

Letter Styles and Stationery Choices

■ Letter Style

1. As you consider the style to use, notice your agency letterhead. Some letterhead lends itself to one style over the other.
2. Consider the image the agency is trying to project. Each has characteristics that might compliment or detract from the image your organization wants to portray.
3. Four main letter styles and their characteristics are:
 - Full Block Style- Every item starts at the left margin, there are no tabs or indents. Although efficient, business-like, and popular, some feel it looks crowded.
 - Modified Block- Date and complimentary closing are to the right of center, while everything else starts at the left margin. Traditional and popular.
 - Semiblock- Identical to the modified block, but each paragraph begins with a 5 space indentation.
 - Simplified- Salutation and complimentary closing are omitted. Everything else is full block style. Recommended by the Administrative Management Society as the most efficient. Critics say it lacks warmth and is too unconventional.

■ Fonts and Typeface Choices

1. Use a typeface that compliments the letterhead and the letter style.
2. Serif type, like this typeface (with the little “feet”—serifs-- on the bottom of the letters), is most appropriate for large bodies of text. (Notice that most text books are written in serif type because of the ease in reading.)
3. San Serif type, which appears like this underlined example, does not have serifs, and is further characterized by a uniform thickness in the letters. (Serif types have letters comprised of thick and thin strokes—look closely at a capital “A” when you read.) San Serif types are best used in titles, small blocks of type, and overhead projections.
4. Although plentiful on the computer, stay away from complex, ornate, or novelty types—unless, of course, there is a reason that suits the subject matter. (For example, a circus-like typeface to announce a foster parent summer picnic / carnival. A stencil-like type to give a military appearance.)
5. The ideal line length for readers is 65 characters. The ideal reading length should be balanced with the need to create reasonable side margins.

■ Stationery Choice

1. “A business letter—much like a person—is judged by appearance, and the stationery would be the equivalent of the clothes you wear.” A letter gives the first impression of you and your organization in many cases. Several seemingly small considerations can promote your purpose or interfere with it.
2. The quality of the paper is the first consideration. Bond paper in the most common weights of 16-, 20-, and 24-pounds is used in business. (The higher the number the thicker the paper.) Rag content is another measure of paper

quality. Most paper is 25% rag content. (The higher the rag content, the higher the quality of the paper. Notice the rag content on a good piece of stationery. It can sometimes be seen in the watermark on the paper.)

3. Standard business size paper is 8 ½ x 11 inches. (Other sizes are available for personal business correspondence or executive use.)
4. Color should be reserved for glamour, art, and show industries. White is the accepted standard for business use. Variations of white (cream, buff, ivory, gray, and others) are being used more. Be aware of the image you are attempting to project. Does a colored stationery project that image?
5. Letterhead should match the business. A doctor's stationery should differ from a photographer or art designer. Letterhead should include the information necessary for someone to get in touch with you. If a logo is being used, it should figure prominently in the design.
6. Second sheets should match the first page in quality and color.

■ Envelopes

1. Business envelopes are the standard #10.
2. The return address (Company name, address, and logo) is located in the upper left corner. The typeface should match the letterhead.
3. The address should be single spaced in block style. Addresses are typed in all capital letters with no punctuation.
4. In-house notations should be typed two or three lines below the return address. All postal notations should be typed under the area where the stamp is placed.
5. Suite or room numbers should be typed on the same line as the street address, immediately following the street address.

From: Business Letter Writing, Lindsell-Roberts, 1995 and Designing with Type, Craig, 1971