
CHAPTER 9

WRITING LEGAL LETTERS

Legal letters are an important part of a legal office, and as a paralegal, you'll spend some of your time writing them. It's important to know the parts of a legal letter, as some parts are mandatory. You'll learn the parts of a legal letter in this chapter.

Learning Objectives

When you finish Chapter 9, you will be able to:

- Understand why legal professionals write letters.
- List and describe important considerations in legal letter writing.
- List and describe the components of legal correspondence.
- Describe common letter formats and organization.
- List and describe common letter types.

As you learned in Chapter 8, writing is an important part of a paralegal's job. As a paralegal, you'll be responsible for writing many different documents. One of these documents is a **legal letter**. Legal professionals write letters for many different reasons. Legal letters may inform, advise, confirm information, or demand action. You should determine the purpose and the audience of your letter before you begin to write.

Legal letters are different from other types of legal writing because they don't have a rigid structure. Although there is some room for creativity, you must still structure your letter properly, include the appropriate information, and remain professional.

WHAT PARTS DO LEGAL LETTERS HAVE?

Although the format and structure of legal letters are not as rigid as other documents, there are still some important sections that you must include. Remember to tailor each section of a letter to fit your audience and your purpose.

Letterhead

When writing a legal letter, you should use **letterhead** for the first page of your correspondence. The letterhead identifies your organization or company. Letterhead is stationery that includes the name, address, telephone and facsimile numbers, and other important information about an organization. Letterhead is generally preprinted with the identifying information at the top of the page. The following is an example of letterhead:

Luther, Freeman and Knox
844 Oakwood Drive
Johnstown, TN 10095
Phone (555) 739-5484
Fax (555) 739-7359

After the first page, the subsequent pages of your correspondence should be printed on paper with the same color and quality as the letterhead, but without the preprinted information. The remaining pages should have a header similar to this in the upper-left corner:

Mr. Devon Luther
Page Two
January 12, 2009

Date

As a legal professional, it's important for you to include dates on all letters that you write. The date should include the month, day, and year. Write the date that you plan to mail the letter if it's different from the day that you wrote it. The date is usually placed three lines below the letterhead, as shown here.

Luther, Freeman and Knox
844 Oakwood Drive
Johnstown, TN 10095
Phone (555) 739-5484
Fax (555) 739-7359

September 13, 2009

Mailing Notations

Occasionally, you'll write a letter that will be sent in a way other than First-Class Mail. In these cases, include **mailing notations**. Examples of mailing notations are "Via Hand Delivery" and "Via

Facsimile.” If you include a mailing notation, it should be located two lines below the date.

Via United Parcel Service

Inside Address

The inside address is a mandatory part of a legal letter. It includes the addressee’s name and address and is located two lines below the date or mailing notation on the left margin. When writing the addressee’s name, be sure to spell the name correctly and include any appropriate titles.

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104 N. Mill Street
Greenville, NC 27833

Reference or Subject Line

Legal letters should include a reference line, or subject line, so that the recipient knows what the letter is about. Insert the **reference line** two lines below the inside address. The reference line (abbreviated “Re:”) may include the title of the case, the subject of the letter, or file and claim numbers. Your company or organization might require specific information in the reference line. Therefore, you may want to review other letters sent by an attorney at your organization to be sure that you follow the correct format.

Re: *Markus v. Dwight*

Greeting

The **greeting**, or salutation, is the opening of a legal letter and is located two lines below the reference or subject line. Because legal letters are professional documents, the greetings you write should be professional. If you don’t know the name of person to whom you’re writing, make an effort to find it. Be cautious if you’re writing a generic salutation such as “Dear Sir or Madam.” People are more likely to respond when you address them by name. If you’re writing to a woman, use Ms. unless you know the woman goes by another title.

Dear Ms. Francis:
Dear Mr. Greene: