Business Letters

Business letters are written messages to a person or group within a professional setting. Business letters are used when the writer would like to be formal and professional. Letters may vary in length depending on the writer's objective, purpose, and message of the letter. The letter can address anyone including, but not limited to: clients and customers, managers, agencies, suppliers, and other business personnel or organizations. It is important to remember that any business letter is a legal document between the interested parties. These documents can be held for up to seven years, so it is important that all information is honest and legitimate.

The Difference Between a Business letter and other letters

The main thing that differentiates a business letter from other letters is that a business letter is a legal document. The writer can be held liable for anything written in the letter. For example, if it is stated that a project will be completed by a certain date in a business letter, the project legally must be completed by that date. However, if the project can't be completed by that date, another letter can be written stating that the project is behind schedule and why. For this reason, business letters must be written differently than letters used for personal use.

A business letter is used primarily to request or provide information, to relate a deal, to bring or continue conversation, and/or to discuss prior negotiations. A business letter can be classified as private, however, it is typically not circulated to others, but rather meant for the eyes of the participants involved. Therefore, a business letter needs to be clear, focused, and to the point. When writing a business letter, the author should avoid interjecting personal stories.

A business letter needs to be concise and clear. Being too wordy is the biggest downfall in this form of writing. Keep sentences short and precise. Avoid over using adjectives and adverbs that distract from the focus of the message. Organize the letter from most important subjects to least. The content of the letter should be persuasive and usable. The tone of the letter should be formal and professional.

Also, in a business letter, it is preferable to use personal singular pronouns like "I" and "you". Avoid using plural pronouns like "we" since it can mislead the audience to assume that the company supports the message of the letter. In addition, personal pronouns are easier to understand, because it directly refers to the parties involved.

What to Include in a Business Letter

Formatting Your Business Letter

- Use single spacing. NEVER use double spaces within the business letter.
- Use a simple format with font that is easy to read.
- For block, and modified block formats use single spaces and left justify the paragraphs.
- Leave a blank line between each paragraph. This makes it easier to follow the changes of topics within the letter.

The Introduction

- This paragraph should introduce why you are writing the letter and sum up the key points in the following paragraphs.
- Include a statement that shows you are knowledgeable of the audience to which your letter is directed.

The Body

- Provide background or history regarding the purpose of the letter.
• Talk about key points you are making.
• Include a justification of the importance of the main points.
• List any important dates, discussions, and conversations that are relevant.
• Ask questions, if necessary.

**Conclusion**

• Summarize the main points of the letter.
• Restate the problem and resolution if pertinent.
• Include deadlines.
• Provide contact information (Email, Phone Number, Fax, Etc...).

**Closing Salutation**

It is important to take into account your audience when ending any business document. Being both respectful and professional are two important elements of your ending salutation. You must remember that each employer, boss, or co-worker may have different expectations as to what is acceptable as a proper salutation. A few general ending salutations deemed professional include:

• Sincerely,
• Respectfully yours,
• Yours truly,
• Best,

These should be used with individuals whom you do not have a relationship with, new co-workers, potential clients, or a large email to a wide variety of individuals. When you are sending a business document to an individual to whom you are accustomed, your salutation should change. Consider a professional salutation, which is not too formal. Examples include:

• Kind regards,
• Best regards,
• Many thanks,
• With appreciation,
• Best wishes,

When in doubt about which type of salutation should be used, a simple "Thanks" or Thank you" is always appropriate.

"**Signature Block**"

Always close a letter. 'Sincerely' would be the safest way to close out a business letter. On a typed business letter, following the closing, you should leave a space to sign your name with a pen. This will allow for a more personal touch on an otherwise bland letter. This is the only handwriting on the paper so make sure the signature is clear. Below this personal signature should be your typed first and last name to allow for easy reading. After this you can include anything else that the reader may need to know. This could include anything from job title, identification, a notation that there are copies attached at the bottom of the document, or other contact information, such as e-mail address or business phone number.
Tips on Writing Business Letters

- Address the reader formally (Mr., Miss, or Mrs.) unless otherwise directed.
- Address the letter to a specific person whenever possible, and not the company so it does not get discarded.
- Use a colon after the salutation if using the reader's last name and a comma if using their first name.
- Use company letterhead to make the document more professional, if the document is related to company affairs.
- Use a subject line to inform the reader quickly of the document's content.
- Sign your name in ink neatly at the bottom, between the closing and the Electronic Signature of the document.
- If a letter does not fill an entire page, put the content of the letter in the middle of the page and the document is balanced.
- Be sure to list the people on the letter that you are sending copies to so a certain individual is not left out.
- It is okay to use specific pronouns, such as "I" and "You", but be careful when using "We". This is simply because it can commit your company to what you have written.
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