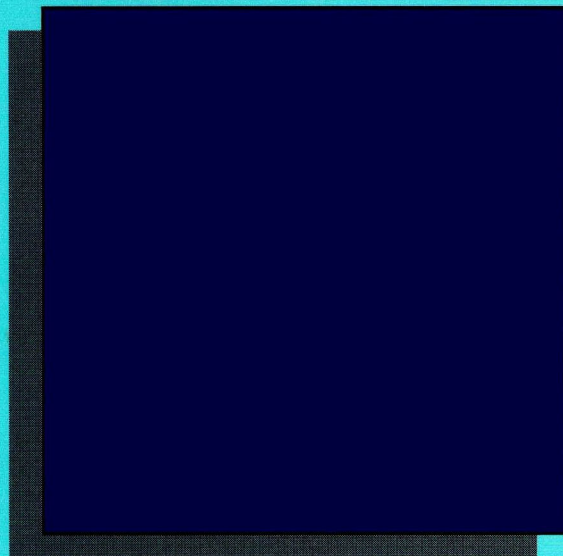
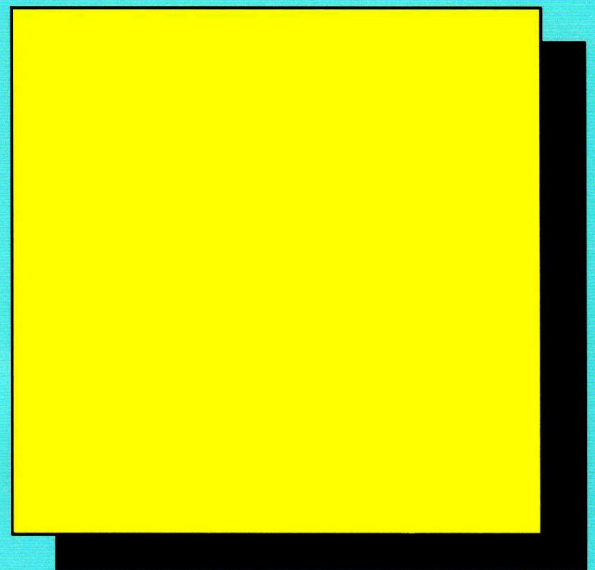
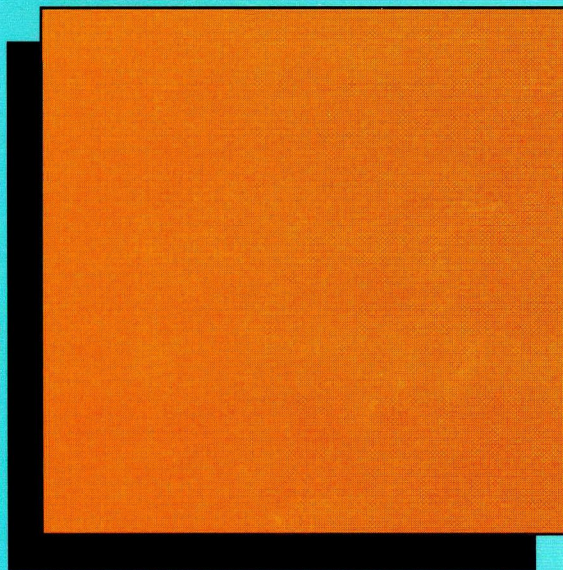


# Letter Writing in English

RATIONALE AND MODELS  
FOR SOCIAL AND BUSINESS LETTERS



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FOR SOCIAL AND BUSINESS LETTERS

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# Letter Writing in English

## Rationale

Writing skills are often the most difficult skills for students of English as a foreign language to acquire. This may be because of the great emphasis on listening, speaking, and reading in the classroom. Or it may be that their teachers have not had special training in this area and feel unsure of their own writing competence. (This is true of native-speaking as well as non-native-speaking teachers of English.) Whatever the case, it is certainly true that guided writing practice in the early stages of English instruction will help to (1) reinforce and integrate the development of all the language skills and (2) prepare learners for the production of written English at more advanced levels.

While there are important differences between spoken and written English—for example, spoken English has more shortened forms, contractions, omissions, and colloquial expressions—these differences need not intimidate the learner at the intermediate level, nor prevent the teacher from introducing real writing practice at this stage. And *real* writing, that is, practicing realistic use of the language (in its simpler written forms), is possible at this stage if the teacher provides good models and useful vocabulary for life-like situations. Writing directions, taking down simple telephone messages, making shopping lists are some examples of simple writing tasks in which the students can actually practice writing English in everyday functions. Letter writing, with its many forms and uses, is another activity that is particularly advantageous for the following reasons:

- The vocabulary and structures in the letter may be taken from the students' own learned material.
- The letters may be short and simple in form and style, gradually increasing in length and complexity as the students progress.
- The letter writing assignments may vary according to type and style as selected by the teacher and the students.
- The letters may be corrected and kept in the students' notebooks for actual use as models later on.

In addition to these reasons for practicing letter writing early in the English language training, there is another even more pedagogically important reason to consider. Letters that are well-organized in form and content generally follow a pattern that is similar to basic composition writing. A well-composed letter, like a good composition in English, usually has three basic components:


1. A salutation, corresponding to the introduction;
2. A general message, corresponding to the body; and
3. A closing and signature, corresponding to the conclusion of the composition.

We see, then, that letter writing can be an effective means of introducing and reinforcing the principles of good composition in English; the writer in both cases must first organize his or her thoughts logically to convey the intended message.

## General Format

Let's categorize the kinds of letters our students are most likely to encounter into two simple groups: social letters and business letters. For both types, indeed for almost any letter written in English, there is a general layout or format that is followed and several general components that are required. The following model sets out (1) the writer's address, (2) the salutation to the addressee, (3) the body of message, (4) the closing word or phrase, and (5) the writer's signature.

### MODEL LETTER

	writer's city/state/zip code writer's country month/day/year
salutation ( <i>Dear</i> ) + addressee's name,	
body of the letter	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
	closing,  (writer's name)

Note: Readers in American English usually expect to find these parts of a letter arranged in this way; they may be confused if the format is changed. In some countries, for instance, the custom is to include the writer's name in the upper right-hand corner above the writer's address. However, a reader accustomed to American English letters may think that the (foreign) writer's name is a street, if it is written on the first line of the address position.

## Writer's Address

Although you will usually find that the writer places his/her address in the upper right-hand corner of the page, business correspondents may place their address in the letterhead at the middle top of the page, or at the lower left-hand corner.

## Envelope Address

On the envelope, the U.S. post office requires the addressee's name on the first line, the street address on the second line, the city/state/zip code on the third line, and the name of the country on the last line. All of this should appear in the center of the envelope. The writer's name and address should appear in the upper left-hand corner of the envelope.

### MODEL ENVELOPE

writer's full name	STAMP
writer's street address	
writer's city/state/zip code	
writer's country	
(title) addressee's full name	
addressee's street address	
addressee's city/state/zip code	
addressee's country	

## Salutation

Salutations are placed on the left margin. As a general rule, when the writer knows the addressee well and is on a “first name” basis (that is, if they call each other by first name informally), the writer begins an informal social letter with *Dear* followed by the addressee’s first or given name:

Example: *Dear John, Dear Mary, etc.*

For formal social letters and business letters, however, the salutation *Dear* is followed by the addressee’s title and family name:

Example: *Dear Mr. Smithson, Dear Dr. Jones, etc.*

In business letter salutations, the reader may also note other forms: for example, *Dear Publisher, Dear Editor, Dear Reader, Dear Parents, Dear Colleague*, etc. This avoids the use of *Dear Sir* and *Gentlemen*, which are now outdated as they assume all readers are male, and overlook the growing number of women in the business world today.

In business letters, the reader may also note the use of *Ms.*, which is the exact linguistic equivalent of *Mr.*; that is, *Ms.* indicates female gender but not whether the person is married. Some women still prefer to use *Miss* (unmarried) or *Mrs.* (married), but most business correspondence today uses *Ms.*, unless it uses some form indicating the position or office for whom the letter is intended. (See the illustrations.)

## Body of the Letter

The letter itself may also begin exactly on the left margin, directly under the salutation, or it may be indented five spaces to the right, the traditional signal for a new paragraph in English. If you prefer not to indent for each new paragraph, you should leave an extra space between paragraphs.

Although we are mainly concerned with format here, it will be well to keep in mind that the body of the letter contains the main message or “point.” Culturally speaking, a native English language reader usually expects the writer of formal or business letters to (1) introduce him/herself, (2) state the purpose of the letter, and (3) conclude the letter. Note that the conclusion often may be a simple “thank you” for the reader’s attention.



## **Closing Signature**

The closing and signature at the end of the letter are usually spaced from the right margin and aligned under the address and date that appear in the upper right-hand corner. (See the illustrations.) If there is any possibility that the person receiving your letter may not be able to read your signature (because of a difference of handwriting styles), you should carefully print or type your name under your handwritten signature. Remember that when the reader answers your letter and addresses the envelope, he/she must be able to spell your name clearly and correctly. Your letter is the only guideline to spelling your name and address correctly.

## **Impact on the Reader**

In summary, a good letter must be clearly thought out, and clearly organized on paper. Its message should be understandable to the reader and its appearance on the page should be well-balanced, like a picture in a frame. A letter, remember, carries the writer's unspoken thoughts and silently reflects the writer's personality. Each letter is a personally creative act of real communication.

## SOCIAL LETTERS

### APOLOGY (formal)

555 Rosamond Street  
Greenville, MA 22222  
September 15, 1988

Dear Mr. Smith:

I want to apologize for not having answered your very kind letter sooner, but I have been away on a trip and just returned today.

The photographs you sent are beautiful. My family and I appreciate them very much. They are the best kind of remembrance, and we are very grateful.

Again, please accept my apologies for the delay. And please give my best regards to your family.

Sincerely,



Your student,  
Alfred Chace

### APOLOGY (informal)

*September 15, 1988*

*Dear George,*

*I'm writing to tell you that I've lost your copy of "Gone with the Wind." I left it in the lounge, and someone must have picked it up. I'm really very sorry, and will try to replace it as soon as I can.*

*Regards,*



CONDOLENCES death in the family (formal)

900 Chesapeake Avenue N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20010  
September 15, 1988

*Dear Mr. Duval:*

*I was saddened to hear the news. Please accept my deepest sympathy in your time of sorrow.*

Your Neighbor,  
*Catherine S. Black*  
Catherine S. Black

CONDOLENCES death in the family (informal)

September 15, 1988

Dear Florence,

We're sorry to hear about your grandfather. We all share your sadness. He was a wonderful man and we shall all miss him very much.

Please call us if we can help in any way.

In sympathy,

*Cathy*

CONDOLENCES on an illness (formal)

211 Oak Ridge Park  
Youngtown, OH 33333  
September 15, 1988

Dear Ms. Rogers,

We were sorry to hear about your illness and hope that you recover soon.  
With best wishes for a speedy recovery,

Your English class,  
*(by) Henry Moore*  
(by Henry Moore)

CONDOLENCES on an illness (informal)

*June 1, 1988*

*Dear Rick,*

*We were sorry to hear about your illness, and hope that you'll be up and around soon. We miss you!*

*Get well soon,*  
*Jenny and Paul*  
Jenny and Paul

CONGRATULATIONS on the birth of a baby (formal)

West 12 Main Street  
Howard, CA 88888  
September 15, 1988

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Miller,

Congratulations on the birth of your daughter Melissa. May you enjoy all the blessings of parenthood.

With very best wishes,

Sincerely,



David R. Johnson

CONGRATULATIONS on the birth of a baby (informal)

4246 38th Street, N.E.  
St. Louis, MO, 44444  
September 15, 1988

Dear Martha and Tom,

*What wonderful news! I was delighted to hear about the baby and that you all are doing well. I want to congratulate both of you on the arrival of Melissa and wish you many years of happy parenting!*

Love,



CONGRATULATIONS on graduation (formal)

25 First Avenue West  
Norfolk, VA 66666  
September 15, 1988

Dear Dr. Harrision:

*Congratulations on the completion of your doctoral degree.*

*May I wish you every success in your new career.*

Sincerely,  
  
Edmund J. Hill  
Director, Language Center

CONGRATULATIONS on a new job (informal)

Fairwoods Apartments #42  
100 Broad Avenue S.E.  
Tulsa, OK 77777  
September 15, 1988

Dear Joe,

Congratulations on your new job! We were all really happy to hear the good news and wish you the best of luck.

Let us know how you're getting along—and when you're coming through Tulsa again. Soon, we hope!

As ever, 

CONGRATULATIONS on a birthday (informal)

**September 15, 1988**

**Dear Kathleen,**

**Happy Birthday, and many happy returns of the day!**

**Love,** *Mary*

CONGRATULATIONS on a fiftieth wedding anniversary (formal)

Route 4, Box 200  
Blackthorn, KY 55555  
September 15, 1988

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Brock,

Congratulations on your golden wedding anniversary! Although we can't be with you to help you celebrate this very special occasion, please know that we are with you in spirit on this happy and auspicious day.

With warmest best wishes.

Sincerely,  
*Mary and John Smith*  
Mary and John Smith

INVITATION (informal)

*P.O. Box 7  
Golden Sands, FL 44444  
June 1, 1988*

*Dear Prof. and Mrs. Miller,*

*My family and I would like to invite you to spend the Fourth of July holiday at our summer house on the ocean. Our house is near the beach and you will be free to swim and walk along the shore to your heart's content.*

*We will meet you at the airport and take care of all your transportation. We are looking forward to seeing you and do hope that you can come.*

*Cordially,  
Mary Margaret Nelson  
Mary Margaret Nelson*

INVITATION (informal)

*September 15, 1988*

*Dear Paul,*

*We're having a Fourth of July get-together at our summer house. Bring your beach clothes and a good appetite and plan to spend the weekend!*

*P.S. We'll pick you up at the airport, of course!*

*Doug*

INVITATION (informal)

*October 4, 1988*

*Dear Jerry & Carol,*

*You are cordially invited to come to our annual Halloween costume party on Monday, October 31, 1988 at our home. We promise surprises, fun costumes, and good food. Bring a friend!*

*Looking forward to seeing you!*

*The Thompsons*

*RSVP regrets only  
555-2367*



THANK YOU "bread and butter letter"

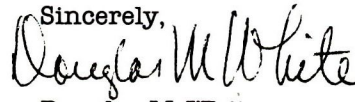
Toledo Park Hotel  
Cincinnati, OH 22222  
September 15, 1988

Dear Mr. and Mrs. Williams,

Thank you again for the wonderful weekend! I had such a good time visiting you and your family, and I enjoyed meeting all your relatives. I shall never forget the warm hospitality.

I hope that someday you are able to visit me and my family. I would like to return your kindness and hospitality, and to show you around my hometown.

Please give my respects to all your family.

Sincerely,  
  
Douglas M. White


THANK YOU "bread-and-butter letter"

September 15, 1988

Dear Edith,

Thanks again for a wonderful weekend! The children and I really enjoyed our visit. We think you're the perfect hostess!

Please come visit us in Chicago. We'd all love to have you stay for Thanksgiving.

Love,  


THANK YOU for a gift (formal)

Broad Branch Road 12 A  
Littleton, NJ 33333  
September 15, 1988

Dear Dr. Malone,

My sister and I want to thank you for the wonderful books which just arrived. They will be extremely useful in our courses this next semester. We deeply appreciate your thoughtfulness.

With very best regards,

Sincerely,

*Agnes Howe*  
*Irene Howe*  
Agnes and Irene Howe

THANK YOU for a gift (informal)

9/15/88

Dear Ruth,

Thanks so much for the birthday book. It's just what I need!

Love,

*Agnes*

## BUSINESS LETTERS

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT (receipt of contract)

9/15/88


ABC Corporation  
123 Long Street  
Bigtown, CA 88888

Dear Director:

This is to acknowledge receipt of the housing contract that I requested.

Thank you for your promptness.

Yours truly,



Thomas R. Hood

Thomas R. Hood Associates  
Fourth and Pine Streets  
Los Angeles, CA 88888

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT (receipt of package)

9/15/88

Prof. Louis Green  
Dept. of English  
Idaho State College  
Boise, ID 99999

Dear Prof. Green:

Thank you for sending the book parcel. It arrived safely and is in good condition.

We appreciate your care and consideration and look forward to hearing from you again.



A.B. Springer

A.B. Springer  
Rockway Apartments  
Northtown, MI 22222

APPLICATION (computer course)

9/15/88

Easy Correspondence Courses, Inc.  
90 East Main Street  
Littletown, SC 77777

Dear Director:

Enclosed please find my application form for your course in Computer Language II, with a personal check for one hundred fifty dollars (\$150.00). Please advise if this amount is not correct.

Thank you.

*Joseph Browning*  
Joseph Browning

Joseph Browning  
1717 Tenth Avenue  
Black Rock, AR 22222

APPLICATION (job)

930 Lewis Street,  
Chicago, IL 60609

September 15, 1988

**Data Control International  
111 Morris Lane  
Kankakee, IL 60620**

**Dear Ms. Boswell:**

**I would like to apply for the position of assistant computer programmer as advertised in the September 14, 1988 *Chicago Daily News*. I feel that I am especially qualified, and would appreciate your sending me an application form.**

**Please send the application to the address above. Thank you for your help.**

**Sincerely yours,**

**Maxell Taylor**

APPLICATION (university)

9/15/88

Dept. of Classical Languages  
Learn Fast Open University  
300 North Boulevard  
Greenville, ND 44444

Dear Director:

Please send me a brochure on your open university and an application form.  
I want to learn Latin.

Thanking you in advance,

*Florence Jones*  
Florence Jones

Mailing address:  
Ms. Florence Jones  
41 Rose Street  
Grange, ND 44444

APPLICATION (university)

Sept. 15, 1988

Registrar's Office  
State University  
Littleton, SD 55555

Dear Registrar:

I am a student of microbiology in Geneva, Switzerland. I would like to apply for entrance to your university. Would you please send me an application form and information on your university.

Thank you.

Yours truly,

*Renee Martin*  
Renee Martin

Blanc Apt. 406  
Geneva, Switzerland

COMPLAINTS (damage in shipment)

9/15/88

**Great Falls Manufacturing Co.  
100 Main Street  
Great Falls, MO 88888**

**Attention: Domestic Shipping Dept.**

**This is to register a complaint about the shipment of pottery (invoice # 33355999) that I received today. Several pieces were broken, and others were chipped. I am returning the entire shipment air freight. Please send a replacement order packed in styrofoam.**

**I will appreciate your prompt attention.**

*E.J. Fields*  
E.J. Fields

**Fields Arts and Crafts  
20 Drury Lane  
Boston, MA 33333**

COMPLAINTS (error in printing)

Sept. 15, 1988

Highways, Incorporated  
222 Broadway  
New York, NY 10000

To Whom It May Concern:

This is to call your attention to an oversight in your spring advertisement on overseas travel. You have totally overlooked the entire Mediterranean region.

Hoping to receive a corrected brochure at your earliest convenience,

Yours truly,  
*Helen McKay*  
Helen McKay

Ms. Helen McKay  
Hot Springs Hotel  
Hot Springs, AR 22222

COMPLAINTS (delay in response)

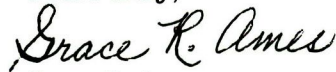
9/15/88

Horizons Books, Inc.  
55 Canal Street  
Chicago, IL 44444

Attention: Orders Dept.

Would you please check on our order for one copy of *World Problems*, by John Doe, Universal Press, 1987, which we sent to you on September 1, 1988 with a check for \$25.00 (twenty five dollars) enclosed for cost and shipping. If you did not receive the order, or if you are out of stock, please advise.

Yours truly,



Grace R. Ames,  
Librarian

Central Library  
Green River, MA 11111

INVITATION (conference)

September 15, 1988

*Dr. Barbara Phillips, Chairperson  
Department of English  
University of Farmington  
Farmington, OH 55555*

*Dear Dr. Phillips:*

*We are honored to invite you to participate in our forthcoming conference on old Gaelic phonology to be held October 7-10 in New York City College's School of Linguistics. The enclosed brochure will give details on papers, speakers, and deadlines for abstracts.*

*We look forward to your acceptance.*

*Very truly yours,*

*ML Bentley*  
Magda L. Bentley,  
Chairperson

*Prof. Magda L. Bentley  
School of Linguistics  
New York City College  
New York, NY 10000*

INVITATION (reception)

Robert Peterson  
113 Parklane Drive  
Williston, FL 66666

Dear Mr. Peterson:

We are pleased to invite you to a reception on September 28, 1988 to be held in honor of Prof. Marilyn Gomez, the newest member of the faculty in the Department of Electrical Engineering. Prof. Gomez will be meeting members of our department for the first time, and we would like to welcome her officially on our staff.

A light lunch buffet will be served before the ceremony in the Johnson Room of the Administration Building at 12:00 noon. Please plan to attend.

James Kendrick, Chairman  
Dept. of Electrical Engineering

RSVP by Sept. 21  
555-2343



ORDERS (book purchase)

XYZ Book Company  
Sunrise Boulevard  
Riverton, MI 44444

9/15/88

Purchasing Department:

I would like to order the following books in cloth or hardback:

- 1) *Changing Times* by Ralph Wright, United Press, 1980, one copy.
- 2) *Music for Millions* by Nellie Blum, Great Books Co., 1955, three copies.
- 3) *General Geology* by Harwood and Brown, Scott Book Co., 1984, one copy.

Would you please send me the list prices and shipping costs as soon as possible.

Thank you,

*Sue Ellen Appleton*  
Sue Ellen Appleton

Mailing address:  
87 Broad Street North  
Dry Gulch, NM 55555

ORDERS (book purchase)

*Blackstone Book Agency  
Sixth and Riverside Avenue  
Olympia, WA 99999*

*September 15, 1988*

*Attention: Ms. R. J. Smith*

*Dear Ms. Smith:*

*Would you please send me a copy of World Wide Dictionary, unabridged second edition, 1982. I am enclosing a money order for \$37.50 to cover cost and handling. If this amount is not correct, please let me know.*

*Thanking you in advance,*

*Yours truly,*

*Josephine Black*  
Josephine Black  
Principal

*Dr. Josephine Black, Principal  
City College  
Mountainview, WA 99999*

REQUEST (for catalog)

*Superior Books, Ltd.  
55 Second Avenue  
Prairie, NE 77777*

9/15/88

*Catalog Department:*

*I would like to request a free catalog on American literature books. Please send it to the address below.*

*Thank you for your attention.*

*Sincerely yours,*

  
*Harry Redding*

*Dr. Harry Redding  
Dept. of English  
Western College  
Lakeview, NM 44444*

REQUEST (for reservation)

*Tiptop Travel, Inc.  
Fifth Avenue  
Greenburg, VT 11111*

Sept. 15, 1988

*Attention: World Travel Reservations*

*Please reserve one seat on your Around-the World tour leaving Greenburg on March 30, returning May 30. I am enclosing a down payment of \$500.00 (five hundred dollars) by personal check. Please bill me for the remainder.*

  
*(Mrs. J.H. Harris)*

Mrs. J.H. Harris

*Mrs. J.H. Harris  
Rockford Arms Hotel  
Rockford, CO 33333*

## POSTCARD GREETINGS

Tampa, Florida	STAMP
Dear Mary,	
I'm having a wonderful time in Tampa. Wish you were here.	Ms. Mary Smith 10 Main Street Newark NJ 22222
<i>Love, Lois</i>	

London	STAMP
Jack — Greetings from London! See you next week.	Mr. John Brown 400 12th St. Los Angeles CA 98000
<i>Hal</i>	

Hot Springs, Arkansas	STAMP
Dear Jane,	
You must come to Hot Springs— it's wonderful! Thinking of you,	Mrs. J.R. Black 17 Willow Lane San Antonio, TX 78900
<i>Barbara</i>	

New York City	STAMP
Dear Anna and Phil,	
Greetings from New York—The Big Apple!	Mr. and Mrs. P.W. White Grand Apts. 501 Northtown, PA 33000
Love to all, <i>the Thompsons</i>	

## **GLOSSARY (terms are defined in the context of letter-writing)**

<b>acknowledgment</b>	a statement of recognition (or receipt of a letter) informing the sender that the letter has been received
<b>addressee</b>	the person to whom the letter is addressed (and who will receive the letter)
<b>apology</b>	an admission of error that is also an expression of regret
<b>bread-and-butter letter</b>	a letter of thanks after a visit, special dinner invitation, etc.
<b>condolence</b>	an expression of sympathy or regret over a great loss, death of a friend, etc.
<b>complaint</b>	a statement or expression of dissatisfaction over a purchase, a service, etc.
<b>congratulations</b>	an expression of pleasure and happiness at someone's good fortune or special achievement
<b>distance</b>	degree or amount of separation between two things or people. The greater the "distance," the greater the degree of formality between two persons; age and social status are two factors that determine sociolinguistic "distance."
<b>felicitations</b>	an expression of congratulations and good wishes for someone's happiness
<b>indent (to)</b>	to set in (from the left margin) several spaces, usually five spaces
<b>margin</b>	the part of the page or sheet of paper that is outside the printed body of writing; the edge
<b>register</b>	style level; the linguistic vocabulary and grammar, etc., used in a specific context (e.g., <i>formal</i> register used with officials during a state ceremony, <i>intimate</i> register used with very close family, pets, etc.)
<b>regrets only</b>	on an invitation, responding only if you will not attend
<b>RSVP</b>	<i>repondez s'il vous plait</i> (reply if you please); a reply to the invitation is requested (and necessary)

## Zip Code Abbreviations used in the U.S.:

Alabama	AL	Missouri	MO
Alaska	AK	Montana	MT
Arizona	AZ	Nebraska	NE
Arkansas	AR	Nevada	NV
California	CA	New Hampshire	NH
Colorado	CO	New Jersey	NJ
Connecticut	CT	New Mexico	NM
Delaware	DE	New York	NY
District of Columbia	DC	North Carolina	NC
Florida	FL	North Dakota	ND
Georgia	GA	Ohio	OH
Hawaii	HI	Oklahoma	OK
Idaho	ID	Oregon	OR
Illinois	IL	Pennsylvania	PA
Indiana	IN	Rhode Island	RI
Iowa	IO	South Carolina	SC
Kansas	KS	South Dakota	SD
Kentucky	KY	Tennessee	TN
Louisiana	LA	Texas	TX
Maine	ME	Utah	UT
Maryland	MD	Vermont	VT
Massachusetts	MA	Virginia	VA
Michigan	MI	Washington	WA
Minnesota	MN	West Virginia	WV
Mississippi	MS	Wisconsin	WI
		Wyoming	WY

Note: Some new business addresses may now have an additional number following the standard 5-digit zip code number. These numbers should be used on all correspondence.

Examples: ....

Iowa State University  
Ames, IO 50011

...

University of Kansas  
Lawrence, KS 66045-2140

...

Michigan State University  
East Lansing, MI 48824-1035

