

Writing a letter

Overview

The purpose of a letter is often to inform or communicate an experience or point of view to the reader. Letters give the reader information about a certain topic and can also be used to persuade the reader; for example, to ask for the writer's opinion to be considered. Letters can be formal; for example, if the letter is being used to apply for a job. Letters can also be more informal; for example, if it is a letter to someone you know well to tell them about your holiday and persuade them to try visiting the same place. The ways you use language and vocabulary when writing a letter will depend on the audience and the purpose you are writing for.

Tips for writing a letter

Language – think about:

- **the audience that the letter is for** – usually letters are written to one person, although for more formal letters you will not always know that person's name. If you do not know your reader's name, you can start your letter with 'Dear Sir/Madam' and will need to end your letter with 'Yours faithfully'.
- **how you expect, or want, your audience to react** – for example, if you are trying to persuade your reader to agree with a particular idea or project, your language might be positive and cheerful in tone.
- **the purpose for the letter** – for example, if you are writing to complain you are likely to be more formal and may use emotive words to describe aspects of poor service or a bad experience.
- **how to influence your reader to take your point of view or suggestions seriously** – remain calm and polite, even when you feel strongly and avoid writing very simple sentences with the same grammatical structures or simple repetitive vocabulary.

Organisation:

- **Plan a route through your letter before you start writing it** – the structure of a formal letter is usually in three parts. For example:
 1. **the opening paragraph** – outline the overall aim of the letter and make it clear why you are writing.
 2. **a middle** – explain and develop your points making sure they are relevant to the purpose of the letter.
 3. **an end** – draw your points together; for example, summarise the main points you want your reader to remember, or the action now required.
- **Use a conventional structure** – include the address of the writer at the top, a date and an opening greeting 'Dear ...'. You should end your letter with a standard phrase such as 'Yours sincerely' (if you know the reader's name). Formal letters also include the address of the reader at the top.
- **Use linking words and phrases which suit a more formal type of writing** – for example, you could use 'furthermore', 'however', 'in conclusion' to link ideas in sentences and paragraphs.
- **Make any timescales involved clear to your reader** – for example, 'I am currently', 'previously', 'prior to that'.

Example of a letter

	Comments
<p>Dear Hotel Manager, ¹</p> <p>I am writing this letter in connection to the wedding celebrated at your hotel of my son, and his now wife, that was on 16th April, 2022. ² Overall, the celebration was enjoyable and we would like to thank your decoration team especially for doing such an excellent job. All our guests liked the simple, yet elegant, combination of gold and silver. The lighting was perfect as well. ³</p> <p>⁴ However, there were several mistakes that put a dent in our otherwise great experience. Firstly, even though the quality of the food was admittedly fantastic, some guests were served with food they had never ordered. Secondly, many guests had to wait or did not get any of the items they had asked for. My wife and I ordered the lamb chops and shrimp sizzlings. It was almost ten o'clock when our food finally arrived and instead of lamb chops and shrimp sizzlings, we got fish cutlets! Furthermore, the hotel was told that there would be around 140 guests, hence, to prepare food for 140 people. Disappointingly, there was food for just 110 and some of the 127 who arrived had to be served something else. Embarrassingly, the hotel team had also misspelled my daughter-in-law's ⁵ name on the wedding cake. Likewise, several guests who had booked to stay the night were informed at the last minute that there were no rooms available after all. Moreover, on leaving the hotel they discovered that their cars were blocked into the car park and it took staff hours to find the drivers.</p> <p>I expect the hotel to compensate for these mistakes and refund my son the money he paid for the food for thirty people more than we got. Additionally, I would request that you send the newlyweds a ⁶ new cake with their names spelled correctly and an apology for the accident. Finally, I expect that you take the necessary actions to avoid such situations with car parking in future. I trust you will be agreeable to my requests.</p> <p>Yours faithfully, ⁷</p> <p>[Full Name]</p>	<p>¹ The learner uses the title of the person they are writing to since they do not know the manager personally and are writing about a matter related to the hotel.</p> <p>² The learner introduces the topic in this opening paragraph.</p> <p>³ The learner politely acknowledges the positive aspects of the hotel's work to suggest they are taking a reasonable and balanced view.</p> <p>⁴ The candidate uses a range of appropriate linking words to connect their points, e.g. 'firstly', 'admittedly' 'however', 'furthermore' 'likewise', 'moreover'.</p> <p>⁵ There is good evidence of a sense of purpose and audience in this paragraph.</p> <p>⁶ The learner maintains a calm and firm tone in this concluding paragraph to make it clear what action they are expecting from the hotel.</p> <p>⁷ The learner uses an appropriate sign off.</p>