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Part 1

Writing Business Letters

Key Terms

abbreviation

a shortened version of a word, such as "Mr." for "Mister"

acronym

a group of letters that stand for a phrase and may be used instead of that phrase, for example, "RAM" for "random access memory"



bold (type)

a font with thicker strokes than regular fonts. Bold type appears thicker and darker and helps items in a document stand out

bulleted list

a list in a document in which the items are indented and set off with a bullet (·) or other symbol

colon

a punctuation mark (:) that is used to direct attention to information (such as a list, an explanation, or a quotation) that follows

complimentary close; closing

the phrase used to end a business letter, such as "Sincerely" or "Regards"

correspondence

communication by letters, including emails and faxes

functional writing; functional document

a piece of writing that is read to learn something, rather than for pleasure

hard return

use of the "Enter" key to jump to the next line of text in a document

header; heading

a title that introduces a new section in a functional document. Headers should be written in bold type and should briefly tell what information comes next

hierarchy

a graded or ranked series. In writing, hierarchy refers to the organization of a document, with major ideas at the top followed by supporting or related ideas or information

indent

to move a line of text in from the left margin (toward the center of the paper)

jargon

highly technical or specialized words and terms

postscript

a note added to the bottom of a completed letter, indicated by "PS"

signature

a person's name, written in his or her own handwriting. Signatures are used to prove documents are real or personal





Basic Business Letter Format and Parts

1 What is a business letter?

A business letter is any letter written from one business to another or to a client, customer, or partner. Business letters use more formal language than letters between friends. They usually deal with business processes or transactions.

2 When will I write business letters?

You will use business letters to correspond with customers, clients, partners, and other businesses. Some business letters are "business to business"; others are sent between individuals in different companies.

3 What are the parts of a business letter?

A business letter consists of several specific sections, and before you start writing, it's important to learn how to use and format them correctly. The following are the main components of a business letter, and detailed explanations are provided on the next page.

Basic Elements of a Business Letter

- 1. Company letterhead
- 2. Date
- 3. Receiver's address
- 4. Attention line
- 5. Reference number
- 6. Salutation
- 7. Subject line or heading
- 8. Body
- 9. Closing sentence
- 10. Signature



Catherine Davies 15 Qingtong Rd.-1011 Pudong New District, Shanghai, PRC 201203

November 2, 2024

Ms. Nina Lin Double Design Room 205, Building 3 Lane 2498, Pudong Avenue Shanghai, PRC

Dear Ms. Lin:

I am writing to request an interview regarding Double Design's opening for a graphic designer.

I am a recent graduate of the Academy of Art with a degree in graphic design. For the past six months, I have interned with Studio Design in Shanghai, learning to apply the skills I gained in school. I appreciate an opportunity to learn more about the graphic designer position and to discuss how I can contribute to your company.

I have enclosed my résumé for your reference. Please feel free to contact me for any reason at (021) 5184-3155 or by email at cath.davies@yahoo.com. Thank you for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Catherine Davies

Enc (1)

Closing

Cic: Flora Lopez

Catherine Davies

Basic letter parts



1 SENDER'S ADDRESS

Within the letterhead (printed company logo and address) or typed

2 DATE

- USA date format: MM/DD/ YYYY
- British date format: DD/MM/YYYY

(e.g., October 12, 2024)

(e.g., 12 October 2024)

SPECIAL MAILING NOTATIONS

- CERTIFIED MAIL
- SPECIAL DELIVERY
- AIR MAIL

ON-ARRIVAL NOTATIONS

- PERSONAL
- CONFIDENTIAL
- PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL
- STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL

S RECIPIENT'S ADDRESS

- Name of person addressed
- Title of person addressed
- Name of organization
- Street number and name
- City, state, and postal code
- Country of destination
- **6** ATTENTION
- **REFERENCE** (if any)

3 SALUTATION

- Dear Sir:
- Dear Sir or Madam:
- Dear Ms. XXX:

- Dear [Full Name]:
- To Whom It May Concern:
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

SUBJECT

10 BODY OF LETTER

(First paragraph) (Second paragraph . . .)

- **11** CLOSING
- 12 SIGNATURE (handwritten)
- **13 NAME** (typed)
- 14 TITLE (typed)

- (1) IDENTIFICATION INITIALS of the writer and typist
 - IS/jd
 - IS:jd

10 ENCLOSURE/ATTACHMENT

- Enc.
- Encl.

COPY TO

- cc: carbon copy
- pc: for photocopy

10 POSTSCRIPT

The Parts of a Business Letter

1 The letterhead

Letterhead is a company's stationery, which has the company's name and logo printed on it. When writing business correspondence, use letterhead in most instances because it looks more professional than plain paper. Let's look at some examples of letterhead:



2 The date

Because business letters so often deal with **time-sensitive information** (such as orders), they always include **the date** on which they were written. Write the month out fully and include the whole year—for example, November 12, 2024. **Do not use only numbers** (11/12/24) and **avoid abbreviations** (Nov. 12, 2024). Depending on the format you use to write the letter, the date will be either flush left or aligned on the right side of the page. It should fall under your company's address and logo on your letterhead.

Different regions use different formats for writing dates. In the United States, dates are written in the **month-day-year** format. In most other English-speaking countries, however, the date is written in **a day-month-year** format. Meanwhile, some people believe a full year-month-day format is the clearest, but this is not very common.

Format	X Only numbers	✓ Write the month out fully
Am: month/day/year	3/15/2024	March 15, 2024
Br: day/month/year	15/3/2024	15 March 2024
Year/month/day	2024/3/15	2024 March 15

3 The receiver's address

The receiver's address should be typed **flush left**, two spaces under the date. Do not use punctuation at the end of the lines of the address (this is called "open style" or "open punctuation").

4 The attention line

An attention line is not always necessary in person-to-person business letters, but it can be helpful when writing letters addressed to a company or department. When addressing a letter to a company or department, use an attention line to help direct it to the right person. The attention line states **who the letter is for, whether it is a particular person** ("Attention Dr. Smith") or **a division** ("Attention: Accounts Receivable").

There are different ways to type and format attention lines. You can type out the full word "attention" or use an abbreviation. You can use a colon after the word "attention" or choose not to. Some writers use capital letters to write "ATTENTION." You can also choose to write out the entire phrase, as in "To the attention of Ms. Jane Harper." The following examples illustrate acceptable attention lines:

- Attention Ms. Jane Harper
- Attention: Ms. Jane Harper
- ATTN: Ms. Jane Harper
- To the attention of Ms. Jane Harper

5 The reference number

Much like an attention line, a reference number is not always needed in business letters. However, a reference number is very useful for **keeping track of orders** and other correspondence. In letters sent between organizations, there is often an internal reference number. This may be **a form of the date** (such as 111215) or **any combination of letters and numbers** that refers the company to the right file.

Reference numbers are usually put two spaces above the salutation (after the receiver's address) and flush left. Phrases for noting a reference number include:

- Ref. No. 111215
- File number 111215
- Reference number AR48.

Or you can type out the whole phrase, as in "Please refer to file number 111215."

Two businesses may use different reference numbers to refer to the same file. In that case, you can mention both reference numbers on one line: "Our reference/Your

If you are not using a reference number, it is still wise to refer to any previous correspondence in the first line of the letter, for example, "Regarding your letter of November 12" or "In reference to your request of October 2, 2024."

6 The salutation

The salutation is the **greeting** you write to the recipient of your letter. Three things to think about in the salutation are:

1 The title of the recipient

Be sure to use the recipient's correct title. Different professions use different titles. Medical doctors and PhD holders should be referred to as "**Dr.**" University professors can be "**Dr.**" or "**Professor.**" Always look up the correct titles for judges, government officials, and high-ranking officials in organizations. When writing to a woman who is not a doctor or a professor, always use "**Ms.**" unless you are specifically asked to use "Mrs." or "Miss."

2 The name of the recipient

Depending on the context, you can address the recipient by their name in different ways. Here are several common ways to express this:

Way of addressing	Example	Suitable circumstances
Dear + title + last name	Dear Dr. Howard	Applicable in most general situations
Dear + name	Dear Jessica	Having a personal relationship with the recipient
Dear Sir/Madam	Dear Sir (for male) Dear Madam (for female)	Only knowing the recipient's gender
Dear Sir or Madam	Dear Sir or Madam Ladies and Gentlemen	Not knowing the recipient's gender and name
Dear + full name	Dear Kim Jones	Only knowing the recipient's name

3 Punctuation

There are three acceptable ways to punctuate the salutation. The most common is to follow it with a **colon**. You can also use the open style and avoid punctuation at the end of the salutation. In **less formal business correspondence**, it is also acceptable to use a **comma** after the name.

Punctuated style	Dear Ms. White:
Open style	Dear Professor Bard
Less formal	Dear Mr. Howard,

7 The subject line or heading

You may choose to include a **subject line** as a title to your letter. A subject line will tell your reader the topic of your letter right away. Type the subject line **two line spaces** below the salutation, flush left. The subject line can be formatted several different ways. Here are some examples:

- Re: Information Technologies Conference
- Subject: Information Technologies Conference
- SUBJECT: Information Technologies Conference
- Information Technologies Conference

Avoid using all capital letters in any part of your business letter. They make your text hard to read, and they can affect the tone of your document. In general, try to make your subject line as specific as possible without making it too long.

8 The body

The body of your letter contains the main message. It is broken into paragraphs, and its length depends on how much information you need to convey. The text in the body of the letter should be **clear, concise, and to the point**. Use the organization of your letter to help your reader find the information he or she wants.

The first paragraph

In the first paragraph, clearly state why you are writing ("With reference to our conversation of August 3" or "I am seeking a position in your Data Management Department"). If your letter will be long, the first paragraph is an appropriate place to list the contents of the rest of the letter.

Some common phrases used to open business letters are:

- With reference to your letter/email/fax of (date) . . .
- Thank you for your letter/email/fax/catalog/etc. . . .
- Regarding our meeting on Thursday . . .

2 The middle paragraphs

The middle paragraphs should be used to **explain the topic more fully** and to **give key details or instructions**. Keep the paragraphs short and confine each one to a single central, key idea. If you have important information for your reader to see in the middle paragraphs, consider putting it into a **bulleted** or **numbered list**. And remember, be **concise**. Your reader will want your letter to be brief and to the point. Don't feel that you must add length if you don't have any more information to convey. If you need only one paragraph to make your point, write only one paragraph!

3 The conclusion/final paragraph

Your conclusion will depend on the type of information you are communicating in your letter. You can use the conclusion to **make a recommendation**, **summarize your thoughts**, or **offer your help**. If you are writing a letter of application, you will want to include information about how, when, and where to contact you.

Some common phrases for closing business letters are:

- Please don't hesitate to contact us again if you have any questions or concerns.
- Please let me know if I can be of more assistance.
- If you need further help, please contact us again.
- We look forward to our next meeting.
- We look forward to working with you.

The closing line/Complimentary close

The closing line or complimentary close is another standard part of a business letter. It should be **two line spaces** under the last sentence of the last paragraph of your letter. Depending on the format you are using, the closing line may be flush left or aligned on the right side of the page.

Closing lines can be formal or informal. **Commonly used closings are**:

Common closings in business letters	More personalized closings
Yours truly,	• Love,
Respectfully (yours),	• With love,
Cordially (yours),	 Best wishes/regards,
(Yours) Sincerely,	 Warmest/Kindest regards,
Sincerely yours,	 Your devoted friend,
(Yours) Faithfully,*	• Cheers,
Faithfully yours,	• As always,

* In British English, "(Yours) Faithfully" is often used as a closing salutation when the recipient's name is **not known**, and the salutation would typically be "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam." If the recipient's name is known, use "Sincerely" instead.

10 The signature

Always sign business letters, preferably with a high-quality pen. A signed letter is more personal than a mass-produced form letter. Use four hard returns after the closing and type your name and title. Write your signature in the space created between the closing and your typed name and title.

If your name and title are long, write them on **two separate lines**:

Reginald K. Dahl Marketing Director

If not, you may write them on **one line**:

Jackie Smart, President

For email correspondence, always type your name at the **bottom** of the letter and attach a .sig file. More information about sending business emails is presented in Part 2: Writing Emails.

11 Enclosure/Attachment

An enclosure refers to documents, which could be brochures, orders, catalogs, reports, or other files, attached to the letter. You should mention the enclosed documents within the main body of the letter, and then reiterate it below your signature at the bottom of the page.

You can use the following phrases to convey information about the enclosures:

We are enclosing . . . We enclose . . . Please find enclosed . . . Enclosed is . . .

Style	Example
Type out the full word " Enclosure " and include the number of enclosures after it in parentheses.	Enclosures (3)
Use the abbreviation "Enc." or "Encl."	Enc (3).
List the exact enclosures.	Enclosures (1) Invoice 1029; (2) Return slip; (3) Customer satisfaction survey.

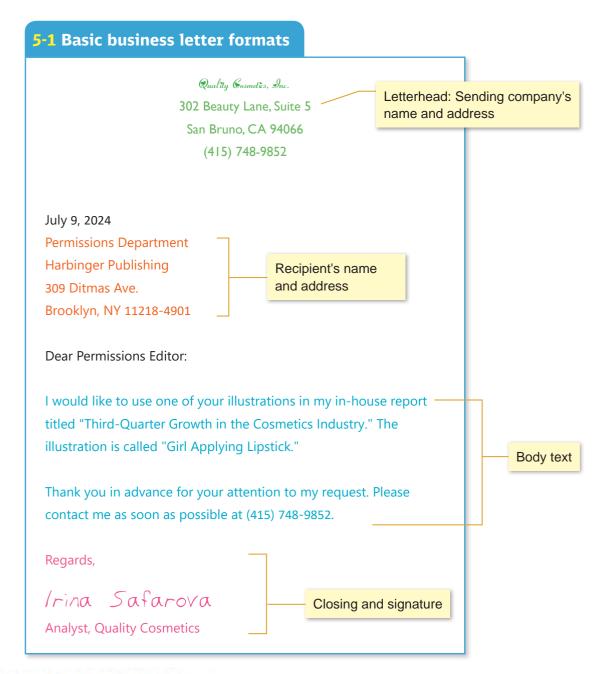


Sample Business Letter

	[Your Name]
	[Address: Street → City → State → Zip Code]
1 blank line	[Phone: Phone # → Fax phone # → Voice mail phone #]
	[Email Address]
1 blank line	[Littali Addiess]
1 blank line	[Date today]
	[Bute today]
3 blank lines	
3 Bidi ik iii ics	
	[Special Mailing Notations]
	[On-Arrival Notations]
1 blank line	
	[Recipient's Name]
	[Company Name]
	[Address]
1 blank line	
1 blank line	Attention [Recipient's Name]
Dialikiliic	D C DAIL AND LANGE CO. A. D.
1 blank line	Ref: [What this letter refers to]
	Door [Decinient's name]
1 blank line	Dear [Recipient's name],
Diarikiiric	[SUBJECT]
1 blank line	[SOBJECT]
Didrik iiric	(First paragraph)
1 blank line	(mos paragraps)
	(Second paragraph)
1 blank line	
	Sincerely,
3 blank lines	[Sign here]
	[Your name]
	[Your title]
1 blank line	
111 11:	[Identification Initials]
1 blank line	Final and war at INI comband
1 blank line	Enclosures: [Number]
Dialikiliic	Co: [Name for Conv.]
	Cc: [Name for Copy] [Name for Copy]
1 blank line	[Manie 101 Copy]
	P.S.

Three Business Letter Styles

1 Before moving on to the three main styles of business writing, look at the example below, which shows how the letter can be formatted.



5-2 Three business letter styles

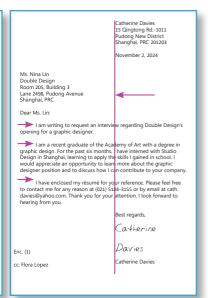
1 block style

2 modified block style

3 indented style



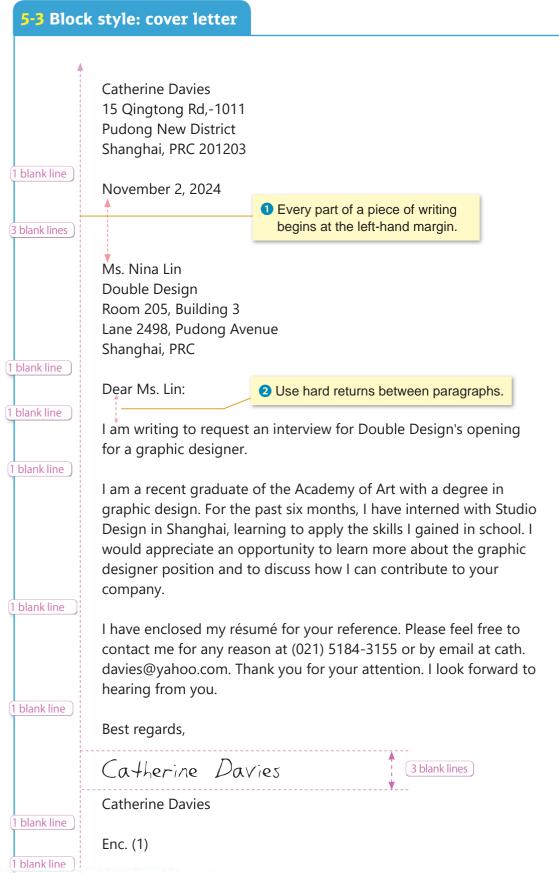




2 Business letter style (1): block style

Block style is a simple format for business letters. In block style, each section of the document or letter **starts at the left margin**. Different sections, such as paragraphs or addresses, are separated by blank lines. Block style is **straightforward** and therefore quite popular. Its main format is as follows:

- 1 Paragraph alignment: Each section of the document or letter starts at the left margin.
- 2 Blank line between different paragraphs: Different sections, like paragraphs or addresses, are separated by blank lines.
 - 1. Between the date and recipient's address: Leave one or three blank lines.
 - 2. Between the **salutation and the first paragraph** of the letter: Leave one blank line.
 - 3. Between **paragraphs in the body** of the letter: Leave one blank line.
 - 4. Between headings and subsequent paragraphs: No blank line.



3 Business letter style (2): modified block style

Modified block style combines the features of **indented** style and **block style**. Its appearance closely resembles indented style, and its most notable characteristics are as follows:

- 1 Paragraphs in the modified block style are **flush left**, and new paragraphs align with the **left margin**. This creates a flush left alignment for the start of each new paragraph.
- 2 Sender's address, date, closing salutations, and signature are indented, similar to indented style.

Modified block style, much like block style, maintains a clear and organized layout. It's also a commonly used format for business letters.

5-4 Modified block style: cover letter



Catherine Davies 15 Qingtong Rd.-1011 **Pudong New District** Shanghai, PRC 201203

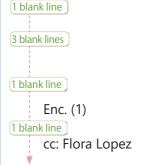
November 2, 2024

2 The return address, the date, and the closing and signature are indented.

I am writing to request an interview for Double Design's opening for a graphic designer. 1 blank line

I am a recent graduate of the Academy of Art with a degree in graphic design. For the past six months, I have interned with Studio Design in Shanghai, learning to apply the skills I gained in school. I would appreciate an opportunity to learn more about the graphic designer position and to discuss how I can contribute to your company.

I have enclosed my résumé for your reference. Please feel free to contact me for any reason at (021) 5184-3155 or by email at cath.davies@yahoo.com. Thank you for your attention. I look forward to hearing from you.



Best regards,

Catherine Davies

Catherine **Davies**

4 Business letter style (3): indented style

Indented style is **more complex** compared to other styles. It's an **older style** of business letter formatting, so many people are familiar with it. In indented style, the first line of each paragraph is indented, as well as certain other parts of the letter.

The parts that require indentation are:

- First line of each paragraph
- Return address
- Date
- Complimentary close
- Signature

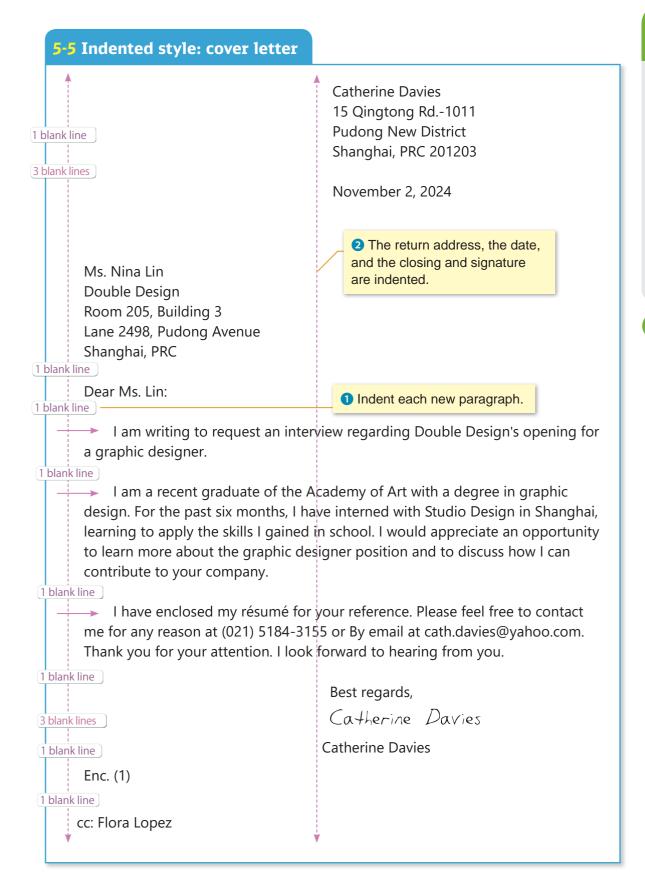
Consistency is key when using indented style. The minimum indentation is usually around **four to five spaces**, although some may use an indentation greater than 3.5 centimeters. The important thing is that the indentation distance remains the same for each paragraph. There are several ways to indent paragraphs:

- Use multiple spacebar presses
- Press the tab key
- Use paragraph formatting options

Typically, you would use the enter key to leave a blank line between paragraphs, but in indented style, paragraphs don't need to be separated by blank lines. Whether or not you choose to leave blanks lines in between paragraphs, the key is to maintain consistency.

Other parts of a business letter also require indentation when using indented style. These parts include the **return address**, **date**, **complimentary close**, and **signature**. The indentation for these parts should start from the right side of the page, slightly to the right of the page's center.

Some consider indented style to be the most traditional format for business letters, while others find it outdated. The layout of indented style on the page might not be as clear, and aligning the indented parts vertically might not be as straightforward. Other formatting options are generally easier to apply. Nowadays, many prefer newer formats, but a significant number of business professionals still prefer using indented style.



The Envelope

Appearances are important in business, and the envelope you choose is the first thing people will see when they receive your correspondence. It is important for your envelope to be clear and professional.

How should I address a business envelope?

The two most important pieces of information on a business envelope are **the sender's** address and **the receiver's address**.

2 The return address (your address)

If your address is not already printed on your envelope, type it in the upper left corner. Try to **avoid writing your address by hand**.

Begin with **your name and title**, then write **your company's address**. Write the address in the open style—without end punctuation. (Commas, dashes, hyphens, and periods indicating abbreviations should still be used.) Don't let the longest line of your address extend farther than half the length or one-third of the height of the envelope.

3 The receiver's address

After you write your address, imagine there is a 1.5-centimeter margin around the rest of the envelope. Don't write in that margin. **Write the receiver's address in the center of the envelope**, keeping it below the bottom of the stamp. Start with the receiver's name and title; then write the address of the receiver in whichever way is customary in his or her country. Write the address in the open style. If you want to mark the letter as "Personal" or "Confidential," you can line these notations up with the edge of the stamp in the top right corner.

If you are using a window envelope, fold your letter so the receiver's address shows in the window.



window envelope

4 Special mailing notations

You can add special mailing notations below the postage stamp to indicate the method of mailing the letter. This notation is commonly written in **all capital letters**.

Some common examples include:

- CERTIFIED MAIL
- SPECIAL DELIVERY
- AIRMAIL

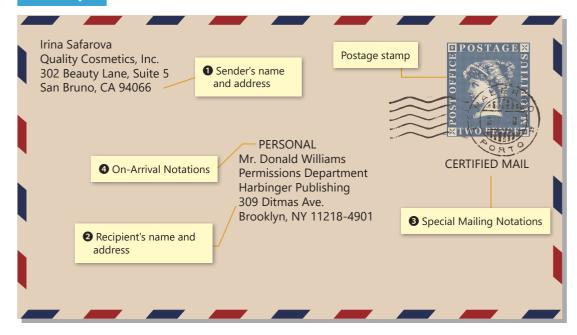
5 On-arrival notations

You can indicate the type of letter next to the recipient's name to inform them about the nature of the letter and how it should be handled. While not mandatory, this notation is considered standard practice in business correspondences. On-arrival notations, like special mailing notations, are written in **all capital letters**.

Here are a few examples:

- PERSONAL
- CONFIDENTIAL
- PRIVATE & CONFIDENTIAL

Envelope

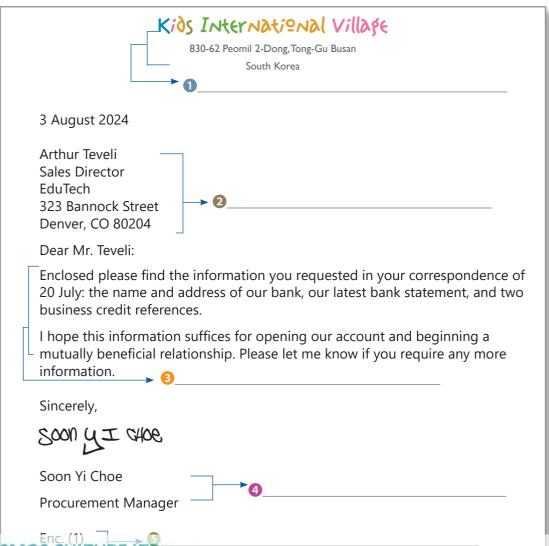


1 Review the concepts

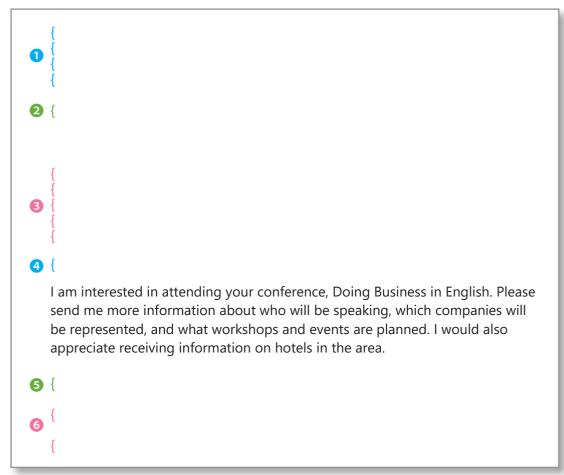
- What does "flush left" mean?
- 2 Which letter format involves lining up each element flush left?
- 3 In which format(s) will the sender's address be on the right side of the paper?
- 4 Which is the oldest format for business writing?
- 6 How does the modified block style combine indented style and block style?
- In the modified block style, which parts of your letter will be on the right side of the paper rather than flush left?
- Where should the receiver's address go on a business envelope?
- What is a "window envelope"?

2 Apply the concepts

1 Label each element in the following letter.



Please write your address, the date, the recipient's name and address, the salutation, the complimentary close, and the signature in block style in this "letter." Use the address of a friend or another business for the recipient's address. The hard returns are marked for you.



3 Address this "envelope." Use your home or business address and a friend's or colleague's name for the receiver.

