

8 Formal Letters

In this unit you will...

- meet words and expressions about formal procedures
- read an article about the legal steps for dismissing an employee
- write a letter dismissing an employee

A Do you enjoy writing formal letters? Why? Why Not?

B Match the types of letter described on the left with the extracts on the right



1	A letter telling you that you've been successful in a job interview	A	It's really great...what I have to do is...
2	A letter dismissing you from a job	B	We are pleased to inform you...We look forward to...
3	A letter to a friend about your job	C	In relation to clause 8 of your contract of employment...

C What do the following words and phrases mean? Which words have a negative connotation?

employment termination, redundancy, (gross) misconduct, poor performance, an appeal, to delay, (a piece of) evidence, to have sth. at your fingertips, vindictiveness, malicious, alienating, a victim, vengeful, libel, defamation, a liability

D Use one item from the vocabulary box to fill each gap. There is more than one possibility for some. You may need to adapt the word.

Sara Liebermann helps workers who have had 1 bosses. The official reason for the 2 of their 3 can be 4, 5 or 6. In many cases the formalities were not followed, and most of the workers weren't given a chance to go to an 7 at work. 'If you decide to go to court, it is important to have 8, and have all the information 9. I tend to see most of these workers as 10,' she says.

E Look quickly at the article on the next page. Who is Mr Jenner advising?

F What is the purpose of the first paragraph? (You can include the text in bold as part of the first paragraph.)

G Each paragraph has a function and makes a point. Summarise each paragraph in a sentence or title.

H Compare the internal structure of paragraphs 3 and 4. What are the topic sentences of each of the two paragraphs? Is there a difference between the topic sentence and the theme of the paragraph?

- I Look at the following paragraph from a review of Mr Jenner's article. Is the letter logically ordered? Re-write it.

He is completely partisan. For Jenner the purpose of keeping records is solely to empower the boss, not the worker. Jenner's article reveals everything which is wrong with management consultancy today. Jenner writes entirely from the employer's point of view. He says bosses should avoid vindictiveness, not because it hurts the employee, but only because it can cause problems for the employer.

- J Reply to the following email in not more than 150 words. Advise Wayne on the what steps he would have to take to make the dismissal legal.

Hi
I hope you are feeling better than I am. This new chap has just borrowed one of our company vans to go off and get himself some lunch. When he gets back in a minute, I'm going to call him a fool and an idiot and sack him on the spot.
How are things with you?
Wayne,
Wayne Shatner, Shatner Catering, 7-11 Park St. 3830 Meckham.

Giving formal notification – real-life phrases

I hereby give notice that...

I have been asked to inform you... (writing for somebody else)

With reference to clause 4 of your contract...

Good-bye Letters

Writing letters terminating employment contracts is not easy. Management consultant Hector Jenner provides some advice.



(1) Whenever you write any kind of official letter there are two things that it is vital to get right: the style and the content. Assuming you have mastered proper business style, here I will concentrate only on the content.

(2) Employers must use proper employment termination and dismissal procedures to ensure that the process when an employee leaves is professionally and legally correct. There are severe costs to the firm if employment termination is, for whatever reason, not handled properly.

(3) Employment termination by the employer normally falls into one of these categories: redundancy, misconduct or poor performance. Poor performance may or may not be the fault of the employee; s/he might be doing his/her best but his/her best is simply not good enough. The central principles for dealing with all three of these situations are broadly similar.

(4) There are basic steps that need to be followed properly. First, give reasons for the proposed dismissal to the employee in writing, and give the employee a reasonable period during which to consider the facts and his/her response. Second, hold a meeting with the employee to explain the reasons and give the employee the opportunity to explain his/her position. Third, after the meeting, give the employee your decision in writing (whether to proceed with the dismissal or other action), and invite the employee to make an appeal and attend an appeal meeting. After any appeal meeting the employer must confirm the appeal decision in writing. A manager of proper authority must attend meetings,

and meetings must be at reasonable times and venues. The employer must also not unreasonably delay any of the stages in this process.

(5) The above process means a minimum of three official letters. Letters should concentrate on the facts of the situation, and the clear evidence to support these facts. Having facts and figures at management's fingertips requires good record-keeping. An essential part of a properly run firm is the keeping of accurate day-to-day records on every aspect of an employee's conduct. Nothing could be worse than getting into the middle of a dismissal process and finding basic facts and figures are lacking.

(6) Even in cases of gross misconduct, avoid vindictiveness; there is no money to be made from it, and unnecessary hostility may cause management problems later. Any subsequent legal review process will not look kindly on any aspects of malicious behaviour used in the employer's handling of a dismissal.

(7) As a matter of good practice, always try to part as friends, not enemies. Nothing is gained by alienating people who already see themselves as victims; negative treatment can prompt them to be vengeful, which does nobody any good at all. Also, by keeping employment termination and dismissal letters positive you avoid the risk of libel or defamation, which carry potential legal liabilities for the employer, irrespective of the circumstances and process of the dismissal itself.

Dear Miss Fletcher,

Further to our meeting held earlier today, I regret to inform you that your employment with Bibby and Jenner is terminated with effect from Friday 14 June.

Exam Skills

- A Look at the letter template below. On a separate sheet of paper, write out the formalities: letterhead and closure (i.e. the position of the sender's name and address, the recipient's name and address, salutations, the date and the reference).

Exam tip: you do not need to reproduce addresses in the exam, but you need to recognise who the letter is from and who it is to.

- B Look at the letter template again. What is the purpose/function of each paragraph?

Exam tip: your letter in the exam needs a clear structure, through logical paragraphing.

- C What is the function of the pieces of formal language highlighted in the text?

Exam tip: you need to use appropriate register in formal letters.



GOOD-BYE

- D You are Mr Jenner's assistant. Using the template below, write a letter dismissing Miss Fletcher, the trainee management consultant. Invent details, but be realistic. Your letter should look authentic.

Name, address, date, reference

Dear Mr/Ms/Mrs

(1) Further to our meeting of (date), I (regretfully) confirm that your employment with us is terminated **with effect from** (date)/**with immediate effect**.

(2) As stated at our meeting, the reason(s) for terminating your employment with us is/are as follows:

(Employer must clearly state reasons – transgressions and relevant policies if applicable.)

(3) (Employer must clearly state previous warnings – informal, formal, written etc. – the circumstances for each warning and the person's response and subsequent behaviour/performance.)

(4) (Clearly state requirements regarding return of documentation, equipment, car, submission of final expenses claims, and any other leaving administration issues.)

(5) (Clearly state actual leaving date, requirement or otherwise to serve period of notice, holiday pay, and other pay and pension details.)

(6) (Optional sign-off, for example: *Thank you for your past efforts and all the best for your future endeavours.*)

Yours sincerely,.

name and position

(Optional section requiring person to sign, confirming receipt, and return copy of this letter.)

- E Swap your letter with a partner. Discuss how effective the letter is, and check for spelling and punctuation.

Exam Practice: Mr Bibby gets angry with Miss Jowell

- A List behaviour which is acceptable (and unacceptable) in an office which deals with high-paying professional clients (e.g. coming to work in jeans).
- B What information should go into a warning letter to an employee?
- C Read Mr Bibby's letter. What kind of person is Mr Bibby?

Bibby and Jenner are a leading firm of management consultants. As Mr Bibby's personal assistant you have received the following emails.

To assistant@bibbyandjenner.com
From rbibby@bibbyandjenner.com

I am so angry that I can hardly write this e-mail!!!

This morning I had a meeting in my room with representatives from a very important client of ours. Throughout, a noisy circus seemed to be going on outside in the corridor. The main culprit was undoubtedly the new trainee in the office, Miss Jowell, who:

- was shouting to her colleagues (I can never stand the shrill sound of young women's voices when they are shouting)
- was using language which was vulgar
- brought in our coffee at 11am, and banged it down on the table, spilling a fair proportion of it into the saucers.

Please draft an official warning letter to Miss Jowell, and mention clearly the standards that Bibby and Jenner expects from its employees. Bring it to me for signature when you've finished.

Take any other steps you think necessary to deal with this matter. I'm too busy to give it any more time.

Ralph Bibby, Senior Partner, Bibby and Jenner.

To assistant@bibbyandjenner.com
From hjenner@bibbyandjenner.com

There will be a senior staff meeting on Thursday at 9.00. If a matter needs placing on the agenda, notify the office manager, Miss Gold, by 13.00 on Tuesday.

H. Jenner, Senior Partner, Bibby and Jenner.

- D Write a letter to Miss Jowell, as Mr Bibby instructs. (About 200 words)
- E Write an email to Miss Gold, giving a short explanation of the matter as an item to be included in the senior staff meeting agenda. (About 50 words)
- F Write the full agenda for the senior staff meeting on Thursday. Act it out in groups of three.
(Tasks E and F are not examination tasks)

Unit 8: Formal Letters

- (p.1) B** 1B, 2C, 3A Letters 1 and 2 are formal; 3 is informal. A dismissal letter will be more formal and legalistic in style than a letter of appointment which will probably have an optimistic tone.
- (p.1) C** employment termination, redundancy, (gross) misconduct, poor performance, vindictiveness, malicious, alienating, a victim, vengeful, libel, defamation, a liability, to delay
- (p.1) D** 1. vindictive, malicious, vengeful, 2. termination, 3. employment, 4./5./6. redundancy, misconduct, poor performance (in any order), 7. appeal, 8. evidence, 9. at your fingertips, 10. victims
- (p.1) E** employers
- (p.1) F** to establish the topic of the article (i.e. the correct contents of a letter of dismissal)
- (p.1) G** 1. Getting the style and content right, 2. Use correct procedures, 3. Types of dismissal, 4. Detailed steps of a dismissal, 5. Keeping records and evidence, 6. Avoid vindictiveness, 7. Try to part on friendly terms
- (p.1) H** In both 3 and 4 the topic sentence is the first. Paragraph 3, after the topic sentence, details one aspect and then finishes with a transitional sentence linking to the next paragraph. Paragraph 4, after the topic sentence, details a procedure chronologically.
- (p.1) I** The sentences in the paragraph do not follow a logical order. A possible correction could be:
- Jenner's article reveals everything which is wrong with management consultancy today.
 (= *main thesis statement*) Jenner writes entirely from the employer's point of view. (= *further specification of thesis*) He is completely partisan.
 (= *reformation of specific thesis*) He says bosses should avoid vindictiveness, not because it hurts the employee, but only because it can cause problems for the employer. (= *example and illustration of thesis*) For Jenner the purpose of keeping records is solely to empower the boss, not the worker. (= *another example and illustration of thesis*)
- This paragraph identifies the topic/thesis at the beginning, then proves/illustrates/exemplifies it in the body of the paragraph. Normal paragraph structure moves from the general to the specific.
- (p.1) J** The letter should remind Wayne of the correct procedures if he wishes to dismiss an employee. The letter to the employee should be written in a formal style. He should try not to part with the employee on unfriendly terms. But your letter to Wayne will be informal.
- (p. 3) A** This is a suggested format for a formal letter

Bibby and Jenner Management Consultancy
436 The Grenberg Ring
2318 Grenberg

12 February 2007

Mr G. Schlick
Management Consultant
12 Green Rd.
2567 Meckham

Dear Mr Schlick,

Re: your employment contract

I am writing to inform you...

Yours sincerely,

H. Jenner
Senior Partner

- (p.3) B 1. announcement of employment termination, 2. reasons for termination, 3. history of the case to date, 4. what will happen next, 5. further details of termination, 6. final comments on termination
- (p.3) C These are formulaic pieces of writing used to structure the information in the letter.
- (p.4) C Mr Bibby appears to be intolerant, bad tempered and impatient.