

# THE BUSINESS LETTER

by R. Goodman

The business letter is begun, like the friendly letter, with the address of the writer in the top right portion of the page and indented. If the address contains the name of a house or farm this is placed at the beginning of the address, without inverted commas. The number of the house, building or flat is placed before the street or flat name, as opposed to Afrikaans usage, and there is no comma after the number (e.g. 203 Carlton Street; 76 Bay Mansions). It will be noted that names of streets are written as separate words and that each begins with a capital letter. The abbreviation of 'Street' is 'St' ('Str.' is Afrikaans), and any such abbreviation (e.g. Ave; Rd) need not be indicated by a full-stop.

Each line of the address should end with a comma, including lines that end with abbreviations (e.g. 25 Garden Rd.), except the last line, which ends with a full-stop.

The date may follow the indentation of the address. The accepted order of writing is: day, month and then year; the practice of writing the month before the day is American, not English or South African, and should be avoided. The date is not written solely in numerals (e.g. 18/12/74), but the day is with the addition of 'st', 'nd', 'rd' or 'th' being optional. The month should be written out in full, and be followed by a comma. The year, too, should not be abbreviated (e.g. 1974 rather than '74) and should always be followed by a full-stop.

The business letter must also contain the name and address of the recipient. This is begun one line below the date and against the left margin of the page, and indentation is optional. The name of the recipient, or his position (e.g. The Manager; The Secretary) must be stated first. It is not acceptable for a letter to be addressed direct to a firm, as in 'Messrs. James and White (Pty.) Ltd.'. Either one writes direct to Messrs. James and White, or, as is more usual, one addresses a particular person in the firm, such as the manager or secretary. The punctuation is the same as for the writer's address.

The salutation begins one line below the end of the recipient's address and against the left margin. The possible forms are as follows: Dear Sir; Sir; Dear Madam; Madam; Dear Sirs; Sirs; Gentlemen; Mesdames; Dear Mr/Mrs/Miss Jones. Each of these is followed by a comma.

If there is to be a line stating the subject of the letter (this is optional) then it should be one line below the salutation and just to the right of the comma. It should also be underlined. Avoid prefixing it with 're'. Also in acknowledging a letter avoid expressions such as 'proximo' and 'ultimo' (name the month), and ugly phrases such as 'Your letter refers'.

The importance of brevity in a business letter cannot be over-emphasized. High-sounding phrases such as 'I wish to request, as I hereby do' or 'Hoping that these may receive your favourable consideration' are meaningless and only take up extra space. In any case, a sentence containing an unrelated particle (e.g. Hoping) is ungrammatical. The conclusions 'I am' or 'I remain' should also be avoided.

The final salutation for a business letter is 'Yours faithfully'. This is placed in the centre of the page, on the line immediately following the final line of the letter. It will be noted that 'Yours sincerely,' is not strictly acceptable (although it is coming into use in business letters if you address a person by name); that the word 'faithfully' has a small 'f'; and that 'Yours faithfully' is followed by a comma.

On the following line is the writer's signature. Below that is the writer's name, typed or written in block letters; if the writer is female then the brackets include 'Miss' or 'Mrs', as the case may be. Finally, on the line below that, the writer, if necessary, states his designation.

[Suggestions from readers about alternative practices and approaches will be most welcome. Eds.]