Major Types of Business Correspondence

The major types of business <u>correspondence</u> are *business letters, business <u>memos</u>, business faxes and business E-mail*.

Business Letters. Business letters have been the only type of business correspondence for much longer than any of us can remember, so "business correspondence" is still associated with them more than with its any other type.

<u>Formatting</u> business letters

A <u>full block business letter format</u> is the most popular business letter <u>layout</u> nowadays. It is the easiest to format as everything starts at the left <u>margin</u>.

Major elements of a business letter:

- Return Address or Letterhead

Full block business letters without a letterhead are usually sent by individuals; business to business letters are written on letterhead <u>stationery</u>.

- Date

The <u>return address</u> (or the <u>letterhead</u>) is followed by the *date*. If you are using a letterhead, type the date of your letter two to six lines below it depending on the length of the letter. If you are an individual using your return address in the business letter, leave just one line between the return address and the date. Type the date <u>in full</u>: do not use <u>figures</u> as they can be confusing. In the US the date starts with the month and in Europe, with the day. All the rules are impossible to follow, so just try to work out some rules for yourself. But whether you start with the month or not, do not <u>abbreviate</u> it – this rule stands.

- Inside Address

If you know the person's name, write it on the first line of the inside (or receiver's) address. It can <u>be preceded</u> by the <u>courtesy title</u> (Mr., Ms., etc.). Try to put the full name: Margaret Edwards or at least M. Edwards. The courtesy title is more often <u>omitted</u> than not lately. The receiver's name can be followed by his/her position in the company or the name of the department. It is also acceptable just to write the name of the company.

Punctuation of Addresses

It has become common to use *open punctuation*, especially in a full block business letter. It means no punctuation at all at the end of the address lines. If you prefer to use punctuation, follow by a <u>comma</u> each line of the address except the last one.

- <u>Attention Line</u>

Put the <u>position</u> of the person you are writing to in the attention line (optional). Attention line can be <u>skipped</u> in a business letter.

- <u>Salutation</u>

Salutation depends on whether you know the name of the person you are writing to. If you do, you use "Dear Ms. Edwards". Initials or first names are usually not included in salutations. On the other hand, you could write "Dear Margaret Edwards" and skip the courtesy title.

If you don't know the name use either of the following:

Dear Sir	*Ladies*
Ladies and Gentlemen	*Dear Sir or Madam*
Gentlemen (US)/Dear Sirs (UK)	*To Whom It May Concern*
Dear Madam	

The Body of the Letter

Write the body of your letter keeping it <u>brief</u> and <u>to the point</u>. Leave a line space between the <u>paragraphs,</u> it is essential for the full block business letter format.

Complimentary Close

The most common <u>complimentary close</u> accepted in the US and UK is *Sincerely.* Just use "sincerely" and forget about figuring out the difference between complimentary closes. But if you insist on using some other ones, try the following depending on your situation:

Respectfully yours (very formal)

Yours faithfully (UK for business letters that begin with Dear Sir, Dear Sirs, Dear Madam, Dear Sir or Madam)

Very truly yours (polite and neutral for the US)

Cordially yours (quite informal)

Signature

Leave four <u>blank lines</u> after the complimentary close to <u>sign your name</u>. Stick to this rule unless you have very little space, but three is a minimum. Sign your name between the complimentary close and your printed name. <u>Title</u> is optional depending on relevancy and degree of formality.

A Few Additional Points

About Punctuation

According to the US rules for business letters, you are supposed to use <u>colon</u> (:) after salutation and comma after complimentary close; it is called mixed punctuation. In Europe commas are used in both cases. Open punctuation (i.e. no punctuation) after salutation and complimentary close is becoming common, especially in the US.

*A*bout <u>Line Breaks</u>

There used to be strict rules about line breaks between different parts of the letter. For instance, you were supposed to leave two breaks after salutation and two breaks between the body of the letter and the complimentary close. Now these rules are becoming less <u>strict</u>, so use your own judgment in choosing which rules to follow and to what extent.

Modified Block Business Letter

Modified block layout is quite common in business letters. It is traditional and quite popular. Modified block business letters use a slightly different format from the full block business letters. In the modified block style the return address, date, complimentary closing and the signature line are slightly to the right of the center of the paper. As it has already been mentioned, the return address has become uncommon for business letters, it is usually substituted by a letterhead. http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/interactives/letter_generator/

Indented or Semi-Block Business Letter

The indented/semi-block style of business letters is very similar to the modified block. The only difference between the two is that the semi-block letter's paragraphs are indented one tab stop. The indented layout of business letters is what people are most used to because this is how letters were written before PCs which really has been a long time, come to think of it. In a lot of countries indenting paragraphs in a business letter is still a must. In the US the indented letter does look a little outdated. On the other hand, a lot of companies still use it. Well, there are three layouts to choose from. And if you justify to yourself using this one, go for it.

Questions
1. What major types of business correspondence do you know?
2. What kinds of business letter layout are you familiar with?
3. What are the major elements of a business letter?
4. Do they write return address on business letters?
5. What is the return address (or the letterhead) followed by?
6. How many lines should be left between the return address (or the letterhead) and the date?
7. Why is it recommended not to use figures when writing a date?
8. Is it necessary to write a courtesy title on the first line of the receiver's address?
9. What can the receiver's name be followed by?
10. What is *open punctuation*?
11. What should be written in the attention line? Where is this line?
12. Can the courtesy title be skipped in the salutation?
13. In what kind of business letter format a line is left between the paragraphs?
14. What are the most common complimentary closes in the US and the UK?
15. Why are four blank lines left after the complimentary close?
16. In which country colon is used after salutation?