

PLEASE POST

**The Ohio Academy of Science**  
100 West Jackson, Suite 200  
Columbus, OH 43260  
Phone/FAX: 614.486.2228

January 10, 1995

**Inside Address:** Mr. John M. Smith  
Chief Executive Officer  
McKibbin Corporation  
115 West Street  
Middletown, OH 45128

**Salutation:** Dear Mr. Smith:

**Body (Text):** This is the first line of the first paragraph. It should state the purpose of the letter or the reason for writing. This may be the only paragraph that gets read, so brief and clear. Write and rewrite until you get it right.

This is the second paragraph. Most letters have more than one paragraph. Although your letter should be more exciting to read than this one, it will not be well received unless it has all of the essential elements of a standard business letter: heading, date, inside address, salutation, body of text, complimentary closing, your handwritten signature, and your name typed below your signature.

Although there are variations in these basic elements, including additional parts for special purposes, you can spend the rest of your life simply writing standard business letters if you get these basics right now.

I'm closing this letter now so that I can demonstrate the final elements of a letter.

Thank you for considering these suggestions.

**Signature:** Sincerely,  
*[Handwritten Signature]*  
John M. Elliott  
Chief Executive Officer

**Complementary closing:**

**Typed name:** JME:epf

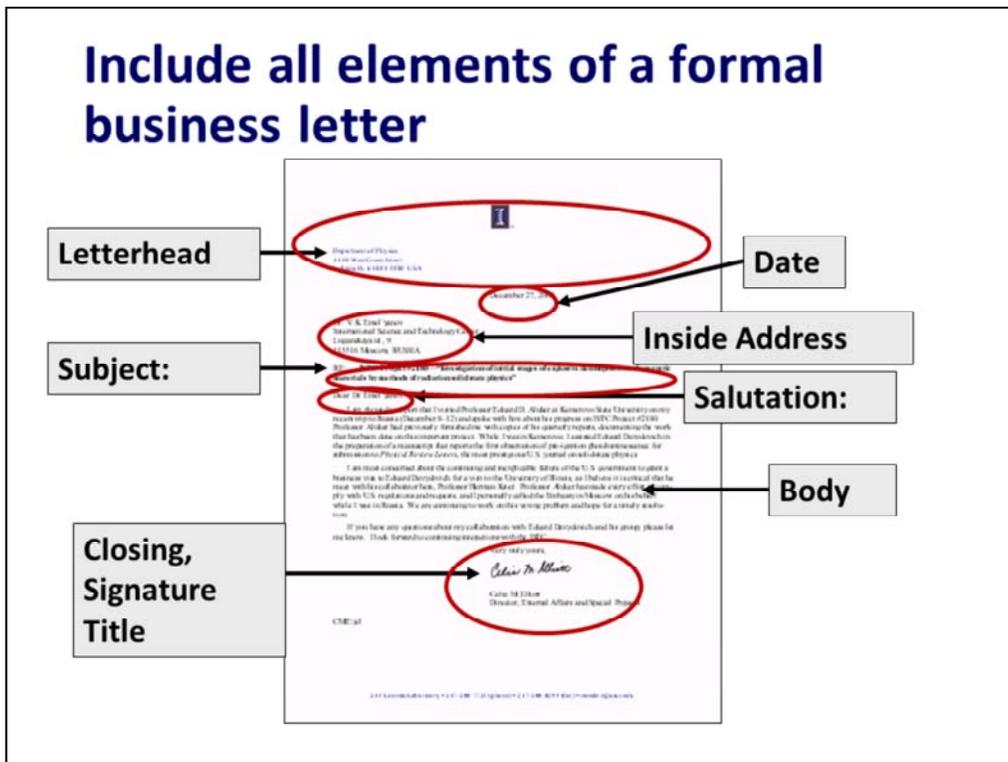
**HOW TO WRITE A BUSINESS LETTER**

**Writing (or asking for) Good Letters of Recommendation**

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## **After the date, type the “inside address”**

**Repeats the same information that is on the envelope**

**Arrange in the following order:**

**[Title] [First name] [Middle Initial] [Surname]**

**Department or Division**

**Name of the Institution**

**Post Office Box or Street Address**

**City, State Postal Code Country**

Professor Dale J. Van Harlingen  
Department of Physics  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
1110 West Green Street  
Urbana IL 61801-3080 USA

## After the inside address comes the “salutation”

“Dear” [Title] [Surname]:

If the person works at a university,  
address him or her as

Dear **Professor** [Surname]:

If the person works at a national lab or a private  
company, address him or her as

Dear **Dr.** [Surname]:

Follow the salutation with a colon (:)

Dear Professor Van Harlingen:

Dear Dr. Xu:

## **In the opening paragraph:**

### **State that your remarks are confidential**

“I write to provide a confidential assessment of Zhaoqi’s potential to be successful in graduate school.”

### **Briefly state your qualifications**

“I am an associate professor of physics at the University of Illinois.”

### **Explain your relationship to the applicant**

**In what capacity you have known him/her**

**How long you have been acquainted**

“Cassie has worked for three semesters as an undergraduate hourly employee in my materials characterization lab, where she prepares samples for STM imaging.”

## **Include specifics in the body of the letter**

### **Describe general positive\* traits backed up by examples**

“Susan was extremely conscientious; she meticulously documented her new fabrication method so that anyone in the lab could reproduce her technique.”

### **Include specific, quantifiable measures of performance**

“Ahmed completed 100 percent of his homework assignments within the time allotted.”

**\*If you cannot be positive and persuasive on the applicant’s behalf, decline to write the letter**

## **Make it personal and memorable**

### **Tell an anecdote about the person**

“Jim had the misfortune of having the projector lamp burn out—no replacement to be found—in the middle of his final talk on his capstone project. He immediately moved to the blackboard, sketched his two important data plots, and finished his talk. Few full professors could handle a projector disaster with such aplomb.”

### **Use visual imagery to make the person come alive**

“Observing Jorge as a TA might make you think you were at football practice instead of an undergrad physics class; he continually circulates through the room—making a suggestion here, offering encouragement there—as students work through the discussion questions.

## **In the closing paragraph...**

### **Rank the candidate in comparison with others in his/her cohort**

“Of the undergraduate students that I have supervised in my 30-year career, Pedro easily ranks in the top 10 percent.”

### **Suggest other possible references**

“Professor Warrens of our department is also well acquainted with Grace’s work.”

## **Use a standard closing**

### **Use one of the following phrases:**

Very truly yours,  
Sincerely yours,  
Respectfully yours,

### **Follow the closing with a comma (,)**

### **Leave four blank lines for your signature**

Sign the letter in blue ink  
Write neatly

### **After the blank lines, on one or two lines, print your name and title**

## **Tips for asking for letters**

**Don't wait until the last minute!**

**Provide the following information, in writing,  
to the letter writer:**

**Addressee (name, title, complete  
address)**

**How it is to be sent (electronically,  
on letterhead by mail, submitted  
via the Web)**

**A copy of your CV and statement of  
purpose or project summary**

**When the deadline is**

## Give your writers a “cheat sheet”

Letters of Recommendation for  
**Alicia B. Canuteson**

B.S. in Engineering Physics, expected May 2013

CV—attached  
Basic statement of purpose (will be customized for each department)—attached

In one or two sentences, specify how the letter writer knows you; give dates

Remind the writer of what your strong points are (no more than one line each))

- Selling point
- Selling point
- Selling point

Cornell University, Dept of Physics—DEADLINE—**DECEMBER 15, 2015**

- You will receive an email from Cornell with instructions on how to submit your letter; prefer online submission for letters
- Interested in working with Paul McEuen on nanostructured materials or Daniel Ralph on nanofabrication techniques

Stanford University, Dept of Applied Physics—DEADLINE—**JANUARY 3, 2016**

MUST BE submitted using online service; you will receive an email from Stanford on how to submit your letter

- Interested in working with Harold Hwang on atomic-scale synthesis and control of complex oxide heterostructures or Yuri Suzuki on atomically precise heteroepitaxy of complex oxides

Cornell University, Dept of Applied Physics—DEADLINE—**JANUARY 5, 2016**

- You will receive an email from Cornell with instructions on how to submit your letter online; prefer online submission
- Interested in working with Harold Craighead in nanofabrication and integrated microfluidic/optical devices

**Give name as it will appear on your application\***

**Identify the dept as well as the school**

**Arrange by deadline date**

**\*And make sure the name on your application matches the name on your GRE scores and transcript(s)**

## **Celia's Commandments**

**Never EVER address a letter "To Whom It May Concern" —dated and tacky in the extreme!**

"Dear Colleagues:" "Dear Committee Members:"

**Follow the salutation of a business letter with a colon (:), not a comma**

"Dear Professor Rasputin:" "Dear Grandma,"

**Provide a mechanism for follow-up**

"Please call me at 555-400-1219 if you have any questions."

Excellent resource for further reading and good advice:

<http://www.hhmi.org/resources/labmanagement/downloads/letter.pdf>