

BUSINESS LETTERS: CHARACTERISTICS, TYPES

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This unit reflects the techniques, characteristics, types, structure and nature of business letters. It has three lessons which are designed to develop in students the abilities to:

- Comprehend and apply the techniques in writing business letters
- Identify the characteristics of business letters so that student can explain each characteristic of business letters all by themselves
- Explain the types of business letters
- Explain the nature and structure of business letters.

School of Business

Blank the page

UNIT-2

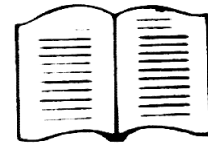
Lesson-1: Nature Types and Principles of Writing Good Business Letters

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- explain the nature, types of various business letters
- understand and apply the principles of writing good business letters

Letters Defined

The information age generates more and more documents in the form of letters, reports, memos, notices. So whether be at private sector or public sector, or at home and abroad all professionals have to write **letters which serve as the media for conveying information among entities and individuals**. Sometimes you write to give information to some one, sometimes you may be asking for some information from a particular person, or a company; sometimes you want refund for your damaged product from the supplier, or you like to send a note of condolence to one of your depressed associate whose wife died recently, or you are writing to inform a candidate that his application was not accepted whatever your plans, **you in fact do not write for yourself, but to inform others, and to fulfil a certain need**. This need that moves you to write the letter is your **primary objective** for writing the letter. You may have more than one objectives in the same letter such as informing about steps, instructing to follow the steps or acknowledge an order and clarifying a vague order in the same letter. Then of course there is always the secondary public relations objective that all business letters have. To flourish its success and profit each company should work to improve the images of their company in public's minds. And the most important areas of public relation that a company should try to improve is its **correspondence**. As a rule the letters that a company writes create strong impressions for a number of reasons.



Letters serve as media for conveying information among entities and organisation.

We write to inform others and to fulfill a certain need.

First, letters are highly personalised messages, for they single out a special reader and, usually a letter is written by a single writer not by a team.

Second, they have the more formal effect than most face to face communication.

Third, They receive the added impetus of the printed word and have the quality of performance.

So a company can create good public relations only by presenting its face in the best possible way through good business letters.

Letters provide data for two main **purposes**:

1. To fulfil certain needs;
2. To elicit a definite response and to make the reader to be on the writer's side.

Types of Business Letters

Letters typically go to people outside the organisations. By writing letters you in fact present your organisations image, face to the outside world. As a family member, social person you do write the personal letters conveying your feelings, interests, good news, bad news, depending on the type of relationship you have with the reader and also on the message that is being conveyed. Business letters are written and received for keeping all business transactions, relationships, perfect, live in the business world. Most formal letters fall under three main category:

Writing 'yes' : accepting something, agreeing to a plan.

Writing 'no' : refusing something or disagreeing to a plan or offer.

Writing for action : to move people to do something, to persuade or to give orders sometimes.

On the job you might write the following common types of letters:

- a. **Sales Promotion letter** designed to create interest in a product or service.
- b. **Letter of instructions** outlining a procedure to be carried out by the reader.
- c. **Letter of transmittal** (cover letters) to accompany reports and other documents that you will mail out.
- d. **Letter of recommendations** for friends, fellow workers or past employees.
- e. **General business letters** describing progress on a project, requesting assistance, ordering parts or tools, confirming meeting times, and so on.
- f. **Letter of inquiry**, asking about the cost or availability of a product, requesting advice for solving a problem, soliciting comments about a job applicant and so on.
- g. **Complaint letters** written to complain about disappointing service or faulty products and to request adjustment.

You may also need to write letter in response to those letters received by your company. You might also write letters to apply to colleges, to compete for scholarship, or foreign study programmes, or to join a campus organisations. These application letters are considered important for good reasons: they provide evidence of your talent for clear self expression, your level of confidence, your sensitivity to your readers, your ability to recognise important points, your attention to detail your

mastery of logical reasoning and your level of maturity and personality development.

Different letters are written for different purposes.

Principles of Writing Good Letters

Depending upon its quality your letter will either open doors or, be a waste of time. So to be an effective letter writer think of the good communication principles that you can apply in writing a business letter.

The following basic principles will help you to produce a letter which is most likely to achieve the desired result.

- Remember the basic rule: never send a letter until you genuinely feel confident about signing it; your signature certifies your approval of the content.

The You Approach

In writing a letter you face a blank page; you can easily write to please yourself only, forgetting that a flesh-and-blood person will be reading your letter. The "you" perspective affects your tone and as the letter is more personal than a report, tone is the major ingredient of your message. Put yourself in your reader's place; ask yourself how readers will respond to what you have just written. Your letter creates a relationship with reader. So the words should be chosen carefully in order not to offend and confuse the reader. Instead of writing:

Tone is the main ingredient of message.

"I beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter dated, and I have to inform you that"

It is better to write : "Thank you for your letter of, you will be pleased to know that"

Plain English

The reader of a business letter is not interested in the type of person who has written the letter but in the content of the letter i.e., what the letter say, and how simply and easily he can grasp the message, and help his organisation.

So avoid stuffy, tired and over blown phrases (letterese) that you might think will impress your reader. Here are a few of the many Letterese that make letters unimaginative and boring:

DO NOT USE	USE
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Letterese	Translated into plain English
As per your request	As you requested
Contingent upon receipt of	As soon we receive
I beg to differ	I disagree
It is imperative that you reply	You must reply
Please be advised that my new address is	My new address is
We are in hopes that you succeed	Good luck
In the immediate future	Soon
I humbly request that you consider	Please consider
Pursuant to our agreement	As we agreed
I beg to acknowledge receipt of	I received

Notice that, all the above letterese are exaggerated, sound insincere and above all no one speaks in this way. So why not write as you would speak in a classroom? Be natural in your expression while you write a business letter.

Clear Purpose

Before writing as you plan, answer these questions:

- A. What purpose do I wish to achieve (get a job, file a complaint, ask for an information, answer an inquiry, give instructions, share good news, share bad news).***
- B. What facts does my reader know? (dates, cost, model numbers, enclosures, measurements, other details).***
- C. To whom am I writing? (reader's name? or title? write to a person not a title).***
- D. What is my relationship with reader? (Is he an employer, employee, a person asking for favour, customer asking for refund, an associate, a stranger?)***

Answer to all of the above questions will help you prepare the draft and after writing the draft ask yourself three more questions such as:

- a. How will my readers react to my statement as phrased? (with anger, hostility, pleasure, confusion, resistance, satisfaction).**
- b. What impression will readers get from my letter? (courteous, friendly, confident, dull, intelligent)**

c. Am I ready to sign my letter? (This one will take you to some more thought)

Do not submit or mail your letter until you have answered these questions and keep on revising as often as you need to achieve your purpose.

Aim for brevity, accuracy, and conviction

This one is the most important principle of all communication skills. For readability, keep your letter short, straight, formal and right to the point. Give readers as much as they need no more no less even. Also write with conviction i.e., write what you believe in, in order to sound convincing to your readers.

Direct-Indirect Plan

The reaction that you visualise from your readers should help you organise your material whether you should apply direct or indirect method of writing. In the direct plan you put the main points right away in your body section of the letter followed by explanation. Usually use the **direct plan** for good news writing, inquiry or application or other routine correspondence.

If you expect your reader to disapprove or need to be persuading or refusing a claim then use the **indirect plan** i.e., give the explanation before the main points. The **indirect plan** in fact makes readers more tolerant of bad news or more receptive to the writer's arguments stated in the letter.

SUMMARY

- Think before you write
- Analyse the purpose of the letter and reader's needs
- Make sure you have included all the points relevant to your purpose
- Use a courteous tone and 'you' approach
- Use plain, precise English and avoid Letterese
- Be concise and keep your language warm and personal

ACTIVITY

These questions are designed to help you assess how far you have understood and can apply the learning you have accomplished by



answering (in written form) the following questions:

1. What are the reasons that are responsible for creating strong impressions on the letters written by a company?
2. What is the primary purpose of writing a business letter?
3. Name at least five types of business letters that you might write on any work day.
4. Which of the following phrases you should not use for writing a letter? What are the correct or plain English against each of the phrases.
 - a. **Please be advised** that my new telephone number is 606263
 - b. **You must reply** the moment you reach Dhaka airport.
 - c. I shall see you **in the immediate future**.
 - d. We shall carry our duties **as per your order**
5. What are the questions that you ask yourself before you begin to write a letter, in fact **plan** for it?

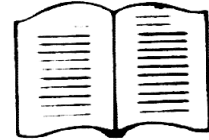
Lesson-2: Techniques of Writing Effective Letters

After reading this lesson you will be able to:

- identify the standard parts and specialised parts of formal letters
- select and use the appropriate and accepted format (provided in the lesson) for writing any formal letters.

Introduction

An efficient document, or a letter, or a report is never just 'happens' — instead, the writer plans, organises, revises to meet the purpose of the letter, document, and readers' needs and interest. Also to make it an effective one, the writer connects its writing with the readers by recognising their differences in background, their specific needs, temperaments, preferences, fears, attitude, etc.



Whenever you write a formal business letter make sure that you include the structure of all good communications, and also the required general parts. Depending on the nature, and type of letters that you will be writing, you might have to include the specialised parts essential for formal business letters.

Introduction-Body-Conclusion Structure

All useful messages — whether in the form of a book, chapter, news article, report, or memo typically follow a common organising pattern:

Introduction - Body - Conclusion

Most letters include a brief **introduction** paragraph (having three to five lines, or fewer) in which you identify yourself, and your purpose for writing the letter.

There may be one or more paragraphs in your **body** section of the letter detailing the messages you want to convey.

Then comes the **conclusion** section. Where you tie up your information and courteously encourage your readers to act.

Standard Parts

Letters typically have six parts, in order from top to bottom:

- heading,
- inside address,
- salutation,
- the text (Introduction-body-conclusion),
- complimentary close,
- and signature.

Heading

If your stationary is blank, include your address and the date (do not include your name) as shown in Fig.-1 of this lesson. But, if you have a

stationary containing letter head of your company, then simply include the date two lines below the letterhead as shown in Fig.-1 of this lesson. Depending on the length of the letter, place your heading at least **one inch below the top of your page** and far enough to the right. Avoid abbreviations except the Postal Services two-letter state abbreviations (foreign countries like UK USA) when addressing the envelope and in the heading itself. Sample below.

Street Address House # 16, Road # 2
Dhanmondi R/A
City, Post Code Dhaka 1205, Bangladesh
Month, Day, Year August 20, 1995

Inside Address

Place your inside address using the reader's title (Director General) two to six spaces below your heading and near the left margin. Include only the routinely abbreviated titles such as (Mr., Ms., Dr.). Titles such as major, captain are written out in full. Do not write "Dr. A. M. Safi Ph.D." only write Dr. A. M. Safi.

Salutation

Place your salutation **two spaces below your inside address**. Begin your salutation with "Dear" and end with a colon ("Dear Mr. Zafar"). Always include the person's full title. Use the attention line if you do not know the person's name or sender but only know the position title. Current trend is to address reader by his or her first name if that is the way of addressing people in that country. For example, the Germans get annoyed if you address them by first name. Also people from China, Japan, Bangladesh, India, Mexico do not appreciate the informal tone which is so common in British and American culture. So to overcome this difficulty you should be aware of the culture of that country before communicating in letter form. Example:

Dear Ms. Jerina:

Dear Mr. Haroon:

Also people consider the greeting 'Dear Sir' or 'Madam' appropriate in India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, but these type of greetings are too formal, and old-fashioned according to British and American culture. So it is sometimes best to use the attention line.

Letter Text

Begin your introduction two spaces below your salutation. For letters that will fill most of the page, use single-spacing within the paragraphs, and double-spacing between. For short letters double space within paragraphs, and triple-space between to balance the page.

Complimentary Close

Place your complementary close two spaces below the concluding paragraph, aligned with your heading. Make sure the complimentary close parallel the level of formality in your salutation, and reflects your

relationship with the reader. Some conventional complimentary close are as follows:

Respectfully,
Sincerely,
Cordially,
Best wishes,
Warmest regards,
Regards,
Truly,

The complimentary close is followed by a comma.

Signature

Type your **full name and title four spaces below your complimentary close**. Sign in the space between.

Sincerely,

SHIHAB ZAFAR
Research Associate

Your signature indicates your approval of and responsibility for the letter (even if it is typed by a secretary). If you are writing on behalf of the company, or group that bears legal responsibility for the correspondence, type the company's name in full capital two spaces below the complimentary close; place your typed name and title four spaces below the company name and sign in between. (Fig.-1)

Yours truly,

TAMUN LABORATORIES

TABASSUM ZAFAR
Research Associate

Specialised Parts

Some business or official letters require one or more specialised parts.

Attention Line

Use an attention line when writing to a firm, institution and when you want a particular person (whose name you don't know) title, or department to receive the letter.

ATTENTION : Research and Development Division

ATTENTION : District Financial Supervisor

School of Business

Usually drop two spaces below the inside address, and place the attention line either near the left margin, or centred on the page. (Example given in Fig.-1)

Subject Line

In order to forecast and draw the attention of a busy reader a subject line is sometimes used as a good device.

SUBJECT: Application for the Post of the Local Consultant (Junior)

Place the subject line two spaces below the inside address. Write in caps or underline it.

Typists Initials

If you give someone the responsibility to type your letter than place your initials (in caps) and your typist's initials (in lower case) two spaces below the typed signature.

SZ/tk

But sometimes due to fear of repetition the writer's initial may be eliminated.

Enclosure Notation

If you are giving other documents with your letter, then, add one of these notations one space below the typist's initials.

Enclosure:

Enclosure 2

Encl. 3

In case of very important documents name them:

Enclosures: 4 Certified Checks, 1 set of Master Plan.

Distribution Notation

If you are distributing copies of your letter to other readers, indicate so one space below any enclosure notation.

xc: Office file

Shamsul Alam

xc: Director

xc: Manager, Personnel

Post Script

A post script is usually given if the writer wants to draw the attention of the reader to a particular point he wants to emphasise. Do also use Post Script to add a personal note:

P.S. You will appreciate the way he/she handles customers.

But do not use a Post Script for a point you have forgotten, in that case you better write a fresh one. You can place the Post Script two spaces below any other notation. Use the Post Script sparingly in professional communication.

Appropriate Format

Your letter should have uniform margins, spacing and indentation: leave at least 2.5 inches as top margin and 1 to 1.5 inches as side and bottom margin; single space within paragraphs and double space between paragraphs. Avoid hyphenating at the end of a line. If your letter needs more than one page, begin the second page seven spaces from the top, with a notation identifying the addressee, date and page number. They are typed in plain paper, not letterhead.

Shamsul Arefin, July 25, 1995 page-2.

Begin your text two spaces below this notation. A sample is given in Fig-2. Notice that it contains enough information to identify the second page if it gets separated from the first page.

Accepted Letter Form

Although several letter forms are acceptable and your office, company, or institution may have its own letter head stationary, there are two common forms: **Semiblock** and **Modified Block**.

In semiblock there is no indentation (Fig.-3) and in modified block the first sentence of each paragraph is indented five spaces (Fig.-4)

Fig.-1 A sample letter to show various parts of a letter

PANKASH PAPER CO.
BEACH ROAD, COX'S BAZAR

August 20, 1995

Mr. Jamal Uddin
20 Ranking Street
Dhaka-1000

ATTENTION : Mr. Uddin

In answer to your inquiry about leasing lakeside areas at Cox's Bazar, we have no lands for lease in "highly remote areas." We have some limited number of leases available, but you would have to visit our office to know the exact location.

Dropby in any week day morning between 9:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m. You need to apply for a building permit too.

Thank you for your inquiry.

Yours truly,

PANKASH PAPER COMPANY

PRIMA KABIR
Town Site Manager

PK/pc

Fig.-2 SAMPLE OF A CONTINUATION PAGE; BLOCKED FORMAT

Md. Jamal Uddin August 20, 1995, Page-2
Sincerely yours,
Writer's Signature
WRITERS TYPED NAME
PK/pc
Enclosure:
xc.: Mr. S. Murray
Ms. Tanya Zafar

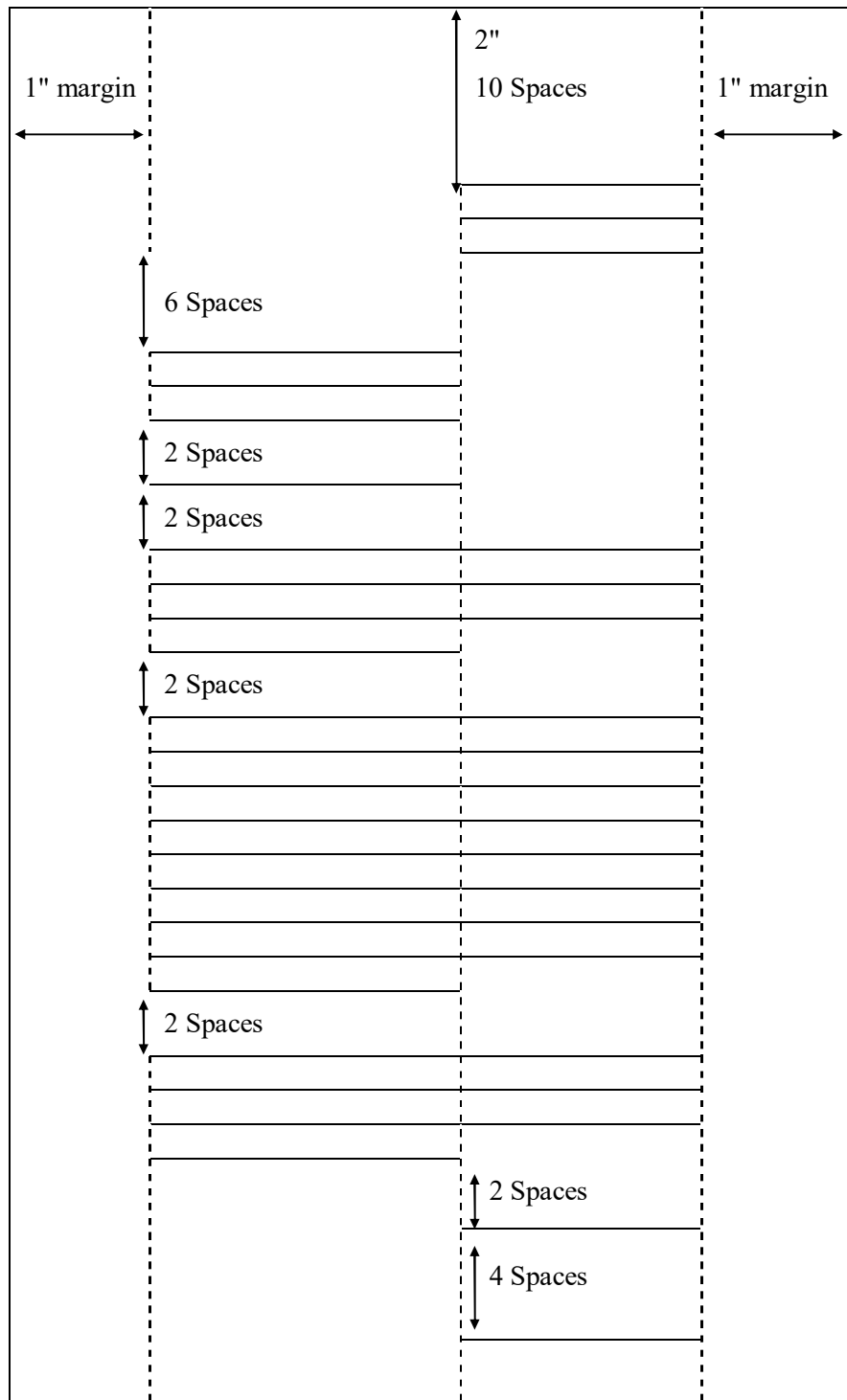


Fig.-3 A SEMIBLOCK LETTER

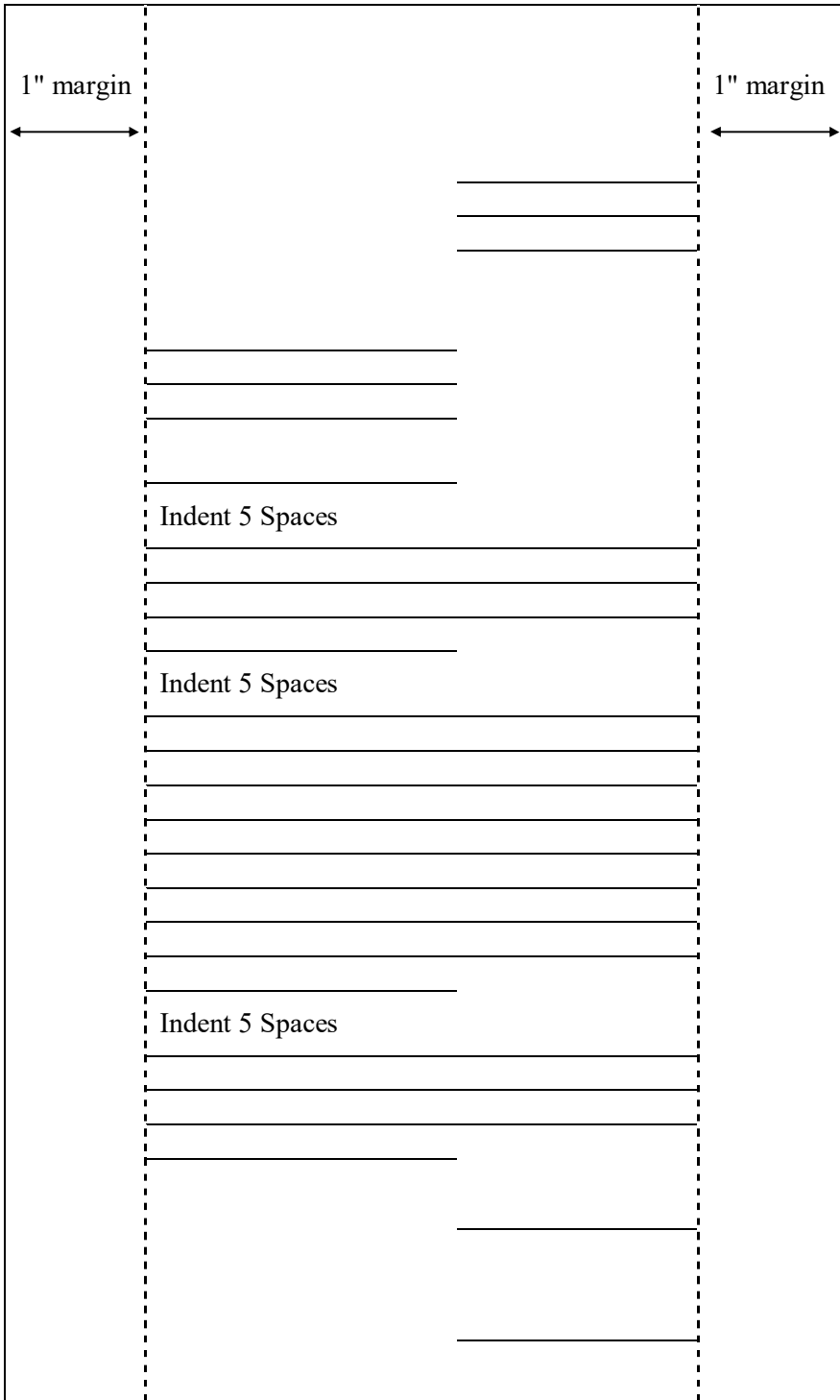
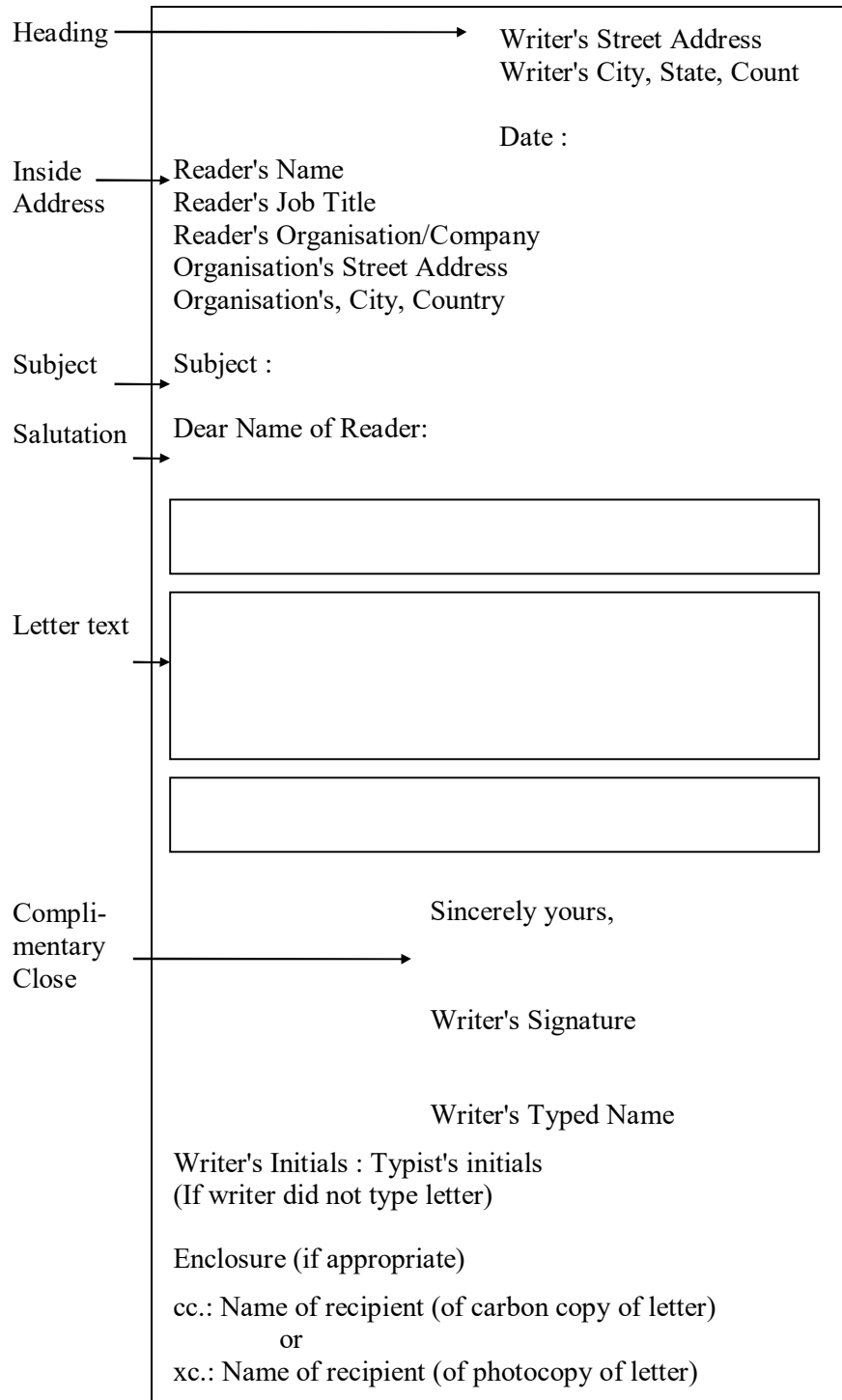


Fig.-4 A MODIFIED BLOCK LETTER

Fig-5 LOCATION OF BACKGROUND INFORMATION IN A

LETTER UNBLOCKED FORMAT

(On letterhead stationary, the writer's address will already be printed)



SUMMARY

A good letter is carefully designed by its writer in order to make the content worth reading, organisation easy to follow, and style readable,

and clear. Always remember to do a little more than you have to for your reader and maintain a balance between knowledge of your subjects and the skill in organisation and presentation of that information.

ACTIVITY

Write a letter to personnel Manager of an "XYZ Company" stating that you have accepted their employment offer for the post of "PROBATIONARY OFFICER."



Question for Review

These questions are designed to help you assess how far you have understood and can apply the learning you have accomplished by answering (in written form) the following questions:

1. What do you mean by the good structure of all communications?
2. What are the standard parts of a letter? Name them.
3. Which ones are called specialised parts? Just name them. Does a letter need all the specialised parts to be an effective one?
4. What is a post script? How do you place it in your letter?