

Practical Writing: Drafting a Business Letter

Sometimes the best way to make a change in your school or community is to write a persuasive letter. In the following letter to his principal, Alex Hastings asks for lights on a soccer field.

The letter follows the correct format. (See pages 276–277.)

The beginning introduces the issue and asks a question.

The body of the letter uses details to persuade the reader.

The closing includes a polite call to action.

1080 Burns Road
Orange Park, FL 32000
May 5, 2011

Principal Joseph Rodriguez
Greenberg Middle School
116 Shelton Street
Orange Park, FL 32000

Dear Mr. Rodriguez:

As a soccer team member at Greenberg Middle School, I have a suggestion. We need lights for nighttime games. When school starts in the fall, it gets darker earlier and earlier. It's hard for our teams to finish games safely.

I realize that lighting is expensive. However, a lighted field could be used by the whole community, so the community could help pay for it. The soccer team could even run a citywide fund-raiser.

Adding lights to our soccer field would make a huge difference for my teammates and me. Please make the request at the next school board meeting.

Sincerely,

Alex Hastings
Alex Hastings

Writing Tips

Use the following tips as a guide when you are asked to write a persuasive letter. (Also see pages 276–277.)

Before you write . . .

- **Choose a topic that you care about.**
Make a list of problems in your school or community and think of possible solutions. Choose a problem that is important to you.
- **Gather information.**
Learn as much as you can about the problem. Find facts to support your solution.
- **Consider your reader.**
Determine what the person you are writing to needs to know.

During your writing . . .

- **Keep it short.**
Make your point quickly and stay focused on the main idea. Your letter should not be longer than one page.
- **State the problem and your solution.**
Explain why the situation exists and how it can be fixed.
- **Be polite.**
Use a courteous voice to persuade the reader.

After you've written a first draft . . .

- **Check for completeness.**
Make sure you did not leave out any important facts or reasons.
- **Check for correctness.**
Read your letter several times. Double-check the address and spelling of all names. Correct any errors in punctuation, capitalization, spelling, and grammar.



Think of a problem in your school or community. Find out who can help solve it. Write a persuasive letter to that person or organization and make a strong but polite argument. (You may send the letter or simply treat it as a school assignment.)

Parts of a Business Letter

- 1 The **heading** includes your address and the date. Write the heading at least one inch from the top of the page at the left-hand margin.
- 2 The **inside address** includes the name and address of the person or organization you are writing to.
 - If the person has a title, be sure to include it. (If the title is short, write it on the same line as the name. If the title is long, write it on the next line.)
 - If you are writing to an organization or a business—but not to a specific person—begin the inside address with the name of the organization or business.
- 3 The **salutation** is the greeting. Always put a colon after the salutation.
 - If you know the person's name, use it in your greeting.
Dear Mr. Christopher:
 - If you don't know the name of the person who will read your letter, use a salutation like one of these:
Dear Store Owner:
Dear Sir or Madam:
Dear Madison Soccer Club:
- 4 The **body** is the main part of the letter. Do not indent the paragraphs in your letter; instead, skip a line after each one.
- 5 The **closing** comes after the body. Use **Yours truly** or **Sincerely** to close a business letter. Capitalize only the first word of the closing and put a comma after the closing.
- 6 The **signature** ends the letter. If you are using a computer, leave four spaces after the closing; then type your name. Write your signature in the space between the closing and the typed name.

(See page 577 for more about writing letters as well as a set of guidelines for addressing envelopes properly.)

Business-Letter Format

The diagram illustrates the format of a business letter, divided into six numbered sections:

- 1:** Three horizontal lines representing the recipient's address. A bracket indicates a spacing of "Four to Seven Spaces" between these lines.
- 2:** Five horizontal lines representing the sender's address.
- 3:** A horizontal line followed by a colon (:). A bracket indicates "Double Space" between this line and the next.
- 4:** A horizontal line followed by a comma (,). A bracket indicates "Double Space" between this line and the next.
- 5:** A horizontal line followed by a period (.). A bracket indicates "Double Space" between this line and the next.
- 6:** A horizontal line followed by an exclamation point (!). A bracket indicates "Four Spaces" between this line and the next.