

paper. APA documentation style is described in detail in Chapter 34. You can also find a sample student research paper using APA documentation style in section 34h.

Chicago Manual (CM) documentation style is sometimes used in the social sciences as well. (See 32a.)

CHAPTER 38

Special Writing

All writing starts with thinking about your PURPOSE and your AUDIENCE. This chapter explains how to write typical business correspondence—letters, memos, resumes, job application letters, and e-mail messages—and how to write essay exams.

38a Business Writing

38a.1 How do I write and format a business letter?

Business letters give information, build goodwill, or establish a foundation for discussions or transactions. Experts in business and government agree that the letters likely to get results are short, simple, direct, and human. Following is the most useful advice for writing business letters:

- Address the person by name.
- Tell what your letter is about in the first paragraph.

BOX 38-1 SUMMARY



Guidelines for business writing

- Consider your audience's needs and expectations.
- Have a clear purpose.
- Put essential information first.
- Make your points concisely, clearly, and directly.
- Use conventional business formats.

- Be honest, clear, and specific.
- Use correct EDITED AMERICAN ENGLISH.
- Be positive and natural.
- Edit ruthlessly.

Keep the following points in mind when writing a business letter:

- **Format:** Select block style (in which all lines begin at the left margin) or modified block style (lines for inside address and body begin at left margin; heading, closing, and signature begin about halfway across the page).
- **Paper:** Use only 8 1/2-by-11-inch paper. The most professional colors are white or very light beige. (Business letters from other countries are often on other sizes of paper. Still, write back on US and Canadian standard size.)
- **Letterhead:** When writing from a company, use its official letterhead. If you're writing on your own behalf, use or create your own letterhead on your computer. Center your full name, address, and phone number at the top of the page. Use a larger size font than for the content of the letter. Avoid any font that's fancy or loud. After all, your letter carries a serious business message.
- **Name of recipient:** Be as specific as possible. An exact name (or at least a specific category of people) tells readers you have taken the time to do some research. If you use a category, place the key word first: For example, use "Billing Department," not "Department of Billing." Avoid using "To Whom It May Concern," which implies you didn't do the necessary research and expect the person who receives the letter to do the work of figuring out the specific recipient. Such letters are often ignored.
- **Spacing:** Use single spacing within paragraphs and double spacing between paragraphs.
- **Content:** Write using CONCISE and clear language. Open by explaining immediately your purpose for writing. Check that your information is accurate and includes all relevant facts. Never repeat yourself. Use as even-handed a TONE as possible. Indeed, you can express disappointment or make a complaint without resorting to inflammatory language. A reasonable approach always gets the best results.
- **Tone:** Use a medium LEVEL OF FORMALITY in word choice and style.
- **Final copy:** Proofread carefully. Your neat, error-free letter reflects well on you and your company or organization. Also, your reader is more likely to read it because you took the time to show the importance of your message and your respect for your reader.

In a business letter, always use GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE in the salutation (the opening "To" or "Dear"). If you don't know the specific person to

BOX 38-2 SUMMARY



Writing a gender-neutral salutation

1. Telephone the company to which you are sending the letter. State your reason for sending the letter, and ask for the name of the person you want to receive it.
2. Never address the person by first name. For a man, use Mr. or another appropriate title. For a woman, use Ms. or another appropriate title, unless you are specifically told to use Miss or Mrs. or another title such as Dr.
3. If you use a title alone instead of a name, keep the title generic and gender-neutral.

NO

Dear Sir: [obviously sexist]

Dear Sir or Madam: [*Madam* is an out-of-date term, and few women like its connotation]

YES

Dear Human Resources Officer:

Dear IBM Sales Manager:

whom you need to address your letter, take the steps listed in Box 38-2; see also 20g.

The sample envelope below and sample business letter that follows are models of typical formats you can use.

38a.2 How do I write a memo?

Many business memos are sent through e-mail, although some are printed and circulated on paper. Be specific, not general, in your “subject” line. Prefer “Results of Evaluation” over “Update.” Readers need to determine

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742 Lincoln Hall
Northeast College
2038 Washington Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60312

ENVELOPE: Fold letter in thirds horizontally and insert in an appropriate-size envelope. Place your return address in the upper left corner and the mailing address in the middle of the envelope.

Ms. Yolanda Harper
Abco Rental Company
1249 Logan Rd.
Chicago, IL 60312

Sample envelope

Jan Dubitz
742 Lincoln Hall Northeast College
2038 Washington Blvd.
Chicago, IL 60312
(210) 555-3723

September 14, 2006

▲
4 spaces

▼
Ms. Yolanda Harper
Abco Rental Company
1249 Logan Rd.
Chicago, IL 60312

SALUTATION: Use an appropriate title (*Mr., Ms., Dr., Professor*) and the person's name. If you do not know the name, use a title (*Dean of Students, Human Resources Coordinator*). Add a colon at the end of the salutation.

Dear Ms. Harper:
▲
2 spaces

▼
I rented a refrigerator from your company on August 28. After only two weeks, the freezer compartment no longer keeps food frozen. Per the rental agreement, this is my written request for a replacement refrigerator. The agreement states that you will replace the refrigerator within five business days from the receipt of my letter.

I will call you next week to arrange the exchange.
Thank you for your prompt attention.

Sincerely,

— **CLOSING:** Capitalize only the first word (*Yours truly, Sincerely yours*) and follow with a comma.

4 spaces

Jan Dubitz
Jan Dubitz

— **SIGNATURE:** If you have a title, type it underneath your name. Sign letter in space above your name.

Enc: Copy of rental agreement

— **OTHER:** Use *Enc:* or *Enclosure:* if you include material with your letter. Use *cc:* to indicate that you have sent any courtesy copies.

Sample business letter

quickly the importance of a memo by reading the headings, especially the “subject” line. A memo from a supervisor asking for sales figures will receive prompt attention, whereas a memo from the office manager about new forms for ordering supplies will probably not receive a careful reading until the time comes to order more supplies.

The AUDIENCE for a memo, sent through e-mail or on paper, is usually “local.” For example, in the workplace, local audiences can be senior management, other levels of supervisors or managers, people at your level, all employees, or customers. Non-local audiences can be people who share interests (religious, political, or leisure-time groups) or causes (environment, education, health care). Be as specific as possible in naming your memo’s audience on the “to” line.

The PURPOSE of memos, whether sent through e-mail or on paper, is to give new information; to SUMMARIZE, clarify, or SYNTHESIZE known information; to put information officially on the record; to make a request or suggestion; or to record recent activities and outcomes. Most word processing software provides formats for paper memos. All e-mail services provide an on-screen format for entering headings. For example, in versions of Microsoft Word™, you can click FILE>NEW>MEMO. Select the style you want—“Professional” is a good choice for workplace use. A memo has the following parts:

■ Headings

TO:	[Your audience, named as specifically as possible]
FROM:	[Your name]
DATE:	[Month, day, and year you’re writing]
SUBJECT:	[Memo’s topic, specifically and concisely stated]

■ Contents

Introductory paragraph: State the memo’s purpose and give needed background information.

Body paragraph(s): State the point of the memo and why it’s worth the recipient’s time to read it. Or, as the sample memo in this chapter shows, give the data required.

Conclusion: End with a one- or two-sentence summary or, when appropriate, with a specific recommendation. If the memo is short, like the sample memo, end either with a sentence of instructions or a thank-you message.

Before sending your memo, proofread it to eliminate grammar and spelling errors, to check the accuracy of the content, and to make sure it’s clearly and concisely stated. Perhaps ask others to review it before you send it out. One or at most two pages is the expected length of a memo. If you need more pages, you’re writing a report.

TO: English Teaching Assistants
 FROM: Professor Thomas Nevers, Director,
 First-Year Composition
 DATE: December 1, 2005
 SUBJECT: New Computer Programs

Several new writing programs will be installed in the English computer labs. Training sessions are scheduled during the week before classes begin next semester.

Tuesday, January 3 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Wednesday, January 4 1:00-3:00 p.m.

Thursday, January 5 8:30-10:30 a.m.

Friday, January 6 1:30-3:30 p.m.

Please stop by my office by December 12 to sign up for one of the two-hour workshops.

Sample memo

38a.3 How do I create a resume?

A **resume** details your employment experience, education, and other accomplishments for a potential employer. Because your resume will be compared to those of numerous other applicants, take time to make a favorable impression. Format your resume so that it's easy to read, and include only information relevant to the position available.

Use the guidelines below for writing a resume; also, examine the sample on page 488. A helpful Web site for writing resumes is <<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/ecep/resume/>>.

- Adjust the emphasis in your resume to fit your purpose: For a job as a computer programmer, you need to emphasize different facts about yourself than what you'd offer when applying to be a retail salesperson.

Margaret Lorentino
1338 Sunflower Lane
Rochelle, IL 61068
(815) 555-3756

- OBJECTIVE:** Seeking a full/part-time position as a medical transcriptionist to utilize my medical, computer, and office skills
- EDUCATION:** Certificate of Completion, Medical Transcription
Kishwaukee College, Malta, IL, December 2006
Bachelor of Science, Marketing
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL, May 2006
Associate in Arts; Studied Nursing and Business
Harper Junior College, Palatine, IL, December 1993
- EMPLOYMENT:** Kishwaukee College, Malta, IL, January 2003–Present
Lab Assistant and Computer Skills Teacher
RTD Real Estate, Muncie, IN, August 1997–August 1998
Receptionist, Accounting Assistant
Northwestern Mutual Life, Schaumburg, IL,
May 1994–July 1995
Sales Assistant
Reliable Personnel, Park Ridge, IL, May 1993–May 1994
Temporary Employment Manager
- SKILLS:** Computer
- Experienced with Microsoft Office 2003
 - Type 60 wpm
 - Have experience with Lotus, Excel, and Access
 - Teach basic computer skills in first-year college English classes
- Organizational
- Girl Scout leader, soccer coach, Sunday school teacher
 - Trained employees in data entry and accounting principles
 - Managed a temporary workforce of 20–30 employees
- REFERENCES:** Available upon request

Sample resume

- Fit all information on one page (or two at the most—but one-pagers usually appeal to employers more) by stressing what will interest your potential employer. If you must use a second page, put the most important information on the first page.
- Put the most recent item first in each category.
- Use clear headings to separate blocks of information.
- Write telegram-style under the headings. Start with verb phrases, not with the word *I*, and omit *a*, *an*, *the*. Write, for example, “Created new computer program to organize company’s spreadsheets,” not “*I* created *a* new computer program to organize *the* company’s spreadsheets.”
- Don’t pad entries with irrelevant information or wordy writing.
- *Never* lie.
- Include references or state that you can provide them “upon request” (and have them ready to go).
- Print your resume on high-quality, white or very light beige paper.
- *Multilingual writers*: For a job in the United States or Canada, never include personal information that may be expected in other countries. For example, don’t state your age, marital status, or religion.

38a.4 How do I compose a job application letter?

A job application letter always needs to accompany your resume. Avoid simply repeating what is already in the resume. Instead, acquaint yourself with available descriptions of the position and its responsibilities, and connect the company’s expectations to your experience. Stress how your background has prepared you for this position. Follow the guidelines below for writing your letter; also, examine the sample job application letter on page 490.

- Use one page only.
- Use the same name, content, and format guidelines you use for a business letter (38a).
- Open by identifying the position you want to apply for.
- Address the letter to a specific person. If you can’t find out a name, use a title (such as “Human Resources Coordinator”). Avoid using “To Whom It May Concern” (38a) because it tells employers you’ve made only a minimal effort.
- Think of your letter as a polite sales pitch about you. Don’t be shy, but don’t exaggerate what you can do for the company if you get the job.
- Explain how your background will meet the requirements of the job at this workplace in particular.
- Stress your qualifications for the specific position for which you’re applying.

Margaret Lorentino

1338 Sunflower Lane
Rochelle, IL 61068

December 1, 2006

Ms. Arlene Chang
Employment Coordinator
Rockford Medical Center
820 N. Main St.
Rockford, IL 61103

Dear Ms. Chang:

I had a chance to talk with you last spring about your company at the Kishwaukee College Job Fair. I am very interested in the medical transcription position that I noticed in the Rockford Register Star on November 29.

I will be completing my Medical Transcription Certificate at the end of December. I have taken courses in medical transcription, medical office procedures, and keyboarding, as well as numerous computer courses. I have a bachelor's degree in marketing from Northern Illinois University and also studied nursing for almost a year at Harper Junior College. I believe that this background would help me in this position.

The enclosed resume will give you the details of my experience and qualifications. I think that my experience and education make a great combination for this position. I am available for an interview at your convenience. My home phone number is (815) 555-3756.

Sincerely yours,

Margaret Lorentino

Margaret Lorentino

Sample job application letter

- If the job will be your first, give your key attributes—keeping them relevant and true—such as that you’re punctual, self-disciplined, a “team player,” eager to learn, and ready to work hard for the company.
- State when you’re available for an interview and also how you can be reached easily by mail and telephone (and cellphone, if you have one).
- Edit and proofread carefully. Even one misspelled word can hurt your chances.

The sample letter on the opposite page is by Margaret Lorentino, a mother with young children, who seeks a position that would allow her to work at home. She is responding to a newspaper ad for a medical transcription position. The format is modified block style.

38a.4 What are guidelines for writing e-mail?

Today, a great deal of business and other communication is conducted by e-mail. Business and professional e-mails differ from casual, everyday e-mails and instant messages that you send to friends and family. An e-mail resembles a business memo, but it is relayed in electronic form. Follow the guidelines below for writing a business e-mail.

- Write a specific, not general, topic in the Subject box. Unless you do this, you won’t capture your reader’s attention. After all, attention spans when reading e-mail can be quite short, especially for business people who get dozens of e-mails a day and therefore tend to skim the screen.
- Use block style by single-spacing within paragraphs and double-spacing between paragraphs.
- Never write in all capital letters or all lowercase letters. Not only are they hard (and annoying) to read, but all capital letters are considered “flaming,” the written equivalent of shouting. This is poor, even insulting, “netiquette,” the word for etiquette online.
- Use bulleted or numbered lists when itemizing.
- Keep your message brief and your paragraphs short. Reading a screen is harder on the eyes than is reading a print document, which means that business people tend to skim e-mail.
- Be cautious about what you say in a business e-mail. After all, the recipient can forward to others without your permission, even though this practice is considered unethical and rude. And, of course, never give personal information to strangers, and never give credit information on a nonsecure site.
- Forward an e-mail message *only* if you have asked the original sender for permission.

- Check your e-mail and any attachments to make sure your message is clear, your TONE is appropriate, and your spelling, grammar, and punctuation are correct.
- Use emoticons only if you are sure the reader appreciates them. :-) Some people do not. :-(
- Never make personal attacks on others, share jokes that would offend some groups of people, or gossip in a business e-mail.
- Never “spam” (send unsolicited, or “junk,” mail).

When you want to include in your e-mail a separate document, such as a business report, a proposal, or the like, compose it in a word processing program, and then attach the document to an e-mail message using the “Attachments” function of your e-mail service. Attached documents, rather than copied and pasted documents, look better because they maintain the original formatting (margins, spacing, italics). One word of caution: If an attached file is large, alert your recipient to its size so that the person can decide whether to download it—and ask whether they’d prefer to receive the document by fax or in the mail.

38b Preparing for essay exams

Writing answers for essay tests is one of the most important writing tasks that you face in college. Common in all disciplines, including the natural sciences, essay tests demand that you recall information and also put assorted pieces of that information into contexts that lead to GENERALIZATIONS you can support. Essay tests give you the chance to SYNTHESIZE and apply your knowledge, helping your instructor determine what you’ve learned.

38b.1 How do I prepare for essay exams?

Begin preparing for exams well before the day of the test itself. Attend class diligently and take good notes. Just as important, be an active reader, annotating your textbook and putting concepts into your own words. Reading and writing are closely connected, but there is no substitute for actually doing some writing yourself.

38b.2 What strategies can I use when writing under pressure?

If you use specific *strategies* when writing under pressure, you can be more comfortable and your writing will likely be more effective. As you use the strategies listed in Box 38-3, remember that your purpose in answering questions is to show what you know in a clear, direct, and well-organized way. When you’re studying for an essay exam, write out one-sentence summaries of major areas of information. This technique helps fix the ideas in your

BOX 38-3 SUMMARY



Strategies for writing essay tests

1. Do not start writing immediately.
2. If the test has two or more questions, read them all at the start. Determine whether you're supposed to answer all the questions. Doing this gives you a sense of how to budget your time, either by dividing it equally or by allotting more time for some questions than for others. If you have a choice of questions, select those about which you know the most and can write about most completely within the time limit.
3. Analyze each question that you answer by underlining the *cue words* and *key words* to determine exactly what the question asks.
4. Use the writing process as much as possible within the constraints of the time limit. Try to allot time to plan and revise. For a one-hour test on one question, take about ten minutes to jot down preliminary ideas about content and organization, and save ten minutes to reread, revise, and edit your answer. If you're pressed suddenly for time—but try to avoid this—consider skipping a question that you can't answer well or a question that counts less toward your total score. If you feel blocked, try FREEWRITING (2f) to get your hand and your thoughts moving.
5. Support any GENERALIZATIONS with specifics (see 4f about using the RENNS TEST for being specific).
6. Beware of going off the topic. Respond to the cue words and key words in the question, and do not try to reshape the question to conform to what you might prefer to write about. Remember, your reader expects a clear line of presentation and reasoning that answers the stated question.

mind, and a summary sentence may become a thesis sentence for an essay answer.

The more you use the strategies in the box and adapt them to your personal needs, the better you'll use them to your advantage. Practice them by making up questions that might be on your test and timing yourself as you write the answers. Doing this offers you another benefit: If you study by anticipating possible questions and writing out the answers, you'll be very well prepared if one or two of them show up on the test.

OPEN LETTER TO MULTILINGUAL STUDENTS

If you ever worry about your English writing, you have much in common with us and with many US college students. The good news is that errors you make demonstrate the reliable truth that you are moving normally through the unavoidable, necessary stages of second-language development. Unfortunately, there are no shortcuts. The process is like learning to play a musical instrument. Few people learn to play fluently without making lots of errors.

What can you do to progress as quickly as possible from one writing stage to another? We recommend that you start by bringing to mind what school writing is like in your first language. Specifically, recall how ideas are presented in your written native language, especially when information is explained or a topic requires a logical argument.

Most college writing in the United States is very direct in tone and straightforward in structure. In a typical essay or research paper, the reader expects to find a **THESIS STATEMENT** that clearly states the central message of the entire piece of writing. Usually, the thesis statement falls in the first paragraph, or in a longer piece, perhaps in the second paragraph. Then, each paragraph that follows relates in content directly to the essay's thesis statement. Also, each paragraph begins with a **TOPIC SENTENCE** that contains the main point of the paragraph, and the rest of the paragraph supports the point made in the topic sentence. This support consists of **RENNS (4f)** that provide specific details. The final paragraph brings the piece of writing to a logical conclusion.

Writing structures typical of your native language most likely differ from those in the United States. Always honor your culture's writing traditions and structures, for they reflect the richness of your heritage. At the same time, try to adapt to and practice the academic writing style characteristic of the United States. Later, some college instructors might encourage you to practice other, more subtle English writing styles that allow greater liberty in organization and expression.

Distinctive variations in school writing styles among people of different cultures and language groups have interested researchers for the past thirty years. Such research is ongoing, so scholars hesitate to generalize. Even so, interesting differences have been observed. Many Spanish-speaking students feel that US school writing lacks grace because writers do not include any wide-ranging background material: in fact, US writing teachers usually say such broad introductory material is wordy or not really relevant to the central message. Japanese school writing customarily begins with references to nature. In some African nations, a ceremonial, formal opening is expected to start school writing as an expression of respect for the reader. Personally, we greatly enjoy discovering the rich variations in the writing traditions of the many cultures of the world. As college teachers, however, our responsibility is to explain the expectations in the United States.

If you were in our classes, we would say “Welcome!” and then ask you to teach us about writing in your native language. Using that knowledge, we would respectfully teach you the US approach to writing so that we could do our best to help you succeed in a US college.

Lynn Quitman Troyka
Doug Hesse

CHAPTER 39

Singulars and Plurals

39a What are count and noncount nouns?

Count nouns represent items that can be counted: *a radio* or *radios*, *a street* or *streets*, *an idea* or *ideas*, *a fingernail* or *fingernails*. Count nouns can be SINGULAR OR PLURAL.



Noncount nouns name things that are thought of as a whole and not split into separate, countable parts: *rice*, *knowledge*, *traffic*. There are two important rules to remember about noncount nouns: (1) They’re never preceded by *a* or *an*, and (2) they are never plural. The Box 39-1 on page 496 lists eleven categories of uncountable items, giving examples in each category.

Some nouns can be count or noncount, depending on their meaning in a sentence. Most of these nouns name things that can be meant either individually or as “wholes” made up of individual parts.

COUNT You have **a hair** on your sleeve. [In this sentence, *hair* is meant as an individual, countable item.]

NONCOUNT Kioko has black **hair**. [In this sentence, all the strands of *hair* are referred to as a whole.]

When editing your writing (see Chapter 3), make sure that you have not added a plural *-s* to any noncount nouns, which are always singular in form.

 **ALERT:** Use a singular verb with any noncount noun that functions as the SUBJECT in a CLAUSE. 

To check whether a noun is count or noncount, look it up in a dictionary such as the *American Heritage English as a Second Language Dictionary*.