

Quick Guide: How do I start?

This is a question we are often asked on our letter writing courses. Writers are usually fine with the middle of a letter as they have something specific to say but your letter will still need an opening and introduction. Before writing, think carefully about what you want to say and the overall purpose of your letter. Although I have referred to how to start letters, of course these phrases will also apply to emails. See the **top ten tips** below for how to start the most common letters written in offices. And look out next month for how to end your letters.

1. **Avoid starting with wordy old fashioned phrases** like 'With reference to', 'With regard to', 'In connection with', 'Further to'. These prepositional phrases can make your opening sentence very long and sound stuffy and pompous.

2. **You can often start with** 'Thank you for your letter dated...', then go onto state your reason for writing in a new sentence.

3. **Were you ever told at school** "don't start letters with 'I am writing to...' " as it is stating the obvious? If it helps you to get going, start with the phrase but then use your second verb as your main verb. So instead of:

I am writing to enquire	WRITE	I would like to enquire about
I am writing to confirm	WRITE	I am pleased to confirm
I am writing to request	WRITE	I am interested in ... and request ...

4. **If you are following up a telephone call**, it is usual to write 'Further to our telephone conversation...' or 'Following my call earlier today...'. There is nothing grammatically wrong with these; however, you will end up with a long, rambling first sentence. Instead use: 'I was pleased to speak to you about...', 'We spoke earlier this week ...'.

5. **Often our letter is in reference to something** that has previously happened. Start simply with 'I refer to your letter of...', 'I refer to our order number...'.

6. **If you need to confirm a meeting**, a conversation etc, again start simply with 'I confirm the points we discussed at our meeting today', 'This is to confirm the meeting on...'.

7. **If you take over a task from your manager** or a colleague you may have to introduce yourself. You could start with 'John Brown has asked me to contact you as I am now responsible for your...', or 'I would like to introduce myself as I will now be...'.

8. **Do you ever have to complain?** You could begin with 'I'd like to complain about...'. However, with this aggressive tone you may not receive a very quick response! For a friendlier, firmer and less aggressive approach, start by stating the facts and then ask for their help to resolve the matter.

9. **You may not wish to complain** but merely draw someone's attention to a problem or concern to prevent it escalating. Begin this letter with 'I wish to draw your attention to...', 'I am disappointed to tell you that...', 'We are concerned about...'.

10. **And finally**, just in case you do something wrong and need to apologise! Apply the KISS principle (Keep it short and sweet!) and start with 'I am sorry that...', 'I was sorry to hear that you were not happy with...'. Always state what you are sorry about to show sincerity.

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