

# HOW TO WRITE LETTERS

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## Keeping the content relevant

There are certain expectations when it comes to writing specific types of letters. If you include irrelevant things, they will stand out far more than in other types of writing. EFL students really seem to struggle with this and include all kinds of unnecessary information in their letters. Take this excerpt from a letter of application, for example:

*“I am a very responsible person. I have three dogs and I take care of them every day. One of them is called Allie, one is called Sam, and the other one is Steven. Allie is brown, Sam is also brown, and Steven is white. They are not related. I like to take care of my dogs very much. I also like other animals too.”*

What’s wrong with this? Contrary to what you may think, not absolutely everything. The student succeeds in showing she is responsible by using an example to support this claim. But, she then includes some very irrelevant information about her dogs. If she was applying for a job working with animals, then she might have gotten away with providing so much information about her pets, but in this instance, she was applying for a job at a bank. So, whatever form of letter you’re writing, remember to keep the content relevant.



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## Formatting

Everything you write reveals something about you. Like it or not, you will be judged on how you format your letter, so take control of the impression you make by adhering to the necessary conventions. As you will see in the example letters later in this book, letters always follow a specific format. Here's a brief look at some of the ways letters are formatted:

- 1) Your address always goes at the top right of the page.
- 2) Leave a small gap, and put today's date under your address.
- 3) The recipient's address should be written at the top left, starting below where your address concluded.
- 4) Letters always begin with "Dear [insert recipient's name]".  
If you don't know the specific person you are writing to, use "Dear Sir or Madam".
- 5) When you sign off, you should always sign your name in ink.
- 6) Below your signature, type your name.
- 7) Beneath your name you should include your job title and the name of your company (e.g, Head of Sales, Microsoft).

The diagram on the next page will give you a better idea of how a letter should be formatted from a visual perspective.

1. Write **your own address** here.

2. Write **the date** here.

3. Write the **address of the recipient** here.

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4. Use **Dear Sir or Madam** if you don't know the specific person you're writing to.

A large rectangular area consisting of 12 horizontal grey lines, intended for writing the body of the letter.

5. **Sign your name** in ink here.

6. **Type your name** here.

7. Write **your job title & company** here.

## Leaving space on the page

Imagine how you'd feel if you opened a letter to find a page tightly packed with words. I'm sure you wouldn't be desperate to read it. The best way to create space on the page is to adhere to the standard formatting rules and leave spaces between paragraphs. For examples of this, see the sample letters.

## Ensuring formality

There is no one way to ensure formality, but there are several elements that can work together to achieve the desired result. I have listed some of them below but remember that the most important thing is to get the basics right and write clearly, so don't get so caught up in these suggestions that you forget the fundamentals.

- 1) Avoid contractions. For example, write: "I am writing to you", rather than "I'm writing to you".
- 2) Avoid informal words. For example, "totally", "loads", "awesome". The best way to achieve this is to be precise in your word choice and opt for words that are less emotional. For example, instead of "awesome", you might choose "helpful".
- 3) Avoid idioms and figures of speech, for example: "better late than never", "I'm up to my neck in it".
- 4) Do not use abbreviations such as "info", "Aug", "grad".
- 5) Replace informal intensifiers such as "really" and "so" with more formal ones such as "extremely" and "highly".
- 6) Avoid the word "anyway". Some good alternatives include, "however", "nevertheless", and, "that being said".