Fact Sheet

1.21 | WRITING LETTERS

> **At the completion of this fact sheet you will:**
> - **Understand the main steps to writing a business letter**
> - **Be able to layout a business letter**
> - **Be able to choose and write a letter in the appropriate style**

Writing an effective business letter is an important skill for every student wishing to enter the workforce. In this brief overview we will examine the main steps in creating an effective business letter. With this knowledge you can quickly amend and personalise business letters.

MAIN STEPS
- Identify your aims
- Establish the facts
- Know the recipient of the letter
- Create sample copy
- Decide on the physical layout of the letter

Identify Your Aims
Clearly establish what you want to achieve from the letter. Whatever the aim, create your letter from these goals.

Establish the Facts
Make sure you have the relevant accurate facts available. Dates, names, addresses, etc, must all be readily accessible so as to be quickly and accurately transferred to the letter.

Know the Recipient of the Letter
Write in the language of your recipient. Try to put yourself in the position of the recipient. Read it from their point of view. Is the letter clear or open to misinterpretation?

If you know the recipient personally, use this knowledge to phrase the letter to generate your desired response.

Create a Sample Copy
Having established your aims, collected the relevant facts with a conscious view of the recipient- write down the main points of your letter.

Decide on the Physical Layout of the Letter
The physical appearance of a letter consists of the paper and the envelope. The first thing a recipient sees is the envelope. It is essential that it is of suitable quality with the name and address spelt correctly. Quality envelopes and paper suggest a professional attitude.

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TECHNICAL LAYOUT OF LETTER

Business letters can be written in indented or blocked style. Both are acceptable. We will consider blocked style and open punctuation as standard in this section. These are the most frequent kinds of letters found nowadays.

- BLOCKED style means that each line comes right under the other (vertically aligned).
- OPEN punctuation means no commas after each line of the addresses or the salutation or complimentary closes.

Source: http://www.effective-english.com/services_free_ml_sp_letter_writing.html

Neither one is preferred, however, remember you must be consistent in style and punctuation all through the letter.

A LETTER'S STYLE

To transform a letter into its final version, four main considerations are necessary.

- Format
- Prose
- Manner
- Accuracy

Format

There are three main formats: blocked, semi-blocked and indented.

The former has all entries tight against the left –hand margin. The semi-blocked format sets the references and the date to the right margin for filing and retrieval purposes, with the remaining entries placed against the left margin.

The indented format follows the same layout as either of the above, but indents each paragraph by five or six spaces.

Prose

Clarity of communication is the primary goal. Don't use technical jargon if the recipient is unlikely to understand it. Short sentences are less likely to be misunderstood or misinterpreted. Be precise and don't ramble.
Keep **I**t **S**hort and **S**imple (KISS)

adapted from http://www.holtww.com/learn2writedemo/intro.html

Some business writers believe that a very short letter looks too abrupt or even rude. They try to strengthen their writing by adding unnecessary details or flowery compliments. Modern business people don't have time to waste reading excessively long letters. Remember to:

- Get to the point
- State your ideas clearly
- Stop when you have said everything necessary

Although you should keep your writing as brief as possible, don't judge the length by counting the number of words it contains. If you have written a two page letter and every word is essential to make your meaning clear, then it is a short letter. But if you

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have written a one-page letter and you only needed one or two lines, your letter is much too long.

In short, business writing should be brief without omitting important details, and it should not waste the reader's time with unnecessary details.

Manner
Always try to personalise your letters. Always try to be civil and friendly even if the subject matter is stern and sensitive. Give the impression to the recipient that some effort and thought has gone into the letter.

Accuracy
Once the final version of the letter has been created, polish it off with a final spelling and punctuation check.

Summary

- There are five main steps to writing a business letter, identifying your aims, establishing the facts, knowing the recipient, creating a sample copy and deciding on a physical layout.
- There are two common physical layouts for letters; blocked and open.
- There are four main aspects to a letter's style; format, prose, manner and accuracy.

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