

## Seven Cs of Writing ~ Issue 3

Welcome back. This month's ezine deals with the conventions of writing letters and emails and is a part of the C for Courtesy. During my 20 years of teaching English as a foreign language, I have seen a number of changes regarding these conventions. It started with blocked layout (everything starts on the left and there is no punctuation) which replaced the traditional indented layout. This already made life a lot easier, but since the arrival of email, many other changes have come into force and these, and a few other English writing idiosyncrasies, are what we will be looking at this month.

### SALUTATIONS & COMPLIMENTARY CLOSES

The chart below demonstrates the rules of starting and closing a formal letter/email. I should point out that not much has changed here and there really isn't a lot of space to manoeuvre. We are particularly strict with the first box (Dear Sir, Madam etc.), it really is a big boo boo if you start your letter with *Dear Madam* and close with *Yours sincerely!* What always tickles me is the sexism involved: note how we address a company Dear Sirs!

<b>Salutation</b>	<b>Complimentary Closes</b>
<b>Dear Sir</b> (a man you do not know) <b>Dear Madam</b> (a woman you don't know) <b>Dear Sir/Madam</b> (a person whose name & sex you don't know) <b>Dear Sirs</b> (a company) <b>NB: All of the above are the MOST FORMAL form of address in English</b>	<b>Yours faithfully</b>
<b>Dear Mr Brown</b> <b>Dear Ms Jones</b>	<b>Yours sincerely</b> <b>NB: You will often see letters beginning with Dear Mr/Ms etc. that then close with 'Best regards'. This very much depends on company house style. Moreover, it is typical of emails.</b>
<b>Dear John</b>	<b>Best regards, Kind regards etc.</b>  <b>NB: In informal business correspondence, 'Best regards' is the most appropriate close.</b>

**NB: Americans sometimes use different forms of address.**

#### FORMS OF ADDRESS

Mr = man  
 Ms = woman whose marital status you do not know  
 Mrs = a married woman  
 Miss = unmarried women

Most women in business prefer to be addressed by '**Ms**'. Please also note that we no longer use a full stop (.) after these titles. Remember, if the person you are writing to has a title (e.g. Dr.) ensure that you use it! If you don't, this could be a serious case of treading on someone's toes.

## WRITING AND SAYING THE DATE

It's a myth that all English speakers write the month first and then the day. Look at this:

03.04.2010	UK & Europe	= 3 April 2010
03.04.2010	US & Japan	= 4 March 2010

To avoid any confusion here, always write important dates (e.g. in contracts) in full.

Writing the date:	3 April 2010
Saying the date:	"the 3 <sup>rd</sup> of April 2010"

Remember, that in English, months of the year and days of the week are written with a **capital letter**.

## ACCEPTED ABBREVIATIONS IN FORMAL BUSINESS WRITING

Abbreviations of Latin decent are the only accepted abbreviations in formal English writing. Here are the most common ones:

e.g.	for example
i.e.	that is
etc.	etcetera
cc	carbon copy
pp	when signing on behalf of somebody else
no.	number

Interestingly, the Dutch have invented a few of their own abbreviations which always leave their English readers mystified. A couple of my favourites are **a.o** (amongst others) and **f.i.** (for instance). I'm afraid these DO NOT exist.

## PUNCTUATION

As I have already mentioned above, one of the elements of blocked layout is NO punctuation in the address or date. I should also point out that there is no comma after the salutation (e.g. Dear Mr Jones) or complimentary close (Yours sincerely). Moreover, we no longer use a full stop (.) after titles such as Mr, Ms etc. – which can be confusing as the spell check doesn't seem to know this! I will have to send this ezine to Mr Gates!

So people, I have run out of space again! Next month's newsletter will continue with email and letter writing and will be looking at standard phrases for formal and informal business correspondence and how to avoid some typical Dutch mistakes. Sounds quite intriguing don't you think?

*Happy writing,*

*Nicola.*