

Effective Business Writing: How to Write Letters and Inter-office Documents

Imagine the world without language. There would be catastrophe in silence, in cultures, in our surviving and in our sense of being. This is the same with having insufficient communication within a corporate organization or a business. Without communication, there would be no sales, no suggestions, and no solidarity. Hence, today, we will tackle the basics on business writing for office relations:

The Anatomy of A Business Letter

Different Types of Business Letter: Inter-office Documents

The Anatomy of A Business Letter

To deliver a message effectively, the channel should be solid and clear. According to the book *Effective Business Communication*, by Ronnie A. Bouing, the following are parts of a business letter:

Heading (Letterhead) - This usually displays the name of the institution represented by the author, as well as the corporate name and business address.

Date (Dateline) - This indicates the day when the letter was written, and not when the document was released.

Inside Address - The name, position, business name, and business address of the addressee appear on this part.

Return Address - Your address

Salutation - For the recipient's name, use Mr. or Ms. and then the last name to show respect. Other salutations are: Ladies, Gentlemen, Dear Sir, and Dear Sir or Madam.

Body - Paragraphs should be brief and straight to



[Image source](#)

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the point. The length of the letter depends on the purpose of the letter.

Complimentary Close - This is the part where the author should signal the ending of the letter. Among the suggested closings are: "Very truly yours," "Very sincerely yours," and "Very respectfully yours."

Signature Block - Your name and position are on this part.

Reference Initial - Any of the writer, dictator, or encoder of the letter should be mentioned using an acronym, initial or code.

Courtesy Copies - These are the secondary recipients of the letter.

Enclosure Notation - This reminds the recipient about the attachment/s to the letter.

Postscript (PS Notation) - Important details are stressed here, calling the recipient's attention. This is usually found on a sales or marketing letter.

Through Line - "This part appears in the letter if the sender is a subordinate who writes to a person higher in position than his immediate superior. It is a protocol that communications should pass through channels."

Notes on Salutation: Syntax Training founder Lynn Gaertner-Johnston shares the following tips when greeting your letter's recipient:

Use the title *Ms.* if you are unsure of what the person prefers between *Mrs.* and *Ms.*

Use two names in the salutation when there are two recipients, like this:

Dear Mr. Lodge and Ms. Cooper: or Dear Maine and Thomas:

Titles *Mr.*, *Ms.*, *Mrs.*, and *Dr.* do not have to be spelled out. But do spell out titles like these:

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“Professor, Dean, Sister, Rabbi, Imam, Senator, Governor, Captain, Admiral, Judge”

If unsure of a person’s gender, you may use the full name rather than a title:

Dear Lea Swift: / Dear Ed Green:

Avoid “To whom it may concern.” Instead, choose the job title or a generic greeting:

If you are writing to a company rather than any specific individual, use the company name: Dear Trex Printing:

As for the format of a business letter, the [University of Wisconsin – Madison](#) identifies two basic formats for a letter:

The Block Form – All the parts are indented to the left

The Indented Form – The return address, date, closing, and signature of the author are indented to the right and the rest to the left

Below are samples of business letters.

1) Complaint Letter / Personal, no letterhead needed: From [Georgia’s Office of Consumer Protection](#)

[Your address]

[Your city, state, zip code]

[Today’s date]

[Name of contact person (if available)]

[Title (if available)]

[Company name]

[Consumer Complaint Division (if there is no contact person)]

[Street address]

[City, state, zip code]

Re: [Account number or other reference to your complaint]

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Dear [Contact Person]:

This letter is to [notify you {or} follow up on our conversation of {date}] about a problem I am having with the [name of product or service performed] that I [bought, leased, rented or had repaired] at your [name of location] location on [date].

I am dissatisfied with your [service or product] because [describe problem]. I have already attempted to resolve this problem by [describe attempts and actions taken]. I have enclosed copies of my records. *[Include copies of receipts, canceled checks, contracts, and other relevant documents]*

Unfortunately, the problem remains unresolved. I am hereby requesting that you: *[List specific actions you want (such as: refund, exchange or repair the item)]*

1)

2)

3)

Please contact me within [number of days] days to confirm that you will honor my request. I have prepared a complaint for submission to the proper agencies for investigation. I will not file the complaint if you resolve the problem within this time period I have indicated.

Thank you for your anticipated assistance in resolving my problem. Please contact me at [telephone number and/or e-mail address] if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

[Your signature]

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[Your name]

Enclosure(s): [List attached document copies]

cc: [Name(s) of anyone to whom you are sending a copy of this letter]

2) Request Letter: From the [Jane Goodall Institute of Canada](#)



Date

Your name

The name of your Roots & Shoots group

Your street address

Your town/city, state/province zip/postal code

Name of the person to whom you are sending your letter

Job title of person to whom you are sending the letter

Name of business or organization

Street address

Town/city, state/province zip/postal code

Dear Mr./Ms. _____ (name of person to whom you are sending the letter):

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My name is _____, and I am writing on behalf of _____ Roots & Shoots group (your group name). Roots & Shoots is the education program of the Jane Goodall Institute (www.janegoodall.ca) and a global network of youth working for positive change.

As Roots & Shoots members, we are trying to make a positive difference through our actions. We have begun a project to _____ (describe your project goals, schedule and methods). Our goal is to make our community a better place for people, animals and the environment.

In order to complete this project, we need _____ (write down a short list of the equipment or materials you need that the business you are writing to could donate to you). We would be most grateful if _____ (name of business/organization) could _____ (choose the word that applies: donate/ lend) any of these items to help us implement our project. If you are interested, we will keep you informed with regular updates on the progress of our project.

Please contact me at _____ (your phone # and/or email address) if you are able to help. If we don't hear from you within a week, we will contact you personally. Thank you for your time and for considering this request. We look forward to working with you and creating a stronger community.

Sincerely,

(your name signed)

Your name typed

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Different Types of Business Letter: Inter-office Documents

Some say that how businesses communicate and deal with their partners and clients reflect their way of handling their own internal communications. This is, according to the [Saylor Foundation](#), a non-profit institution in Washington D.C., organizational communication. It involves “sending and receiving of messages among interrelated individuals within a particular environment or setting to achieve individual and common goals.” The process is strictly anchored on the organization’s context and culture. This can be conducted using mediated channels, face-to-face, or written. Each written internal communication has its purpose, which directs a document’s details, tone, and style.

Writing An Office Memo



An office memo is a widely circulated document in the office conveying a message, a brief report, an announcement, or invitation. The [Loyola University - New Orleans](#) points out the parts of a standard memo format.

1) *Heading*. This part contains the following elements:

To: (readers’ names and job titles)

From: (your name and job title, and your hand-written initials next to your name)

Date: (complete, current date)

Subject: (what the memo is about, the main idea of the memo summarized)

2) *Opening*. This segment should focus on the subject and purpose of the memo. It should

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clearly answer: What is this memo about? What should people do, learn or realize after reading the memo? For example, an opening sentence can be “To uphold the new company policy on attendance, everyone is advised to check in 15 minutes before the start of the production time.”

3) *Summary (optional)*. Sometimes, when a memo is longer than one page, a summary is placed at the beginning to mention the highlights of the memo. It acts like a longer introduction.

4) *Closing*. This is the part where the actions or request of the letter should be clearly reiterated. This should mention the necessary steps, relevant dates and deadlines. If there is no request for action, the memo can have a closing thought. Examples: “I would be glad to meet with you about this on” ; “Thank you for your attention to this matter.” ; “Please review this information and respond to me by”.

5) *Attachments (optional)*. If the memo has supporting documents (graphs, lists or tables), this should be mentioned at the end of the memo.

Here are links for sample memos:

[Sample of Award Notification Memo from the Duke Office of Research Support](#)



Writing Goodwill Messages

According to the book *Business Communication: In Person, In Print, Online* by Amy Newman

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and Scot Ober, goodwill messages are not actually meant to produce business directly. They are often for building and maintaining relationships. These can be done by phone, but a handwritten note or email can be considered “more thoughtful, more appreciated, and more permanent.” Here are the authors’ guidelines for goodwill messages:

- 1) Be prompt. Send a goodwill message while the reason is still fresh in the reader’s mind. For example, a welcome to note to a new employee should be given within his or her first few days on the job.
- 2) Be direct. Give the major idea in the first sentence or two, even for sympathy notes.
- 3) Be specific. By including a specific situation or anecdote in a compliment note, the intention of the author will be more convincing to the recipient.
- 4) Be sincere. Write as if you were speaking to the person directly, and avoid flowery or too strong language to keep things more sincere.
- 5) Be brief. A personal note card or a one-paragraph email is already enough and sincere.

Example of a Recognition Note

Dear Javier,

You did a terrific job on the feasibility study for Barker Associates. Ron called me this morning to tell me it was the most thorough, detailed analysis he had received in years. He also complimented the easy-to-read report format.

I really appreciate your work on this project. You put in a lot of long hours in the past three months, and your dedication has certainly paid off. When Ron has another project in the pipeline, he’ll definitely call us for the job.

Keep up the good work,

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Maurice

Example of A Congratulatory Note

Congratulations, Tom, on being elected president of the United Way of Alberta County. I was happy to see the announcement in this morning's newspaper and to learn of your plans for the upcoming campaign.

Best wishes for a successful fund drive. This important community effort surely deserves everyone's full support.

Daniel

Writing A Letter to Persuade the Audience



Image source

Newman and Ober states that persuading someone means motivating him or her to act upon a belief, and that business communication is mostly about persuasion. Sometimes, even a

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document that aims to inform also intends to ask the reader to accept a perspective and believe in the very information. Meanwhile, for managers, it is their job to persuade others to do their best in their jobs.

The very first step in persuading people is to analyze their behavior, culture, attitude, and even possible reasons for resistance. This way, you can tailor your letter in a way that will capture their approval. For example, if you are a manager and the recipient of your letter is for someone who is ambitious and wants to be promoted, the letter asking the person to take on additional responsibilities must sound like these will help him or her to get a higher-level position in the future.

The three persuasion principles that can be applied in business letter writing are Aristotle's:

Ethos (appeal based on credibility) - Emphasize your background, your character, your authority over a topic, field, or issue

Pathos (appeal based on emotion) - Connect with people emotionally through vivid language and dynamic delivery

Logos (appeal based on logic) - Present data, solid evidence, and reasoning

Sample of an email presenting an idea

To: Jason Myers

From: Grace Y. Lee

Date: September 17, 2013

Subject: Adding Hot Food Choices to the Menu

Jason,

I have an idea to add hot food items to the buffet. The restaurant has done tremendously as well as a salad bar and deli since its grand opening in 2005, but

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guest count and revenue have been declining in the past year. If we redesigned the menu to include hot food, Jason's can benefit in the following ways:

Increase revenue and profit: hot foods are priced higher than cold foods.

Distinguish the cafe from competitors: few other details in the area offer hot foods.

Keep pace with market trends: people want more variety in their food choices.

By adding hot foods, Jason's can return to last year's revenue level, I look forward to hearing your reaction when we met on Thursday. At that time, I can provide you with more of my research.

Grace

Writing A Letter to Announce A Bad News

An indirect plan, according Newman and Ober, should be applied when sending a negative message to people who report to you, customers, readers who prefer it, or readers you are not yet familiar with. Here are their guidelines:

Make sure the purpose is to establish a common ground with the readers.

Compose an introduction that is "neutral, relevant, supportive, interesting, and short."

Give a point of agreement, express appreciation, a sincere compliment, a fact or general principle, or understanding.

Transition from the buffer to the reasons that follow.



Image source

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The Indirect Plan Technique

Subordinate the bad news by putting it in the middle of a paragraph and discussing additional reasons.

Talk about the bad news as a logical outcome of the reasons given.

Deliver the bad news in a positive and impersonal language.

Never apologize.

Make the refusal clear and definite to avoid misunderstanding.

Close on a positive note: Express best wishes, offer a counter-proposal, or suggest other resources.

Writing A Letter to Reject An Idea



An example of a bad-news message is the rejection of a proposal. The principle here is to explain the reason for such decision and persuade the audience that the writer's position is reasonable. Take a look at this example that answers the proposal of Grace above:

To: Grace Lee

From: Jason Myers

Subject: Re Adding Hot Food Choices to the Menu

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Dear Grace,

Your idea to include hot food items is a great example of your dedication to the business and your creative thinking. I appreciate your taking the time to consider ways to increase profitability at Jason's.

For another business, I could see adding hot food items. As you say, these items are higher priced and may result in higher profits. However, for Jason's, I'm concerned that the change would take us too far away from our mission. The deli/restaurant was built on cold food-items that customers could pick up and eat quickly during their lunch hour. The hot buffer may add a level of complexity to the lunch rush, both to us and to your time-pressed customers.

You're right that few other deli restaurants in the area offer hot food items. However, the few that do are so close to use-two on our block and one across the street-that I'm not sure we'd achieve the differentiation you use.

Grace, the reality is, we just lose one of your biggest investors. If this hadn't been the case, I might view your idea differently. But right now, with this loss and our declining guest count and revenue, we simply don't have the capital to invest in making this change.

Again, I so appreciate your thinking about how to move Jason's forward. I'd like to hear any other ideas you have for the business. Jason's is lucky to have you as part of our team!

Best regards,

Jason