

Inward structure of business letter

→ **Heading:**

A business letter is different from a personal letter as it follows certain formalities. Heading is one of the formalities of a business letter. Heading indicates the name and postal address of the writer. Heading printed at the top of the page is called the letter head. A letter head is an expression of a firm's personality. Heading contains the following information:

- The firm's name
- Nature of business
- The firm's full postal address
- Symbols and trademarks
- Telephone number
- Fax number
- e- mail address

The heading is typed in the middle of the paper sheet at the top of the letter. The nature of the business is mentioned in the second line. In letterhead the firm's full postal address is typed on the right hand side and firm's telephone number, fax number and e-mail address are typed on the left hand side. Heading is considered to be the window of a firm. All the activities of the firm should be reflected in the heading. It should not contain maxims; moreover the name of the branches should not be mentioned. Heading is also known as 'head address' or 'letterhead'.

→ **Date:**

Since a business letter is an important document for the purpose of reference and has a legal value, it is necessary to write a date in full on every letter. All business letters should have correct date, typed under the letterhead. The date records when the letter was written, and may serve as an important reference. The date should be written on the right-hand side of the letter, just below the heading. In a block or semi block form it is written on the right hand side. In a full block form it is written on the left hand side.

There are two methods of writing dates in a letter. They are known as American method or cardinal method and British or ordinal method.

The American method follows the chronological order of name of the month, date and year. To indicate a date cardinal numberings are used

E.g. March 1, 2012

The British method follows the chronological order of date, name of the month and year. To indicate a date ordinal numberings are used.

E.g. 1st March 2012

One must avoid the practice of writing dates in figures. As both the methods have different chronological patterns there are chances of misunderstandings. Therefore it is advisable not to mention date in figures.

→ **Inside address:**

The inside address contains the name and address of the person or firm to whom the letter is written. It is written on the left hand side of the sheet below the date and above the salutation. It can be written in either the indented form or in the block form. In the indented form the first line begins at the margin whereas the subsequent lines begin two space away from the beginning of the previous line. In this case each line ends with comma and the last one ends with full stop. The block form has all the lines beginning at the margin and no punctuation at the end of any line. This style is preferred more as it looks neater and takes less time to type. While addressing firms or individuals, different courtesy titles are used like,

- 'Mr.' is used for men both married and unmarried.
- 'Miss' is used for unmarried woman.
- 'Mrs.' is used for a married woman.
- 'Ms.' can be used for both a married and an unmarried woman.
- 'Messrs' is used as the plural for 'Mr.' This form is used in addressing firms with titles that contain personal names. E.g. Messrs Kapoor & Sons
 - It should not be used when title is impersonal e.g. Mysore store
 - When it starts with 'The' e.g. The West India Co.
 - When the courtesy title is included e.g. Sir Franklin & Co.
- Where a person holds a special title such as Doctor, colonel, it is written before his/her name. e.g. Dr. K.H.Mehta

The inside address enables us to know the name and address of the firm in future. Moreover in case of window envelopes, the letter is folded in such a way that the inside address can be read from outside. Thus, it saves time and energy.

→ **Salutation:**

The salutation is a complementary greeting. It is written below the last line of the inside address. The form of salutation depends upon the personal relations between the writer and the addressee. If you are addressing a firm, a company, a club, a society or an association use 'Dear sirs' while writing to an officer by designation, write 'Dear Sir' or 'Dear Madam'. If the organization you are writing is consist of only women then use the salutation 'Dear Mesdames'. If you write a letter by name then use 'Dear Mr. /Miss/Ms' then his/her name. Sometimes sales and circular letters are addressed as, 'Dear Customer' or 'Dear Subscriber'.

→ **Subject Line:**

The subject line summarizes the topic of the letter in a few words. As it is a part of the body of the letter, it is centered about two lines below the salutation. The subject line reflects the central idea of the letter very clearly. The word 'Subject/ Referring to' is followed by a colon.

→ **Body of the letter:**

The main purpose of a letter is to convey a message, and the main purpose of the message is to produce suitable responses in the reader. This is done mainly through the body of the letter. It is the most important part of a business letter. It contains the message or information to be communicated. The body of the letter presents the message in an artistic and persuasive manner. The qualities which are essential for a good business letter are to be implemented through the body of the letter. The message is to be presented in as brief as possible manner. Moreover the tone of the letter should be courteous and cheerful. Usually the body of the letter is divided in to three parts: Beginning/opening paragraph, middle paragraph and ending/closing paragraph. The purpose of the paragraphing is to help the writer to convey his message more clearly and thus to make thing easier for the reader.

In business letter the opening paragraph should be brief and should only give a reference to the letter received from the addressee and may introduce the message. This paragraph should arrest the interest of the reader and make him go through the whole letter. Middle paragraph conveys the main message of the letter. This paragraph elaborates the message that has been introduced in the opening paragraph. It should be brief and to the point.

In the closing paragraph writer once again refers to the main purpose of writing the letter. the writer should clearly state what action he expects the reader to take. The closing should be effective as it leaves the last impression on the mind of the reader. The writer may end the letter indicating his expectations, wishes or intentions.

→ **Complementary close:**

The complementary close or subscription is a symbol of courtesy. It is a polite way of ending a letter. It appears at the foot of the letter just above the signature line and consists of the expression of respect to the addressee. This is a kind of conversational good-bye. Salutation and complementary close should correspond to each other. If salutation is 'Dear sir/madam' then complementary close should be 'Yours faithfully', if person's name is mentioned in salutation then complementary close should be 'Yours sincerely', 'Respectfully is used only when writing to a high official. Only the first word of the complementary close begins with a capital letter. the close is always followed by a comma.

→ **Signature:**

The signature is placed after the complementary close. It should be written by hand. The name of the person should be typed below his signature. The signature of a sole trader should be his name. In the case of a firm any of the partners of a firm should sign on behalf of the firm. He may do this by typing the name of the firm and putting his own signature below the name of the firm. In case for limited company some important official of the company such as a manager, managing director or the secretary should sign a letter on behalf of the company.