

FOR **Work** **Learning** SERIES

Writing
LETTERS
AT WORK

Booklet

3



Name: _____

Writing LETTERS AT WORK

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Introduction

Information and skills you will acquire

Writing Letters at Work is one of a valuable and user-friendly series of easy-to-read booklets created specially to help you develop at work. The materials have been created from actual experience in workplace training. Experts from Workbase Training and the Campaign for Learning have pooled their knowledge and experience to involve you in learning new skills and building on those you already have. The booklet is divided into clear *sections*, containing specially devised *activities* and a *mini project*, to allow you to practise as you learn.

This workbook looks at writing letters at work. Email is now the usual way of communicating both inside and outside the workplace, however, you may still need to write letters in certain situations. Some of the skills you will acquire will apply to writing emails too.

Writing Letters at Work will enable you to:

- Understand the difference between formal and informal letters.
- Structure and lay out letters correctly.
- Choose the right words in order to get the desired message across.
- Draft and write short letters.
- You may want to work your way through the booklet from start to finish or focus on an area of interest.
- Once you have completed the questionnaire on page 4 you will be able to see clearly which topics you need most help with, and which areas you can safely leave out.
- The questionnaire will also allow you to create your own learning plan, for which an example and space is provided on page 5.
- You may want to ask your supervisor or another colleague for their views on the areas you could work on, or for help with the activities in the booklet.
- As you may want to use the booklet for future reference, you may want to write the answers out in rough first and then write them in the booklet.

Getting the most out of this booklet

Questionnaire

This questionnaire is to enable you to think about what letter writing skills you need most help with.

Tick boxes as appropriate

What do you need most help with?

SECTION 1: Identifying formal and informal letters

Choosing when to write a letter

SECTION 2: The format for laying out a letter

How to structure a letter

Addressing an envelope

SECTION 3: Starting and ending letters

SECTION 4: Choosing the right words

SECTION 5: Drafting and editing letters

How often do you need this information/do this in your job?				How confident do you feel?		
A	B	C	D	1	2	3
not at all	not very often	fairly often	frequently	not at all	fairly	very

The most important areas for you to concentrate on are those which you have marked B, C, D, and 1 or 2.

Section I

GETTING STARTED: TYPES OF LETTERS

Identifying formal and informal letters

A formal letter would address you by your title and surname (e.g. Mr Smith or Ms Jones), whereas an informal letter would address you by your first name.

Formal letters very often have some official purpose. They can cover a range of subjects, such as asking for information, giving information, offering an appointment, explaining requirements or new legislation, or making a complaint. Most business letters are formal, although formal letters may also be exchanged between individuals.

An informal letter has a friendlier tone and will be written in similar words to spoken English. Informal letters are usually more personal. You would generally write informal letters to people you know. Official letters can be written in an informal style if you know the person or people you are writing to.

Examples of a formal and an informal letter are provided in Section 2.

Activity I

Look at the following list of different types of letters. Which do you think would be formal (more official) and which would be informal letters (more personal)?

A letter to	formal	informal
1. A former colleague, inviting them to a presentation		
2. Your supervisor, asking for annual leave		
3. A company, asking for a job application		
4. Your bank manager, asking for an overdraft		
5. The council, about services they provide		
6. A supplier, with a query about the photocopier		
7. A relative, thanking them for a present		

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 22.

Activity 2

Now think about the letters you have to read or write at work. Make a list in the table below and state whether they are formal or informal letters. Use a typical day's or week's post to help you think about this activity.

Letters I have to read or write at work	formal	informal

FEEDBACK: Here are some examples with which you can compare your answers.

- Letters to make appointments would be formal.
- Letters or notes to colleagues you know well would be informal, but if you were writing about something important, such as new safety equipment, you would write a formal letter.
- A short letter to a colleague you know well, about a subject like the back gate being locked, could be informal if there were no safety or other important implications.

Choosing when to write a letter

Before you begin to write a letter think about whether writing is the best way to get your message across.

Writing is suitable if:

- it needs to be on record
- complex material, such as figures, is involved
- you want someone to carry out a specific action
- you can't contact the person any other way.

Writing is not suitable if:

- you need to discuss something
- you think that the situation is sensitive
- you feel a more personal touch is needed.

It is often better to explain something face to face because the other person is then able to ask questions. You can also get immediate feedback this way.

Activity 3

Listed above are some of the reasons for writing a letter and some of the reasons for contacting someone in person or by telephone. Write down any other reasons you can think of.

When it would be better to write a letter

When it would be better to telephone or meet face to face

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 22.

Activity 4

Look at the following situations, then decide whether each person should send a letter or use some other form of communication.

Situation 1

John got up on Wednesday morning to find a letter in the post asking him to come for a job interview on Friday of that week. He was very pleased because he was really interested in this post. He was asked to confirm that he would be attending the interview.

What is the best way for John to contact the company?
Give reasons.

Situation 2

Jane is an office administrator. A new photocopier was installed three months ago but it has never worked properly. Jane has made a number of complaints and the engineers have been out to repair it several times.

Jane is now at the end of her tether and wants some immediate action. She plans to contact the Service Manager directly to make an official complaint about the service and demand that action be taken now.

How should she complain? Give reasons.

*You will find the feedback to
this activity on page 22.*

Key Learning Points

- Formal letters usually have some official purpose. They are generally sent to or between organisations or businesses, although formal letters may also be exchanged between individuals. They cover a range of subjects, such as asking for information, offering appointments or making a complaint.
- Informal letters are usually more personal. They are exchanged between people who know one another. The style is less official and more similar to spoken English.
- Before you write a letter make sure that this is the best way of communicating. This will depend on a number of factors, including: how quickly a response is needed; the sensitivity of the situation; whether or not something has to be explained or discussed; whether or not a written record or some action is needed.

Section 2 LAYING OUT AND STRUCTURING LETTERS

The format for laying out a letter

Look at the examples of formal and informal letters below and opposite. You will notice several features in the way they are set out.

- Your address should be written at the top right-hand corner unless you are using your organisation's writing paper which includes a printed address.
 - The address of the person you are writing to should be written below your address and on the left-hand side of the page.
 - The date on which you are writing the letter should be placed below the address of the person you are writing to.
 - No punctuation (such as commas or full stops) is used in the addresses, the greeting or the ending.
- The main body of the letter always has punctuation.

Look at some copies of letters sent out by your organisation. Notice how the letter is laid out and where the addresses and date are positioned.

Example of a letter written in a formal style

Rainbow Industries
10 Highgate
London N12 UB2

Tracy Dobson
Personnel Officer
134 High Road
London SW7

4 February 2008

Dear Ms Dobson

Teambuilding Development Programme, 28–30 April 2008

Following our telephone conversation of 3 February about the above programme, I enclose a draft course outline for your information.

I have also attached a specimen copy of our client contract as requested.

I will telephone you during the week beginning 8 February to discuss the above programme.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Rainbow
Development Consultant

Example of a letter written in an informal style

Rainbow Industries
10 Highgate
London N12 UB2

Tracy Dobson
Personnel Officer
134 High Road
London SW7

4 February 2008

Dear Tracy

Teambuilding Development Programme, 28–30 April 2008

Thank you for telephoning me yesterday about the above programme. As promised, here is a draft course outline and also a specimen copy of our client contract for you to have a look at.

I will ring you at the beginning of next week to discuss the course outline.

I hope your presentation went well!

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely

Michelle Rainbow
Development Consultant

How to structure a letter

Every letter needs a structure; it helps the reader to understand the letter without having to reread it. Almost all letters can be structured in the following way.

Part 1: Why you are writing/Introduction

The first paragraph should identify the subject matter of the letter and state the reason for writing.

If you are answering a request, state what the request was.

If you are replying to a letter, the most straightforward method is:

'Thank you for your letter dated 22 January 1999.'

If you are initiating a contact, refer to the event that prompted you to write.

Example: 'I understand from a colleague of mine, Horace Smith, that you would like some more information on ...'

Part 2: Details and supporting information

This is the meat of the letter. If there is a lot of information and you want the points to come across clearly, you may find it useful to give each paragraph a heading.

Part 3: What happens next and concluding remarks

You will need to make sure that your letter indicates:

- what action needs to be taken
- when it is to be taken
- who is expected to take it.

If you end a letter at the action stage, it may sound abrupt. The letter should end with some concluding remarks to ensure a friendly tone.

Example: 'I hope this gives you all the information you require. Please telephone me on the above number if you would like to discuss anything.'

Sample letter structure

Your name and address if not on letter-headed paper
(Some organisations require references and computer codes, e.g. Our ref.pc244)

Reader's name
Reader's job title
Reader's address

(Date can be written here or below your name and address)

Start of letter
Example: Dear Miss Elliot
(See page 14.)

Part 1
Why you are writing the letter

Part 2
Details and supporting information

Part 3
What will happen next

End of letter
Example: Yours sincerely/Yours faithfully
(See page 14.)

Activity 5

Look at copies of letters at work and compare them with the structure shown above. Why do you think this structure helps to produce clear and easy-to-understand letters?

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 22.

Addressing an envelope

There are three ways of addressing envelopes:

- using printed labels
- using window envelopes, through which the address on the letter can be seen
- writing the address on the envelope.

Writing an address on an envelope

Start about halfway down the envelope to leave space at the top for the postmark.

The postcode should always be the last line of the address. This helps the Royal Mail to sort the letter more easily.

No punctuation is used in the address and the lines are not indented. This means that you start each line directly underneath the one above, rather than staggering them. (This is not a strict rule, but is generally modern practice.)

Look at the example below:

Workbase Training
Finchley House Business Centre
707 High Road
Finchley
LONDON
N12 0BT

Key Learning Points

- There is a standard format for laying out letters and addressing envelopes. Generally, both formal and informal letters follow this format.
- You are more likely to achieve the purpose of your letter if you follow a basic three-part structure. The three parts cover: why you are writing; the main details; what action is needed.
- Using a structure helps the reader to understand the purpose of the letter.

Section 3

STARTING AND ENDING LETTERS

Greetings and signatures

If you know the person you are writing to, you should use their title and surname (e.g. 'Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Ms Brown') and end with 'Yours sincerely'.

If you do not know the person you are writing to, you should begin with 'Dear Sir/Madam' and end with 'Yours faithfully'.

You should sign your name directly underneath 'Yours faithfully' or 'Yours sincerely'. Below your signature you should print your name because signatures can be difficult to read. It is usual to include your preferred title in brackets after your name.

Example: Patsy McBride (Mrs)

If it is a business letter always put your title or position underneath your printed name.

Example: Patsy McBride (Mrs)
Office Manager

Activity 6

Write the correct ending for letters which start as follows:

1. Dear Mrs Green, _____
2. Dear Ms Donovan, _____
3. Dear Miss Graham, _____
4. Dear Sir, _____
5. Dear Mr Cornelius, _____
6. Dear Madam, _____

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 22.

Opening and closing sentences

The first and last sentences of letters are very important. The opening sentence should identify straight away why you are writing the letter. The closing sentence should leave the reader feeling that the letter is complete rather than left in the air.

Some common phrases used to start letters

Thank you for the 2008 brochure ...

I was pleased to hear that ...

Thank you for your letter dated ... concerning/regarding ...
I saw your advertisement in today's Herald.
Following our telephone conversation of (date) ...
I am working at ...
Here are the course materials as promised.
I saw a colleague of yours at ...
I would like to apply for the post of ...

Some common phrases used to end letters

I look forward to hearing from you.
Please let me know if you need further information.
Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions.
Best wishes.

Key Learning Points

- If you begin a letter with the person's name, you should end it with 'Yours sincerely'.
- If you begin a letter with 'Dear Sir/Madam', you should end it with 'Yours faithfully'.
- Print your name and your title directly underneath your signature.
- Use the opening sentence to state the purpose of your letter. If you start with the right opening line it is easier to continue the letter.
- Choose a suitable sentence to finish your letter. This will give it a friendly tone even when you are writing a formal business letter.

Section 4 CHOOSING THE RIGHT WORDS

Tips for writing effectively

Your letters will be more effective if you take time to choose suitable words and make your writing easy to understand. Here are some tips to help you:

- Think about who will read your letter and what they want to know. This will help you to achieve a favourable reaction.
- Use everyday words wherever possible, e.g. 'about' instead of 'in respect of'.
- Keep your sentences short.
- Limit yourself to one idea per sentence.
- Avoid jargon and technical language. If you have to use technical words to a non-technical person, explain them.
- Use short words unless longer words are more precise.
- Leave out unnecessary words.
- Be specific – e.g. about the time, place, action or quantity required.

Activity 7

Fill in the blank spaces in the column headed 'when you really mean'.

Using short words

Why use ...	when you really mean ...?
1. Please advise me	
2. Please endeavour to	
3. Included herewith	
4. We will commence	
5. If you require	

Being specific

Why use ...	when you really mean ...?
6. As soon as possible	
7. Let us know sometime	

Leaving out unnecessary words

Why use ...	when you really mean ...?
8. Due to the fact that	
9. In order to	
10. With reference to	
11. At a later time	
12. Just recently	

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Key Learning Points

- Always use a short word unless a longer word is more precise.
- Be specific about dates, numbers, etc.
- Use everyday words where possible.
- Keep your sentences short and avoid unnecessary words.
- Think about your reader's reaction to your words and the tone of your letter.

Section 5 DRAFTING AND EDITING LETTERS

Draft first, edit second

There are certain key points to remember when you are drafting a letter. The most important point is to be clear about why you are writing the letter and what you want to achieve. If you are not clear about your purpose, it is unlikely that you will include the right points or use the right tone.

When you draft your letter you need to:

- use the structure for writing a letter shown in Section 2
- write down all the points you want to make as they come into your head
- leave any checking of spelling and changing words or phrases until the editing stage.

Once you have all your points down on paper, you should then go back and edit your letter.

To edit your letter you need to:

- change any words you're not happy with
- check the spelling
- shorten sentences where necessary
- change the order of your points if necessary
- take out anything that is not relevant to the letter.

Remember, letters are often changed three or four times before the writers are happy with them. As always, practice makes perfect: the more letters you write, the more confident you will feel.

Activity 8

Your name is Craig Edwards and you work as an Assistant in the Customer Services Section of Toppoint Washing Machines. Your manager has passed a letter on to you (see page 19). Read the letter first of all then draft a reply using the following notes.

Service Engineers have been out four times to Mrs Dubber but have found no one in. The last visit was on 5 January 2008.

On the last visit, a month ago, a message was left asking Mrs Dubber to contact the Service Section but she did not do so.

You want to arrange to repair the machine on Monday, 17 February at 11 am and you need Mrs Dubber to confirm that she or someone else will be at home.

Claims for damage to carpets, etc. can only be settled by household insurance. Toppoint is not liable for the damage.

You will find the feedback to this activity on page 23.

Use a separate sheet of paper to draft your reply.

Letter from Mrs Dubber, to be answered by you (Activity 8)

199 Walnut Tree Avenue
South Pimms
Herts

Service Manager
Toppoint Washing Machines
Dallow Road
Belwyn City
Herts SG44 2AJ

5 February 2008

Dear Sir

I am writing to you to sort out a problem I have had for several weeks. The door of my washing machine bursts open while in wash cycle and the spin dryer does not work.

My kitchen and hall carpets have been soaked and ruined and there is mould growing on the kitchen wall. I cannot wash clothes for my five children. The rooms are still damp.

I find this disgraceful and trust that you will replace our carpets and pay for redecoration.

I first contacted your Service Section in the middle of December and nothing has happened. I have rung your office several times. I am not on the phone and have to walk nearly a mile to a call box.

Please contact me straight away with your reply.

Yours faithfully

Phyllis Dubber (Mrs)

Checklist for drafting a letter

Below is a list of points to help you to draft a clear letter and achieve your purpose in writing.

Have you:

- used the right tone?
- written the date below your address or your reader's address?
- included the name, title and address of the person you are writing to?
- used the correct name or title in the greeting?
- stated clearly what the purpose of your letter is?
- used a new paragraph for new points?
- proof-read for spelling and punctuation errors?
- written in a logical order?
- made sure that your writing is easy to read and that there are no crossings out?
- used the correct ending?

Next time you write a letter remember to use the checklist.

Key Learning Points

- Be clear about why you are writing and what you want to achieve.
- Remember to draft your letter first. Don't expect it to be perfect straight away.
- It is important to write clearly and concisely so that your reader can understand what you are saying.
- Once you have written a draft you can begin to edit your letter for spelling, logical order and appropriate tone.
- Don't try to draft and edit at the same time.
- Try to get somebody to read over your letters and comment on them.
- Use a checklist to make sure that you haven't missed anything out.

FeedBack toActivities

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 1

- | | | |
|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Informal | 2. Formal | 3. Formal |
| 4. Formal | 5. Formal | 6. Formal |
| 7. Informal | | |

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 3

Here are some points you might have made. You may also have included other points:

When it would be better to write a letter

1. Particularly careful wording is needed.
2. The subject needs to be carefully considered before a reply is made.
3. It is a matter that is legally binding.
4. The subject has been formally finalised.

When it would be better to telephone or meet face to face

1. When the other person may want to ask questions.
2. It is a simple and straightforward message.
3. It does not need to be recorded.
4. You want to see someone's reaction, e.g. body language or expression.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 4

Situation 1

John needs to contact the company by telephone. The response has to be quick and a letter might not arrive in time to let the company know that he will be attending the interview on Friday. John could also ask any questions about the arrangements at the same time.

Situation 2

Jane needs to put her complaint in writing. This is because all her points need to be recorded so that she can refer back to them at a later date if necessary. Also, people are more likely to respond to a written complaint.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 5

1. It is easy to identify what the letter is about at the start.
2. The ideas are likely to be in a logical order.
3. The letter flows easily.
4. Any action needed is set out at the end of the letter.
5. The action follows on from the main part of the letter.
6. You are more likely to achieve the purpose of your letter if you follow the three-part structure.

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 6

- | | |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Yours sincerely | 2. Yours sincerely |
| 3. Yours sincerely | 4. Yours faithfully |
| 5. Yours sincerely | 6. Yours faithfully |

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 7

Using short words

1. Please tell me
2. Please try to
3. Included
4. We will begin
5. If you need

Being specific

6. By 31 May
7. Please could we have your reply by 21 May

Leaving out unnecessary words

8. Because
9. To
10. About
11. Later
12. Recently

FEEDBACK TO ACTIVITY 8

The Customer Service Assistant's reply to Mrs Dubber

	Toppoint Washing Machines Dallow Road Belwyn City Herts SG44 2AJ Tel. 0800 456789
Mrs P. Dubber 199 Walnut Tree Avenue South Pimms Herts	7 February 2008
Dear Mrs Dubber	
Thank you for your letter dated 5 February 2008. The Service Manager has asked me to reply, as I am responsible for arranging the Service Engineers' appointments.	
We are very sorry that you have had to wait so long for your washing machine to be repaired. Our Service Engineers have called at your house on four separate occasions and, unfortunately, nobody was in when we called. On the last visit, on 5 January, the engineer left a note for you to contact us on the above telephone number, but we did not hear anything from you.	
We would like to make another appointment for Monday, 17 February at 11 am. Please ring me on the above number to let me know whether you will be at home on that date.	
Unfortunately, Toppoint Washing Machines cannot compensate you for damage to your carpets and interior decoration. You should claim for these on your household contents insurance.	
If you have any problems or queries please telephone me on the above number. Could you also ring me to confirm that this appointment is convenient.	
Yours sincerely	
Craig Edwards Customer Services Assistant	

Do you:
Feel nervous when someone asks you to write a letter?
Get confused about what to include?
Feel unsure about how to present the letter?
Try to avoid writing the letter altogether?

If you answered 'yes' to one or more of these questions, you will find that the activities in this booklet will help you with the following:
Knowing and achieving your objective in writing the letter.
Deciding what to say and what to leave out.
Structuring the letter using a simple three-part technique.
Using headings and paragraphs.
Starting off and ending the letter.

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Finchley
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Workbase Training is a national specialist organisation for workforce learning and development. These booklets are based on work with over 20,000 employees within 120 organisations since 1980. Workbase is a not-for-profit charitable company, limited by guarantee, and is supported by the Confederation of British Industry and the Trades Union Congress and other unions.

The Campaign for Learning is a national charity seeking to create an appetite for learning in everyone. Its four areas of work are Workplace Learning & Skills, Family Learning, Learning to Learn and influencing policy. It co-ordinates Learning at Work Day and a Family Learning Festival each year. The Campaign is supported by the government, a wide range of businesses, local authorities, voluntary sector organisations and individuals.

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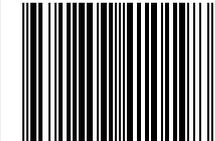
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