

# Letters I

## Letters

- Use letters to communicate outside your organization.
- Whereas the memorandum is the primary vehicle for communication within an organization, letters are often used to communicate to individuals outside it, especially in formal and semiformal contexts.
- Letters are an essential part of all business and technical communication because they are more formal and reliable than electronic mail and more precise and permanent than telephone or face-to-face conversations.

### Types of Letters

- The following are some of the most common types of letters written by people in technical fields.
  - Job application letters
  - Acceptance letters
  - Transmittal letters
  - Inquiry letters
  - Technical-information letters
  - Letters of recommendation

### **Format of a Letter**

- If your organization has a specific style for business letters, follow that format. Otherwise, follow the guidelines provided here.
- Business letters are commonly either full-block formatted, with every line starting at the left margin and usually a business letterhead at the top of the page, or modified-block formatted, with the heading and the closing aligned at the center of the page.

### **Elements of a Letter**

- Business letters have the following elements:
  - Heading
  - Date
  - Recipient's address
  - Salutation
  - Body
  - Closing
  - End notations

# PAIGETT HOUSEHOLD PRODUCTS

## Intracompany Correspondence

TO: Herman Wyatt  
FROM: Frank Thurmond

DATE: October 12, 19  
SUBJECT: Tests of Salett 321  
Bottles for StripIt

We have completed the tests you requested to find out whether we can package StripIT Oven Cleaner in bottles made of the new plastic, Salett 321. We conclude that we cannot, chiefly because StripIt attacks and begins to destroy the plastic at 100°F and 125°F. We also found other significant problems.

Summary of key points

Headings

Test Methods

Topic Sentence

To test Salett 321, we used two procedures that are standard in the container industry. First, we tested the storage performance of filled bottles by placing 24 of them in a chamber of filled bottles by placing 24 of them in a chamber for 28 days at 73°F. We stored other sets of 24 bottles at 100°F and 125°F for the same period. Second, to test the response of filled bottles to environmental stress, we exposed 24 of them for 7 days to varying humidity and varying temperatures up to 140°F.

We simultaneously subjected glass bottles filled with StripIt to each of these test conditions.

Heading

Results and Discussion

Heading

Results and Discussion

Topic Sentence

In the 28 day storage tests, we discovered three major problems.

List (begins with the most important item)

The StripIt attacked the bottles at 100°F and 125°F. At 125°F, this attack was particularly serious, causing localized but very severe deformation in several bottles. Most likely, the attack was by the ketone solvents present in StripIT. The deformed bottles leaned, which could cause them to fall off displays in retail stores.

Topic Sentence

The sidewalls sagged slightly at all temperature, making the bottles unattractive.

Topic Sentence

The StripIt yellowed in the plastic bottles stored at 125°F. No discoloration occurred in glass bottles at this temperature. Therefore, we speculate that this discoloration resulted from interaction between StripIt resulted from interaction between StripIt and the resin used in Salett 321. If so, the StripIt probably absorbed harmful impurities from the plastic.

In the environmental test, StripIt attacked the bottles at 140°F.

Heading

Conclusion

Salett 321 is not a suitable container for StripIt.

Please call me if you want additional information about these tests.

## Heading

- If you are using letterhead stationery, include only the date two lines below the bottom of the letterhead.
- Spell out the name of month.
- If you are not using letterhead stationery, begin with your full address (city, street, and zip code) 1 to 1½ inches from the top of the page.
- Spell out address designations, such as Street, Avenue etc.
- Include the date aligned at left with the address, spelling out the name of the month.

## Recipient's Address

- Two to four lines below the date, place the following items:
- The recipient's title (such as *Mr.*, *Ms.*, or *Dr.*) and full name (address a woman who does not have a professional title as *Ms.* unless you know she prefers *Miss* or *Mrs.*; if the recipient does not have a title and you are unsure of his or her gender, omit the title).
- The recipient's job title, if appropriate.
- The name of the company or institution, if appropriate.
- The full address, following the same format as for the address in the heading.
- The recipient's address is always aligned on the left margin.

## Salutation

- Place the salutation two lines below the recipient's address.
- The salutation begins with the word *Dear*, continues with the recipient's title and last name, and ends with a colon.
- If you are unsure of the recipient's gender and the recipient does not have a professional title, omit the title and, instead, use both the first and the last names in the salutation (*Dear Tabassum Khursheed:*).
- If you do not know the name of the recipient of the letter, refer to the department you are writing to (*Dear Technical Support:*).
- Avoid salutations such as *Dear Sir or Madam:*.

## Body

- Start the letter two lines after the salutation. Body paragraphs should be single spaced with a double space between paragraphs.
- Indenting the first line of each paragraph is acceptable but is more informal than the unindented style.
- Be *concise*, direct, and considerate.
- State the letter's purpose in the opening paragraph.
- Include supporting information in a middle paragraph or two, and conclude your letter with a brief paragraph that both establishes goodwill and expresses what needs to be done next.

- If a letter requires more than one page, make sure there are at least two lines of body text on the final page.
- Never use an entire page for just the closing.
- The second page and all subsequent pages must include a heading with the recipient's name, the date, and the page number.

## Closing Phrase

- Write a complimentary closing phrase two lines below the final body paragraph.
- *Yours truly, Sincerely, or Sincerely yours* are common endings for professional letters.
- Capitalize the first letter of the first word of your complimentary closing, and end the complimentary closing with a comma.
- Four lines below the closing phrase, write your full name.
- If you are writing in an official capacity that is not included in the stationery's letterhead, write your title on the next line.
- Your signature goes above your typed name.

## End Notations

- At the bottom of the last page of a business letter, end notations may show who typed the letter, whether any materials are enclosed with the letter, and who is receiving a copy of the letter.
- The typist's initials, in lowercase letters, follow the initials of the author, in capital letters, and a colon or a front-slash (*LCP: ecb* or *LCP/ecb*).
- An enclosure notation--*Enclosure*., *Encl.*, or *Enc.*—alerts the recipient that additional material (such as a resume or a technical article) is included with the letter.
- You can either identify the enclosure or indicate how many pieces there are.

### Example

Enclosure: Article by Ali Bashir

Encl. (2)

Enc. (2)

- In addition to the enclosure notation, always refer to your enclosures explicitly within the text of the letter.
- A copy notation (cc:) lets the recipient of the letter know who else is receiving a copy. Put each recipient of a copy on a separate line.

### Example

cc: Dr. Maria Aalam  
Mr. Waleed Usman

## Job Application Letters

- Write job application letters that identify a specific area of employment, summarize your qualifications for the job, refer to an enclosed résumé, and request the next step of the application process, usually an interview.

### Application letters

- Application letters are usually just one page and consist of three sections:
  - Front Matter
  - Body
  - End Matter

#### Front Matter

- State that you are applying for a specific job title or field.
- Also mention the person who referred you or told you about the job.
- If you learned of the job from an advertisement, mention that.

#### Body

- Explain specifically why you are qualified for the job.
- Describe education and work experience and any other activities that display relevant talents, such as foreign-language proficiencies and leadership or supervisory experience.

#### End Matter

- Refer to your enclosed résumé and express your desire for an interview, stating when and where you will be available for one.
- In addition, invite further inquiries, and state how you can be contacted.

#### Front Matter

May 17, 1995

Mr. David White  
Atria, Inc.  
37 Cochituate Place, #113  
Frammingham, MA 01701

Dear Mr. White:

I will be graduating from MIT in June with a bachelor's degree in computer science and am interested in opportunities at Atria.

I have worked as an intern with Loral Infrared and Imaging Systems for the past two summers in their software engineering department. While there I developed data stream emulation software for the NASA AIRS weather satellite in C on

## **Body**

I will be graduating from MIT in June with a bachelor's degree in computer science and am interested in opportunities at Atria.

I have worked as an intern with Loral Infrared and Imaging Systems for the past two summers in their software engineering department. While there I developed data stream emulation software for the NASA AIRS weather satellite in C on UNIX and Macintosh platforms. At MIT, I worked in the Earth and Planetary Science Department to create a graphic user interfacing system for viewing data sent back by the Magellan space probe orbiting Venus. This experience would be applicable to the creation of the GUI for the up-coming version of Clearcase revision control tools. While I have taken general course work in computer science, I have taken additional courses in media arts, systems design, algorithms, and artificial intelligence.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss my qualifications

## **End Matter**

have taken additional courses in media arts, systems design, algorithms, and artificial intelligence.

I would welcome the opportunity to meet with you and discuss my qualifications for working at Atria. I believe my training has given me the skills to make a valuable contribution. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

## **Acceptance Letters**

- Letters accepting a job not only convey information, but also establish a contractual relationship between you and the organization or person offering you the position.
- Consequently, acceptance letters should accurately restate the key terms of employment.
- Send an acceptance letter as soon as you are absolutely sure that you want to accept the job offer.
- If you need more than two weeks to decide whether or not to accept an offer, telephone or write the person making the offer and ask for an extension of time to decide.

## Format

- Begin the first paragraph by enthusiastically accepting the job.
- Be sure to state the exact title of the job and the salary.
- The second paragraph usually discusses details about the position, especially the date that you will begin work.
- The last paragraph is short statement of goodwill, usually indicating that you are looking forward to starting your new job.
- The following is an example of a standard letter of acceptance.

## Sample

Dear Ms. Lightman:

I am pleased to accept your offer of a position as an Analyst-Programmer I in the Loki Electronics Operating Systems Division at a salary of \$XX,XXX per year.

I have already given my current employer notice of my intention to leave, and will be ready to report for work on the date you mentioned in your letter, June 1.

I look forward to a long and rewarding career with Loki.

## Transmittal Letters

- A transmittal or cover letter accompanies a larger item, usually a document.
- The transmittal letter provides the recipient with a specific context in which to place the larger document and simultaneously gives the sender a permanent record of having sent the material.
- Transmittal letters are usually brief.
- The first paragraph describes what is being sent and the purpose for sending it.
- A longer transmittal letter may summarize key elements of the proposal in one or two sentences and provide the recipient with other useful information.
- End transmittal letters with a one-sentence paragraph that establishes goodwill by thanking or complimenting the recipient.
- The following document is an example of a formal transmittal letter accompanying a grant proposal to the National Science Foundation.
- The structure of the letter, the use of language, such as *herewith*, and the use of the passive voice reflect common conventions for submitting formal scientific proposals.

## Sample Letter

Dear Dr. Schmick:

I submit herewith a proposal in support of a research program entitled "Problems of Excess Argon in Silicates" to be performed under my direction in Euphoria State University's Earth Science Laboratory.

I am requesting funding in the amount of \$72,134 in total estimated costs for the period July 1, 1998 through June 30, 1999.

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Questions relating to any technical aspects of the proposal should be directed to me. Questions of an administrative nature may be directed to Ruben Perez, Associate Director of Sponsored Programs, at (617) 868-9971.

Your consideration of my proposal is greatly appreciated.

## Revision

- Letters
  - Job Application Letters
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