

Unit 8

Business Letters and Envelopes

As a secretary, there are several kinds of letters that you need to know about, for example, the letter to make arrangements, to confirm arrangements and to thank someone for a service. This unit aims to provide practice in dealing with office activities which require written communication especially writing letters and addressing envelopes. Business letters to companies are formal letters in which you need to follow certain rules and conventions. Thesedays, written communication also includes electronic mail or e-mail.

Get started

Vocabulary

Match the word on the left with its meaning on the right.

1. indent ____ lined evenly with a margin along the left or right edge of a page;
not indented.
2. flush ____ the material form or layout of a publication.
3. layout ____ the use of standard marks and signs in writing and printing to
separate words into sentences, clauses, and phrases in order
to clarify meaning
4. address ____ the blank space bordering the written or printed area on a page.
5. format ____ short, clear and using few words
6. punctuation ____ the overall design of a page
7. brief ____ to move in from the margin.
8. margin ____ the location of a person or organization as written or printed on
mail as directions for delivery

Discussion

Look at the two letters below.

1. How are the two letters different?

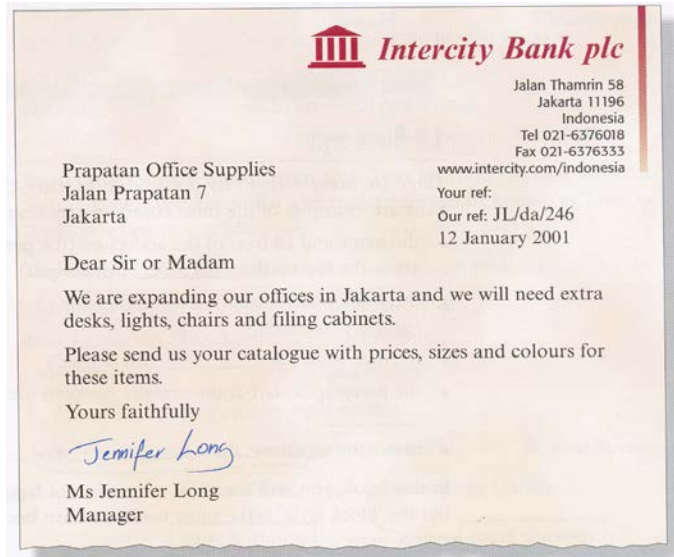


Figure 8.1 Jennifer's Letter

Source: Littlejohn, 2001, p. 1

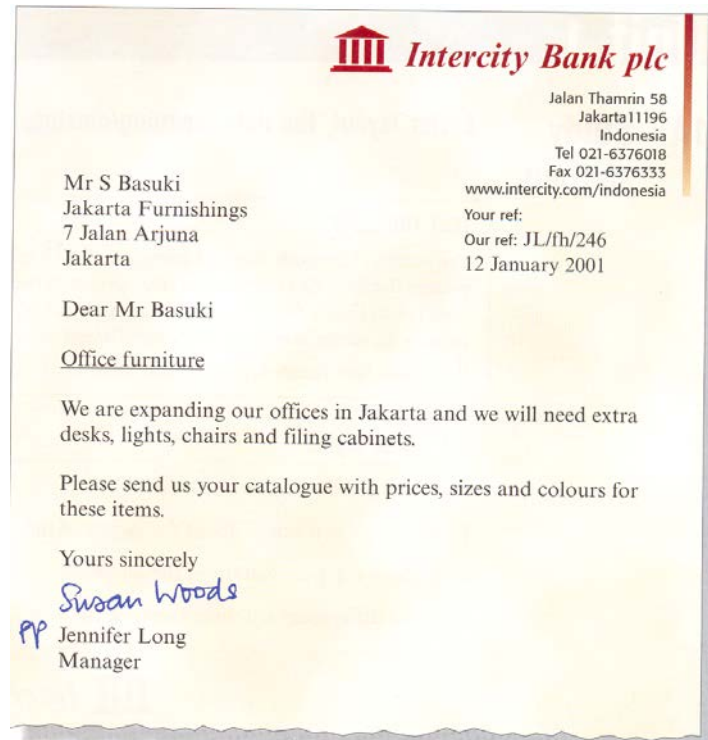


Figure 8.2 Susan's Letter

Source: Littlejohn, 2001, p. 1

8.1 Business letters

Business letters in English are usually brief and precise. The purpose is clearly stated and there is no room for unimportant information. Though there are different types of letters (Applications, Orders, Circulars, Letters of Complaint, Letters of Request, etc.), they all look alike because their form or layout contains similar parts.

8.1.1 The Layout of Business letters

The layout of letters can be classified into two important parts: essential and optional parts.

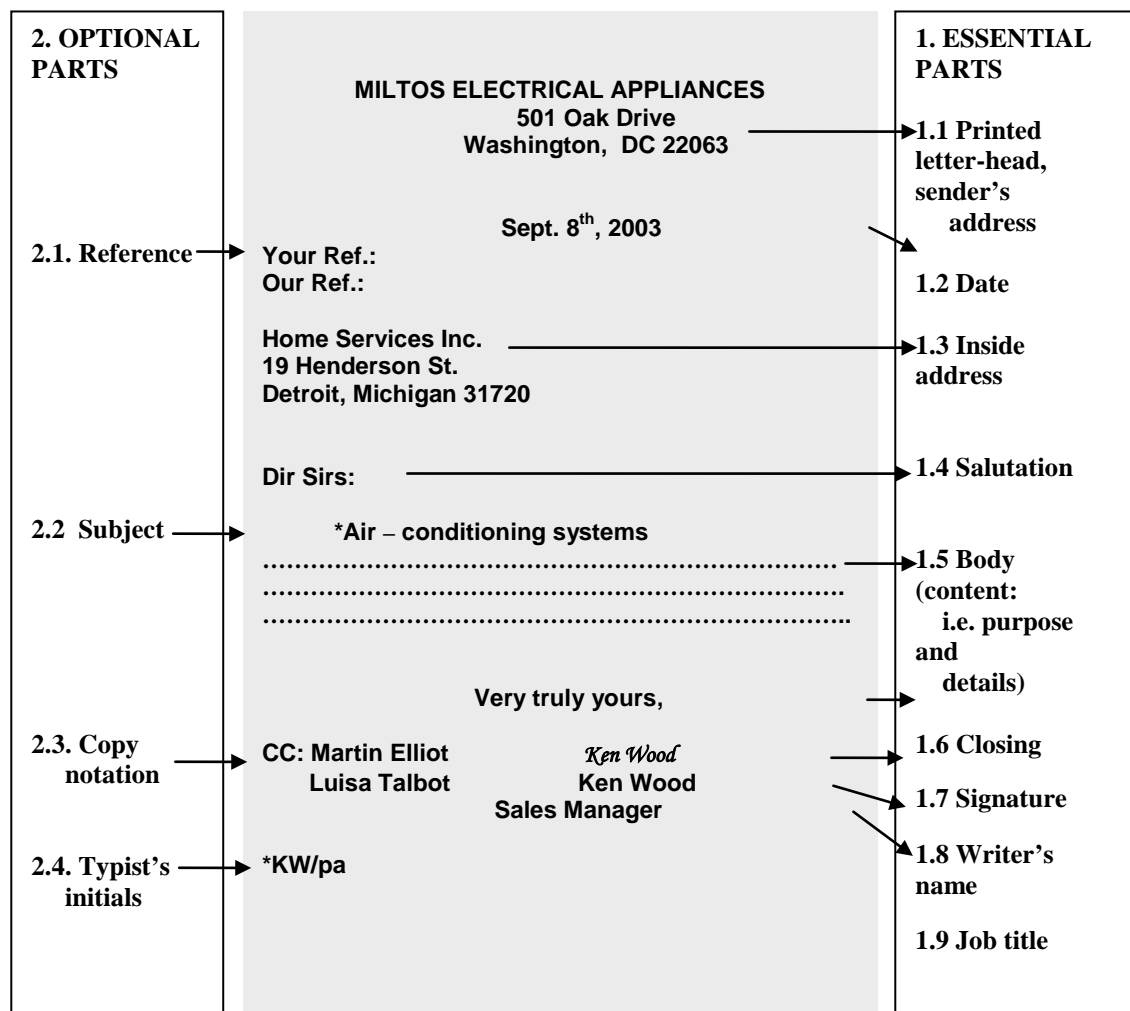


Figure 8.3 Letter Form

Source: Millan & Toselli, 1997, p. 84

Language Focus

1. Essential Parts

1.1 **The sender's address** is either in the top right hand corner or centered.

Companies and organizations usually have this information printed.

1.2 **The date**, written under the sender's address, may be expressed in different ways.

	American Style	British Style
Letters	March 4, 20...	4 March 20...
Form-filling	3.4.20.... Mar. 4, 20... 3/4/20...	4.3.20... 4 Mar., 20... 4/3/20...

Americans write the month first and then the day. The British and people from most other countries always write the day first and then the month.

1.3 **The inside address** includes the name of the addressee or the position of the addressee or both if you know them.

Mr./Mrs./Miss/Ms. K. Morris
Personnel Director
Household Equipment Inc.
2 Florida Boulevard
San Diego, CA 91122

To address a letter to a company you may use American or British style.

American Style

Home Services Inc.
456 Madison Avenue
New York, NY 10014

British Style

Messrs. Jones & Co.
25 Crocus Lane
Oxford OX1 1DZ

1.4 Salutation to a person in a company.

Formal

- Salutation to a person

Dear Sir: (American) or Dear Sir, (British)

Dear Madam: (American)

or Dear Madam, (British)

Less formal

Dear Mr. or Mrs. or Miss or Ms. Morris,

- Salutation to a company

Gentlemen/Dear Sirs: (American)

Dear Sirs, (British)

1.5 The body of the letter is the content of the letter.

- It may include **an introductory sentence** that makes reference to another letter or fax previously received or sent.

For example:

- Thank you for your letter of June 16.
- I/we refer to your fax dated....
- With reference to your letter dated...

- It must include a **statement of purpose** of the present letter.

For example:

- I am writing to apply for the vacancy of....
- We would like to order the following items...
- It may also include **statements of additional information**.

For example:

Agreeing to Requests

I would be delighted to...

Giving Bad News

Unfortunately...

I am afraid that...

Enclosing Documents

I am enclosing...

Please find enclosed...

Enclosed you will find...

The body of the letter usually includes closing remarks to express a more personal wish or comment related to the aim of the letter.

For example:

Thank you for your help Please contact us again if...

...we can help in any way.

...there are any problems.

...you have any questions.

I/we will be pleased to be considered for an interview

I/We will be very grateful to receive a trial order.

I/We look forward to hearing from you. I'm looking forward to ... (informal)

1.6 The closing or complimentary close ends the letter.

Table 8.1 The Closing or Complimentary Close

American Style	British Style
Formal	Formal
Sincerely,	Yours sincerely, (addressee's name known)
Sincerely yours,	Yours faithfully, (addressee's name not known)
Cordially yours,	
Cordially,	
Less Formal	Less Formal
Very truly yours,	Yours sincerely,
Yours very truly,	Yours truly,
Yours truly,	Best regards,
	Kind regards,
	Regards,

After the Closing there are three things to identify the sender of the letter:

1.7 The signature

1.8 The identification of the sender's name

1.9 The sender's position or job title

Note: When you begin a letter *Dear Sir/Madam*, you end with *Yours faithfully*.

When you begin with *Dear Mr/Mrs/Ms* you end with

Yours sincerely, *Yours truly*, or *Best wishes* (but not *Yours faithfully*)

2. Optional Parts

2.1 References: It refers back to a letter, fax, quotation, order no., file of the sender and addressee respectively.

2.2 Subject Line: theme or subject.

2.3 Copy Notation: Names of the persons who receive a copy of the letter.

2.4 Typist's Initials: Initials of the person who signs the letter and the person who types it.

Exercise 1 – Salutation

Identify the mistake in each sentence and correct it.

Example: Dear Messrs Lewis and Ramsay Ltd.,
should be: Dear Sirs,/Gentlemen,

1. Dear Mrs.
2. April the 10, 1995.
3. Lewis and Co., West Road 13, Bristol BR 3 8HG
4. Sirs. Sinclair and Hughes.
5. Sales Manager
Mr. Keith Morgan
2 Elm Street
Santa Barbara
CA 93106

8.1.2 Types of Business Letters

These are two types of formats for business letters: the Block Format Letter and the Modified Block Format Letter.

1. A Typical Business Letter – Block Format (all parts flush left)

Note that in the example above, all the parts of the letter except the logo are on the left side of the page. Your company name and address; the recipient's name, title, company, and address, the letter's main text; the sender's typed name and title; and the attachment, enclosures, cc. are all single-spaced. The company's address, date and the recipients name must be double or triple spaced. You can also double space or triple-space between the letter's main text and the complementary close (which is usually the word "sincerely"). Leave about four lines for your written signature, and double-space or triple-space between your title and the ending lines.

The main text is always single-spaced. Each paragraph is not indented but begins at the left margin. Double space between the paragraphs

Company Logo	
Your Company Name (company name & address can be centered)	
Your Company Address	
Date	
Recipient's Name	
Recipient's Title	
Recipient's Company	
Recipient's Address	
Salutation:	
Main text	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Introduction- Body- Conclusion
Complimentary close,	
Signature	
Sender's Typed Name	
Title	
Attachments:/Enclosures:/CC:	

Figure 8.4 Block Format

2. Another Business Letter - Modified Block Format (modified flush left):

This letter format is slightly different from the first. The date, the closing, your signature, and your title are all lined up along the center of the letter. They are not centered, but if you drew a line down the center of the letter, these parts would all be flush against this line.

The main text is different, also. Single-space the text and indent the first sentence of each paragraph. Do not double-space between paragraphs. With both types of business letters, you may leave more space between each of the parts. With shorter letters you may wish to leave 3 blank lines between each part. You may also wish to drop the top margin down. The idea is to achieve good visual balance. Always try to keep a one-inch margin at the bottom and on the right and left sides.

Never mix the block and modified block formats.

The diagram illustrates the Modified Block Format for a business letter, enclosed in a light gray rectangular box. The components are arranged as follows:

- Company Logo**: Centered at the top.
- Your Company Name (company name & address can be centered)**: Centered below the logo.
- Your Company Address**: Centered below the company name.
- Date**: Centered below the company address.
- Recipient's Name**: Left-aligned.
- Recipient's Title**: Left-aligned.
- Company Name**: Left-aligned.
- Recipient's Address**: Left-aligned.
- Salutation:**: Left-aligned.
- Main text**: Left-aligned, followed by a bulleted list:
 - Introduction
 - Body
 - Conclusion
- Closing,**: Centered.
- Signature**: Centered.
- Sender's Typed Name**: Centered.
- Title**: Centered.
- Attachments:/Enclosures:/CC:**: Left-aligned at the bottom.

Figure 8.5 Modified Block Format.

Exercise 1

Here are the main messages from four letters. Choose the correct beginning and ending from sentences (A) – (H) and then add 'Yours faithfully/sincerely' or 'Best wishes'.

- A. Thank you for your telephone call today, enquiring about our prices.
- B. Looking forward to seeing you,
- C. Thank you for your letter of 16 February, concerning Arabian Electronics.
- D. I look forward to receiving your order.
- E. Thank you for your telephone call today.
- F. Thank you for your fax of 18 July, concerning your forthcoming visit to Hong Kong.
- G. I hope that this information will help you.
- H. Please feel free to contact me if you need any information about our other branches.

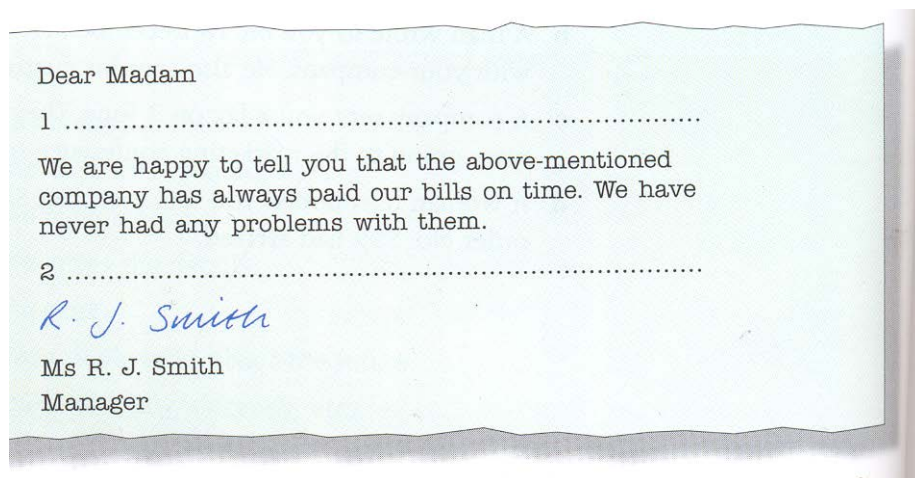


Figure 8.6 Letter 1

Source: Littlejohn, 2000, p. 16

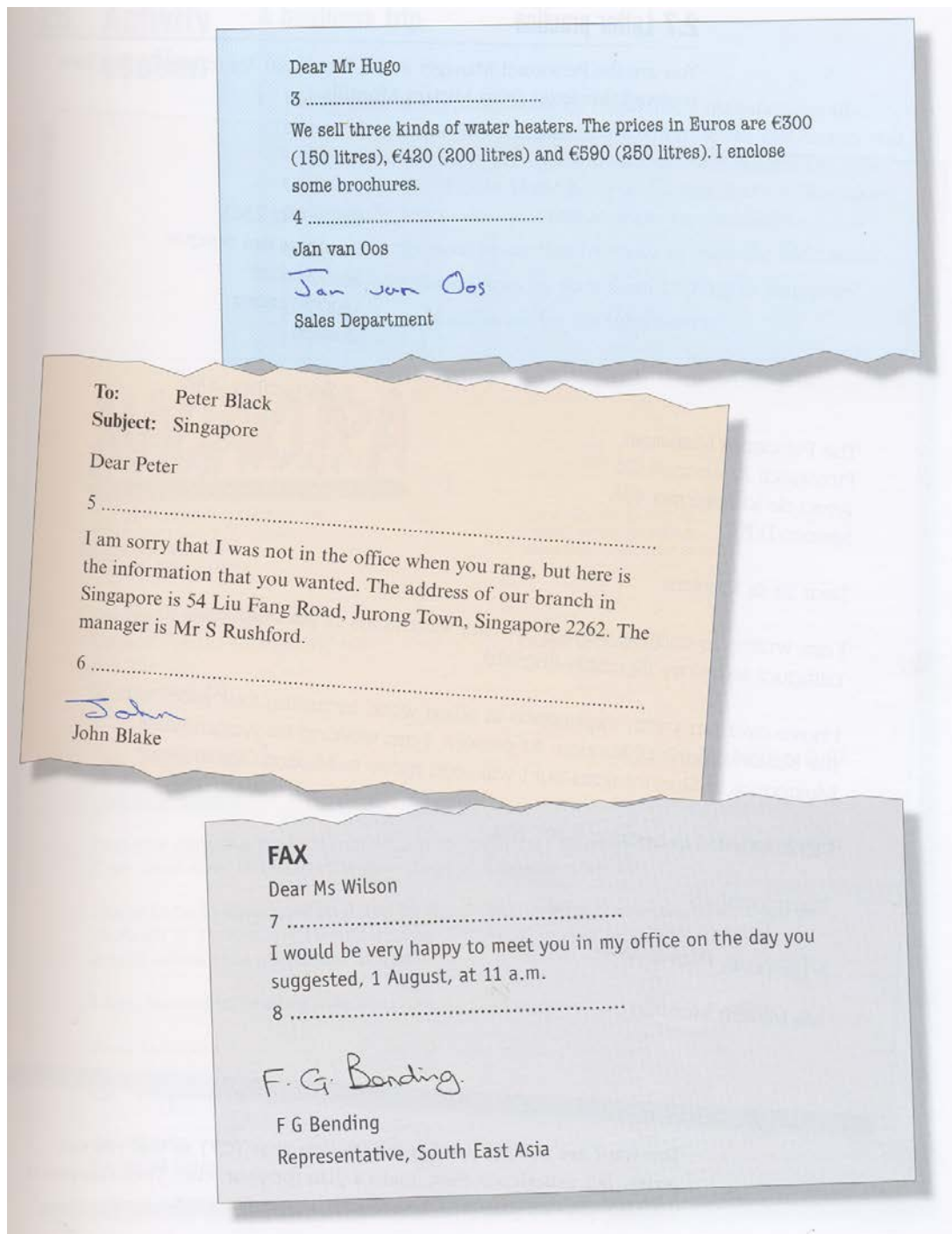


Figure 8.7 Letter 2

Source: Littlejohn, 2000, p. 17

Exercise 2 – Letters in Different Situations

Study the letters in different situations below in groups and match the each situation with one of the letters below.

- A. Welcoming a Visitor from Abroad
- B. Refusing an Application
- C. Favorable Reference
- D. Letter of Congratulations
- E. Requesting an Appointment
- F. Accepting an Invitation
- G. Acknowledgement of Change in Meeting Date
- H. Permission Granted
- I. Declining an Invitation
- J. Confirming an Appointment
- K. Inviting a Speaker to a Conference

Letter 1 _____

Dear Mr. Russell:

Regarding the new contract which you sent to me last week, there are a number of points which I do not understand, and I would like to discuss these with you.

I will be in Bangkok from 10 to 17 November, and will call you on my arrival i.e. 10 November to arrange a date and time which would be convenient for us to meet.

I look forward to the opportunity of meeting you again.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 2 _____

Dear Mrs. Violet:

Thank you for your letter regarding the new contract.

It will be a great pleasure to meet and to discuss this matter with you.

I will be available on 12 November at 14.30. My secretary will call and confirm the day and time with you within a next few days in case the day and time is not convenient for you. Thus, an alternative appointment will be arranged.

I will look forward to meeting you again.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 3 _____

Dear Mr. Luke,

According to your request, we have changed your meeting with Khun Pongsaton on 12 June to 14 June at 11:00 a.m.

I am pleased to be able to accommodate you in this manner, and

Khun Pongsaton will be looking forward to your meeting on this newly appointed date.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 4 _____

REF: INT2001/1190

Dear Miss Ribbon,

Thank you for your application to join XYZ. Unfortunately we cannot accept it as we received it after the closing date.

If you would like further assistance please phone Training and Development no. 02-4135889 or if you are phoning from outside Thailand and this number is not available, please dial 662-335-9987.

We would like to thank you for your time and interest in XYZ.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 5 _____

KW/BS

Mr. K Win

A&B Company Ltd.

35-37 Old Street

London

YJ9 8II

22 May 2001

Dear. Mr. Win,

We refer to your request of 20 May requesting permission to use our name as a reference in your transaction with the Kitty Supplier Limited.

During the time we have done business together, you have been a very reliable customer. If your suppliers decide to approach us for a reference we shall be very happy to support your request for credit facilities.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 6 _____

Dear Mrs. Oxford,

In reply to your letter of yesterday, Ms. Thiri Wongsard is both capable and reliable. She came to us 5 years ago to take charge of our Purchasing Department.

She knows the trade thoroughly and does all the buying for her department with notable success. I know that for some time she has been looking for a similar post with a larger company. While we would be sorry to lose her services, we would not wish to stand in the way of the advancement which a company as yours could offer.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 7 _____

Dear Mr. White,

It was a great pleasure to receive your letter of 12 February and to learn that you are planning to visit Thailand in April. I am very pleased to welcome you and to do all I can to make your visit enjoyable and successful.

I understand this will be your first visit to Thailand, and am sure you will wish to see some of our principal places of interest. A suitable program is something I can discuss when you arrive. I would also be pleased to introduce you to several firms with whom you may like to do business.

When the date of your visit is settled, please let me know your arrival details.

I will arrange to meet you at the airport and drive you to the hotel. You may be assured of a warm welcome.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 8 _____

Dear Mr. Mills:

I would like to convey my warm congratulations on your appointment to the Board of Start Ltd.

My fellow directors and I are delighted that the many years of services you have given to your company should at least have been rewarded in this way. We all join in sending you our very best wishes for the future.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 9 _____

Dear Dr. Wanchai,

Our organization will be holding a conference at the Tower-Hotel in Bangkok from 19th – 20th September, the theme of which will be how to improve the productivity. Approximately 250 delegates are expected for this conference.

We would be delighted if you would accept our invitation to speak on the subject of working conditions on 19th September from 13.30. to 15.00. We would be prepared to pay you the usual fee of 20,000 baht.

For your information, a copy of detailed draft of the program is enclosed. You will be welcome to attend other sessions of the conference on that day.

We look forward to hearing that you will accept our invitation. At the same time, please let us know if any visual aids will be required.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 10 _____

Dear Mr. Kurt,

Thank you for your letter inviting me to attend your conference on 19th September on the subject of working conditions.

I am delighted to accept your invitation, and confirm that I will require the use of an overhead projector for my presentation. I hope this can be made available.

I look forward to renewing my relationship with your organization at your conference.

Yours sincerely,

Letter 11 _____

Dear Mr. Kurt,

I was very delighted to receive your letter of invitation this morning.

Much as I would like to present at your conference on 19th September,

I am sorry to say that I will be unavailable to do so, as I shall be abroad at the time. I must therefore regretfully decline your invitation.

I do hope that the day will be a great success.

Yours sincerely,

8.2 Addressing Envelopes

Writing envelopes correctly is very important. Names and addresses must be carefully typed; otherwise, the letter and the information it contains may not reach its destination.

Language Focus

Envelopes contain two types of information: essential and optional.

1. Essential Parts

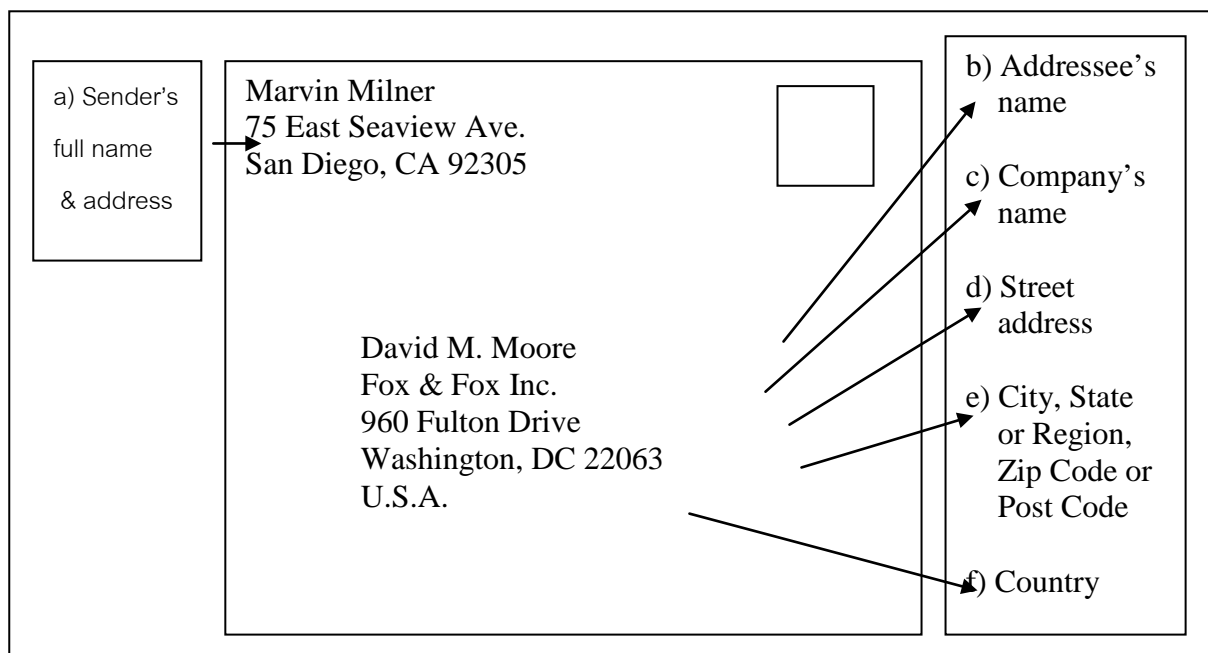


Figure 8.8 Essential Parts

Source: Millan & Toselli, 1997, p. 81

Note: Street number comes before the street name. The name of the country is included only if it is necessary. If you don't know the name of the addressee, use the name of the business organization.

Example: Brown and Sons (American)

Messrs. Brown and Sons (British)

On envelopes the forms Mr., Mrs., Miss and Ms. do not precede the addressee's name. However, in the letter they do.

2. Optional Parts

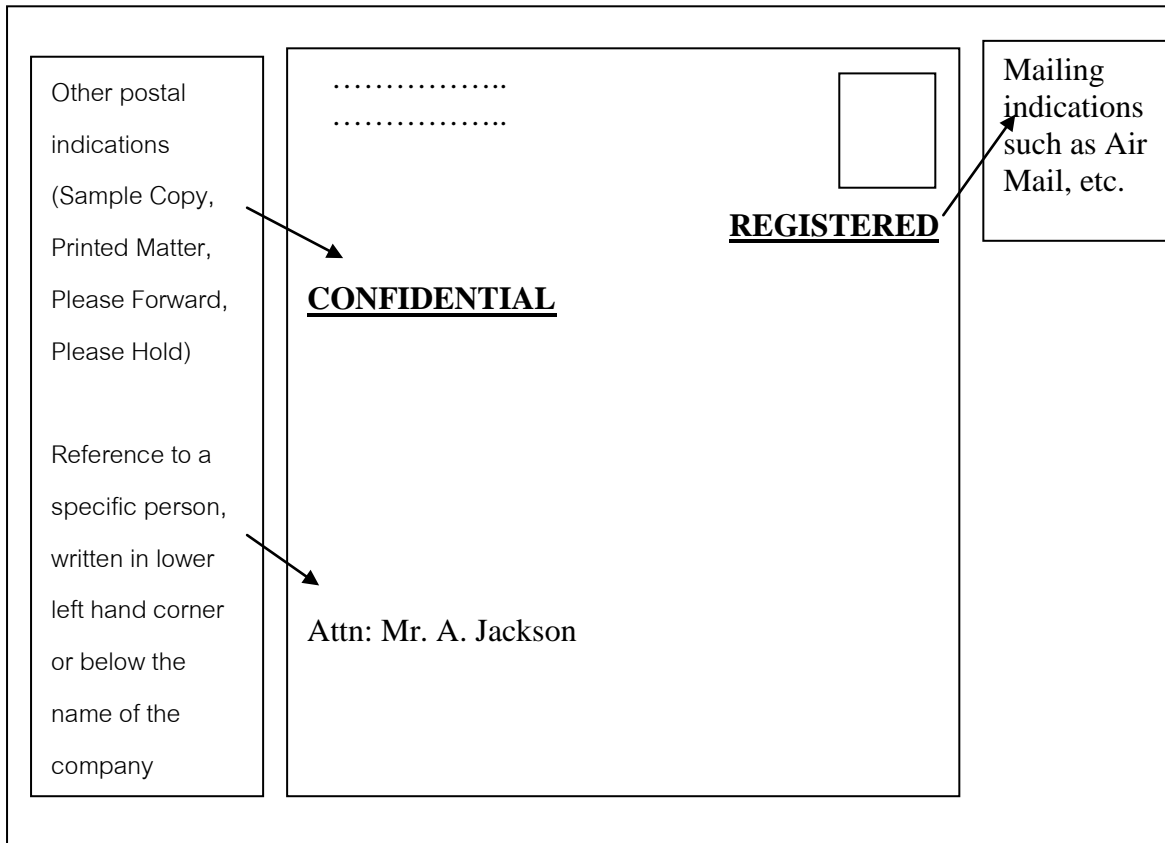


Figure 8.9 Optional Parts

Source: Millan & Toselli, 1997, p. 82

Writing

Exercise 1

Organize the information below and address the envelopes according to the instructions.

- a) To: Queen's Road/ The Neon Light Co./292/W1 3TF/ Sample
Copy/ London
From: Temple Street/ 28/ Kent/ James Hall/ TN1 1 LQ

- b) To: Richard Murray/ U.K./ Riverside Road/ Southampton/248/SO1
1ZB
From: N.Y. /Home Service Inc./ Madison Avenue/456/ New York/
10014

- c) To: 10156/The Faculty of Economics/ MO./ Nelson Street/ 293/
Jefferson City/ Attn: The Dean
From: New York/Albert Wayne/10017/31st Street/24/ N.Y.

- d) To: Pacific University/Dean of the Faculty of Economics/CA
95616/San Francisco/ Frank Wilson/U.S.A.
From: Charles Jackson/12/ Cambridge/ Holton Road/CB2 1RP

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8.3 Electronic Mail

Correspondence is increasingly sent by electronic mail these days. Electronic mail is commonly known as e-mail. E-mail messages are usually less formal than letters, but follow the same format as letters. Generally, e-mail messages are used for informal correspondence between people who already know each other. Letters are still used for more formal business communication such as applications, enquiries and replying to complaints.

Reading 

Exercise 1

Read the following tips about using e-mail for business correspondence and answer the questions that follow.

Business E-mail Netiquette

1. Originating e-mail

When sending someone an e-mail message for the first time, say where you got their e-mail address from or mention the web page name or URL if you e-mailed from a web page. Many business people have more than one page on the internet and knowing from where or why you are contacting them is helpful.

In addition, always put something in the Subject box. Messages that arrive with no Subject will probably be treated as "junk mail" and deleted.

Do not send 'attachments' (files attached to an e-mail message) with your e-mail unless and until your correspondent has indicated that they will accept it. Ask first!

2. e-Mailheads and Signatures

Create an e-mail company letterhead for formal proposals, contracts, offers, and other messages. Keep it short - 3 lines are enough.

Use it whenever it is necessary to make it clear that the message is from your company, rather than from yourself, such as an offer to purchase.

Also, create a signature. Keep it short and concise. Include your e-mail address in case the signature gets separated from the header.

Here's an example:

To: *recipient@hisco.com*
 From: *John Doe (jdoe@mycompany.com)*
 Subject: *Work Proposal*

 M y C o m p a n y, I n c.

Message.....

Message.....

Message.....

John Doe (jdoe@mycompany.com)

 Visit our web page at <http://www.myco.com/>

3. First names and Titles

If your correspondent uses your first name, then by all means use theirs. But, should you be the first to do so? Many people do not want such immediate informality in a business situation, especially in the international arena. Business people in many countries find the friendly nature of Americans, for example, somewhat over-bearing at first.

Options

1. If you are the first person to make contact and want to keep it formal, use a title (Mr., Ms, with or without the full stop). For international e-mail, err on the side of caution and write formally.
2. Or, send your first message without a salutation. If you are not sure what to use, use nothing.
3. When replying, be guided by your correspondent's signature. If they have signed a single name (probably their given name), you may address them accordingly. If both given and family names are used, it is safest to reply formally.
4. Some business communications quickly take on the flavor of a personal chat - in which case, first names are appropriate. Others remain on a formal level - in which case, retain the formal address.
5. Consider age and rank, too, if it can be discerned from the correspondence. Outside North America, people in a position of authority and people of mature years expect a certain amount of respect from their juniors.

4. The Message

Like business letters e-mail messages should short and to the point.

When replying, you will often be replying to only part of the received message. Maintain the thread, by all means, but save space by not returning the whole message, only the part to which you are replying.

Don't use "smileys" (:-) ;-) :-/ etc.) These are fine for personal notes but are quite inappropriate for business use. The meaning of your words should be contained within the words themselves, and not need additional explanation with funny faces!

5. International Considerations

Keep messages short, but do not let meaning suffer.

Short, plain sentences are easier for someone reading in a language other than their mother tongue. In some parts of the world, the written language is very formal and quite different from the spoken language. Therefore, for international business e-mail, write in a formal tone. It's easy and natural to progress from formal to friendly, but it weakens your position to have to step backwards from friendly to formal.

In many countries people in authority and older people expect a certain amount of respect from people who contact them.

Don't spam (sending the same message to hundreds or thousands of e-mail addresses in the hope of hitting a few interested people). Don't send long junk. In North America, freedom is your highest ideal: in most other parts of the world privacy is held in higher regard!

6. Unsolicited e-mail, Junk, and Spamming

Unsolicited e-mail - or junk e-mail - is the electronic equivalent of junk postal mail and direct mail selling. Just as junk postal mail is considered by many to be annoying and wasteful, junk e-mail is more so. But, at least with postal mail, you can throw the envelope away unread. With junk e-mail, you have to take time to read it to find that you didn't want to. It is therefore time-wasting and inconsiderate.

But business acknowledges that direct mail works! How can you satisfy the need to get new customers, which by definition must be strangers to your business, and at the same time be polite. Remember our first rule: "... show consideration for the other person..."

We believe that any business solicitation can be condensed to one sentence. It is unnecessary, counter-productive and quite rude to send many pages of details before confirming that the recipient is interested.

Spamming is inconsiderate. It displays selfishness and total disregard for the 99%+ that are annoyed and inconvenienced by it.

So, if you must send unsolicited e-mail in your search for new customers...

1. Only send one-line solicitations, followed by "e-Mail for details." People who want details will reply, those that don't, won't;
2. Use proper bulk e-mail software that suppresses the list of names; or put the list of e-mail addresses in "Bcc" (stands for blind copies) to protect the privacy of your audience. "Cc" lets all recipients see the full list of addresses. Apart from the privacy angle, it's frustrating to receive a one-line message preceded by 5 pages of e-mail addresses!
3. Put your own e-mail address at the top of the list, as a quality check, so you can see what everyone else is receiving;
4. End with your full name and a short, one-line signature.

Figure 8.10 Business E-mail Netiquette

Source: Business E-mail Netiquette (Online), 2005

Questions

1) When you send an e-mail message to someone who doesn't know you what should you tell them?

2) What is something that you should surely include with your message?

3) What is something you surely should NOT include?

4) What information can be included in the e-mail letterhead and signature?

a. _____ b. _____ c. _____ d. _____

5) Is it best to use a formal title or just a first name when contacting someone for the first time?

6) What's the most important thing to remember about the message?

7) When you are communicating with someone who doesn't use English as a first language what should you remember?

8) What is "spam"?

9) If you do decide to use e-mail to search for new customers what should you remember?

8.4 Review Activities

Pair work

Work with a partner to arrange the following letter correctly. Every piece should fit the proper layout of a formal letter.

31st Street

21 July 1992

New York NY

Very truly yours,

I am writing to apply for the vacancy of Assistant Director.

I am referring to your advertisement dated 18 July 1994.

Dear Sirs:

I believe I have qualifications for that position.

Sinclair Hughes International Consultant Office.

My name is Donna Foster.

PO. Box 744102 Cincinnati, OH 22872

Dictation

Work with a partner. Choose a letter from this unit and dictate it (read it out loud) to your partner who must write it down. Make sure all the words are spelled correctly using the language structures and spelling system that you learned in Unit 3. After you have finished you can change roles and use a different letter.

Conclusion

In this unit, writing business letters and addressing envelopes have been presented. The learners have practiced writing business letters and addressing envelopes by studying the layout, types of business letters, and the example letters from different situations. In addition to this, they have learned about using electronic mail for business correspondence.

Follow-up Activities

Group work

Bring business letters written in your native language. Share them with your teacher and classmates.

- a) Write down the main differences and similarities with respect to: date, salutation, body, closing, punctuation.
- b) Classify them according to their aim or purpose.
- c) Make a list of these purposes.

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