

How to write a business letter

Layout

Your company will have its own ideas on how a letter should be laid out, but when writing in English, please remember to start with the greeting: **Dear** —, which should be on a line on its own. If you use a subject heading (e.g. *Business Skills Course*), it comes **after** the greeting.

The letter should have three main sections:

- an opening, where you say why you are writing, often with a reference to the past
- the main message of the letter
- a closing section, usually with a reference to the future

At the end of the letter, underneath your signature, you should always type your name and job title (and, if appropriate, your department) – **in that order**. Giving your name obviously will help the person receiving your letter if they cannot read your signature! But it also allows you to say how you wish to be addressed:

e.g. *Mary Caversham (Mrs) or Mrs M.V. Caversham*
Simon James (Dr) or Dr S. James

Key phrases

- Opening and closing greetings:

Dear Sir or Madam / Sir / Madam → *Yours faithfully*
Dear Mr / Mrs / Miss / Ms Smith → *Yours sincerely*
Dear John / Mary → *Best wishes*

- Ways of starting a letter:

We are writing to enquire about ...
I am writing in connection with ...
We are interested in ... and we would like to know ...

- Ways of referring to a letter / invoice / phone call / etc. you have received:

Thank you for your letter of [date] asking if / enquiring about / enclosing / concerning
With reference to your ... [something written]
Further to our ... [letter, telephone conversation]

- Giving good / bad news:

I am pleased / delighted / happy to tell / inform / advise you that ... [good news]
I regret / am sorry to tell / inform / advise you that ... [bad news]



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Key phrases (continued)

- Saying what you can and cannot do:

We are able to ...
We are unable to ...
We have been forced to ...

- Apologising:

We must apologise for ...
We are extremely sorry about ...
We hope this has not caused you too much inconvenience.

- Giving reasons:

This is due to / owing to / as a result of / because of (the fact that) ...

- Requesting action:

Please could you ...
We would be grateful if you could ...
We would appreciate it if you could ...
It would be helpful if you could ...
Would it be possible for you to ...?

If it is urgent, you could add:

as soon as possible
without delay
immediately
right away

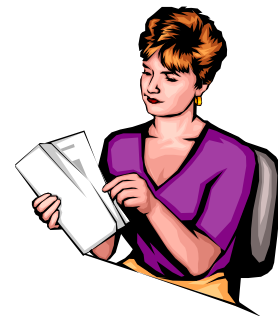
- Requesting information:

Please could you
We would be grateful if you could
We would appreciate it if you could
We would like to know (about / if) ...

inform us (about / if) ...
let us know (about / if) ...
give us further details about ...

- Ways of closing a letter:

I look forward to receiving your reply / order / brochure / etc.
Looking forward to hearing from you.
Please contact me if you need any further information.
I hope this information will help you.



Questions of style

As we have seen there are a lot of **polite** expressions in English business letters, but they are generally less **formal** in tone than Danish business letters. So if you are trying to translate a Danish expression into English, it is a good idea to turn it into ordinary everyday Danish first and then translate it. However, your written English should **not** contain those shortened forms we use so much in the spoken word (*I'm* → *I am*, *I'll* → *I will*, *I don't* → *I do not*, etc.).

The date: There are a lot of different ways of writing the date in English, but if you write the date like this:

23 May 2009

... then everybody will know what you mean. Remember the capital letter for the month.