

Writing Business Letters

¹Good business letters follow some standard practices and well-known formats and guidelines. ²Most business letters are presented in either block format or modified block format. ³The **modified block format** is often used for longer letters. ⁴In this format, the return address and the closing and signature are centered on the page. ⁵But the paragraphs are not indented from the left margin. ⁶The **block format** is often used for short letters. ⁷In this format, all paragraphs are flush at the left margin. ⁸This includes the greeting and the signature. In both styles, notations following the signature are flush left. ⁹This includes initials for the writer and typist (RL:gw), *Enc.* or *Enclosure*, or *cc: Nancy Harris* (the name of a person sent a copy). ¹⁰Follow these additional guidelines for business correspondence.

Stationery. ¹¹The best is 25 percent or 50 percent white cotton bond paper. ¹²Avoid colors and fancy paper styles.

Print quality. ¹³Check that your typewriter or word processor is in good repair. ¹⁴Use a laser printer or a letter-quality impact printer. ¹⁵Your credibility will be damaged and your readers may be frustrated by fuzzy or light print. ¹⁶Avoid nonstandard or stylized print styles—they are often hard to read.

Salutations. ¹⁷Use the first name of your recipient only if you are already on a first-name basis. ¹⁸Use the full name if you don't know the person's gender. ¹⁹Avoid male-specific salutations such as "Dear Sir" or "Gentlemen"; they are no longer appropriate. ²⁰If you do not know exactly to whom you are writing, use salutations such as these.

²¹Dear Accounts Department:

²²Dear Credit Manager:

Longer letters. ²³Use plain paper of the same weight as the first page. ²⁴Use letterhead stationery only for the first page.

Envelope. ²⁵Envelope paper should be the same color and weight as the letter, and the type style should match that of the letter.

—Adapted from Anson and Schwegler, *The Longman Handbook for Writers and Readers*, pp. 52–53.