

Module 7 – Writing: Emails and Letters

Center for Learning and Teaching

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1. Successful Writing

Plan before you write

- establish a clear objective
- plan how much time you will need
- decide what and how much to write
- write to get the answer you want

Know your reader

- Include only relevant information
- Remain courteous and polite
- Adapt style and tone to the reader's
 - specific relationship with you
 - professional position: internal/
external/place in hierarchy
 - level of familiarity with topic
 - cultural background
 - age
 - gender (avoid sexist language)

Structure the information clearly

- Format with a professional layout
- Have a clear opening and conclusion
- Plan a logical sequence
- Organize your ideas into paragraphs
- Link ideas together with connecting words and phrases
- Use headers and/or bullet points to highlight key points

Select the right language

- be concise: sentences [15-20 words] –paragraphs [7/8 lines]
- use plain everyday English
- avoid jargon, abbreviations and complex words
- be careful not to repeat words and phrases
- start and finish with the correct phrases
- pay attention to grammar, spelling and punctuation

Finally ... evaluate, amend and send

- give yourself time to review content, format, language and style
- read it out loud to check it sounds natural
- check grammar, punctuation and spelling again
- get feedback from a colleague

The Writing Process

Plan before you write ► Consider the reader ► Structure the information ► Select the right Language ► Draft, evaluate and amend ► Send

2. Organization information

How to plan - Work in five stages:

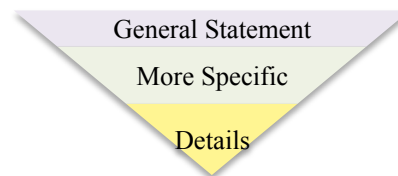
1. write down your objective
2. brainstorm possible content
3. prioritize and select information
4. prepare an outline with main points
5. fill in the details and start writing

Methods of organization

There are many different ways to structure information. Here are some common techniques.

1. The pyramid

Begin with the most general information and move steadily to detail.



*Our customers expect the best in terms of service quality.
So- we prioritize reliability, availability, and safety in our systems.*

You can invert the pyramid, beginning with the specific first.
Useful for handling specific problems where rules must be stated.

*Last week a member of staff parked in the CEO's parking space.
May I remind staff that there are spaces reserved for senior management.
Any further incidents of this nature will be dealt with severely.*

2. Chronology – report in the time frame of real events

The negotiation went well yesterday. We managed to agree to quantities and price. We spent a lot of time today sorting out terms of payment and a timetable for delivery. We should be in a position to sign the contract tomorrow.

3. Moving from problem to solution

Several users have reported that their new passwords no longer allow them to access the Intranet. The problem was caused by a software error. Please enter and confirm a new Password with a minimum of seven, not six characters.

4. Process sequence

To activate Voice Mail from Sweden:

1. Dial 134
2. Listen to the information message
3. Activate Voice Mail by pressing 1

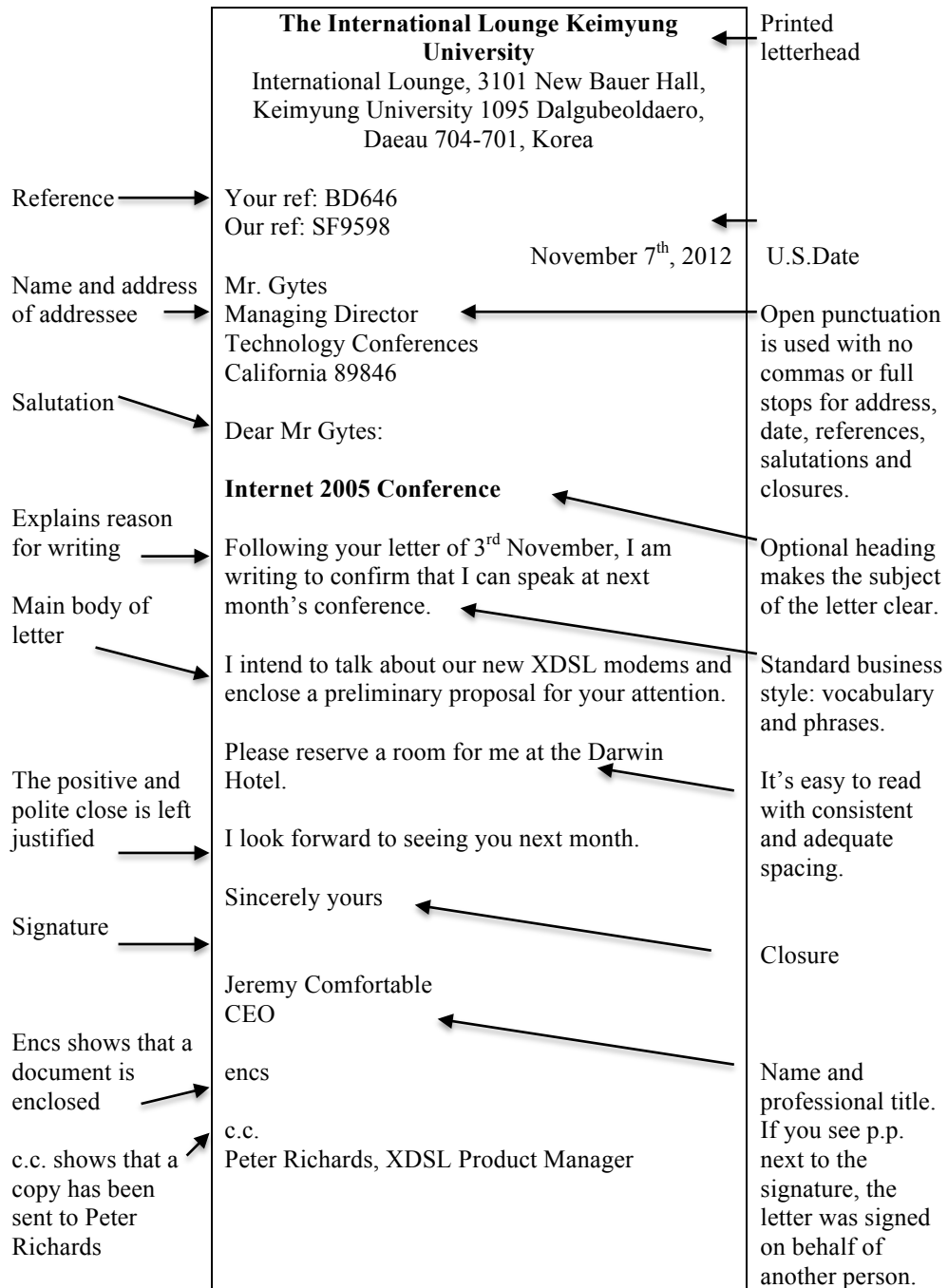
5. Classic story-telling – have a beginning, a middle and an end

Many letters use this three-paragraph format, which is clear and concise.

I'm sorry that I wasn't able to make the meeting last Friday. **1 = Introduction**
Unfortunately, we had a major problem at our plant in Berlin, **2 = Development**
which I had to solve.
Fortunately, it's okay. I will be in Paris next week and look **3 = Conclusion**
forward to seeing you in order to finalize the outsourcing issue.

3. The business letter – layout

Many companies have an in-house writing style. The layout below is one example, containing all the elements of a business letter.



Context	Salutation	Closure
You don't know the name	Dear Sir or Madam	Yours faithfully (UK only)
	Dear Sir /Madam	Sincerely yours (US)
		Yours truly (US)
		Sincerely / Yours sincerely (US)
	Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss/Mr Smith	Yours sincerely
	Dear John	Best regards/Regards
		Best wishes

4. Correspondence phrases

Starting

With reference to your letter dated 12 January...
Regarding our meeting last week...
Thank you for your letter of... (date)
Re your fax...

Reason for writing

We are writing to...
I'm just writing to...
Just a short note to...

Giving good news

We are delighted to inform you that....
You will be pleased to hear that....
You'll be happy to learn that....

Giving bad news

We regret to inform you that....
I am afraid that .../Unfortunately...
I'm sorry but....

Making a request

We would appreciate it if you could
I'd be grateful if you could...
Could you...

Offering help

If you wish, we would be happy to.
Would you like me to...? / Shall I...?
Do you want me to...?

Apologizing

We must apologize for (not).... / We deeply regret...
I do apologize for... (any inconvenience caused.)
I'm really sorry for/about.

Enclosing documents

We are enclosing.... / We enclose....
Please find enclosed....
I'm enclosing.... / I've enclosed....

Closing remarks

Do not hesitate to contact us again if you need further assistance.
If you have any further questions, please contact me.
Let me know if you need any more help.

Don't forget! – Thank you for your help.

Positive future reference

We look forward to meeting/seeing you next week.
We look forward to hearing from you.

After writing checklist!!

- Clear objectives
- Good organization
- Professional layout
- Clear, concise language
- Right style
- Correct facts and figures
- All questions answered
- Positive ending
- Right grammar, spelling and punctuation!

5. Model Letters

One strategy to improve your writing is to prepare model letters, which you can use many times for key scenarios. Some examples are given below. Simply adapt them to your needs!

Organizing a meeting

I am writing to organize our next MCP meeting to reassess our current marketing strategy for the E258. ← Clear statement of the reason for writing

I am free to travel to Germany between June 13 and 15. ← Date proposed

Please let me know as soon as possible if these dates are convenient. ← Confirmation request

Agreeing to a meeting

Thank you for the reminder about the MCP meeting! ← Friendly, informal reference

I think it would be best if you flew in on Monday, June 13 and we hold the meeting on Tuesday. If we begin at 9:00, I'm sure we'll be finished by 3:30. ← Clear proposal

Please confirm your arrival details so that I can arrange for someone to pick — you up at the airport. I will book a room for you at the Sheraton, as usual. ← Polite request and offer of help

Confirming travel details

Regarding our MCP meeting in June, I am writing with my travel details. ← Clear reference and reason for writing

Arrive in Frankfurt at 09:30 on Monday, June 13. I will take a taxi and plan to be at your office by 10:15. ← Concise information

If there are any problems, you can reach me on 00441904-769009 ← Contact details

Look forward to seeing you. ← Positive close

Requesting information

Am writing to request a copy of the instructors' manual for the E10 and S12. ← Clear request

Please could you also send me a copy of your new brochure and price list? ← Good style. Uses *could you* to avoid repeating request.

Sending information

With reference to your enquiry of July 15, I am enclosing two copies each of the E10 and S12 instructors' manuals. You will also find enclosed our latest brochure and price list. ← Clear reference

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you need further information. ← Polite, formal offer of help

Raising a problem

To: IS Department

I am having problems accessing the Intranet from my desktop. ← Definition of the problem

When I enter my password, the screen freezes and will not re-boot ← Polite request for immediate help

Could you please solve this problem as soon as possible? ←

Problem solving

To: Joe User ← Clear explanation of the problem

The Intranet access problem was caused by a password corruption error. ←

Please enter CLEAR as a password next time you access the Intranet. ← Clear solution to the problem

Then, key in your new password – SMART. ← Polite, informal offer of help

If you have any further problems, please contact me immediately. ←

6. Writing clearly – extra points

You must always present your message clearly and adapt your style and tone according to your objective, the specific reader and the business context.

Language

- Keep sentences short and focused.
- Use plain and simple vocabulary.
- Begin and/or end paragraphs with key ideas = topic sentences!
- Avoid jargon, abbreviations, acronyms and cliché.
- Make sure headers are clear and concise.
- Vary the beginnings of sentences and paragraphs.
- Don't repeat!

Examples of plain English

advise -tell	prior to before
commence -start	per annum a year
complete fill in	terminate end

X *Please could you* send me report 667/Ab?
Please could you also let me know the meeting agenda for Friday?

Formatting – keep readers smiling

- Ensure that spacing is consistent and sufficient.
- Maintain wide margins, nothing less than 2.5 cm.
- Avoid long paragraphs. Use headers and sub-headers in bold or underlined.
- Write lists as bullet points.
- Use a maximum of 2 or 3 fonts in long documents.
- Develop a clear and consistent numbering system.

Graphics

- Use a graph, diagram, chart or illustration, to clarify and highlight key information.
- Number and caption each graphic.
- Refer to illustrations as Figures (abbreviated to Fig.)
- Keep graphics close to the relevant part of the text.
- Set graphics in plenty of white space.

Tone

- Ask yourself:
 - Why am I writing?
 - What do I want to achieve?
- Be polite at all times.
- Package negative content by starting and ending with something positive.

Reasons for writing	Tone
To reprimand	Strict
To give information	Neutral
To get feedback	Open

Communicate your opinion by selecting the right phrase!

	Recommending
Strong	We strongly recommend that... We are absolutely convinced that...
Neutral	We recommend that... We expect that...
Weak	One option may be to... We could consider...

7. Connecting words

The secret of effective writing is to connect words, sentences and paragraphs together to enable the reader to understand quickly and easily.

Connectors

Connectors link words and phrases, for example, however and as a result of. They are signals to the reader of the relationship between ideas. For example, as a result introduces the cause of something.

- sequencing	First, second, third, after that, finally
- adding	In addition, moreover, furthermore
- alternatives	Alternatively, instead of
- consequence	Therefore, consequently, as a result
- comparing	Similarly, in line with
- contrasting	However, yet, whereas, although, despite
- conditions	If, on condition that, providing, unless
- reference	With respect to, regarding, in relation to
- reasons	Because, since, as, in response to
- cause verbs	To lead to, to result in, to bring about, to cause
- effect verbs	To result from, to be due to, to be caused by
- highlighting	In particular, especially, mainly chiefly
- exemplifying	For example/ instance, such as, as follows
- generalizing	Usually, normally, in general

Replacement words

Replacement words, for example, *who, this, the former*, are used to refer to people, ideas and things already mentioned in a text. Although **partial recycling** of key words may link a text effectively, style and efficiency are improved by avoiding too much repetition.

Replacement words	It / they/ them	This / that	The former/ the latter
	One /ones	These/ those	Who / which / that
	respectively	such	

Text flags

To improve the clarity of texts, we sometimes need to refer back or forward.

Text flags

Above / below	In paragraph 10.1
As mentioned earlier	The above-mentioned...
The previous / following	As follows
	On page 12

8. Grammar and spelling check

Poor grammar and spelling are unprofessional and can damage the reputation of both the writer and his or her company. Edit your own writing with the following checklist!

Checklist	Common mistakes
Tense	The goods have arrived yesterday.
Verb number	My people is are highly trained.
Countable or not	Please e-mail these datas this data.
Modal verbs	We must to solve this problem soon.
If	If I would have had money, I would travel more.
Adverb or adjective	Please follow the normally normal procedure.
Position of the adverb	We always have always this problem.
Preposition	We must focus at on this at the next meeting.
Key words e.g. since	He is working has been working here since July.
False friends	The actual current inflation rate is 3%.

WHO for people/WHICH for things

1. We need a technician who is familiar with Unix.
 2. Peter James, who is currently in Japan, will lead the project team.
- which/that = things**
1. We have identified the circuit board that is faulty.
 2. The new strategy, which was agreed on by the whole board, has proved to be a great success.

Commas are used when you add non-essential information

Spelling – don't believe your eyes

Don't rely on the computer spell check. It will **not** tell you if you have misspelled a name, place or product. It will also **fail** to identify words, which are spelled correctly but wrongly used. Can you correct the underlined errors in the text below?

I was delighted to here that you took my advise and bought a new English dictionary. Their very useful and will help you too practice your spelling. I think you know that spelling is your principle weakness. The dictionary will help you identify you're mistakes and were you must improve!

American		British	
Important general differences			
labor	-or	labour	-our
catalog	-og	catalogue	-ogue
center	-er	centre	-tre
program	-gram	programme	-gramme
canceled	-led	cancelled	-lled
Important individual differences			
check		cheque	
defense		defence	
practice (verb or noun)		practice (verb)	
through/ thru		practice (noun)	
		through	

9. Punctuation

Clear and professional writing needs good punctuation. In general, we punctuate less now than in the past, with more room for personal style, especially in informal communication.

The comma

1. After introductory word(s)

Technically speaking, it is possible to repair the machine.

As requested, I am attaching the COM file.

2. To separate items in a list

Our people will identify, analyze and solve the problem.

3. To create breaks in a sentence

a. As a parenthesis (the sentence can stand without the part between the commas)

The project, despite some setbacks, ran exactly to schedule.

The big problem, which all agreed, was how to cut costs.

b. As a natural break for the reader

The existing software has crashed several times, leading to severe operational difficulties.

Tip: Don't overuse commas to create very long sentences.

The colon - introduces a list of items

We must clarify three key issues: manpower, deadlines and finance.

But in terms of style and clarity, a bullet point list is sometimes better.

The semi-colon – connects two sentences which are closely related.

BUILDCOM wants a meeting; they are worried about the delay.

The apostrophe

1. For possession/relationship

Human	President Bush's decision
Organization	The company's strength
Location	Japan's trading partner
Time	In two month's time.

2. To contract two words

Contraction is used for less formal business correspondence.

I've she's we're
we'd won't we'll
shouldn't can't

The dash – is similar to the comma

1. As an informal parenthesis

The meeting was postponed – to everyone's annoyance – until June.

2. As an informal natural break

Subscribe to UK Telecon today – and buy the best service.

CAPITAL LETTERS

Beginning of a sentence	Months	Names
Streets	Countries	Days
Nationalities	Languages	

10. Golden Rules

Do

1. keep the reader in mind at all stages of writing
2. plan thoroughly before you put pen to paper
3. let your reader know quickly why you are writing
4. organize your ideas clearly and logically
5. link ideas, sentences, and paragraphs with connecting language
6. format documents in a reader-friendly way in corporate style
7. use 100% correct grammar, spelling and punctuation
8. minimize your use of jargon, slang and cliché
9. support recommendations and ideas with facts
10. create interest by using a variety of sentence forms
11. always emphasize the positive over the negative
12. vary sentence length but keep the average at 18 words
13. avoid humor except in very informal correspondence
14. remain polite and professional at all times
15. be concise and stick to the point
16. check any facts and references that you quote
17. use a thesaurus to avoid repeating words
18. break up long, boring text with headers/sub-headers
19. be simple and direct, as if talking to a friend
20. ask a friend to check your writing and give you feedback
21. make it perfect by editing and re-drafting
22. create a personal file of model letters and phrases
23. give response or follow-up emails quickly
24. when asking for something...email at least 1 week in advance minimum
25. when giving information on events, give 1 weeks notice and a reminder email 2/3 days before event.
26. ensure proper Name is written, spelled, structured
27. always respond to an email.
28. make sure all your info is in one email, no one likes a follow up email.
29. ensure attachments are attached.
30. stick to one message per email.
31. ask questions to check if they are receiving the message as you had intended
32. ask questions to check if you are receiving the message as they had intended
33. when in doubt, pick up the phone.
34. make sure you have the right email address for the recipient.

Don't

1. write too much
2. think that grammar and punctuation are unimportant
3. rely on the computer spell check
4. be rude or negative
5. repeat too many words and phrases
6. try to be humorous
7. use sexist language
8. over-use capital letters
9. forget that badly formatted documents look unprofessional
10. use more than two or three fonts in longer documents
11. show bias or prejudice
12. send an important document without getting feedback first