

Writing Business Letters

Business correspondence is generally about building or maintaining relationships. In that sense, they are usually persuasive in nature; and because they are used in the workplace for professional reasons, they are always written using formal language and tone.

There are various types of business letters. This handout covers:

- **Informational business letters** (sometimes called cover letters [*should not be confused with [employment cover letters](#)*]): These letters usually accompany or introduce a product or service to customers or potential clients.
- **Complaint letters:** These are letters that inform a company of customer dissatisfaction, such as poor customer service or a faulty product; some companies write complaint letters to other companies when partnerships are not working the way one company would like.
- **Adjustment letters:** This is a reply to a complaint letter. These letters can contain good news, bad news, or a combination of the two. The goal is to maintain a good relationship with customers no matter what news you have to give them.

Below you will find explanations and a general structure for each type of business letter. It's important to understand that the way you compose these business letters is different because the audience and purpose of each type of letter is distinct.

Informational Business Letters

Informational business letters generally accompany or introduce a new product or service. The audience for this type of letter can be wide in that it is written for the general public, but usually a product or service is targeted to a specific demographic. For instance, quick meals are usually targeted to working parents; outdoor gear is often intended for a young, athletic, adventurous segment of the population; and landscaping materials and services are for homeowners. While informational business letters are not usually written to a specific person, it is still important to know certain characteristics and the values of your audience before composing such letters. For instance, working parents want meals that are quick, but cost and nutritional value are also important to them.

The following is a general structure for informational business letters; however, this is not a template, and modifications may be necessary depending on your particular circumstances for composing this type of letter. An example is included at the end of this handout.

- **Letterhead.** Most companies have stationary that has the company logo and contact information at the top. Generally, readers expect to see business letters on letterhead because it adds to the company's credibility; so if this is available, it is advisable to use it for all business

correspondence to outside customers or clients. It is generally not needed for internal letters or memos.

- **Opening information.** This includes a date and the name and address of the customer.
- **Introductory paragraph.** For an informational business letter, the introduction can go several ways. It can introduce the product or service or it can establish a problem for which the reader will want to know a solution.
- **Body paragraphs.** Body paragraphs will follow the lead made in the introduction. This is where you give details about the product or service and explain how it will solve a problem you think the reader faces.
- **Closing paragraph.** Here is where you might give your strongest point or last pitch and provide contact information.
- **Complementary close.** The letter should end with a close like Sincerely or Best or Respectfully.
- **Signature block.** Sign your name and include your title.
- **Format of business letters.** Business letters are written single-spaced and generally in a block format, which means that everything is aligned to the left margin. In block format, paragraphs are generally not indented, so double-space between paragraphs. All three letter examples linked to this handout are written in block style.

[Example informational business letter](#)

Complaint Letters

We all have complaints because things don't always work the way they are supposed to. Generally, people are infuriated when they either call a company to complain or sit down to write a complaint letter; their initial reaction is to "let them have it," meaning to hold nothing back and really let the company know you are upset. But if you think about it, that's not effective communication on your part, and it probably will not result in what you want to happen on the other end either. Angry communication usually just begets more angry communication. It is best to always maintain a [professional tone and voice](#). A professionally composed complaint letter does the following:

- It tells the company that you are dissatisfied and why
- It tells the company what you would like as a result of the dissatisfaction or inconvenience
- It usually results in effective communication and continuing business relationships

The following is a format for composing a complaint letter; however, before you write one word, it is best to calm down.

Introduction. In the opening paragraph, clearly state your complaint and tell the reader what you would like in return.

Body paragraphs. Provide detailed, and usually chronological information, regarding your complaint. It is important that the reader know the whole story, so detail is crucial for these paragraphs. Background

information can include dates, cost, shipping details, or previous conversations with company personnel.

Conclusion. State what you would like as compensation and provide your contact information.

Keep complaint letters short, usually no more than one page, and stick to the facts, not opinion. Remember that you are writing to a person, not an inanimate “company.” You want your communication to be clear and effective.

[Example complaint letter](#)

Adjustment Letters

An adjustment letter is a response to a complaint letter. In this letter, your goal is usually to maintain a good working relationship with the customer despite whatever mishap may have occurred. In business, contrary to the popular saying that “the customer is always right,” that is not always the case; therefore, you may not be able to give every customer what he or she expects or asks for in a complaint letter. Thus, you may find yourself in situations where you have to deliver bad news (you not giving the customer any or all of what was requested) sometimes. In persuasive writing, there is a preferred way to give bad news, which is explained in the letter structure below.

Introduction. In the opening paragraph, acknowledge the customer’s correspondence (the complaint letter) and validate his or her concerns.

Body paragraphs. It is important to not start any paragraph with bad news; instead, build your case so that the reader can follow your reasoning and understand the decision you have come to.

To begin the body paragraph where you have to break the bad news, keep to the details provided in the customer’s letter and any other information you have uncovered yourself in your investigation of the complaint. Build your case with facts from the customer’s history and/or complaint. Then in the middle of the paragraph, state the bad news clearly, but sensitively. For instance, instead of saying, “We are not going to let you out of your contract,” you might consider saying “We are unable to cancel your membership with us; it will still have to be fulfilled until the end date of June 12, 2012.” In this example, the wording is sensitive, but clear. The customer knows that the contract still holds and the date it will end. It is equally important to not end the paragraph with bad news as the first and last parts of a paragraph are most memorable to readers. Follow up the bad news with one or two sentences of goodwill, such as stating how much the customer is valued.

Conclusion. Continue the goodwill and wish the customer well.

[Example adjustment letter with bad news](#)