

# COMMERCIAL CORRESPONDENCE

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FOR STUDENTS OF ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Charles Love  
Joseph Tinervia

SECOND EDITION

McGraw-Hill



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# UNIT 1

## THE PARTS OF THE BUSINESS LETTER AND THEIR PLACEMENT

### DISCUSSION

Commercial correspondence is a vital factor in making the world of business run smoothly and efficiently. This correspondence may take many forms. The business letter is the most common form. It includes such different types of communication as interoffice memorandums, reports, telegrams, cables, résumés, and printed forms that are used for particular purposes (such as order blanks and routing slips).

### The Business Letter

To make commercial correspondence as effective and productive as possible, one must know and follow the conventional, established forms for each type of correspondence. Since the business letter is the most frequently used business communication, you should be familiar with the main parts of such a letter:

1. The *heading*, which includes the name of the firm, its address, and the date. Most companies use stationery with printed letterheads. However, the date line, an important part of the heading, must be added to the letterhead to make the heading complete.
2. The *inside address*, which includes the name, title, and complete address of the person to whom the letter is sent.
3. The *salutation*, which is a greeting to the addressee.
4. The *body of the letter*, which may vary in length from a few sentences to several pages.
5. The *closing*.
6. The *signature*, which usually includes the job title of the writer.
7. *Special notations*, which include references to any relevant information: the names of any persons who are to receive copies of the letter, an enclosure notation if additional material is sent with the letter, the initials of the secretary who typed the letter, and so on.

Study the two examples of business letters that follow. The first is on letterhead stationery and is written in behalf of the firm for which the writer works. The second is a business letter that is written for the correspondent's personal business. She has supplied her own heading to provide the information that would be given in a printed letterhead.

HEADING



# Hotel Radcliffe

1600 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, New York 10019

LETTERHEAD

DATE LINE → September 14, 1980

Mrs. Ella Lindstrom ← ADDRESSEE  
President, Houston Branch  
Business Education Teachers of America  
1443 South 25th Street  
Houston, TX 77016

→ INSIDE ADDRESS

Dear Mrs. Lindstrom: ← SALUTATION

As you requested, I am enclosing our schedule of rates for delegates to your national convention. Please note the information on page two about the special rates for groups of ten or more. These rates will be in effect for members of your organization.

A number of the important sessions for your convention will be held in the facilities of our hotel, Hotel Radcliffe is centrally located for all of the other meeting places that have been selected by the Business Education Teachers of America. Hotel Radcliffe is in the heart of New York City, convenient to the major shopping areas, theaters, and many fine restaurants--including our own famous Greenhouse Room.

I look forward to receiving your reservations, but please remember that early reservations are advised. We have only a limited amount of space available.

→ BODY OF LETTER

CLOSING ← Sincerely yours,

SIGNATURE BLOCK ←

*Edward Burton*

Edward Burton  
Reservations Manager

EB/sgd }  
Enc.

→ SPECIAL NOTATIONS

When you write a business letter, use only one side of the paper. If the letter is too long for one page, use as many additional sheets as necessary, but never use the other side of a sheet. Commercial correspondence should be typed. This will be no problem with any letters written at work. Any business letters that you write for yourself should also be typed. If this is impossible, write legibly and neatly. If the first version of your letter is not neat, copy it over. Remember that the appearance of your letter—not the content—gives the recipient the important *first impression* of you. A sloppy letter will not create a favorable reaction.

Leave good margins at both the right and left sides of the letter—usually 1½-inch margins on each side. Never write to the edge of the page.

Be as brief as possible. Do not include any more information than the addressee needs. Unnecessary information only weakens the forcefulness of the letter and wastes both your time and the recipient's. A business letter should be long only when a great deal of information must be included. Consider these two approaches to the same request:

**Too Wordy:** I am interested in obtaining any information you can supply about the relative differences in material and construction for the various makes of your office equipment. Since my company is opening a new branch office, I must have all applicable information about prices, sizes, and availability of various pieces of equipment: desks, swivel chairs, filing cabinets, and movable typing stands.

**Clear and Brief:** Please send me information about prices, sizes, availability, and the relative differences in material and construction of your office equipment. I am particularly interested in desks, swivel chairs, filing cabinets, and movable typing stands.

The first example is unnecessarily wordy (60 words) and contains unessential information. For instance, the recipient of the letter does not need to know that your company is opening a branch office. The second example is a shorter, clearer version (34 words) of the same message. In your effort to be brief, however, do not be incomplete. Be sure that you have included all the necessary information.

It is wise to make a file copy of every business letter you write, whether it is a letter written for your company or for yourself. A correspondence file is especially useful when it becomes necessary to check on the course of a business transaction. If, for example, you receive a complaint that a certain order was not billed at the price you quoted in a letter three months earlier, you will need to check a copy of that letter and the price you quoted before you know if the complaint is valid.

Always be accurate when you write a business letter. Check your facts before you write, and proofread the finished letter carefully to make sure it does not contain any typographical errors. If you type your own letter, proofread it before you sign it, checking all the information in the letter—including the spelling of the addressee's name and the accuracy and completeness of the address. If a secretary types the letter for you, check its accuracy before you sign it. If the price for a certain item is typed as \$29.95 when it is actually \$39.95, you'll definitely have a problem when the addressee orders that item and encloses payment—a check for \$29.95. If your letter promises delivery of a shipment on March 20 when you meant March 30, you'll have a dissatisfied customer on your hands on March 21. Check the facts before you write and proofread the letter before you sign it. You will save time and energy, avoid errors, and keep a customer happy.

HEADING

{ 211 East 34th Street  
New York, New York 10016  
November 23, 1980

DATE LINE

Mr. Harold Rossi → ADDRESSEE  
Calamari and Anderson Realtors  
24 East 88th Street  
New York, New York 10028

INSIDE ADDRESS

Dear Mr. Rossi: → SALUTATION

I am interested in the residential properties, located in Long Island, northern New Jersey, and southern Connecticut, that you advertised in the New York Times on Sunday. Please send me the brochure, mentioned in the advertisement, which describes these properties in detail.

→ BODY OF LETTER

I am particularly interested in finding a three-bedroom home that is within one hour's commuting distance from midtown Manhattan.

CLOSING ← Very truly yours,

SIGNATURE BLOCK

{ *Maria A. Lopez*  
Maria A. Lopez

## The Envelope

The envelope is an essential part of the business letter, and its appearance should reflect favorably on both the company and the writer of the letter. The envelope stationery should match the letterhead stationery in color, quality, and weight.

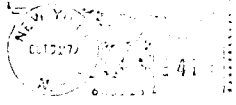

The names and addresses of both the sender and the addressee must be complete and accurate. In the United States and Canada, the ZIP Code (which is an essential part of the address) should be used both in the letter itself and on the envelope. Failure to include the ZIP Code on the envelope will often delay the receipt of the letter. Business firms normally use envelopes with printed return addresses, but whenever plain envelopes are used, this information must be added by the sender.

The following information should always be included on the envelope of any letter:

1. The *sender's name*. If you are using an envelope that has the printed name of your company, you should add your name above the name of the firm.
2. The *return address*.
3. The *name of the addressee*. If you do not know the name of the recipient, use the title of the person, such as "Manager, Northeast Sales District" or "Director, Advertising Department."
4. The *envelope address* (the recipient's address).
5. The *necessary postage*, either in stamps or franked by a postage meter.

*Special Mailing Notations*, such as "Special Delivery" or an attention notation (see p. 91), may be used for some envelopes, but most business mail does not require such notations.

Examine the two illustrations that follow. The one below shows an envelope, printed with the name and return address of the company, completed and ready to be mailed. The second, on page 6, shows the correct use of the above information on a plain envelope.

Edward Burton, Reservations Manager		→	SENDER	
	<b>Hotel Radcliffe</b>	→	RETURN ADDRESS	
	1600 Avenue of the Americas New York, New York 10019			↑ POSTAGE (METERED MAIL)
ADDRESSEE	←	Mrs. Ella Lindstrom		
ENVELOPE ADDRESS	←	{ President, Houston Branch Business Education Teachers of America 1443 South 25th Street Houston, TX 77016		

Maria A. Lopez → SENDER

211 East 34th Street

New York, New York 10016

→ RETURN ADDRESS



POSTAGE  
(STAMP)

ADDRESSEE ←

Mr. Harold Rossi

ENVELOPE

ADDRESS ←

{ Calamari and Anderson Realtors

{ 24 East 88th Street

{ New York, New York 10028

## BUSINESS USAGE: CAPITALIZATION

In written English, words are capitalized for clarity, identification, and, in some cases, respect. The rules for the capitalization of words in English are simple and not especially numerous.

Always capitalize the first word in a sentence, the first word in any quotation included within a sentence, and the first word of any phrase that is used as a sentence.

The office building is scheduled for  
demolition in the late summer.

(sentence)

The secretary answered the telephone and  
said, "Dutton, Blackstone, and Spears.  
Good morning! May I help you?"

(sentence,  
quotation, and  
phrase used as  
a sentence—  
"Good morning!")

Four newspapers carried the story on  
the first page.

(sentence)

Capitalize the names of people; specific geographical locations; calendar indications such as the days of the week, the months of the year, and holidays; organizations, including governmental bodies; and historical events and documents.

When capitalizing the names of people, you will sometimes encounter parts of names that are not capitalized, such as Emil *von* Hoffman, Leonardo *da* Vinci, and Simone *de* Beauvoir. If you are in doubt about whether to capitalize some part of a person's name, check the correct

usage in the correspondence file or with someone in your office who would know what is correct. It is extremely important to write a person's name correctly in every particular in all business and personal correspondence. Generally, all parts of a person's name are capitalized, including any initials used. If titles are used with the name, these titles are also capitalized. (For more detailed information on the capitalization of titles, see the Business Usage section of Unit 4.)

Carmen Ortega

Mrs. Delores McCormick

John S. Kiernan

Mr. H. F. Conant

Rev. Samuel Wilkins

Caroline Hawkins Rossini

Ms. T. Sheila Atkinson

Senator William Kaufmann

In written English, only proper nouns are capitalized. It is incorrect to capitalize such words as *woman*, *man*, *boy*, or *girl*. Unless a specific person is named, capitalization is not used. The same rule holds true for geographical designations. A specific location, site, or area must be mentioned. Remember the word *specific*. When a word such as *street*, *building*, *park*, *mountain*, or *river* is included in the name of a particular place, the word becomes specific because it designates a distinctive thing or place rather than a general locale. When the location mentioned is given in specific terms, capitalize. When it is given in general terms, do not capitalize.

The Chalmers *Building* was built in 1933.

(specific)

The *building* that houses our warehouse has been sold.

(general)

The *southeastern* section of the United States is known for its cotton production.

(general)

The *Southeast* has a temperate climate.

(specific)

The *river* was muddy after several days of rain.

(general)

The Hudson *River* gives New York City its western boundary.

(specific)

Capitalize all calendar designations and names of holidays, but do not capitalize the names of the seasons.

June

Monday

Christmas

February

Saturday

Labor Day

autumn

summer

Rosh Hashanah

Capitalize the names of organizations, companies, and governmental bodies, but do not capitalize the word *the* when it precedes the name unless it is a part of the official name.

the United Nations

The Bank of Korea

the Rialto Theater

the University of Illinois

The Advertising Council, Inc.

the Better Business Bureau

the Internal Revenue Service

The Rand Corporation

All names of continents, countries, states, and cities and the adjectives derived from these names are capitalized.



The western part of Russia is in Europe, but its eastern section is in Asia.

Our company has branch offices in Seattle, Phoenix, Kansas City, Memphis, and Cleveland.

I plan to study the history of the Spanish-speaking people in the West Indies.

Cézanne and Renoir were French artists.

The names of commercial products should also be capitalized, but do not capitalize the generic name when it is not part of the brand name. For example, Esquire Boot Polish and Lipton Cup-A-Soup are the correct brand names, but Maxwell House Coffee and Van Heusen Shirts are not correct, although Maxwell House makes coffee and Van Heusen makes shirts.

When you are in doubt about the capitalization of specific words, check a source that is likely to have the information—your files for the names of people and companies, a dictionary or atlas for place names, invoices for brand names, and so forth.

## GRAMMAR REVIEW: NOUNS AND THEIR PLURALS

Although most nouns in English have plurals that are formed by adding *-s* or *-es* to the singular noun, the only reliable standard for the plural form of a particular noun is the dictionary. A good employee, like a good student, depends on a good dictionary and keeps one available for use at all times. You should remember that the following rules for forming plurals are general and practically every rule given will have an exception. Use your dictionary when you are in doubt.

Many singular nouns are changed into the plural by the addition of *-s*.

street—streets

cent—cents

hall—halls

house—houses

check—checks

manager—managers

desk—desks

lawyer—lawyers

office—offices

To form the plural of singular nouns that end in *-ch*, *-sh*, *-s*, *-x*, and *-z*, however, add *-es*.

lunch—lunches

flash—flashes

tax—taxes

wrench—wrenches

class—classes

box—boxes

dish—dishes

loss—losses

blitz—blitzes

When a singular noun ends in *-y* preceded by a consonant, change the *y* to *i* and add *-es*. When the noun ends in *-y* preceded by a vowel, simply add *-s*.

country—countries

supply—supplies

tray—trays

specialty—specialties

copy—copies

galley—galleys

variety—varieties

hobby—hobbies

convoy—convoys

(When forming the plurals of proper nouns that end in *-y*, simply add *-s*. The plural form of *Henry* is *Henrys*, of *Kelly* is *Kellys*, of *Mallory* is *Mallorys*.)

Two types of noun endings—those that end in *-f* or *-fe* and those that end in *-o*—can give particular trouble when forming the plurals because there are so many exceptions to any rule. If you are in doubt about the correct form for the plural with such nouns, your best response is to use a dictionary. Many words that end in *-f* or *-fe* change the *f* to *v* and add *-es* to make the plural

form (*leaf*—*leaves*, *knife*—*knives*). Other nouns in this category only add -s and do not change the consonant (*roof*—*roofs*, *safe*—*safes*).

The second problem category is singular nouns that end in -o. The plural is usually formed by adding -s (*radio*—*radios*, *embryo*—*embryos*), and this is true of all such nouns that relate to music (*soprano*—*sopranos*, *piano*—*pianos*, *solo*—*solos*). When a singular noun ending in -o is preceded by a consonant, however, the plural is often formed by adding -es (*veto*—*veto*es, *potato*—*potatoes*, *echo*—*echoes*). The only safe recourse is to consult a dictionary. (Some of the most recently published dictionaries now state that either plural version for some nouns ending in -o is acceptable. Thus, these authorities accept both *zeros* and *zeroes*, both *mottos* and *mottoes*.)

A number of English nouns are irregular in the plural, but most of these are relatively common words and can be easily remembered.

ox—oxen	woman—women	foot—feet
tooth—teeth	man—men	mouse—mice
goose—geese	child—children	sheep—sheep

Many nouns that have been incorporated into English from other languages retain the plural forms used in the original tongue (*criterion*—*criteria*, *datum*—*data*, *crisis*—*crises*). In some cases, such words have been given two plurals in English: one is the plural form from the original language, and the other uses the regular English plural form (*formula*—*formulae*, from the Latin, or *formulas*; *memorandum*—*memoranda*, from the Latin, or *memorandums*). Rely on a dictionary to be correct.

The only time that apostrophes—normally used to indicate the possessive—are used to form the plural is with symbols, characters, and numbers written as figures. When numbers are written as words, the plural is formed in the usual way (*three*—*threes*, *twenty*—*twenties*).

15—15's	abc—abc's	&—&'s
100—100's	x—x's	+—+'s

## PUNCTUATION REVIEW: THE PERIOD

Use a period at the end of any sentence that makes a statement (a declarative sentence) or expresses a command (an imperative sentence). The period is also used at the end of a condensed expression (a word or phrase used as a sentence).

The audit will be completed by Wednesday of next week. (declarative sentence)

Ask Mrs. Ingersoll for a copy of the auditor's report. (imperative sentence)

Thank you. (phrase used as a sentence)

A sentence that is worded as an indirect question also requires a period.

Do you know how to play chess? (direct question)

I asked if you know how to play chess. (indirect question)

In commercial correspondence, a command or request is sometimes worded as a question. If the writer is demanding or seeking fast action, a period is used at the end of the sentence