose the one that gives the best visual separation of the information.) Double space between inside address and salutation. Double space between salutation and body. Double space between paragraphs in the body. Double space after complimentary closing. Quadruple space after complimentary closing—this creates the space for the signature. Double space after the written sender name under the signature. Double space between written name and typist initials. Double space after typist initials and attachment/enclosure and “cc:” information.

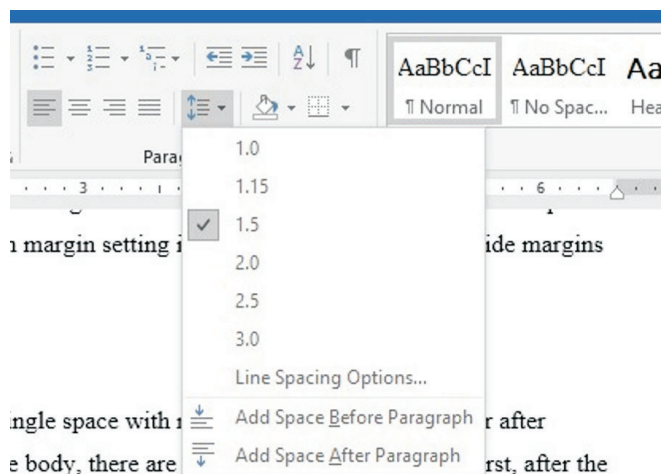


FIGURE 3. Line spacing options.

### Special Note

If the stationary (paper) is on letterhead that contains the sender’s address, then that information can be left out of the opening elements. In this case, start with the date as the first opening element.

## MODIFIED BLOCK-STYLE AND SIMPLIFIED BLOCK-STYLE LETTER FORMATTING

Modified and simplified block-style letters are quite similar to block-style letters. **Modified block-style letters** are letters containing all of the same elements as block-style, but changes have been made to some of the alignments and placement of information on the page.

### Modified Block-Style

All of the elements remain in modified block; however, elements in the opening and closing are positioned in the center. Specifically, the date is center formatted, or approximately 4 inches from the left margin. The complimentary closing, signature area, and sender’s name in the closing are also placed at the center of the page, or approximately 4 inches from the left margin. Also, the first line of each paragraph can be indented in modified block-style letters. The spacing requirements are the same as block-style.



## FURTHER EXPLORATION...

### ONLINE CONNECTION: To Simplify or not to Simplify?

To simplify or not to simplify, that is the question. Why do you suppose a professional would select the simplified block—style letter over the block-style letter? Recall the key differences are omitting salutation and complimentary closing in a simplified block-style letter. Under what conditions would it make sense to leave out these two elements? Begin your exploration of this question at the following web resources: <https://www.reference.com/world-view/simplified-letter-style-ec687690c159a986>; and <https://smallbusiness.chron.com/simplified-style-business-letter-10318.html>.

### Simplified Block-Style

**Simplified block-style letters** are letters that do not contain all of the same elements as block and modified block-styles; hence it gets the name “simplified”. The salutation and complimentary closing are not included. The inside address is written in all capitals. A subject line is included to replace the salutation. The subject line is written in all capital letters. Under the signature area in the closing elements, the sender’s name and title are typed in all capitals. All of the simplified elements are aligned to the left margin and follow the same spacing formatting as block-style.

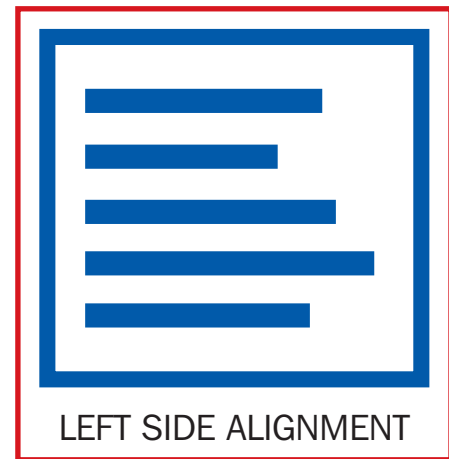


FIGURE 4. Left side alignment icon.

### Summary:



Standard business letters contain the following elements: sender’s address, date, inside address, salutation, body, complimentary close, sender’s typed and handwritten signatures, sender’s job title, typist initials, enclosure notation, and indication of copies sent to others. A block-style letter is one that feature all of the business letter elements listed above, along with distinct left margin alignment. Block-style formatting includes the following formatting rules: left margin alignment; top, bottom, left-, and right-side margin settings; and line spacing rules. Modified block-style letters are letters containing all of the elements as block-style, but change some of the margins and placement of information on the page. Simplified block-style letter are letters that do not contain all of the same elements as block and modified block-styles; hence it gets the name “simplified”. The salutation and complimentary closing are not included. These three styles of business letters are used to maintain professional business standards.

## Checking Your Knowledge:

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1. What are the eleven elements of a block-style business letter?
2. What are two big differences between block-style and modified block-style letter formatting rules?
3. In which format are the salutation and complimentary closing not used?
4. What is the required line spacing in the body of all three formats?
5. What is the alignment formatting for date, inside address, and signature area in a simplified-style letter?

## Expanding Your Knowledge:

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Search for letter templates in Microsoft Word and on the Internet. Find templates for the three styles covered in this e-unit: block-style, modified block-style, and simplified block-style.

## Web Links:

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### Modified Block

<http://www.savvy-business-correspondence.com/ModifiedBlockBizLetter.html>

### Formats for Different Letter Types

<https://www.universalclass.com/articles/writing/business-writing/formats-for-different-business-letters.htm>

### Side-by-Side Comparison of Four Business Letter Types

<https://www.yumpu.com/en/document/read/27825138/4-business-letter-formats-block-modified-block-simplified-the->

### Letter Formats

<https://www.lexico.com/grammar/letter-formats-block-modified-block-and-semi-block>