

How to Start a Letter (With Professional Greeting Examples)

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What's the best way to start a letter? When writing a letter for professional purposes, an appropriate greeting is essential. Your greeting sets the tone for your letter or email, and is an indicator of your written [communication skills](#).

Review information on options for starting a letter, including professional and personal greetings, examples of the best salutations, and what to do when you don't have a contact person.

Options for Starting a Letter

When deciding [which salutation to use](#), you should consider whether, and how well, you know the person you're writing to. The answer will determine how you start your letter. It's important to use a formal and professional greeting when you don't know your letter or email recipient well.

Personal Greetings

When to use a person's first name: If you are writing to someone in a professional capacity that you have known personally for many years, it is appropriate to use only their first name.

Professional Greetings

When to use a professional greeting: If you don't know the person well, it is best to use [Mr., Ms., or Dr.](#) as an [appropriate business letter salutation](#). When you don't know the recipient's gender, you can use their first and last name. If you have any doubts about which greeting you should use, err on the side of caution and use the more formal style of address.

Use a Formal Salutation

Keep it formal: Try to avoid the temptation to begin your professional letter with informal salutations like "Hello," "Greetings," "Hi There," or "Good Morning." [...]

While those informal greetings are fine for *casual* emails to friends or even for more formal emails you might send to groups of people, in a professional letter you'll need to use a personal salutation with either a first and/or last name ("Dear Mr. Doe") or a job title ("Dear Hiring Manager").

Always be sure to double-check the spelling of the recipient's name. Otherwise, you'll be making a poor impression from the start of your letter.

Punctuation

Also remember to include the period after "Mr." and "Ms." and follow your salutation with a colon or comma (e.g., "Dear Ms. Doe:" or "Dear Jamie Chen,").

Examples of Professional Letter Greetings

These greetings are all suitable for professional communications.

When you know the person *well*:

- Dear Cindy
- Hi Peter
- Hello Bob

When you know the person's name:

- Dear Mr./Ms. Lastname; e.g., Dear Mr. Dolan or Dear Ms. Butler
- Dear Mr./Ms. Firstname Lastname; e.g., Dear Mr. Martin Haynes or Dear Ms. Melissa Tandor
- Dear Firstname Lastname; e.g., Dear Michael Cairns

When you don't know the person's gender:

When you have a name but are unsure of the gender of the person you are writing to, it is acceptable to leave out the honorific, and use the first and last names alone. For example:

- Dear Robin Miller
- Dear Jamieson Cavanaugh

Try to Find a Contact Person

If at all possible, use a contact name when you write. This makes your letter more personal, and it creates an immediate relationship with the reader. If you don't have a contact name, do some research to find out the [right person to address your letter to](#).

It doesn't take much extra time to make an attempt to find a name, and the sentiment it conveys is worth it. It's worth a try, even if you aren't successful.

Sometimes the name will be on the company website, or you may be able to find the right person on LinkedIn. Perhaps one of your colleagues or contacts knows who the appropriate person might be. You can also call the office of the unknown person you are writing to and ask the receptionist for the name by explaining your reason for calling.

For example: "I am applying for a job with your company. Can you please tell me the name of your Hiring Manager so that I know to whom I should [address my cover letter?](#)"

Greetings to Use When You Don't Have a Contact Person

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, you just can't find a name to address your letter to. In that case, you have a variety of choices, all of which are professional and appropriate.

The more information you have about where you are sending the letter, the better. (For example, the human resources department of the company, or the manager of the department related to your inquiry.) This way, you can make a more targeted choice when selecting your greeting.

If you don't have a contact person, there are a variety of options to choose from:

- Dear Hiring Manager
- Dear Human Resources Manager
- Dear Recruiting Team
- Dear [Company Name] Recruiter; e.g., Dear ABC Company Recruiter
- Dear [Department Name] Recruiter; e.g., Dear IT Support Recruiter
- Dear [Department Name] Team; e.g., Dear Product Recruiter
- Greetings
- Dear Sir or Madam (this is outdated, so avoid if possible)
- [To Whom It May Concern](#) (use if you have no other workable options)

Greetings to Avoid Using

The following greetings aren't appropriate for formal letters **or email messages**:

- Good Day
- Good Morning or Afternoon (you don't know when they'll receive the letter or email message)
- Hi

- Hi There
- Hey
- Hey There

Tips for Writing and Sending a Letter

Greeting

Start your letter with an appropriate greeting, as listed above.

First Paragraph

After your greeting, begin your first paragraph, which is usually an introduction that lets the reader know who you are and what you are writing about. If you have a mutual acquaintance who referred you to the reader, you should [mention them at this time](#).

Body of Letter

The body of your letter normally consists of a paragraph or two of text. Here, you can elaborate on the theme of your letter and provide supporting details for the subject.

You'll want to keep it concise and pertinent to the person and the topic.

Be thorough but don't repeat yourself or go on and on about unimportant details.

Conclusion

Next, you'll need to sum up your letter. Your summary should include a thank you to the person for his or her time and consideration. If you plan to follow up later, you can also provide the details of when and how you will contact him or her.

Closing Options

Finish your [professional letter with a closing](#), such as "Sincerely" or "Regards." If you plan on sending the letter by postal service, your signature should be followed by your typed name.

If you're sending an email, your typed name should be followed by your contact information, which you can type in manually or have it done automatically for you. Here's [how to set up an automatic email signature](#).

Key Takeaways

- Choose a formal greeting. When you don't know the person you're writing to well, don't use a casual greeting.
- Try to find a contact person. If you can't find a contact person, it's fine to use a generic greeting.
- Proofread your letter or email. When you're sending professional correspondence, it's important to carefully proofread your document before you send it.