Include all elements of a formal business letter

- Letterhead
- Date
- Inside Address
- Salutation:
- Body
- Closing, Signature
- Title
Print your letter on formal letterhead

Use “company” letterhead only for official business (not job applications)

Use only if you are acting as an agent of your company

For personal business, make up your own letterhead

Include your complete contact information

Put the date immediately below the letterhead

March 23, 2019
Next comes the “inside address”—same information as the envelope

CELIA MATHEWS ELLIOTT
308 Deerfield Drive
Champaign, IL 61822-9773 • +1.217.244.7725
celia.elliott@gmail.com
March 23, 2019

Professor Dale J. Van Harlingen
Department of Physics
Loomis Laboratory of Physics
1110 West Green Street
Urbana, IL 61801-3080 USA

Put an informative subject line next

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Invitation to speak at Columbia University
After the subject line comes the “salutation”

“Dear” [Title] [Surname]:
What if you’re not sure of the person’s title?

If the person works at a university, address him or her as
Dear Professor [Surname]:

If the person works at a national lab or a private company, address him or her as
Dear Dr. [Surname]:

Salutation Quiz:
Dear Elliott:
Dear Celia Mathews Elliott:
Dear Celia,
Dear Professor Celia Elliott:
Greetings!

All are incorrect! (and some may really annoy the recipient).

Don’t address a professional woman old enough to be your grandmother as “Hey Guys”
What if I don’t know the name of the person to whom the letter is sent?

Dear Selection Committee:
Dear Colleagues:
Dear Human Resources Officer:
Dear Customer Service Representative:
Dear Sir or Madam: dated!
To whom it may concern: trite and tacky!
Better: Do the work and find out the name
Use gender-neutral language

Structure your letter as follows:
State immediately why you are writing—first sentence!
Add additional information, explanations, examples in the body of the letter
Close with a specific statement of what you want the recipient to do—give a specific deadline if appropriate
Tell the recipient how best to get in touch with you for follow-up questions
For most letters, limit to one page
Tone is important!

Convey sincerity and respect

Use appropriate professional language—no slang, no jokiness, no inappropriate familiarity

If you’re asking somebody to do something, present the benefit for complying—write from the recipient’s point of view

Professional ≠ stuffy, legalistic, high-falutin’

Use a standard closing

Use one of the following phrases:
   Very truly yours,
   Sincerely yours,
   Respectfully yours,

Follow the closing with a comma (,)

Leave four blank lines for your signature
   Sign the letter in blue ink
   Write neatly

After the blank lines, on one or two lines, type your name (and title, if any)
What about email?

Formality depends on the purpose and recipient

For business email, use a formal salutation, at least for the first interaction

Include all elements of a business letter except the date and inside address

Write a meaningful, informative subject line

Keep emails short and to the point

General email rules:

Don’t use your company’s email for purely personal business—that includes job hunting

Set up your “from” line with your full name (no nicknames)

Create a signature line in a standard font that includes your complete contact information

Don’t use backgrounds, embedded images, or FROU-FROU fonts

Think before you hit “Reply All” or “Forward”

Proofread everything before you send it
Rules for email subject lines:

- Make them explicit and informative—no teases or cutesiness
- Be concise (<10 words)
- Frontload key words
- If the message requires action or has a deadline, put it in the subject line
- Don’t put the subject line in all caps (THE READER WILL THINK IT IS SPAM)
- Don’t write “See Attachment” (the reader will think you’re a virus spreader)

To recap:

- Regardless of the medium or the message, present yourself as a serious professional
- Don’t use company letterhead or the company server for non-company business
- Make your message concise, logically organized, and explicit
- Provide complete contact information
- Proofread before you send

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