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EMAILS AND LETTERS

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Irrespective of whether you communicate by email or letter, these guidelines should be followed.

1. Follow a standard.

There are differences between British English and American English customs in emails and letters (see the boxes below).

2. Use the same standards for emails and letters.

Both can either be formal or informal (see the boxes below).

3. Use a salutation (greeting) in English.

In most cases this will be with 'Dear Mr Jones,' or 'Dear John'. Occasionally in emails people just use the first name if they know the person well. 'Hi,' is only suitable among friends. Letters of recommendation usually start: 'To whom it may concern,'.

4. Use the ending that matches the salutation.

If you are unsure, follow the guidelines in the boxes below.

5. It is often useful to use '-ing forms' in the verbs at the end.

This stresses that you have an on-going relationship and that there is unfinished business. Some examples are: 'We are looking forward to receiving your comments on this report, by the end of April'. 'We are considering your proposals and are looking forward to discussing matters with you on 12 April'. Naturally this does not apply to all types of emails.

6. Write the month in letters or use the ISO standard for international contacts.

Use the format, 2 May 2011, or the ISO standard for all-digit dates (CCYY-MM-DD). In ISO 8601, 2 May 2011 is written 2011-05-02. Remember that a date written as 02.05.11 or 2/5/11 will mean 2 May 2011 to most Europeans but February 5, 2011 to most Americans.

7. Avoid exclamation marks (!) in formal business emails or letters.

An exclamation mark in English is used to express astonishment or surprise.

8. Avoid short forms like 'I'm' and 'don't' in formal business emails or letters.

These should only be used in informal, conversational writing and when reporting another person's exact words. Sometimes they are used in personal emails to stress closeness and informality.

9. In letters, never put the place name in front of the date.

Never write "Oslo, 12 December 2010" at the top. Just write the date.

In personal letters, never put your name at the top. Your printed name comes at the bottom under your signature.

10. Never capitalize 'you' and 'your' in mid-sentence.

Many people say that they were taught this in school.

Capitalized 'You' and 'Your' in mid sentence disappeared in English a few hundred years ago, so there must be some old teachers around.

Summary of how to start and end emails and letters in British English (BE):

<i>1. Formal tone, where you write to an institution or an unnamed person:</i>

These start with the following salutations:

Dear Sirs,	(when writing to a company, organization, university)
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Dear Sir,	(to an unnamed person, who is male)
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Dear Madam,	(to an unnamed person, who is female)
Dear Sir or Madam,	(the safe option to an unnamed person, such as: Personnel Manager)
These always end:	
Yours faithfully,	

II. Normal business emails and letters, where you know recipient's name:

These start:

- Dear Mr Jones,** (to a named man. Never "Mister")
Dear Ms Jones, (to any named woman, no reference to her marital status)
Dear Professor Jones, (used for all types of professors: (assistant, associate and adjunct)
Dear Dr Jones, (can be used for someone holding a PhD or other doctorate)

These two are becoming rare:

- Dear Mrs Jones,** (to a named married women. Some write (Mrs) after their names to ask for this salutation in the reply)
Dear Miss Jones, (to a named woman, who is unmarried)

These always end:

Yours sincerely,

Note that in British English, you do not use a stop after abbreviations like **Mr, Mrs, Dr** or **Ms** (pronounced "miz"), as is the custom in AE. If you are writing to someone where it is difficult to determine whether you should use Mr or Ms, one solution is just to use the first and last name: *Dear Sam Smith* or *Dear Li-Ching*.

III. Emails and letters to colleagues, associates and friends etc.:

These start:

Dear Jim, (if a person signs his letter with "Jim", use this in your reply. If you use "Dear Mr Jones", you signal coldness and distance to Jim)

Dear Mary, (same comments as for "Dear Jim")

Dear colleagues, (useful in group mailings, but could be more personal)

There are many endings. Here are some on a scale from a business-like tone to close friendship:

Yours sincerely, (even though you start "Dear Jim," you show that this is a businesslike email or letter)

Regards, (although frequently used in emails and faxes, this is too informal for most business letters and is "warmer" than "Vennlig hilsen")

Kind regards, ("warmer" than "Vennlig hilsen")

Best wishes, (used to signal friendliness)

Warm regards, (getting slightly "hotter", frequently used for friends)

Love, (only used for close friends)

Example of a formal letter

12 Hills Road
Haywards Heath
RH16 4XY

12 November 2010

Dear Sir or Madam,

IMPROVED SERVICE ON SOUTHERN RAIL

This is not a letter of complaint about your rail services. In fact, it is quite the reverse. I wish to compliment you on your rail services. Getting to London and back is so much more comfortable than it was a few years ago when another company was running the service. I regularly go to Victoria and your staff are extremely helpful. I have also noted that the service staff keep the carriages clean and tidy. Keep up the good work.

Yours faithfully,

George Smith
George Smith

Example of a job application letter

78 Wingate Road
Trumpington
Cambridge
CB2 2RF

The University of Exeter,
The Queen's Drive,
Exeter,
Devon,
EX4 4QJ

12 November 2010

Dear Ms Smith,

**APPLICATION FOR POSITION AS ASSISTANT OFFICE
MANAGER IN STUDENT SERVICES, UNIVERSITY OF
EXETER**

I wish to apply for the above position that was advertised in *The Daily Telegraph* on 28 October 2010. I have a bachelor's degree in business studies from the University of Nottingham in 2005 and since then I have worked at The Grand Hotel in Eastbourne with responsibility for updating their booking systems (2006 – 2007). I am presently working as an assistant office manager in the RSA Examinations Syndicate at Cambridge. This is only a temporary position until the end of the year.

The position you advertise seems to be an excellent opportunity for me to apply my knowledge of business studies and work in a university environment which is a central objective in my career plans.

I have enclosed my CV where I feel that my education and skills should make me a candidate worth consideration. I speak and write excellent French which I have noted is one of the skills you require. My computer skills correspond with what you specify in the above advertisement. My tutor and present employer have kindly agreed to provide references and their contact details are given on the CV.

I am a serious-minded person who works conscientiously and diligently. I get on well with colleagues and like to be part of a team. Outside working life I enjoy sports, especially rugby which I play at Old-Boys level, although I have appeared twice for the eastern counties team.

I am available for an interview in Exeter at any time in November or December.

I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Slater
Colin Slater

Example of an email to a friend

Subject line: Exeter calling ...

Hi Jane,

How are things in Bath? I tried to give you a buzz just now but your mobile must be on the blink so I decided to send this mail. Last week, we talked about spending a weekend together. Guess what? I've been picked for an interview for that job in Exeter. I'll be there on Thursday next week. How about making it a weekend trip and we can see a bit of Devon? I can pick you up on Wednesday afternoon, if you can get time off work.

Love,
Colin

Example of a business email

Subject line: Interview at University of Exeter

Dear Mr Birnet,

Thank you very much for inviting me for an interview. I confirm that I will be at your offices at 10.30 on Thursday 19 November.

I am very grateful that you have offered to cover my travel expenses.

I am looking forward to meeting you on Thursday.

Yours sincerely,

Colin Slater