

How to start the letter

The first paragraph in a business letter usually does **three things**:

1. **It identifies who you, the writer, are in relation to the reader.**
For example you might be a customer, the person who ordered three cases of bananas from them or someone seeking work.
2. **If you have had previous business with the reader, it should mention the last significant occasion this happened.**
3. **And what your purpose is in writing the letter.**

Business people are busy people so they like writing that gets straight to the point and says what it has to say as clearly and as briefly as possible. Often the first paragraph is only one sentence long.

In our example, the business person we aim to write to might appreciate the following opening line:

I am a student at Victoria University currently undertaking a Business Studies Diploma. I would like to interview you in order to complete one of my subjects.

Unfortunately their response is likely to be to read no further and drop our letter into the waste paper basket! Business people are busy people and they have no time to spare for student interviews. This is where a 'letter of request' differs from most business letters. Letters of request try to include some persuasive points early in the letter before the writer's intent is clear. At least with this approach the reader actually gets to see these points before they decide whether to grant your wish or not. A personal touch is also more effective than a formal opening. An example of this approach is given below:

My family and I have been satisfied customers of your firm for many years. So when I was asked to research a "successful local business", I naturally thought of your company. I need to carry out this research for the Business Studies Diploma I am studying at Victoria University.

First Sentences

Avoid starting with "I am writing this letter ...". After all when you begin to speak to someone you don't start off with "I am saying these words ..."

- I was very interested to read in [*name the newspaper/magazine*] that your company ...
- A [*teacher/customer/(someone influential)*] suggested that your firm was [*community minded/(something positive)*] and might be willing to grant an interview for ...