

Writing a Formal Letter

A formal letter (or business letter) is a piece of formal correspondence and has a very specific format. It should be within one page and be fully blocked (everything is lined up to the left and between every section is a double space). There are a number of sections. They include:

1. **Heading.** This includes the return address (the writer's address) and should be two or three lines. Include the postal code. If the letter is being written from a company, the company's letterhead may serve as the heading, if the address is already printed on it.
2. **Date.** There should be double spacing above and below the date.
3. **Inside Address.** This is the address of the person you are writing to. Include the name and position of the person if you know it, followed by the address.
4. **Greeting (also called Salutation).** The greeting in a formal letter is always formal and usually starts with the word "Dear" followed by the person's family name or job position (Dear Mr. Smith / Dear Human Resources Director). The greeting ends in a colon.
5. **Body (the paragraphs).** This part of the letter is the text. Each paragraph should be separated by double spaces. Also there should be double space between the greeting and the body. It could be three to five paragraphs, but not usually more than five. Indenting is not necessary.
6. **Complimentary Close.** This is the short, polite closing that ends with a comma. A common complimentary close is Best regards. There is a double space between this and the body and between this and the signature line.
7. **Signature Line.** This is your signature (usually for printed letters). It is possible to put a digital signature here, your name in blue or just your name in black. If your name is in blue or in the form of a digital signature, your name is required in black at the bottom. Otherwise, just your name in black is printed (unsigned) if the letter is not on paper.

A formal letter should not contain post scripts (PS).

The Body

The body of the letter (the paragraphs) is very important and this text type has specific rules for writing. Here are the rules for paragraphs in the body of a formal letter.

In the first paragraph, you should say clearly who you are and why you are writing. The introduction paragraph is quite short, just about three sentences, so you don't explain anything or give details here. It is like an introduction. The reader should know exactly what the purpose of the letter is. Avoid unnecessary discussion or opinion here. Simply say what your purpose is.

The second paragraph is for details or explanation. You should give details on what you mentioned in paragraph one and explain anything that needs more information.

A third paragraph can be added if there is a lot more information that is needed, or if there is another topic that needs to be covered. If it can all be put into one paragraph (paragraph 2), then it is better to keep it shorter. However, if another paragraph is really necessary, put it here.

The next paragraph should state what you would like the reader to do. If you need information, ask for it here. If you wish to apply for something, state here what you need the reader to do for you. You may want a letter of recommendation or perhaps you need product information. Be clear and tell the reader exactly what it is you need from him or her.

The last paragraph is also very short, like the first paragraph. You should thank the reader for his or her time and include your email, telephone number, etc if you need the reader to reply to you. This is especially important for job application letters.

You can also include your telephone number/e-mail address after your printed name at the bottom, so that they can contact you ASAP if necessary.

Be sure to keep a copy of the letter for yourself and include photocopies of any relevant documents and enclose them with your letter.

Types of formal letters

There are many types of formal letters. They include:

1. Complaint letters
2. Job application letters
3. Letters requesting information
4. Apology letters
5. Letters to the editor

On the following pages, you will find a sample template and examples of the different types of formal letters.

Template for Formal Letters

Your address

Date

Address of the company
You are writing to.

Greeting (Dear...)

Paragraph 1
(Why you are writing)

Paragraph 2
(Explain the situation)

Paragraph 3
(What do you want the reader (company) to do?)

Paragraph 4
(A short closing thanking the reader or company)

A closing,

Your signature

Your name

Sample Complaint Letter

65 Geylang East Ave 4 #12-34
Singapore
153045

June 29 2015

Customer Service Desk
Grammar King Language Books Pte. Ltd.
2 McNally Street
Singapore 246810

Dear Sir or Madam:

I recently ordered a new grammar book called “Sing Your Way to Perfect Grammar” by Madonna Carey. It is a textbook with a corresponding CD, and the ISBN number is 13579. My order number is A6237 (ordered March 9, 2010). The book is not in good order and the CD is not working properly.

When I received my order in the mail, I opened the box and found that the packaging was not thorough and the CD was actually not firmly in its case. The book seemed to have been damaged even before I had opened the cover. When I examined the contents I found that the book had a torn back cover and pages 14 – 17 were missing. Later I tried the CD, but could not get it to work either on my computer or the computers of my friends.

To resolve the problem, I would like you to credit my visa card for the amount charged for the book and CD. Also I had to pay shipping charges when the package arrived, so I would like to be reimbursed for this amount as well. That could be in the form of a credit to my card or as a cheque, since I paid for it in cash. I have already bought another book from a different retailer, because I needed it quite urgently. I would accept a voucher or credit for other materials, if that is your policy.

Thank you in advance for taking care of this matter. I have always used books from your series and would like to remain a loyal customer.

Best regards,



Signature

Justin Thyme

Sample Letter Requesting Information

65 Geylang East Ave 4 #12-34
Singapore
153045

November 11 2016

Service Desk
Dictionary Heaven Pte. Ltd.
2A Tampines St. 1
Singapore
246810

Dear Customer Service Representative:

My name is Justin Thyme and I am interested in ordering your new dictionary and grammar book called "I live for English". I have been trying to order it online, but I have not had any success, and would like to know how this can be done.

When I went to your website, I entered the correct information, including the book's ISBN number: C29874. The website asked for my credit card information, as well as for my particulars (mailing address, phone number, etc.). I was able to enter all of this information, but I still could not purchase the book. I was somewhat worried because I entered my credit card information a few times into your system, and I did not receive any message saying it was successful or unsuccessful. I sent an email to my credit card company, but they could not explain why this occurred. They suggested I write to you instead.

Please advise me on the best way to make this purchase. If I need further instruction, please send me any necessary directions. Alternatively, I could pick the book up in person if you supply it at any of the major bookstores in town. Please let me know where I can buy this title, or if there are any other ways I can try. In addition, please check your sales records to see if any of my purchase attempts made it through to you.

Thank you in advance for taking care of this matter. I have always used books from your series and would like to remain a loyal customer. Any information can be sent to grammarman@hotmail.com

Best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Justin Thyme', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Justin Thyme

Sample Cover (Job Application) Letter

1 Geylang East Avenue 1, Unit 11-01
Singapore
389778

May 01 2016

Getta Djab
Director of Human Resources
DBS Bank
14 Tanjong Pagar Road
Singapore
112334

Dear Ms. Djab

Please consider this letter my application for the position of bank teller at the Tampines Branch of DBS, a position listed on your website on April 28, 2016. My objective is to find a rewarding position with an institution that makes use of my education as well as my strengths and talents. Considering my qualifications, I strongly believe that DBS may hold that opportunity and that I would be an asset to your service team.

My education and experience have provided me with an in-depth knowledge of banking operations, as well as the organizational structure. I have an undergraduate degree in Business, during which I also studied Psychology and French. Subsequently, I received my Master's degree in Business and have been able to use the knowledge I gained in both degrees to become an effective business representative.

I would like to find a position that allows upward movement. I believe in starting at an entry position and working my way to the stretches of my potential. I have been interested in banking since I was a high school student and that has shaped the direction of my tertiary education. I believe the DBS may be the institution that helps me grow along with it.

I have attached a copy of my resume with a list of references. I would very much appreciate an opportunity to further discuss my qualifications with you. I may be reached any time at banker@gmail.com or via mobile at +65 94857632. Thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you.

Best regards,

Otto Graff

Sample Apology Letter

Department of Customer Service
Holiday Spinn Hotel
21 Downda Road
Singapore
101010

May 08 2015

Ms. Anna Holly Day
16 A Beet Street
Singapore
202020

Dear Ms. Day:

My name is Shea Monyu and I am the director of the Customer Service Department at Holiday Spinn Hotel, Singapore. Thank you for your letter of April 28, 2016. It is with great concern that I read your letter about the service you received at our hotel between April 24 and April 27, 2016.

Firstly, on behalf of the hotel and the housekeeping department, I would like to apologize for the fact that your room was not properly serviced during your stay and they you left with a very bad impression of our hotel. We take pride in our level of comfort and cleanliness at Holiday Spinn, so I have taken your claim very seriously and have discovered that a problem with a new scheduling software caused the confusion about having the appropriate staff attend to your room at the appropriate time. For this we sincerely apologize.

I have issued a credit to your visa card, so that you will not be charged for your stay with us and would like to personally invite you to stay with us again for a free four-day holiday at a time of your convenience. We value you as a loyal customer and I would also like to assure you that we have taken steps to insure that this kind of mistake will not happen again. I do hope you come to visit us again, compliments of Holiday Spinn.

We value your feedback and look forward to hearing from you about our service once again, so that we can work to serve you better. Please feel free to contact me personally if you have any questions, or would like me to take care of your free booking. I may be reached through the email on our website or at +6599199100. I look forward to serving you again.

Warmest regards,

Shea Monyu
Director of Customer Service
Holiday Shinn

Sample Letter to the Editor

Wan Tu Noh
3 Woodlands Street East
Singapore
837465

May 05, 2016

Editor
The Straits Times
21 Ink Road
Singapore
987654

Dear Editor:

It is with sadness and support that I write to you about the article "Plight of Domestic Workers in Singapore" from the May 02, 2016 edition of The Straights Times, page 42. I feel that this is a topic that both Singaporeans and foreigners in this country must respond to, as it an issue relevant to those who hire domestic workers.

The author, Lim Dim Sum, stated that 20% of domestic workers in Singapore have been abused by their employers at some point during their working time in Singapore. I find this both astonishing and disturbing. As an employer of a domestic worker, I have always done my best to be sure that my helper is treated fairly and well; however, I have heard many stories over the years of maltreatment and even abuse from her friends. I am quite sure that this problem is rampant in Singapore and I wish to acknowledge publicly that this is an issue for us as a population. I also wish to applaud Mr. Lim who so bravely and eloquently presented his findings through his research study on the topic.

I feel it is our responsibility to stand united against abuse and I would like to call this newspaper to its role as well. Please take this issue as a role of your publication and aim to educate the public in the hopes of eradicating the abuse of domestic workers. Please give us more articles and updates on this troubling situation. As a Singaporean, I thank you and hope you will continue to work on this unfortunate issue.

Please consider me a supporter and accept my thanks and congratulations on bringing this important issue to light. I look forward to reading more in The Straits Times.

Respectfully yours,

Wan Tu Noh