

Writing Success **SECRETS**



**Practical Tips
and Tricks For
Everyday
Writing**

by Shaun Fawcett, M.B.A.

www.writinghelptools.com

WRITING SUCCESS SECRETS

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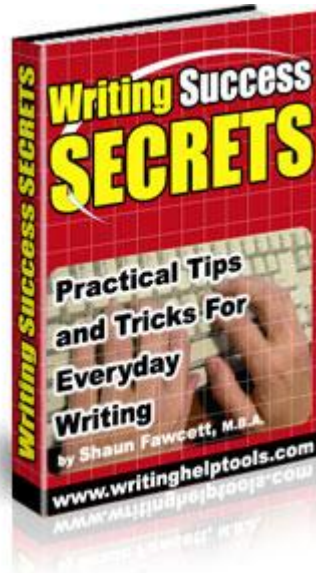
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

My name is Shaun Fawcett. I'm a Canadian-born writer, business consultant, journalist and publisher. Over the years I have worked in a wide variety of professional capacities in both the public and private sectors. I earned my M.B.A. in 1996 through the University of Ottawa's Executive MBA Program.



My recent book "*Internet Basics without fear! (Revised Edition)*" is available in bookstores across North America, and worldwide through amazon.com. I also own and operate Montreal-based Final Draft! Consulting and Publishing.

In the spring of 2001 I launched WritingHelp-Central.com as an Internet portal site focused on providing practical writing help, tips, advice, and resources for the average person. Since then, that site has become a "writing help" destination that receives over 70,000 unique visitors every month.

Thus far, I have written and published three best-selling eBooks as follows:

Instant Home Writing Kit <http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsikit>

Instant Business Letter Kit <http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>

Instant Recommendation Letter Kit <http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrkit>

In early 2002 I launched the now widely acclaimed e-mail-delivered course *Tips and Tricks For Writing Success* to which over 10,000 people subscribed during its first year. I also publish a popular monthly "writing help" newsletter full of practical writing-related tips, tricks, information and resources. You can subscribe here: <http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wscourse>

My latest project was the launching of a one-stop Web site that focuses strictly on proven, high-quality writing tools that can help you save time, money and energy when doing your day-to-day writing tasks, whether for home, work, or business.

Writing Help Tools <http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wstools>

I hope you find this eBook helpful in dealing with your day-to-day writing tasks.



Shaun Fawcett, M.B.A.

INTRODUCTION

Ever since I launched my first “writing help” Web site back in early 2001 I have been observing visitors to my site and learning about the kinds of problems and questions that ordinary people have with respect to their everyday writing tasks, both business and personal. Believe me, a lot of people are looking for this kind of help!

The purpose of this eBook is to share some of the things I have learned over the years as a professional writer and business consultant that will help you deal with many of the problems and issues that arise in day-to-day home and business writing.

This is NOT a creative writing guide.

If you are an aspiring creative writer looking for help with writing your first novel or short story, you might be better served by going to www.google.com and entering the phrase “creative writing help”.

Or, you can try some of the creative writing links at my Writing Help Central Web site: www.writinghelp-central.com/resources.html.

Nevertheless, I am certain that there are some practical tips and tricks shared in this eBook that even aspiring creative writers can learn from.

However, from the very outset, the whole purpose behind my writing help Web sites and writing help e-products has been to help the average person with their day-to-day writing needs. The reason for this is that, in my various jobs over the years, I have observed that many people seem to have difficulty with “putting pen to paper” so to speak, when it comes to performing seemingly straightforward and routine writing tasks, whether at home, at school, or at work - even many well-educated people.

I believe that there are some fairly basic reasons for this, as well as a number of easy-to-implement, simple remedies in the form of tips and tricks that can overcome these blocks for most people that experience these types of writing problems. Many of these remedies are covered throughout this eBook.

Based on visitor behavior and questions at my main writing help Web site over an 18 month period, the principal areas where people are seeking help with their day-to-day writing tasks are: letter writing, resume/cv writing, and report writing. Of these, letter writing information and help are the most commonly requested.

The information included in this eBook is drawn from the following sources:

- My widely acclaimed writing course, *Tips and Tricks For Writing Success*.
- My WritingHelp-Central.com and WritingHelpTools.com Web sites.
- A few brief excerpts from my first three my eBooks.
- Some original material written specifically for this eBook.

I have organized the material in this eBook under five main theme areas:

- letter writing - general
- recommendation and reference letters
- business letters and reports
- resume and cover letters
- other writing issues

I have no doubt that you'll find some of this material useful in helping you deal with your everyday writing challenges.

LETTER WRITING – GENERAL

As I write this, my main writing help Web site is receiving visits from over 3,000 people each weekday looking for help with their letter writing. I would say that the majority of them are looking for sample templates, first and foremost.

However, based on the popularity of my eBook Instant Home Writing Kit, many people realize that they need some help and advice beyond just cutting and pasting someone else's template.

Here's an article I wrote on some basic letter-writing fundamentals.

7 Essential Letter-Writing Strategies

Based on the feedback that I have been getting from visitors to my writinghelp-central.com Web site, letter writing is definitely the area where most people are looking for help or guidance when it comes to day-to-day writing.

Over 55% of the visitors to my site are seeking some sort of letter writing information or assistance. The following lists the types of letters that people request information on, in order of popularity:

- recommendation letter
- reference letter
- business letter
- thank you letter
- cover letter
- complaint letter
- sales letter

- introduction letter
- resignation letter
- termination letter
- follow-up letter

The 7 Strategies

Here are some key practical letter-writing tips and strategies to help you when writing that next letter:

1. Keep It Short and To The Point

Letters involving business (personal or corporate) should be concise, factual, and focused. Try to never exceed one page or you will be at risk of losing your reader. A typical letter page will hold 350 to 450 words. If you can't get your point across with that many words you probably haven't done enough preparatory work. If necessary, call the recipient on the phone to clarify any fuzzy points and then use the letter just to summarize the overall situation.

2. Make It Clear, Concise, and Logical

Before sitting down to write, make a brief point-form outline of the matters you need to cover in the letter. Organize those points into a logical progression that you can use as your guide as you write the letter. The logical blocks of the letter should be: introduction/purpose, background/explanation, summary/conclusion, action required statement. Use this outline process to organize your approach and your thoughts, and to eliminate any unnecessary repetition or redundancy.

3. Focus On The Recipient's Needs

While writing the letter, focus on the information requirements of your audience, the intended addressee. If you can, in your "mind's eye", imagine the intended recipient seated across a desk or boardroom table from you while you are explaining the

subject of the letter. What essential information does that person need to know through this communication? What will be their expectations when they open the letter? Have you addressed all these issues?

4. Use Simple And Appropriate Language

Your letter should use simple straightforward language, for clarity and precision. Use short sentences and don't let paragraphs exceed three or four sentences. As much as possible, use language and terminology familiar to the intended recipient. Do not use technical terms and acronyms without explaining them, unless you are certain that the addressee is familiar with them.

5. Use Short Sentences and Paragraphs

Keep your sentences as short as possible, and break the text into brief paragraphs. Ideally, a paragraph should not exceed two to three sentences. This makes the letter more readable, and entices the recipient to read it sooner, rather than later.

6. Review and Revise It

Do a first draft, and then carefully review and revise it. Put yourself in the place of the addressee. Imagine yourself receiving the letter. How would you react to it? Would it answer all of your questions? Does it deal with all of the key issues? Are the language and tone appropriate? Sometimes reading it out loud to one's self can help. When you actually "hear" the words it is easy to tell if it "sounds" right or not.

7. Double Check Spelling and Grammar

A letter is a direct reflection of the person sending it, and by extension, the organization that person works for. When the final content of the letter is settled, make sure that you run it through a spelling and grammar checker. To send a letter with obvious spelling and grammatical errors is sloppy and unprofessional. In such

cases, the recipient can't really be blamed for seeing this as an indication as to how you (and/or your organization) probably do most other things.

The foregoing basic letter writing strategies and tips are mostly common sense.

Nevertheless, you would be amazed how often these very basic "rules of thumb" are not employed when people write letters.

Instant Home Writing Kit...

- Over 200 Pages Of "How-To" Tips, Tricks, Information And Sample Templates.
- More Than 50 Fully-Formatted Downloadable Real-Life Templates (MS-Word).
- Includes Personal and Business Letters, Reports, Resumes, Essays, E-Mails, Term Papers.
- *Bonus Chapter* On Business Report Writing With Tips, Tricks, Advice, And Samples.
- Over 50 Insider Tips, Tricks And Secrets You Can Apply To Your Everyday Writing Tasks.
- Free Consultation With The Author On The Letter Of Your Choice.
- 100% Risk-Free Guarantee That You'll Save Money If You Apply The Info And Templates.

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsikit>

Real-Life Templates Will Kick-Start Your Writing

The following article explains the fundamental difference between letter and other document templates that I include on my Web sites and in my various writing toolkits.

As you will see below, I am convinced that “real-life templates” are far superior to the standard fill-in-the-blank generic cut-and-paste templates that one sees all around the Web. In fact, I am such a strong believer in this that I include a version of the following article in each of my writing toolkit eBooks. Here’s the article:

At some point along the way, most of us have used what are commonly called "fill-in-the-blank" writing templates. We might have used them to write a letter, format an essay, or set-up a resume or CV. Here’s a typical example:

Dear [NAME OF RECIPIENT]:

This is to advise you that your probation period in the position [POSITION NAME] expired on [DATE].

The [NAME OF REVIEW COMMITTEE] met on [DATE OF MEETING] and determined that your probationary appointment was successful, and that you should be immediately appointed to [NAME OF POSITION] [NAME OF ORGANIZATIONAL UNIT].

Accordingly, this is to inform you that effective [DATE OF APPOINTMENT] you are officially appointed to the position of [NAME OF POSITION] for an initial period of [NUMBER OF YEARS/MONTHS]. Terms and conditions of your employment are covered by [OFFICIAL CONTRACT NAME/NUMBER].

Would you please report as soon as possible to [NAME OF OFFICIAL], [TITLE OF OFFICIAL] in the [OFFICIAL NAME OF HR GROUP] so that the details of your appointment may be properly documented.

Congratulations [NAME OF APPOINTEE]. All of us at [COMPANY OR ORGANIZATION NAME] look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,

[NAME AND TITLE OF ORIGINATOR]

Although this “fill-in-the-blank” approach can work, it has a number of shortcomings:

- Because of their generic nature, they tend to generalize so much that they look like a computer generated form letter.
- They don't provide specific information on how a professional would properly fill in the required information [i.e. the BLANKS].
- They don't provide mental stimulation, or show how a professional might word the letter in a specific real-life context.
- The content is typically watered down to try and cover every possible situation.
- Thus, they are virtually useless for 98% of real-life situations, since they lack real-life content.

On the other hand, here's what a "real-life" template would look like:

Dear Jessica:

This is to advise you that your probation period in the position Customer Service Agent (Temporary) expired on November 30, 2003.

The Staffing Review Committee met late last week and determined that your probationary appointment was successful, and that you should be immediately appointed as Customer Service Agent (Ongoing).

Accordingly, this is to inform you that effective December 1, 2003 you are officially appointed to the position of Customer Service Agent in the Customer Support Group for an initial period of 36 months. Terms and conditions of your employment are covered by the Customer Service Group Employment Agreement.

Would you please report as soon as possible to Jim Jackson, Chief of Human Resources so that the details of your appointment may be properly documented.

Congratulations Jessica! All of us here at MedWay Systems Inc. look forward to continuing to work with you in the future.

Sincerely,

Sharon Smithson
Manager, Customer Support Group

I have no doubt that the "model" that most of us would rather work with if we had to write a similar letter is definitely the second one, the "real-life" template. Many owners of my Writing Kit products that use real-life templates, have confirmed this in their e-mails to me.

It's not hard to understand why people prefer the "real-life" templates.

You can relate to them. They talk about real-life people in a real-life situation that you can identify with. And, you get to see exactly how a professional worded it.

(I should also mention that the "fill-in-the-blanks" sample that I provided in the first sample above is somewhat generous when it comes to depicting the typical template that one finds on the Web. Most of those are much skimpier in detail, are not well-written, and aren't properly formatted.)

In summary, here are the main advantages of "real-life" templates.

Fully-Formatted Final Versions

"Real-life" templates are fully-formatted as final documents so that you can see exactly how they looked when they were sent out in a "real-life" situation. They don't look like some kind of "draft" form letter.

Content With Value

Working with "real-life" templates, it is much easier to adapt them to YOUR actual situations because they give you visual and intellectual cues that you can relate to.

Naturally, when you see how a copywriter or consultant has dealt with a "real-life" scenario, in terms of word choice, context, and punctuation, it is much easier to adapt to the real-life situation that you are writing for. In that way, the actual content has value.

Easy To Work With

"Real-life" templates are just as easy to work with as other templates. You simply load them into your word processing program and edit and adjust them to fit your own specific situation. Presto! You have a fully formatted real-life letter ready to be printed and sent out in the mail. You also have the comfort of knowing that what you are sending has already been used in other "real-life" situations.

Bottom Line On Real-Life Templates

With real-life templates, it is much easier to find an adaptable "fit" for the situation for which you are writing. Not only do they give you the final format of a document, their content provides an excellent real-life sample and gives food-for-thought to assist you in the writing process.

Sample Real-Life Templates

Here are a few sample "real-life" letter templates and one "real-life" resume template from my Writing Help Central web site:

www.writinghelp-central.com/cover-letter.html

www.writinghelp-central.com/thank-you-letter.html

www.writinghelp-central.com/resume-sample2.html

Are you back yet?

Now I ask you, would you rather work from a "fill-in-the-blanks" generic template or, a fully-formatted "real-life" template?

For over 60 downloadable real-life templates for day-to-day home and business writing including, letters, resumes/cvs, essays, business reports:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsikit>

For over 35 downloadable real-life recommendation letter templates for home, business and college admission, plus admission essay templates:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrkit>

For over 100 downloadable real-life templates of business letters and forms for just about all business situations:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>

RECOMMENDATION AND REFERENCE LETTERS

Much to my surprise, when I first started analyzing information as to exactly why visitors were coming to my Writing Help Central Web site, I found that a large percentage of them were looking for information on “recommendation letters” or “letters of recommendation”.

For quite a while I was confused by this because it just didn't seem to make sense that so many people would be looking for information on how to write job-related recommendation letters.

Then I did my research and discovered the real story on “recommendation letters”. The following two articles will tell you what I found.

Recommendation Letters Demystified

There is a lot of confusion about recommendation letters.

Recommendation letters are often referred to in a number of different ways including: letters of recommendation, reference letters, letters of reference, commendation letters, and sometimes even, performance evaluation letters.

This terminology can be quite confusing, especially when these terms are often used interchangeably, sometimes to mean the same thing, sometimes to mean something different.

Below are some definitions that should clear up any confusion.

Letters Of Recommendation

Employment-Related

Also called a recommendation letter, it is an employment-related letter that is specifically requested by the person the letter is being written about. Such a letter is normally positive in nature, and written by someone who knows the subject well enough to comment on the skills, abilities, and specific work attributes of that person.

Typically, an employment-related recommendation letter conveys one person's view of the work performance and general workplace demeanor of another person that has worked under their direct supervision. The requestor of the letter normally requests such a letter to use when applying for a promotion or a new job.

These letters are usually addressed to a specific person to whom the requestor has been asked to submit the letter.

College- and University-Related

Another situation where recommendation letters are a common requirement is for entry into undergraduate and graduate programs at a college or university. Graduate programs often request two or more letters of recommendation as part of admission requirements.

Normally, these college-related recommendation letters are written at the request of the program applicant by people who know them and are familiar with their academic career to date, and their future education and career aspirations. These people could include: former teachers, community leaders, school faculty members, administrators, academic supervisors, and/or employers.

These letters are always addressed to a specific person and are normally included as part of the program admission application.

Letters Of Reference

These are more general letters that are often requested by employees when they leave the employ of an organization. Normally factual in nature, they are usually addressed, "to whom it may concern" and provide basic information such as: work history, dates of employment, positions held, academic credentials, etc.

Reference letters sometimes contain a general statement (as long as a positive one can be made), about the employee's work record with the company that they are leaving. Employees often submit these letters with job applications in the hope that the letter will reflect favorably on their chances for the new position.

Character reference letters are sometimes required by employers when hiring individuals to perform personal or residential services such as child care, domestic services, etc. These letters are usually drafted by a former employer and deal with such characteristics as honesty, dependability and work ethic/performance.

Commendation Letters

These are usually unsolicited letters, which typically commend an employee to their supervisor for something outstanding or noteworthy that the employee has done. Usually, the employee would have to do something "above and beyond" what is normally expected of them in their "official" job to warrant such a letter.

Typically, these letters are written either by co-workers, or by managers from another area of the organization who were suitably impressed while supervising the person on a short-term project.

Commendation letters are also used to nominate individuals for special awards of recognition for outstanding public service.

Performance Evaluation Letters

These are usually detailed assessments of an employee's work performance as part of an organization's regular employee review process. Typically, they are written by the employee's supervisor and are attached to the individual's performance appraisal and placed in their personnel file.

The format and structure for this type of letter is more often than not dictated by the employee performance evaluation system or process that is in-place wherever the subject of the letter is employed.

However, in the academic environment in North America there is often a requirement for a specific “performance evaluation letter” for the assessment of academic staff. A number of real-life templates of academic-related performance evaluation letters are included in the appropriate section of *Instant Recommendation Letter Kit*.

In addition, the Online Resources Links chapter at the end of that eBook contains researched links to various types of performance evaluation letters, from both the academic sector and other employment sectors.

To see a fully-formatted "real-life template" of a recommendation letter, click here:

www.writinghelp-central.com/recommendation-letter.html

For the complete “how-to” guide on writing all types of letter of recommendation, including 35 downloadable templates:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrkit>

Recommendation Letter Tips and Strategies

The following tips apply primarily to the writing of recommendation letters and reference letters as defined previously.

Write It Only If You Want To

If you are asked by someone to write a letter of recommendation about them, you don't have to say "yes" automatically. If it is someone you respect for their work, and you have mostly positive things to say about them, by all means write the letter.

There is no point saying "yes" and then writing a letter that says nothing good about the person, or worse still, concocting a misleading positive assessment of someone.

If You Must Refuse, Do So Right Away

On the other hand, if someone asks you to write a letter of reference for them, and you know you'll be hard-pressed to keep the overall letter positive, say "no" right up front. No point in hesitating and leading them on to believe that the answer might be "yes".

A gentle but firm "no" will usually get the message across to the person. Explain that you don't think that you are the best (or most qualified) person to do it.

Suggest Someone Else

If you feel you should refuse, for whatever reason, it may be helpful for you to suggest someone else who you think might have a more positive and/or accurate assessment of the person. That person may also be in a better position to do the assessment. Usually there are a number of possible candidates, and you may not actually be the best person.

In fact, I have seen a number of cases over the years where people requesting recommendation letters, have not requested the letter from the obvious or logical choice. They usually do this when they don't like the obvious choice or are worried about what that person will say about them.

Write It As You See It

Writing a less than honest recommendation letter does no one a favor in the end. It is likely to backfire on you, the person being recommended, and the new employer.

Also, many employers and head-hunting agencies check references. How would you like to be called up and have to mislead people due to questionable things you may have written in a reference letter?

The above are overall tips for writing letters of recommendation in a general sense and pretty well apply across the board. However, there are also very specific tips and strategies that apply to each different type of recommendation letter, whether employment-related or college admission-related.

Instant Recommendation Letter Kit...

- [Employment-Related Recommendation Letters - Drafting Tips and Sample Templates.](#)
- [College-Related Letters of Recommendation - Drafting Tips and Sample Templates.](#)
- [Reference Letters - Drafting Tips and Sample Templates.](#)
- [Commendation Letters - Drafting Tips and Sample Templates.](#)
- [Performance Evaluation Letters - Drafting Tips and Sample Templates.](#)
- [Bonus Chapter – How-To Write College Admission Essays.](#)
- [35 Downloadable Real-Life Templates – Recommendation Letters and Admission Essays.](#)
- [Bonus Buyers Guide To Online Writing Services For Recommendation Letters and Essays.](#)

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrkit>

Tips For writing Effective Reference Letters

Although reference letters are quite similar to recommendation letters, there are a number of subtle differences specific to writing reference letters.

As mentioned, due to their general nature, reference letters are usually addressed “to whom it may concern”, whereas recommendation letters are more personalized and detailed and are, almost without exception, addressed to a specific person.

If you are asked by someone to write a “letter of reference” for them, here are a few important points to keep in mind:

Make Sure You’re the Right One

If you feel that you don’t know the person well enough or are not the appropriate person, you should decline. Although this isn’t quite as critical as it is for recommendation letters since your reference letter will be more general in nature and not directed to a specific person.

However, remember that your personal “John Henry” will be in the signature block.

Typically, if an employment-related reference letter, you would be asked to write it by someone who is leaving your organization to take another job. Normally, you would have a certain moral obligation to supply such a letter.

But watch out! I recently read an article stating that lawyers for some big firms are advising their corporate clients not to commit themselves to paper in general reference letters for fear of later legal repercussions in cases where they might give a good reference and then later the employee somehow screws up.

To me, this is paranoid thinking. But as we know, most lawyers tend to go to extremes when it comes to covering rear ends. My advice is just to make sure that whatever you do write is honest and fair.

Start With the Background Parameters

As mentioned above, for a reference letter you will normally not be writing to any particular person. It's usually addressed "To whom it may concern". In the opening paragraph provide all of the background information such as: your relationship to the person, organization name, position titles, time-frame and dates covered by your assessment, and any other relevant background information. For most letters you shouldn't have to get much more specific.

Get Additional Input From Requestor

If you feel you need more information, don't hesitate to ask the requestor for a copy of their resume/cv. In addition, if you have access to them, you may want to have a quick review of recent performance evaluations.

You can also ask the requestor to jot down some key points they would like you to mention if possible (at your discretion). This would include things like highlighting their work and accomplishments on a special project and/or their participation on a special task force, for example.

Don't Get Too Specific

Since a reference letter is somewhat general and open-ended in nature, don't go overboard with specific traits and details about the person you are writing about. It will be helpful to use meaningful job-performance-related terms and words, although in a much more general sense than one would in a recommendation letter.

If it's employment-related, your reference letter should address all or most of the areas of the person that are job-performance-related, but in a general sense. Specific examples and details are less necessary than in a regular recommendation letter. For example, such statements as "I observed Wendy to be a hard-working, highly-effective team participant, with strong communication skills" would suffice.

Avoid Controversial Terminology

As with recommendation letters, make sure you avoid using any words or terminology that could be construed as discriminatory such as: race, color, religion, political affiliation, sex, sexual orientation, age, physical appearance, handicaps, marital or parental status, etc.

Use Active, Powerful Words

Neutral words such as good, nice, satisfactory, fair, reasonable, etc. should be avoided. Use active, descriptive words and terms such as: assertive, intelligent, initiator, self-starter, motivated, productive, cooperative, hard-working, creative, articulate, leader, communicator, team player, innovative, effective, efficient, honest, dependable, etc.

Review the Final Product

Before signing your letter, do a final careful review. Check all spelling and grammar and make sure the terminology used is appropriate. Read it out loud to yourself and imagine being the recipient. Is it fair and balanced? Does it truly convey what you believe and want to say about the person who you are recommending? If not, revise it.

See the source on writing reference letters and recommendation letters:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrkit>

BUSINESS LETTERS AND REPORTS

You would be quite amazed to know the amount of confusion that exists on the subject of business letters. In fact, what exactly is a business letter? Well, if you check out the appropriate section of your local bookstore you will find all kinds of guides claiming to tell you all about business letters. The only problem is that most of them don't clearly define a business letter or differentiate it from other "non-business" letters.

What if the letter involves personal business? Do you classify it as personal or business? Is a "letter of introduction" a business letter or a personal letter? How about a "cover letter"? Clearly, a resume cover letter is a personal letter. But then, there are business cover letters too. A cover letter for a report that is being sent from one company to another is one example.

There are many other examples of this kind of confusion as to what exactly comprises a business letter, and what doesn't.

See for yourself. Go to your local bookstore and check out the business books section. You might find half a dozen different books about writing business letters. Look at the Tables of Contents of a few of those. See if you can find a common thread of logic as to what classifies as a "business letter" and what doesn't. Good luck!

Here's an article I wrote that clears up the confusion around business letters.

Business Letters Explained

Despite the widespread use of e-mail in commerce today, traditional business letters are still the main way that the majority of businesses officially communicate with their customers and other businesses.

This is especially true when businesses want to formalize an agreement or an understanding. E-mails are great for all of the preparatory work, but a formal business letter is still most often needed to "seal the deal".

There are two basic categories of business letters: business-to-business, and business-to-customer.

Business-to-Business Letters

The majority of business-to-business letters are written to confirm things that have already been discussed among officials in meetings, on the telephone, or via e-mail.

Can you imagine the letters that would have to go back and forth to cover all of the questions and possibilities that can be covered in a one-hour meeting, a half-hour phone call, or a few quick e-mails?

The main purpose of a typical business letter is to formalize the details that were arrived at in those discussions and communications, and to provide any additional information that was agreed upon.

Over the years, certain general standards have evolved in the business world that the vast majority of businesses use in drafting their business-to-business correspondence.

Typical business-to-business letters include: price quotations, meeting confirmations, order confirmations, joint venture proposals, project status reports, news releases, invitations to participate, etc.

There is also a type of internal business letter that is known as a "business memorandum". Business memoranda are used almost exclusively for formal correspondence *within* a company.

Business-to-Customer Letters

There are many different types of business-to-customer letters. The typical “customer” is defined here as an individual “consumer”. Although technically, other businesses are also “customers” as well, at some point.

Nevertheless, the vast majority of day-to-day business letters are sent to regular, everyday members of the general public who purchase products and services from the company sending the letter.

Typical business-to-customer business letters include: sales and marketing letters, information letters, order acknowledgement letters, order status letters, collection letters, credit status letters, response to complaint letters, service follow-up letters, announcement letters, among others.

As with business-to-business letters, over the years, certain general practical standards have evolved in the business world that the vast majority of businesses use when drafting letters to existing and potential customers.

Of course, going in the other direction are customer-to-business letters. These include such correspondence as: order letters, order status inquiry letters, requests for information, complaint letters, and others.

Since these are customer-generated letters, there is no particular expectation that they follow any particular letter-writing standard. Typically, they are handled just like any other piece of personal correspondence.

Why not try my *45-Second Business Letter Quiz* to see what you know:
<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbquiz>

Business Letter Layout Styles

Let me start by qualifying that this is not “the” all-encompassing definitive list of all possible business letter formats that exist. Just the books in my personal collection of business writing style guides list over a dozen different business letter formats. A number of them even refer to the same format using a variety of different names.

I’ve simplified things as much as possible, and put together what I believe to be the most representative examples of business letter formats that are in use today. So, here are what I consider to be the five generally accepted business letter formats or styles used in most businesses today:

- Basic-Block
- Semi-Block
- Full-Block
- Square-Block
- Simplified Letter

Detailed format style templates illustrating the differences between each of these business letter formats are included in:

Instant Business Letter Kit...

- More Than 300 Pages of Business-Related Tips, Tricks, Information and Samples.
- Over 100 Downloadable Fully-Formatted Real-Life Templates (MS-Word).
- **Style Templates Of The Five(5) Most Commonly Used Business Letter Formats.**
- Top 17 Tips, Tricks, and Guidelines For Formatting Business Letters and Memos.
- Exclusive “6 Secret Tricks” for Keeping A Business Letter On One Page.
- 125 Commonly Used Redundant Phrases and What To Replace Them With.
- 40 Transition Words and Phrases That Will Drastically Improve Your Business Letters.
- Over 70 Researched Links To Online Business Letter Resources, Services, and Tools.
- *Bonus Chapter* – Tips and Tricks for Writing Business Reports.
- Free Consultation With The Author On The Business Letter Of Your Choice.

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>

The following page contains the generic format for a standard business letter.

Basic Business Letter – Layout

LETTERHEAD BLOCK	
1234 Anyold Street., Suite 0000 Anyoldtown, XX, 00000 Tel. (000) 000-0000 Fax. (000) 000-0000	
inbox@company.com	www.company.com
Date Line:	
Address Block: Address Block Line 2 Address Block Line 3 Address Block Line 4	
Attention Line: <i>(optional)</i>	
Salutation Line:	
Subject Line: <i>(optional)</i>	
Body Block: Paragraph 1. The primary purpose of a business letter is to convey a message that is worth writing down, clearly and succinctly, using as few words as possible, but without obscuring or diluting the main point(s).	
Paragraph 2. The primary purpose of a business letter is to convey a message that is worth writing down, clearly and succinctly, using as few words as possible, but without obscuring or watering down the main point(s).	
Paragraph 3. The primary purpose of a business letter is to convey a message that is worth writing down, clearly and succinctly, using as few words as possible, but without obscuring or watering down the main point(s).	
Closing paragraph. This is usually a one or two sentence summary of the main point of the letter with a see you soon or thank you statement worked into it.	
Complimentary Closing:	
Signature Block: Name Line Signature Block: Title Line	
Reference Initials: <i>(optional)</i>	
Enclosure/Attachment Line: <i>(when needed)</i> cc Line: <i>(when needed)</i>	

For full definitions for each of these fields, and guidelines for content:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>

Business Report Writing Tips

People often cringe at the thought of writing a “business report”. Granted, these may be a little more complicated than business letters, but if approached in the right way, writing a business report can be a straightforward and reasonably painless process.

The important thing to realize is that whether it’s a short 10-pager, or a major 100-plus pager, the report writing “process” will involve essentially the same steps.

The following seven points are what I consider to be the essential steps for writing a business report. Follow these steps carefully and you won’t go wrong.

7 Key Steps For Writing Better Business Reports

1. Confirm Exactly What the Client Wants

This is a very important initial step. Whether the client is you, or someone else, be sure that everyone is talking about the same thing in terms of expectations. When determining this, always think in terms of the final deliverable (usually the final report). What issues must it address? What direction/guidance is it expected to give? **What bottom line are they looking for?**

2. Determine What Type of Report Is Required

This is another very important initial matter to clarify. There are a number of different types of business reports. Although there is usually overlap between the different types, there are also important differences. For example, do they want: a business plan, a business proposal, a strategic plan, a corporate information management plan, a strategic business plan, a marketing plan, a financial plan, or what?. **Know exactly what type of report they are expecting, from the outset.**

3. Conduct the Initial Research

Once you know exactly what the client (or you) wants, and the type of report they are looking for, you are ready to conduct your initial pre-report research. This stage may be as simple as collecting and reading a few background documents supplied by the client, or it could involve developing questionnaires and conducting detailed interviews with the appropriate people. It will vary with each situation. The Internet of course, can really simplify and shorten the research process, **but don't forget to double and triple check your sources.**

4. Write the Table of Contents First

In my experience, drafting the Table of Contents (TOC), before you start writing the actual report is the single most important key to developing a successful business report. This should be more than just a rough draft TOC. It should be a carefully thought out breakdown of exactly what you imagine the TOC will look like in the final report. Although this takes a bit of time and brain power up-front, it really streamlines the rest of the process. What I do is to actually visualize the final report in my mind's eye and write the contents down. This really works! **This TOC becomes a step-by-step template for the rest of the process.**

5. Do Any Additional Research

After thinking through the TOC in detail, you will know if any additional research is required. If so, do this before you sit down and start to actually write the report. That way, once you begin the writing process you will have all of the information you need at hand and **will not have to interrupt the writing process to conduct any further research.**

6. Create the Skeleton Document

A trick I always use when working with MS-Word is to create a skeleton document first. That is, before I actually write any of the text, I enter the entire Table of Contents that I have already developed into MS-Word (see Step 4), heading by heading, including sub-headings. At this point, the document is essentially a sequential series of headings and sub-headings with blank space between them. I then have MS-Word generate an automatic Table of Contents that exactly matches my planned TOC. Finally, **I'm then ready to start filling in the blank spaces after each heading and sub-heading in the body of the document, with text.**

7. Write The Report By Filling In The Blanks

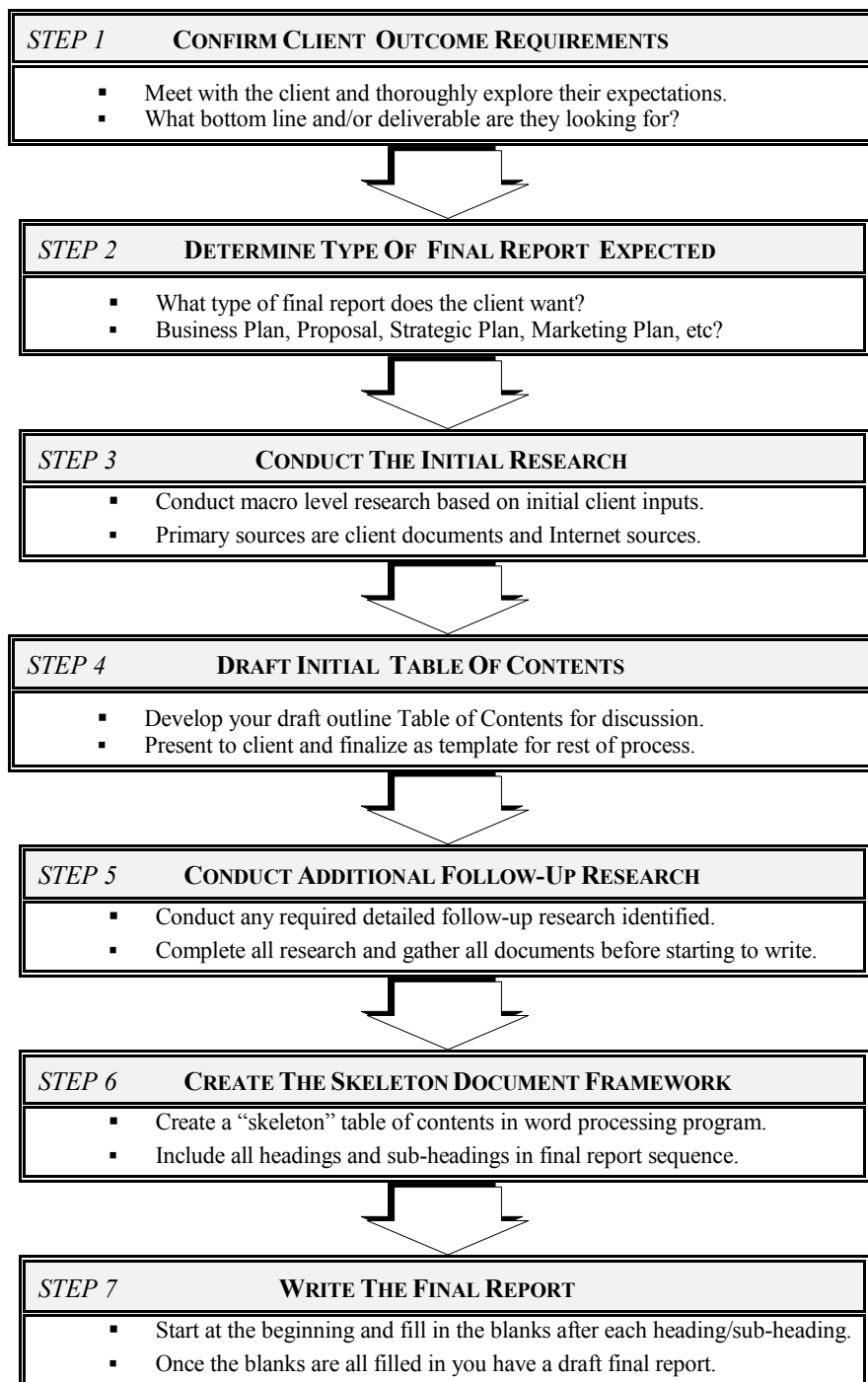
That's right, by filling in the blanks. Once the TOC skeleton framework is in-place as per the previous step, writing the actual report becomes almost like filling in the blanks. Just start at the beginning and work your way through the headings and sub-headings, one at a time, until you get to the end. Really. At that point, **with all of the preparation done, it should be that straightforward.**

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- Top 17 Tips, Tricks, and Guidelines For Formatting Business Letters and Memos.
- Exclusive "6 Secret Tricks" for Keeping A Business Letter On One Page.
- 125 Commonly Used Redundant Phrases and What To Replace Them With.
- 40 Transition Words and Phrases That Will Drastically Improve Your Business Letters.
- Over 70 Researched Links to Online Business Letter Resources, Services, and Tools.
- **Bonus Chapter – Tips and Tricks for Writing Business Reports, with samples.**
- Free Consultation With The Author On The Business Letter Of Your Choice.

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>

The Report Writing Process



For a complete explanation of how to use these process diagrams:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>

RESUMES AND COVER LETTERS

Many people come to my main Writing Help Central Web site looking for information and templates related to the writing of resumes/cvs and cover letters. During my time in numerous management and professional positions over the years, I managed to get lots of experience in recruiting and staffing. I have written and reviewed scores of resumes and cover letters. Based on that experience, I will share some of the practical lessons that I have learned on resume and cover letter writing in the two articles that follow.

Although, I should add that when I look for an authority in this area, I always rely on Kevin Donlin, an experienced human resource specialist who has written what many consider to be the “bible” on resumes and cover letters. It’s called “Resume and Cover Letter Secrets Revealed.” You can check it out Kevin’s masterpiece at this link:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrescov>

Here are my two articles in which I share practical tips and advice for writing resumes and cover letters.

10 Tips For Writing A Winning Resume

Your resume (or curriculum vitae), combined with the cover letter, are the master keys to opening the prospective employer's mind and door so that you can proceed to the next step in the process - the big interview!

Resume Writing Tips and Strategies

Here are 10 valuable tips for anyone writing their own resume, or who is having someone else write their resume for them. These tips and strategies are an abridged version of what is contained in my eBook, "Instant Home Writing Kit".

1. Keep It Focused and Businesslike

A resume should be specific and all business. Don't try to be too smart or cute. After all, you are asking an employer to invest significant time and money by choosing you over many other similarly qualified people. Employers mainly want to know whether you are appropriately qualified and experienced, and if you have the ability to "deliver the goods."

2. More Than Two Pages Is Too Much

For students, recent graduates, or people with just a few years of experience, try to keep your resume to one page, two as an absolute maximum. Even a resume for someone with 20 years or more of extensive working experience, should not exceed three pages. In some cases, one or two "optional" pages can be referred to as "available upon request." These would be such optional annexes as a list of references or an inventory of recent projects and/or publications.

3. Get the Words and Punctuation Right

Make sure the grammar, spelling, and punctuation in your resume are perfect. Any obvious mistakes will hurt your credibility. Also, be sure to keep the language clear and simple. If you draft it yourself, have someone with excellent writing skills do an editorial review and a careful proofread of it. If a professional prepares it for you, such reviews are the responsibility of the resume preparation firm. Use an accepted English language "style guide" if you want to be sure of the finer points of word usage, punctuation, capitalization, abbreviations, etc.

4. Read Between The Lines

Customize the resume to match the stated requirements of the job that you are applying for, without being misleading. Review and analyze the job advertisement carefully. Look for, and itemize the key qualifications, skills, and abilities the

employer is seeking. Then identify certain key words that are usually repeated in such ads. Make sure that the wording and sequence of points in your resume reflect and address these "corporate terminologies" and "code words" as much as possible. When possible, study the company's annual report and Web site, and weave the themes and terms found there into your resume and cover letter.

5. Make Sure It Looks Good

Use a crisp, clean, simple presentation format for a professional looking resume. Just a bit of simple line work and/or shading, done with standard word processing software will do the trick. If you don't have the aptitude for this, there is most likely someone among your friends or in your office who can help you achieve a professional presentation. If not, seek professional advice. It won't cost much for a good simple layout, but it will make a world of difference to the product.

6. Show What Can You Do Today

Focus, first and foremost, on your recent experience that is most relevant to the position at hand. Less relevant and/or dated experience should be either eliminated or summarized in brief point form near the end of your resume. When reviewing your resume information, a prospective employer wants to know what you are doing now, what you have done recently, and how that relates to the job requirements of the post they are trying to fill.

7. Be A Straight-Shooter

Be completely honest. When people lie or "creatively exaggerate" on their resume, they are almost invariably exposed, sooner or later. Think about it - who really wants to get a job based on a lie(s) and then have to live in fear of eventually being found out? We often read in the newspaper about high-profile folks who get caught in a resume falsehood or exaggeration, and it isn't very pretty.

8. Don't Get Lost In the Mail

Submit your resume in exactly the form that the prospective employer requests. If they say e-mail or fax is okay, do it that way. However, if they ask for it by regular mail, send it the way they ask. They must have reasons for requesting it in such a form and they are geared up to process it that way. If your resume is to be sent by snail mail, use the complete address that they specify, or it could go to the wrong office, especially in a large organization.

9. Follow the Instructions

Be careful to respect certain conventions that the prospective employer may require in your resume. For example, make sure that the cover letter mentions the exact name of the specific position you are applying for, and the competition number, if applicable. Sometimes an employer will request that the job title and/or number be printed on the outside of the envelope. You would not want to miss out on a job because you didn't follow minor administrative requirements.

10. Don't Repeat Yourself

In the cover letter, don't repeat what is already detailed in the body of the attached resume. It is a "cover" letter. It should be short and to the point. Introduce yourself first, and then briefly summarize why you believe that you have the qualifications and experience to fulfill the duties of the position better than anyone else. Express enthusiasm about the job and the company. Close by stating how you are looking forward to hearing more from them soon, and that you will follow-up if necessary.

The above list can be used as a "checklist" both during the preparation phase, and when reviewing your resume just before submission. To see a fully-formatted "real-life template" of a resume, click on the following link:

www.writinghelp-central.com/resume-sample2.html

Writing Resume Cover Letters That Work

Sometimes there is confusion about the exact meaning of the term "cover letter".

That's because when most people use that term, they don't realize that there are two main types of cover letters. There are "document transmittal cover letters", and there are "resume cover letters". Let's clear up that confusion right now.

Document Cover Letters

A document cover letter is a letter of transmittal that explains and conveys an attached document to a second party.

The types of documents that this type of cover letter is used for typically include: reports, plans, legal papers, applications, manuscripts, contracts, travel documents, booklets, manuals, brochures, product samples, photos, artwork, etc.

A document cover letter is normally a short one-page business letter that very briefly explains the attached or enclosed document(s) that is being sent. It only contains the essential information such as why the document(s) is being sent, what the recipient is expected to do with it, and any applicable deadlines.

Resume Cover Letters

When most people use or hear the term "cover letter" they are thinking of resume cover letters. Resume cover letters are used for one purpose only; to convey a resume or curriculum vitae to a prospective employer.

A resume cover letter is normally a concise one-pager that introduces you, explains why you're writing, summarizes your key skills, abilities and experience, and asks the

recipient to get back to you. Its main purpose is to capture the attention of the recipient enough to get that person to look at the attached resume with interest.

Of the two types of cover letters, by far the most commonly requested at my Writing Help Central Web site is the cover letter for a resume or curriculum vitae.

Resume Cover Letter Writing Tips

When drafting a cover letter for a resume or c.v., there are a number of important rules of thumb to follow. The following list is an adapted summary of a similar list in my eBook *Instant Home Writing Kit*. Here's the link to check that out:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsikit>

Address It To A Specific Person

Even when sending an unsolicited resume to a company you should take the time to find out the name of the appropriate person and write the letter to that person. At least it will reach their office. Resumes sent to "Dear Human Resources Manager" are almost always a waste of time. Name someone specifically and it will at least make it into an in-basket.

Keep It Short and Focused

Remember, your resume already says it all. Keep the letter short and focused and don't repeat what is already in the attached resume. Never exceed one page in a cover letter.

Be Enthusiastic

Express your interest in the job and the new company with enthusiasm. Show that you really want the job, and that you would really like to work for that particular company.

Focus On Needs of the Employer

Throughout your cover letter make it clear that you are interested in the needs of the employer. You are there to help them. You are part of the solution. Try to make this the subliminal message of your entire letter.

Show That You've Done Your Homework

Demonstrate a good knowledge of the company and industry for which you are applying. A one-liner, or a phrase or two in the appropriate place in your letter that shows you are interested, and understand the company's problems, will give you instant credibility (i.e. do some simple Internet research).

Use the Appropriate "Buzzwords"

Every organization has its own ways of doing things and its own lingo. Look through key documents such as annual reports, corporate Web sites, etc. Try to spot key words, terms, and phrases that are often repeated. Every company has them. Use as many of these "hot buttons" as you can in your cover letter - where appropriate, of course. For example, if the "Message From the CEO" in the annual report mentions the phrase "action plan for the future" three times, make sure you work that term into your cover letter. Don't overdo it, of course.

Summarize Your Skills And Abilities

If possible, without making the letter too long, summarize your overall skills and abilities in bullet-point form. This can make them stand out in a way that they wouldn't, buried in the resume or c.v.

Promise To Follow Up

In the final paragraph, clearly state that you will be following up by telephone in a few days to answer any questions. Make sure you do this. Industry experts say that over 80% of people never do this crucial follow-up, and just wait for the phone to ring.

The challenge of course, is to try to address all of the above points in a three or four paragraph letter. Yes, it can be done!

To see a fully-formatted "real-life template" of a resume cover letter, click on the following link:

www.writinghelp-central.com/cover-letter.html

Resume and Cover Secrets Revealed...

By Kevin Donlin, is considered by many to be the "bible" on writing resumes and cover letters. This amazing do-it-yourself "how-to" manual tells you everything you need to know about writing resumes and cover letters, and includes dozens of real-life samples. It also gives you instant access to winning job-search strategies and proven job interview tips and techniques. Kevin has quite a guarantees too! He says that if you use and apply his guide you'll find a job within 30 days. For *a high quality "how-to" information resource, written by an expert in his field, this is your answer.*

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrescov>

OTHER EVERYDAY WRITING ISSUES

This section contains a couple of articles that I wrote about subjects that are a little more general in nature than the previous ones, but which are still important considerations for everyday writing. In fact, the two subjects covered here are areas where I suspect most people need to make some serious improvement.

E-mail 101: The Dos and Don'ts

You would be amazed at some of the pure gibberish that arrives in my e-mailbox on a regular basis.

Many people seem to think that because they aren't dealing directly with another person (or as directly as they would be face-to-face or by telephone), all forms of civility and basic respect for the other person (i.e. the recipient), and the English language, can go out the proverbial window.

Not true! Writing e-mails is still communicating. Both the recipient and the language still deserve your respect.

The following Dos and Don'ts of writing e-mails have been adapted from my eBook entitled "Instant Home Writing Kit". The first version of these appeared in another one of my books "Internet Basics without fear!"

E-Mail Dos and Don'ts

DO... Use A Descriptive Subject Line

There is nothing more annoying than receiving e-mails in your e-Inbox with no heading, or a heading that does not explain the contents of the message.

When one receives multiple messages every day, the subject-line is important when reviewing and prioritizing e-mail that is in one's mailbox. Also, if you include a descriptive title, your message is almost guaranteed to be read before the ones with blank or meaningless titles.

Tip: I even revise the Subject Line when I am sending a Reply, to reflect the essence of my response. This is especially useful if it's one of those e-mails that travels back and forth 3 or 4 times. Often, there is little relationship between the point of the first message and that of the later ones. So, try revising the Subject Line slightly each time to reflect the content of the current reply.

DO... Use Opening And Closing Salutations

Some people have forgotten that e-mail is interpersonal communication between human beings. Basic civility still applies.

There is nothing much more impersonal than receiving an e-mail that doesn't at least say "Hello..." or "Hi..." for the opening; and "Regards..." or "Thanks..." or "Take care..." or "All the best...", or something similar as the closing.

We can't personally sign the note by hand anymore, but we can surely personalize it a little bit by at least typing in the recipient's name and then wishing them the best.

DO... Use Capital Letters Sparingly

The use of all-caps is shunned on the Internet. It's called SHOUTING. Every once in a while a word or two in capitals for particular emphasis is ok, but avoid overdoing it.

Tip: Cutesy little smiles and similar symbols, known as “emoticons”, should also be used sparingly. :-) I advise you not to use these symbols at all in business e-mails, unless the recipient is a friend or quite well-known to you. Just as with business letters,

the principle underlying business e-mails is: clear and concise businesslike communication with a minimum of clutter. '-)

DO... Check Spelling, Grammar, and Format

Make a point to ensure that your e-mail is relatively readable. It doesn't have to be a work of art, but at least respect the basic rules of spelling and grammar. Most e-mail programs have a spell-checker option. Use it.

Tip: For better readability, break your e-mail into short 1,2, or 3 sentence paragraphs with a blank line between paragraphs. (i.e. double hard-return).

DO... Watch Out For "E-mail Rage"

Many an e-mail has been composed and sent when a person was in an angry or upset state (referred to as "flaming"). Many people have lived to regret these indiscretions in the cold sober light of the next hour, or the next day. Remember, whenever the Send button has been clicked, your e-mail is gone forever.

Tip: When you compose an e-mail while in an "upset state", it is always a good idea to save it as a draft for an hour or two and then read it over carefully at least once before sending it, just to make sure you are communicating what you really want to, in a clear and respectful way.

DON'T... Forward Junk Mail To Others

From time to time, people to whom we have given our e-mail address will have momentary lapses in judgment (yes, even friends and family!) and will forward "junk mail" to you.

These are often long rambling stories, urban myths, scraps of wisdom, chain letters, collections of jokes, or such that are prevalent around the Net.

This is the equivalent of opening your regular mail box at home and finding it loaded with unsolicited and unwanted promotional letters and advertising flyers. Would you forward those to your friends or family? Do you? I didn't think so.

When you receive one of these in your e-Inbox, DO NOT forward it on to someone else. Kill it then and there. This kind of unsolicited junk mail is known as "spam", and is definitely not acceptable on the Net.

If a friend or acquaintance sends one to you, politely e-mail them back asking if they would please be kind enough to remove your name from their distribution list for that type of item. Explain that you are already inundated with this "type" of unsolicited e-mail. Usually, they will take the hint and accommodate you.

DON'T... Think That E-Mail Is Instantaneous

Believe it or not, e-mail is not as reliable as a telephone call when it comes to timely communication!

The Internet is a loosely connected network of computers and telecommunications equipment owned, operated, and managed by many thousands of independent companies, institutions, and government organizations, worldwide.

Your e-mail must often travel a complex and circuitous route to get to its destination. For example, if someone schedules maintenance on a computer or a piece of equipment on the network that your e-mail must pass through, your message may be delayed and you won't even know it.

Also, who is to guarantee that the intended recipient even checks their e-mail regularly? Many people only check their e-mail every few days. So, if your communication is

urgent, use the standard telephone. It is still the only way to be absolutely sure that a message has been received at a particular point in time.

DON'T... Forget To Check Your E-mail Regularly

There is nothing more frustrating than sending an e-mail to someone and then having them tell you on the telephone a week later that they haven't seen your message because the last time they checked their e-mail was 10 days ago!

If you want people to take your e-mails seriously, make sure that you take theirs seriously too. So, check your e-mail regularly; at least every two or three days. The bottom line to all of this is simple. Remember that e-mail is just another form of interpersonal communication. People deserve the same amount of respect and civility as you would give them in a telephone call or a regular letter.

Instant Home Writing Kit...

- Over 200 Pages Of "How-To" Tips, Tricks, Information And Sample Templates.
- More Than 50 Fully-Formatted Downloadable Real-Life Templates (MS-Word).
- Includes Personal and Business Letters, Reports, Resumes, Essays, E-Mails, Term Papers.
- *Bonus Chapter* On Business Report Writing With Tips, Tricks, Advice, And Samples.
- Over 50 Insider Tips, Tricks And Secrets You Can Apply To Your Everyday Writing Tasks.
- Free Consultation With The Author On The Letter Of Your Choice.
- 100% Risk-Free Guarantee That You'll Save Money If You Apply The Info and Templates.

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsikit>

7 Secrets For Beating Writer's Block

Most people can easily identify with the dreaded "writer's block". It is a well-known phenomenon that just about everyone has faced at one point in their lives.

I used to suffer from writer's block, big time! Thus, I know through personal anguish and suffering, that it is definitely not a pleasant experience.

Especially when the due date for one's project or paper is getting closer by the day, and the boss asks you "how's that project going" every time you don't manage to avoid him/her when you're sneaking down the corridor.

One thing for sure, I never want to live through chronic writer's block again!

Writer's Block Is Fear-Based

Writer's block is a fear-based feeling. For whatever reason, many of us have this incredible fear of committing ourselves in writing whenever we are faced with a blank page or computer screen.

Fear no longer! I'm here to tell you that writer's block can be beaten!

Just realizing that writer's block is really an irrational fear that keeps us from putting pen to paper is half the battle. It's actually a fear of the unknown, often coupled with a fear of failure.

We secretly wonder just what exactly is going to come out of this pen/keyboard, and when it does, will we be revealing some kind of incompetent idiot who doesn't know what they're talking about?

On the other hand, if we have done the proper preparation, our rational mind knows that we can do it just like we did it all of those other times before.

Unfortunately, fear often wins the day when it comes to writing.

I know this from personal experience. I suffered from writer's block for many years earlier in my career, and it was not the most enjoyable of experiences.

The 7 Secrets

Fortunately, somewhere along the way I did manage to develop a few tricks to overcome writers block. Some are obvious, others are not.

Here are my personal hard-earned practical secrets for overcoming writer's block:

1. Don't Write Too Soon

Before trying to write, it is important to prepare mentally for a few hours or days (depending on the size of the task) by mulling the writing project over in the back of your mind. (Just as athletes don't like to peak too soon, writers shouldn't write too soon either!).

2. Do The Preparation

Read over whatever background material you have so that it is fresh in your mind. I read through all background material carefully marking important points with a yellow hi-liter and then review it all before I start to write.

3. Develop A Simple Outline

Before sitting down to write, put together a simple point-form list of all of the key points you want to cover, and then organize them in the order in which you are

going to cover them. (I know, I know... your Grade 6 teacher told you the same thing... but it actually does work).

4. Keep Research Documents Close By

When you sit down to write, make sure that all of your key background materials are spread out close at hand. This will allow you to quickly refer to them without interrupting the writing flow once you get going. I keep as many of the source documents as possible wide open, and within eyesight for quick and easy reference.

5. Just Start Writing

Yes, that's exactly what you do. Once you have prepared mentally and done your homework you are ready to write, even if your writer's block is saying "no". Just start writing any old thing that comes to mind. Go with the natural flow. In no time at all you will get into a rhythm, and the words will just keep on flowing.

6. Don't Worry About the First Draft

Once the words start to flow, don't worry about making it perfect the first time. Remember, it's your first draft. You will be able to revise it later. The critical thing at the outset is to write those thoughts down as your mind dictates them to you.

7. Work From An Example Or Template

Get an actual sample of the type of document that you need to write. It could be something that you wrote previously, or it could be something from an old working file, or a clipping from a magazine article, or a sales brochure you picked up. As long as it is the same type of document that you are writing. Whatever it is, just post it up in your line-of-sight while you are working. You'll be amazed at how it helps the words and ideas flow. The main thing is to have an example to act as a sort of visual template.

In my experience this last one is the ultimate secret for overcoming writer's block.

To help with this, be on the lookout for good examples of writing that you may see in newspapers and magazines, and clip out the useful ones for future reference.

If you ever experience writer's block, help is available. A number of writing tools have been created to kick-start the writing process:

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wstools>

“SECRETS” FOR EVERYDAY WRITING SUCCESS

Although the previous 45 pages are filled with dozens of practical tips, tricks and words of advice, I know that somebody is going to say “Yes, but where are the secrets? Isn't your book supposed to contain writing secrets?”

*It's a reasonable question when you think about it. After all, this eBook is called **Writing Success Secrets!** Actually, if you read carefully the “secrets” are all contained in the foregoing text, sometimes right out in the open, other times, between the lines.*

Nevertheless, based on all of the foregoing, here are my Top 10 Secrets for everyday writing success.

My Top 10 Writing Success Secrets

1. Preparation Is the Key

Do all of your research first, before you start to write. Even a letter normally requires some minor research such as making some phone calls or reviewing a file. It's also very important to prepare yourself mentally before writing. So, don't sit down to write too soon. Mull it over for a while, sometimes a day or two, sometimes an hour or two, depending on the complexity of the job at hand. It's amazing how the subconscious mind will work on the problem “behind the scenes” and when you finally do start writing, it will flow.

2. Always Use a Sample

For me, this is critical. No matter what I write, it helps tremendously if I have some visual stimulation. If I'm writing a letter I post a copy of a similar letter, or the one I'm responding to, somewhere in my direct line-of-sight. It helps me focus and keeps my mind on the subject at hand, minimizing the tendency for my mind to

wander. No matter what it is, I always make a point to find some previous work or a sample of work similar to what I'm doing. It really stimulates the creative writing process and increases productivity significantly.

3. Shorter Is Always Better

Whether you're writing a report or a letter, look for ways to cut it down in length. Concentrate on conveying the essential message. If something you've written does not enhance the core message, or doesn't add value, consider cutting it. These days, you have to be "short and to the point" to get your message read.

4. Use Concise and Appropriate Language

Your letter or report should use simple straightforward language, for clarity and precision. Use short sentences and don't let paragraphs exceed three or four sentences. As much as possible, use language and terminology familiar to the intended recipient. Do not use technical terms and acronyms without explaining them, unless you are certain that the addressee is familiar with them.

5. "Be" Your Addressee

A key technique to use when writing anything is to clearly "visualize" your audience. As you write, try to imagine in your mind's eye the specific person(s) to whom your written product is directed. I often imagine that I am sitting across the boardroom table from my addressee, trying to explain my points in person. Make an effort to see the situation from the other person's perspective. What would you be looking to see if you were the recipient of the letter or report?

6. Do the Outline First

Even if it's a one-page letter, it doesn't hurt to jot down a few quick notes on the main points that you want to cover. This process forces you to think logically about exactly what you want to cover and it helps you decide in which order you will approach your subject. For a letter this is helpful. For a report, this is absolutely essential. In fact, I believe that you should force yourself to go through the entire thinking process that is required to develop a complete draft Table of Contents, before you start to write any report.

7. Write and Then Rewrite

No matter how much preparation I do, I always find that I can improve on the first draft. That's partly because when I'm writing that first version, my main focus is to get the essence of my thoughts down on paper. At that stage I don't worry about perfect phrasing, grammar or logic. My main mission the first time through is to make sure that I capture the critical words and phrases that form the core meaning of what I want to communicate.

8. Format Is Important

Whatever you are writing, make sure it looks professional. This is where proper formatting comes in. Your credibility, and/or that of your organization, is on the line, with your report or letter serving as your representative. If it is not professionally formatted, it will reflect negatively on you, even if the content is good and it is well-written. Rightly or wrongly, the value of your work will diminish in people's eyes if the formatting of your document is shoddy or amateurish looking.

9. Read It Out Loud

Some people who haven't tried it may laugh when they read this, but it really works. At any point during the drafting process, but definitely at the draft final stage, read your report or letter to yourself "out loud". It's amazing what one picks up when they actually "hear" their words as if they were being spoken to them as the addressee. I find this helps me the most in picking up awkward phrasing and unnecessary repetition of words or terms.

10. Check Spelling and Grammar

Last, but far from least, make sure you double check the spelling and grammar in your document. These days, with spell-checkers built into word processing programs there's really no excuse not to do this. Once again your document is a direct reflection of you and/or your organization. If it is riddled with spelling mistakes and obvious grammatical errors, it will appear unprofessional and your credibility will suffer. Watch out for the words that sound the same but have completely different meanings that a spell-checker won't pick up. Words such as "four" and "fore", for example. Your final read-through out loud should catch any of these.

RECOMMENDED WRITING TOOLS



Instant Home Writing Kit is a one-stop general purpose writing toolkit that contains "how-to" tips, tricks, and information for writing the most sought after personal and business documents including: recommendation letters, resignation letters, reference letters, business letters, cover letters, thank you letters, complaint letters, sales letters, resumes, essays, reports, and more. The Kit contains over 60 fully-formatted real-life sample templates that users can download into their word processors and use. *It's a powerful general purpose writing toolkit that covers the entire range of day-to-day practical writing needs for both home and business.*

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsikit>



Instant Recommendation Letter Kit is a unique and highly focused information source that concentrates on the writing of all types of letters of recommendation for both employment and college admission. In addition to downloadable real-life letter templates, the Kit also contains a bonus chapter on how to write college admission essays, including a number of samples. It also includes a money-saving "Buyers Guide" that reviews the top sites on the Net that offer online writing services for recommendation letters and college admission essays. *This Kit is a unique "must-have" writing resource if you need help writing any kind of recommendation letter.*

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrkit>

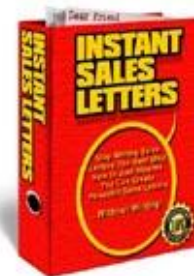


Instant Business Letter Kit is a comprehensive business writing toolkit that combines "how-to" tips, tricks, advice, and information with over 100 real-life templates for writing any type of business letter that you can download into your word processor and use as you choose. The Kit also includes a special bonus book containing business form templates ranging from, invoices and purchase orders, to minutes of meetings, and trip reports. *Whether you're involved in small business, home-based business, or large business, if you need help writing business letters, you could easily make this Kit your business writing style guide.*

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsbkit>



Resume Writing and Cover Letter Secrets Revealed by Kevin Donlin, is considered by many to be the "bible" on writing resumes and cover letters. This amazing do-it-yourself "how-to" manual tells you everything you need to know about writing resumes and cover letters, and includes dozens of real-life samples. It also gives you instant access to winning job-search strategies and proven job interview tips and techniques. Kevin guarantees that if you use his guide you'll find a job within 30 days. *If you need a high quality "how-to" information resource, that was written by an expert in his field, this is your answer.* <http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wsrescov>



Instant Sales Letters was created by well-known marketing expert Yanik Silver. He developed this powerful set of fill-in-the-blank winning sales letters based on his experiences in both online and offline marketing. Using Yanik's unique templates, you can draft a custom sales or marketing letter to meet you needs in a matter of minutes. It contains dozens of proven sales and marketing letter templates for every kind of small and large business imaginable, from retailers and restaurateurs, to physicians, lawyers, and veterinarians. *This resource is highly recommended for anyone starting or growing their own business.*

<http://writinghelptools.com/cgi-bin/a/t.cgi?wssales>