

Snail Mail Letter Format and Sample

Presentation is as important as content, maybe more so in that the look of your letter is the first impression readers, in this case Editors and Agents, have of you.

Since my own format to you is limited to emails that are compatible to everyone, what follows is a “blow-by-blow” description of the traditional parts of a letter. What I’ve done is: number and capitalize the technical name for the part of the letter, place commentary on that section in brackets, and then provide an example of what the letter part should look like. For this section and the example I’m assuming that everyone is writing personal business letters, rather than letters issued by a business. Below I’ll post a sample letter without the commentary so you can see what it looks like.

GENERAL FORMAT: Since we’re now firmly established in the computer age, FULL BLOCK is the most commonly accepted format for business letters. One of the reasons—it’s the easiest set up since EVERY LINE begins on the left hand margin with TWO SPACES separating each of the sections. The only space exception is the section between the *Complimentary Close* and the *Signature Block* where 4 spaces are left to include the signature itself. There is NO indenting of any kind and No punctuation marks for the SALUTATION and the COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE.

1. RETURN ADDRESS: [This is your home or mailing address, please note the absence of punctuation between the City and State/Province]

Variation 1 U.S. Address:

Street number and name
City State Postal Code
Country [if applicable]

Variation 2 Canadian Address:

Street number and name
City Province
Postal Code
Country [if applicable]

2. DATE: [Various formats are acceptable, the most common follows]

Month Day, Year

3. INSIDE ADDRESS: [The format should appear exactly as it would on the outside envelope. Women should be addressed as “Ms.” unless you know otherwise]

Name of Editor/Agent

The Foolproof Synopsis and Query Letter Workshop

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Company Name
Street Address
City State Postal Code
Country [if applicable]

4. SALUTATION: [As you have no doubt heard countless times, a query letter or proposal must be sent to a specific person, hence the use of “Dear” followed by the name of the Editor/Agent. It is up to you whether you use the formal “Ms. Smith” or “Jane Smith”. Of course if you’re sending a proposal to an editor you know really well, chances are you’ll simply say “Dear Jane.” Exceptions to the specific person rule are small print and e-publishers who often request query letters be sent to general submissions. In this case use an “Attention” line as your salutation.]

Variation 1:

Dear Mr./Ms. Editor/Agent

Variation 2:

Attention Submissions

5. SUBJECT LINE: [This is optional, unless this is an e-query and in most cases you won’t need to use one since the pertinent information is already contained in the first paragraph of your letter.]

Subject: Title of Book or other reference as per publisher guidelines

6. CONTENT OF LETTER: [Remember, paragraphs are NOT indented, rather, each paragraph is separated by two spaces. Some content within paragraphs can be indented for emphasis.]

Paragraph 1 MAIN MESSAGE

Paragraph 2 DETAILING BODY OF FACTS

Paragraph 3 CLOSE WITH AN ACTION STATEMENT

7. COMPLIMENTARY CLOSE: [Remember, leave four spaces after the close for the signature itself.]

Sincerely

8. SIGNATURE BLOCK: [While providing your name in legible type, this line should also show how you want to be addressed by the reader. For example, even though you may be publishing under your full name of say, “Clarabelle Jones”, friends, family and acquaintances usually call you “Clara” or “Belle”, so use the applicable shortened version in your signature block. Another consideration is based on personal experience. I often, though not always, include “Ms.” in brackets after my name because “Robin” could be a man’s name, so my hint saves confusion for the reader.]

Clara Jones

9. ATTACHMENTS: [Though not as usual these days, a short form indication of item(s) accompanying the letter is acceptable. Use “enc” alone to indicate one item, or add numbers after the short form to indicate more than one item, ie. “enc 3”]

enc

Sample

Your Street Address
City State Postal Code

Date

Ms. Editor (specific name)
Publisher
Street Address
City State Postal Code

Dear Ms. Editor

Paragraph 1, which states the MAIN MESSAGE. That is the title and other “technical details” of your manuscript.

Paragraph 2 etc. embody the key facts of your manuscript and should include some sort of mini synopsis.

Also consider a paragraph or sentence or two highlighting a saleable feature such as setting, research etc.

And, finally highlights of your “writing resume”

Paragraph 3 closes with an ACTION statement, in this case stating methods of contacting you.

Sincerely

Your Name

Enc.