



Module 3 : Business Letter Writing

- How to write a good business letter
- How a business letter should be structured and edited
- Common mistakes to avoid
- How to be persuasive while maintaining courtesy

As a PA, you will be required to deal with a lot of business correspondence. This could include business associates, employees and customers. You will often be required to send business letters, emails and other correspondence to internal and external entities. Business writing is crucial because the quality of the correspondence will reflect on the company that you represent. Learning business writing is an integral part of a PA's duties and is a major stepping stone to successful execution of administrative duties.

In this module you will learn:

- How to write a good business letter
- How a business letter should be structured and edited
- Common mistakes to avoid
- How to be persuasive while maintaining courtesy

3.1 Introduction



Letter writing is important for your business and as a PA; knowing how to write a successful letter is a key part of making a good impression. Professional business writing helps build trust with those around you. This includes writing to employers, contractors and other external people. It's important to realise that the modern business world is driven by communication of information. Regardless of whether you work in a small company or a global corporation, business writing will be an essential part of your set of skills as a PA.

Business writing comprises several aspects; there is the conventional business letter, but in addition to that, you could be writing memos, promotional copy, grant proposals and so on. All these different formats comprise the art of business writing. A carefully crafted letter or email with an attractive header can function as a powerful communication tool. Unfortunately, most companies tend to underestimate the importance of good business writing. This is why you often come across poorly worded and jargon-riddled correspondence from different business sources. Formal communication skills are considered a core competence in the field of business. High quality business correspondence can make a difference between a good business and a very successful one.

Good business writing is an important asset that can help your company promote sales, address concerns and apply for loans.

Business correspondence is typically used when other means of communication may be perceived as too casual or informal. Business letters are written to satisfy several objectives.

These include:

1. Business letters can be used to provide information on the products or services offered by your company.
2. They are considered important records that serve as evidence of transactions. Mutual issues and problems can be resolved with the evidence of business letters.
3. Business letters can be thoughtfully written to promote and sustain goodwill.
4. Business correspondence has the potential to forge new business contacts as well as reinforce existing ones.
5. Business letters can also be written to thank customers or suppliers. These forms of business correspondence help cement ties and foster goodwill.

Check out the basics of what you should include or remember in your business plan

- Select a professional header that you will use. This would probably be your manager's name or company logo, or both. Stick to the same format to maintain consistency. The header represents your company so you should aim to look distinctive and communicate with high quality. Design and save Email templates so they can be easily accessed and shared. You can also consider getting stamps for posting and packaging that have your company details printed on.
- Use standard formats and templates for business writing. The most common way to write a business letter is in blocks or "block style." This is the place where the text always starts and it can be found at the left of the page. Text should be single spaced, with double spaces between paragraphs.
- Margins are set to roughly 1 inch on each side of the document. This is the default setting for most word-processing apps or programs on computers. If you use Microsoft Word, then you can use the inbuilt Mail Merge wizard to help you. This feature is found in the Mailings menu.
- Start with the date - day, month, year - example 4th June 2017.
- Include the sender's email or address, URL if available. Avoid duplication of information; this will make it easier for the recipient to search for relevant information quickly.
- Ensure that you use the recipient's full name and title - Mr/Mrs etc. Avoid addressing them by first names.
- The main content or body of your letter should be clear, concise and objectively worded. The intention is to establish a connection as quickly as possible by using a professional tone. Outline any possible solutions to a specific issue and provide proof of examples or expert opinions to put the reader's mind at ease. Put group related information into paragraphs.
- Incorporate a closing call to action towards the end of your letter. The call to action should be actively worded and minimise the use of ambiguous phraseology. Provide clear solutions and options to the reader.
- Sign the letter with blue or black - these colours are considered the most professional. You may wish to attach any relevant information to the letter. Print and keep a copy of each letter that you send, so you can keep it for your records for the purpose of future reference.

3.2 Always use a professional tone



The tone should be confident, courteous and sincere. You should emphasise all relevant information and avoid any idle chatter or irrelevant topics. There should be no discriminatory language. You should ideally try and incorporate the use of active language. Keep the language crisp and factual; the aim is to stir the interest of the reader while giving them information at the same time.

Activity 1 - Practise with Business Writing

Estimated time: 10-15 minutes To ensure that you are ready to write your own letters, draft a sample business letter or email of your own. Your letter can include any sample correspondence but should incorporate the business writing tips that are covered in the module.

3.3 Write clearly



Rambling, long-winded and imprecise business letters should be avoided. This will minimise the chances of miscommunication. Incorporate the use of strong, active words that are guaranteed to hold the attention of the reader. Organise all of the information in a logical format and separate text with paragraphs that flow. Use subheadings to break up longer letters into digestible information. Highlight key words so they can help convey your message and stick in the brain of your reader. You can even use colour or bold text to emphasise certain words and important points.

3.4 Establish a positive connection



If you have a prior acquaintance with the reader, remember to include the information in the introductory paragraph. This will help establish a connection early on in the interaction.

3.5 Be concise



Avoid wordy and florid phrases in business writing. After every stage of your writing, take a closer look at your content and be on the lookout for typos and errors. Delete content that does not add value to the correspondence and also delete text that does not contribute to the understanding of the reader.

The use of verbs and nouns

An example of poor business writing: I definitely believe that this motive will be successful.

An example of good business writing: I know this performance will succeed.

The positive sentence is shorter and uses stronger words - this is just a brief example.

3.6 Use active text



Over time you will be able to develop a good writing practice that will be considered your 'written voice'. Good business writing minimises the use of passive voice as it indicates a weaker form of writing. Stick to the active voice which is more helpful when you wish to emphasise a point. Passive voice has a propensity to signify lack of intent and purpose. For example, instead of mentioning that 'the sales report will be sent soon', replace it with, 'I will send the sales report to you by the second week in November'. The simple and correct use of subject, verb, noun and structure will help the reader understand the content much better and in a shorter time.

Avoid the use of prepositions after a verb. Excessive use of prepositions can reduce the quality of sentence structure. For example, 'come up with' can be replaced by 'generated'.

3.7 Vary your sentences



It's a good idea to incorporate the use of sentences that vary in length, style and structure. However, since business writing is factual, technical and formal writing, avoid going overboard with prose. Sentences that vary in length help break the monotony and improve the readability of the content. **Good writing should always include:**

Technique and facts - Use a reference book if it helps you. Style guides, this module and dictionaries can also help you avoid any errors. Business letters are important records. They should be stored for future reference so all mentioned facts must be supported and accurate.

Accuracy and precision are important attributes of good business writing.

Take a Quick Recap Test

[viralQuiz id=68]

3.8 Proofread your letters



Check everything that you have written before you send it to the recipient. The value of effective content and an attractive format will be lost if there are typos, mistakes and errors. Make it a point to double-check the document before clicking the send button. A single typo can ruin the effect of an otherwise fine business document. Spot the error before someone else does.

Activity 2 - Sharpening Your Writing Skills

Estimated time: 10-15 minutes In the previous activity, you drafted a business letter or email of your own, which was very important preparation for you in your upcoming career. This next activity will expand upon what you have learned and sharpen your writing skills. You will again draft a letter, but this time focus on the content of your writing. Address your letter to a business or organisation and follow some of the business writing tips in the module. What are some of the things you should and shouldn't do?

3.9 Additional Business Writing Tips

Avoid the use of meaningless and empty phrases.

Business letters are written to achieve an objective. Keep the content relevant, short and factual. Release the reader with a favourable impression of the company.

Avoid writing when you are experiencing negative emotions.

For example, if you are writing in response to a strongly worded customer complaint, postpone writing until you feel calmer. Rudely or insolently worded business letters come across as unprofessional and unbecoming. We often tend to write down things that we would not wish anyone else to read.

Pay special attention to titles and genders of the recipients.

It can be embarrassing to address Mr. Anderson as Mrs. Anderson. In case you are not sure of the title or gender, make sure that you ask their assistant for the correct spelling and title. As a second option, you may consider using neutral gender words such as 'they' or 'their' to avoid confusion.

Begin your letter with short, decorative sentence structures.

Very often, business letters may contain complex words, but this rather defeats the purpose. The objective is to strive for greater clarity and precision. Avoid the use of clichéd business jargon, foreign phrases and slang expressions. Keep the language plain and simple.

Avoid incorporating the use of exclamation marks.

Exclamation marks are considered as representative of emotion and are not perceived as professional. Multiple exclamation marks should never be included in business correspondence (or any correspondence for that matter).

Use language that is professional, not necessarily formal.

The usage of overly formal language tends to sometimes obscure the meaning of words. Avoid the inclusion of bawdy and off-colour jokes or gossip. Informal should not imply unprofessional.

Ensure that your business correspondence answers the basic questions of who, what, where, when, why and how. The information should be complete without gaps.

Business letters should not offer too many choices to the reader. This will result in indecision and ambiguity of options. Ensure that you finish your letter on a strong, positive and decisive note. Use the word 'very' sparingly. 'Very' often indicates a laziness to go into specific details regarding a

subject. For example, instead of writing, 'The meeting was very good', you could try writing, 'The meeting was able to help us access potential customers'.

See the "Additional Resources" section at the top of this page for examples of business letters.

Assignment

Business Letter Writing *Time: 30+ minutes* Hopefully, you took in as much of the information in this 3rd module as possible. To find out how well you have done, complete the following worksheet. Download the worksheet below print out and complete.

[Download Worksheet \(PDF\)](#)

[Download Worksheet \(Word\)](#)

Module summary

In this module, you have learned the importance of business letters. Business correspondence forms a critical component of communication between and within an organisation. The best way to write business letters is to incorporate the use of professional, concise and active sentence structures. Keep the language plain and simple and avoid the use of slang and florid phrases. Business letters are written to achieve certain specific objectives in mind. They should ideally close with a strong and decisive call to action. Well-crafted business letters can help increase sales, respond to customers and address concerns effectively.

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