

01 What is business writing?

1 Business writing is the type of writing used in today's business world. It includes:



letters



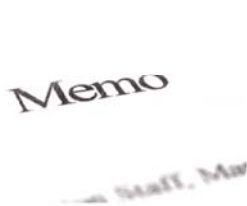
email



faxes



résumés or CVs



memos



presentations



reports



other kinds of documents

2 Business writing is not typically read for pleasure.

Business writing is read for **information** rather than for pleasure or relaxation. Instead of enjoying the plot of a long story, business readers want to get to the end—the **recommendations** or **conclusions**—quickly.

3 Business writing is functional.

Business writing is used to help readers do something. Business writing is often used to make or act on a decision, such as hiring a new employee, changing the team on a project, canceling a partnership with another business, or buying a product or service. Business writing may also be used to communicate information to other people in a speech or meeting.

4 Business writing is read by busy people.

People in the business world don't often have a lot of time to fully read the documents they receive. Instead of reading every word, they will **skim** a document, searching for only the information that is relevant to them. Because of this, business writing should be **clearly formatted** with short paragraphs, headers, and bulleted or numbered lists.

02 How do I begin to write well for business?

- 1 What is a functional document?
- 2 How do people read functional documents?
- 3 Why is it important to make key information stand out visually?
- 4 How can you show readers the structure of your document?
- 5 When should you use a numbered list rather than a bulleted list?

1 Know your readers*

To write a good functional document, you must know who will be reading it and why. Before you write, always:

- 1 Consider who the readers of your document will be.
- 2 Think about their positions and their knowledge of the subject you are writing about.
- 3 Think about what they will want to do with your document.

* More information about how to analyze your readers is presented in Unit 11.

2 Anticipate your readers' questions

Think about the questions your readers might have when they read your document. Good functional documents anticipate readers' questions and answer them. The questions may be:

- 1 Why am I reading this?
- 2 What happened at the meeting, conference, or event?

Often, the questions will be specifically related to what your readers will do with the document; consider this and all the questions they might have while they read.

3 Answer your readers' questions*

After you have thought about what your readers' questions will be, answer them clearly in your document. Anticipated questions can be used to organize a functional document. Answer the most important questions up front.

* More information about how to anticipate and answer your readers' questions is presented in Unit 11.

4 Help readers find information in your document

Because busy readers skim rather than read closely, it is important to make key information stand out visually. Help readers find information by making it "pop."

- 1 Put related information into sections and introduce them with clear headers in bold type.
- 2 Use numbers or font sizes to show the hierarchy of your document, that is, to show how different sections relate to each other and what information is most important.
- 3 Within paragraphs, highlight important information with bulleted lists. If the information should be in a sequence, use a numbered list.

5 Write clearly and directly

Write clear sentences that your readers can understand immediately. Don't use overly formal language; instead, imagine how you would speak to your readers face-to-face and use that as a guide. Usually, use active rather than passive voice.

- ✓ We received your order.
× Your order was received.
- ✓ We decided . . .
× The decision was made.

DISCUSSION & EXERCISE 1

- 1 What is a functional document?
- 2 How do people read functional documents?
- 3 Why is it important to make key information stand out visually?
- 4 How can you show readers the structure of your document?
- 5 When should you use a numbered list rather than a bulleted list?

03 Kinds of Business Writing (1): Indented Style

1 Kinds of business writing

Business writing is formatted differently than academic or creative writing. Often, a company will choose a style to use for all of its internal materials and correspondence. If your company has chosen a style, use it. If you get to choose how to format your writing, there are three main formats from which to choose:



- 1 Indented style
- 2 Block style
- 3 Modified block style

2 What is indented style?

Indented style is somewhat more complicated than other popular styles of business writing. In indented style, new paragraphs in a piece of writing are indented—that is, they begin about 1.5 centimeters to the right of the left margin. Other parts of a business letter are moved farther to the right half of the page. Indented style is one of the oldest formats for business writing currently in use, though other formats are becoming more popular. Indented style is a format that many of today's business people were trained to use.

3 How do I write in indented style?

Basically, writing in indented style means indenting each paragraph in a piece of writing and beginning the return address, date, complimentary close, and signature slightly to the right of the center of the page. Consistency, as usual, is the most important thing to consider when using indented style. It doesn't really matter how large your indents are—they can be five or six spaces or deeper—as long as the indent for each paragraph is the same. The elements of a business letter are treated similarly; their exact placement is less important than keeping all of the elements on the same vertical line down the page.

4 What are the elements of indented style?

1 Indent each paragraph

Indent each paragraph. Indenting means moving the first sentence of each paragraph about 1.5 centimeters to the right of the left margin. (This is the most common indentation, but you may see deeper indents. Different organizations may have different rules for how much to indent paragraphs. The key is to be consistent. Make sure each paragraph is indented the same amount.)

There are different ways to indent paragraphs: You can use the space key to indent a few spaces, you can hit the tab key one time, or you can use the paragraph format function. Usually you will also use a hard return to create a blank line between paragraphs, but you may see business writing in indented style without a hard return between paragraphs. Again, the key is consistency.

2 Indent other parts of a business letter

When writing a business letter in indented style, you should consider other parts of the letter as well. In addition to indenting paragraphs, you should also indent:

- ① The return address
- ② The date
- ③ The complimentary close
- ④ The signature

These parts should begin on the right half of the page. They should not be right justified, but they should stay in one vertical line starting slightly to the right of the center of the page.

5 What are the advantages and disadvantages of indented style?

Indented style is an old style of business writing, so many people are familiar with it. Some people consider this the most traditional style of business writing; others, however, may feel that it is out-of-date.

Some people think indented style doesn't look "clean" on the page. It can be difficult to make sure all your indents and tabs are lined up correctly. Other styles are considered simpler to create.

Basic business letter formats

1 Letterhead: Sending company's name and address

Quality Cosmetics, Inc.
302 Beauty Lane, Suite 5
San Bruno, CA 94066
(415) 748-9852

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

November 2, 2015

2 Recipient's name and address

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

Dear Ms. Lin:

3 Body text

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.

4 Closing and signature

Best regards,
Catherine Davies
Catherine Davies
Enc (1)
cc: Flora Lopez

Permissions Department
Harbinger Publishing
309 Ditmas Ave.
Brooklyn, NY 11218-4901

July 9, 2015

Dear Permissions Editor:

I would like to use one of your illustrations in my in-house report titled "Third-Quarter Growth in the Cosmetics Industry." The illustration is called "Girl Applying Lipstick."

Thank you in advance for your attention to my request. Please contact me as soon as possible at (415) 748-9852.

Regards,
Irina Safarova
Analyst, Quality Cosmetics

Three business letter styles

1 Block style

Catherine Davies
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Catherine Davies
Enc (1)
cc: Flora Lopez

2 Modified block style

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3 Indented style

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Catherine Davies
Catherine Davies
Enc (1)
cc: Flora Lopez

- In the letter written using the indented style, notice that the return address, signature, and closing are all aligned at the same point, just to the right of the center of the paper. Each paragraph is indented, in this case with a tab.

04 Kinds of Business Writing (2): Block Style

1 What is block style?

Block style is a very simple format for business writing. In block style, every part of a piece of writing or letter begins at the left-hand margin. Different parts of a document—for example, new paragraphs or addresses—are separated from the rest of the text using hard returns. Because it is so simple, block style is very popular.

2 How do I write in block style?

Block style is the simplest format for business writing. In block style, different parts of a piece of writing—for example, paragraphs in a memo or addresses in a business letter—are separated by hard returns.

3 What are the elements of block style?

1 Use hard returns between paragraphs

Use one hard return to separate paragraphs in block style (that means hitting the return key two times to leave one blank line between paragraphs).

2 Use hard returns between other parts of your text

You should use more than one blank line to separate other parts of writing in block style. In a personal business letter, for example, you should use four returns (three blank lines) between your address and the receiver's address, but two returns (one blank line) between the salutation and the first paragraph of the letter. In a block style memo with headers and subheads, you should use one blank line between paragraphs but no blank lines between a header or subheader and the paragraph beneath it.

4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of block style?

Block style is very simple to use and to remember. It creates a clean and uncluttered page. It is considered the most modern of all the styles discussed in this chapter.

On the other hand, some companies may be used to the older indented style and may not want to change. Many research and academic organizations still use versions of the indented style. Let's look at a letter and a memo written in block style:

Block style: memo

Memorandum

1 Every part of a piece of writing begins at the left-hand margin

Date: October 6, 2015
 From: Cathy Willis
 To: Design Team
 Subject: Using block style

2 Use hard returns between paragraphs

1 blank line

Starting today, we are going to use block style for all of our inter-office correspondence. This memo will explain the style.

1 blank line

What is block style? Block style is a business writing format. In a memo, don't use two hard returns under a header.

1 blank line

But you can use two between paragraphs.

● Notice how every part of the memo begins at the left-hand margin. Different parts of the memo are separated by blank lines.

Block style: letter

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

1 blank line

November 2, 2015

3 blank lines

Ms. Nina Lin
Double Design
Room 205, Building 3
Lane 2498, Pudong Avenue
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1 blank line

Dear Ms. Lin:

1 blank line

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1 blank line

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1 blank line

Best regards,

Catherine Davies

3 blank lines

Catherine Davies

1 blank line

Enc (1)

1 blank line

cc: Flora Lopez

1 Every part of a piece of writing begins at the left-hand margin

2 Use hard returns between paragraphs

05 Kinds of Business Writing (3): Modified Block Style

1 What is modified block style?

Modified block style combines elements of indented and block styles.

2 How do I write in modified block style?

Modified block style looks very much like indented style. The only major difference is that in modified block style, new paragraphs are flush left. The return address, the date, and the closing and signature are indented as in the indented style.

3 What are the elements of modified block style?

1 Indent elements of the letter

Indent the return address, the date, and the closing and signature so they begin just to the right of the center of the page, keeping all of the elements aligned along the same invisible vertical line.

2 Begin new paragraphs flush left

Instead of indenting new paragraphs, use hard returns to create a line of space and begin each paragraph of the body flush with the left margin.

3 Use hard returns to separate elements of the page

Use two to four hard returns to separate the date and the receiver's address. Use two hard returns to separate:

- 1 The receiver's address and the salutation.
- 2 The salutation and the body of the letter.
- 3 Paragraphs in the body.
- 4 The last paragraph and the complimentary close.

Use four hard returns to separate the complimentary close from your name and signature.

4 What are the advantages and disadvantages of modified block style?

Similar to block style, modified block style looks clean and uncluttered on the page. It is a common choice for business letters. Let's look at a sample of the modified block style.

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Best regards,
Catherine Davies
Catherine Davies

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2
0

Notice how similar this is to the indented style. The only difference is that the paragraphs are not indented; instead, they begin at the left-hand margin.