

HUNTER COLLEGE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK
WRITING CENTER

BUSINESS AND PROFESSIONAL WRITING

Writing a Business Letter

Depending on the purpose of your business letter, there are several formats from which you can choose. **The most widely used business letter formats are full block, alternate block, modified block, and memo.** Remember, the format of the letter helps to establish its tone.

I. FULL BLOCK FORMAT

This is the most modern of the formats and the one most widely used; its clean direct look lends itself well to technical communication, and its simple vertical format tends to reduce the error rate since you simply do not have to be concerned about horizontal spacing to indicate new paragraphs.

EIGHT COMPONENTS OF FULL BLOCK FORMAT

1. The **heading** includes the date the letter is written. If you do not use letterhead stationery, you need to include your address over the date.
2. The **address** above the salutation is the letter recipient's full address. This address should match the address on the envelope.
3. The **salutation** is the line that begins "Dear..." Use Mr. for men and Ms. for women. Try to obtain a name to whom you **can** address your letter. If you cannot obtain a name, you should use "To Whom It May Concern" as a salutation. You can also include an **attention line** two spaces down from the recipient's address as well as a **subject line** (if necessary):

Attention: Technical Director

Subject: Purchase Order #41763

4. The **body** of your letter contains the text of your message.
5. The **complimentary close** should appear two lines below the last line of the body, at the left margin. Capitalize only the first letter of the first word and always end the line with a comma. You can use a variety of closures including Yours truly, Sincerely, Sincerely yours, Best regards or Best wishes.

6. Your **signature** should be in blue or black ink. Allow four vertical spaces for your signature.

7. The **identification** line contains your typed name, and, if you have one, your title. Depending on the purpose of the letter, you can position your phone number or social security number in place of your title.

8. **Enclosures (Encl) or distribution (cc) of the letter** is placed two vertical spaces below the identification line.

EXAMPLE OF FULL BLOCK FORMAT

HEADING	895 North Main Street Bowling Green, OH 43402 February 16, 1994
ADDRESS	Ms. Maria Reinaldo Customer Relations Ohio Telephone Company 133 Buckley Street Columbus, OH 43217
SALUTATION	Dear Ms. Reinaldo:
BODY	<p>I received a collection notice from the Ohio Telephone Company on February 13, 1994. The letter states that I owe a past due balance from the September 16 to October 16 billing period in 1993. The letter also states that my service will be disconnected unless I act immediately; however, I am now informing you for the second time that I paid that bill on January 1st, 1994.</p> <p>On January 15th, I received a call from one of your representatives about this matter, and I immediately told him that approximately two weeks ago I sent a check to your office for the due amount of \$132.57. Unfortunately, I failed to get his name. I am irritated that you have not taken care of this matter since I have the canceled check in my possession, and I am enclosing a copy of it herewith.</p> <p>I hope that this will settle the matter once and for all.</p>
COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE	Sincerely yours,
SIGNATURE	Bill Moritz
IDENTIFICATION LINE TITLE OR PHONE NUMBER	Bill Moritz (419) 352-5555
ENCLOSURES OR DISTRIBUTION	Encl: copy of canceled check

II. ALTERNATE BLOCK FORM

The only difference between the alternate block and the full block is that the alternate block has a **subject line**. The subject line can save time for the receiver by informing her/him of the purpose of the letter. The subject line is situated between the recipient's address and the opening salutation. Skip two vertical lines down from the address and skip another two vertical lines before the salutation.

EXAMPLE OF ALTERNATE BLOCK FORMAT

895 North Main Street
Bowling Green, OH 43402

February 16, 1994

Ms. Maria Reinaldo
Customer Relations
Ohio Telephone Company
133 Buckley Street
Columbus, OH 43217

SUBJECT: Collection notice of February 13, 1994

Dear Ms. Reinaldo:

(The remainder of the letter is exactly the same as the full block format.)

III. MODIFIED BLOCK FORMAT

Modified block format differs from full block in the placement of the heading, date, complimentary close, signature, and identification lines. These components should all start about halfway across the page, and be aligned vertically. The sample also shows that you begin the paragraphs of a modified block letter with a one-tab or three to five space indentation. You should retain the vertical doublespace between paragraphs. Although businesses seem to prefer full block format, modified block is acceptable. Many people consider the modified block's appearance more balanced and traditional.

EXAMPLE OF MODIFIED BLOCK FORMAT

123 Corina Blvd.
Flushing, NY 11235

July 27, 1994

Poona Magazine
115 Eiken Street
New York, NY 10009

Attention: Editor

Subject: Article written by Ms. Tutenberg on June 30

Dear Editor:

On June 30, 1994, you published an article by the author Mary Tutenberg, which I found to be very disturbing. Finally, President Clinton and Hillary Rodham Clinton are getting closer to providing Americans with an opportunity to receive health care regardless of age, sexual orientation or economic status. But Ms. Tutenberg does not want to see these health care reforms take place, and so she makes it her ambition to use the health care issue as an opportunity to unjustly attack homosexuals with AIDs, claiming that "the health care plan is nothing but a disguised liberal plot to bring homosexuality and other such deviant behavior into the main stream."

Being a homosexual, I find Ms. Tutenberg's homophobic commentary to be extremely offensive, misinformed and unenlightened. To blame any disease on a particular group of people or to punish people for the disease they have contracted is destructive to all Americans both spiritually and physically. In the past, I have purchased your magazine because I found it to be very informative: a magazine that views contemporary issues objectively. If you continue to include such moral majority bigots as Ms. Tutenberg, I will stop buying Poona -- and so will a lot of other people.

Sincerely,

Mr. Wallace Davis
Registered Nurse

cc: Ms. Tutenberg

IV. MEMO FORM

Memos are mainly used for inter-office, institutional or organizational communication; however, increasingly, the memo letter format is being used for formal, external communications as well as in informal, internal communications. **If the memo is used for inter-office purposes, leave out the "Dear" salutation and the "Yours truly" complimentary closure, and initial the memo to the right of your name.**

EXAMPLE OF MEMO FORMAT

TO: Sophia Hawkins, Fashion Director, Kuku Designs

FROM: Pat Klodowsky, Editor, BeeBop Magazine

DATE: September 10, 1994

SUBJECT: Fashion shoot on October 3, 1994

Dear Sophia:

It was great talking to you on the phone the other day, and I want to confirm the arrangements we made for the fashion shoot.

As we briefly discussed, the shoot will feature all of your upcoming Spring Kuku Designs collection, and we will be using the Central Park Zoo for our location. We are supplying all models, props and equipment, and we will be picking up all clothing from you on September 25 - a list of which you will be sending me this week (as we arranged).

I will call you as soon as I receive your clothing list. At that time, I would love for us to have lunch together. Looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours truly,

(Just use your signature here, since your name is listed above.)

cc: Max Photo Inc.

Encl: Detailed location site for shooting

CORRECT USAGE AND APPEARANCE

Remember to proofread your letter for these items:

Spelling of the receiver's name
Spelling of the receiver's place of business
Spelling elsewhere -- including your own name and firm
Correct typing throughout
Correct dates
Subject-verb agreement
Pronoun reference
Noun-pronoun agreement
Punctuation.

CHECKLIST

- Did you type in a dateline to validate the letter as a record?
- Did you place a colon after the salutation?
- Did you place a comma after the complimentary close?
- Did you sign the letter below the complimentary close?
- Did you initial or sign the memo to the right of your name?

***Please note**, if you are using company letterhead, type the second and all subsequent pages on blank paper with the recipient's name and the page number in the upper left-hand corner. You can also include the date, but this is not mandatory. For example:

Dr. Paula Mott
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