



preliminary note

Every letter is something special and unique. It's difficult to give strict rules how to write a letter. Nevertheless, there are guidelines how to start and finish a letter. Like in English we have typical standard expressions and there are clear features which distinguish a formal and informal letter.

I'd like to give some advice how to write a formal letter (business letter).
I wrote this discription to help people to achieve the "Zertifikat Deutsch" (level: B1).

A word about the use of "du" and "Sie"

As you know, we've got two different forms in German to address people:

- du (you)
- Sie (you)

We call the use of du "duzen" and the use of Sie "siezen".

Du is used for children, friends, family members, colleagues and people at your age.
Sie is used for people who are older than you and people you are not familiar with.

The use of "Sie" is a sign of respect and if I used "du" for a 70 years old woman I've never met before it would be rather offending. If you are not sure about the age of your counterpart use "Sie".

The use of "Sie", however, has become less strict than years before. When I met my colleagues in our office for the first time and they were apparently at my age I used "du" even though I'd never met them before. Another example is my table tennis club where everybody is using "du". It doesn't matter if 8 or 80 years old. We all "duzen" each other.

The rule for formal letters is easy: **Use always "Sie"**.
Do so in the B1-exam.

Consider:

You have to **capitalise** both "Sie" and "Ihr | Ihre | Ihres".



example letter

addresser	Catherine Höfler Mustermannstraße 4 50765 Köln
addressee	Aupairmädchen Vermittlung Zweigstelle Frankfurt z. Hd. Frau König Rosengartenstraße 74 60311 Frankfurt am Main
	place comma date ↓ ↓ ↓ Köln, 28.02.2009
subject heading	Bewerbung als Aupairmädchen – Ihre Anzeige vom 20.02.2009
salutation	Sehr geehrte Frau König, comma
introduction	mit großem Interesse habe ich Ihre Anzeige in der FAZ gelesen und würde mich gerne um die Stelle als Aupairmädchen bewerben. small letter
main part	<p>Zu meiner Person: Ich bin 19 Jahre alt und habe gerade mein Abitur am Schiller Gymnasium gemacht. Bevor ich mit dem Studium beginne, möchte ich ein Auslandssemester in Frankreich verbringen, um meine Sprachkenntnisse zu vertiefen und das Land besser kennen zu lernen.</p> <p>Da ich in einer Familie mit vielen kleinen Geschwistern aufgewachsen bin, ist es für mich kein Problem, mit kleinen Kindern umzugehen. Zudem habe ich während meines Abiturs als Babysitter gearbeitet, um mein Taschengeld aufzubessern.</p> <p>Ich habe mich schon immer sehr für Sprachen interessiert. Daher habe ich beim Abitur als Leistungsfächer Englisch und Französisch gewählt. Auch Hausarbeiten wie Kochen, Bügeln und Waschen sind für mich kein Problem. Ich musste schon sehr früh zu Hause mithelfen.</p> <p>Wenn es möglich ist, würde ich gerne spätestens im Mai anfangen, da mein Studium im Januar 2010 beginnt. Es wäre auch sehr schön, wenn Sie eine Familie auswählen, die keine Haustiere hat. Ich leide nämlich an einer Allergie gegen Katzen- und Hundehaare.</p>
closing	Ich würde mich sehr freuen, eine Stelle als Aupairmädchen zu bekommen. Vielen Dank im Voraus.
greetings	Mit freundlichen Grüßen
signature	<i>Catherine Höfler</i>



1: Adresse des Absenders (addresser)

In a formal (business) letters you have to put your address on the top of the letter.
 The simplest way is to put it on the left, top corner as shown in the example.
 There are many other ways to do it. Most companies design a nice head in the middle (top) and integrate their company logo and address.

In the B1-exam you will get a clear order to leave out the address. Follow the order and save time.

2: Adresse des Empfängers (addressee)

In a formal (business) letters you have to put the address of the receiver on the top of the letter as well.
 I suggest the top, left corner as shown in the example. There is a simple reason why.
 Many people use envelopes with a transparent window so that they don't have to put an address label on the outside. This place is common in Germany.

In the B1-exam you will get a clear order to leave out the address. Follow the order and save time.

3: Ort und Datum (location and date)

You start with the place, followed by a comma and the date.

Consider:

We write in German the date in the following order: **day | month | year**

4: Betreffzeile (subject heading)

The subject heading should summarise the content of your letter. Write in one line what is the letter about so that the reader knows immediatly he is the right addressee and that he knows what you want.

It's not usual anymore to start the subject heading with: "Betreff" (Re:).
 Just start your text with a capital letter and emphasize the subject heading (bold letters).

Here some typical subject headings:

German	use
Ihre Anzeige vom 19.01.2009	<i>answer to an advertisement in a newspaper</i>
Bewerbung als Au-Pair-Mädchen in Ihrer Familie	<i>application as au pair</i>



In the B1-exam you have to write a semiformal letter. There is no need to write a subject heading in a semiformal letter. So leave it out and save time.

5: Begrüßung/Anrede (salutation)

Typical salutations for a formal letter are:

German	English	explanation
Sehr geehrte Frau Müller,	Dear Mrs Müller	<i>formal salution for woman (married or unmarried*)</i>
Sehr geehrter Herr Müller,	Dear Mr Müller	<i>formal salution for man</i>
Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,	Dear Sir or Madam	<i>formal salution if the name is unknown</i>

* The term "Fräulein" (Ms) for an unmarried woman is old-fashioned and not used anymore.

Consider:

The salutation ends with a comma.

6: Einleitungssatz (introduction)

Typical introductions for a formal letter are:

German	use
vielen Dank für Ihren Brief. Ich habe mich sehr darüber gefreut.	<i>standard introduction to answer a letter</i>
vielen Dank für Ihre Einladung. Gerne kommen meine Frau und ich ...	<i>introduction to say thank you for an invitation</i>
mit großem Interesse habe ich Ihre Zeitungsanzeige gelesen.	<i>standard introduction to answer an advertisement in a newspaper</i>
entschuldigen Sie, dass ich erst jetzt auf Ihren Brief antworte.	<i>standard introduction to answer a letter (belated answer)</i>

Consider:

The introductions starts with a small letter!



7: Hauptteil (main part)

There are no strict rules for the main part.

In the B1-exam you will get 3 or 4 points you have to cover.

My suggestion:

- make at first some short keynotes to every points to make clear what you want to say
It's absolutly ok if you do it in your language.
- bring the 3-4 points in a logical order
- write 1 - 2 sentences about every point.
- structure your text: use e.g. for every point one paragraph
It makes it much easier to read the text.

The task for the examle letter above could have been to cover the following points:



8: Abschlusssatz (closing)

Typcial closings for a formal letter are:

German	use
Ich würde mich freuen, bald etwas von Ihnen zu hören.	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Ich hoffe, bald etwas von Ihnen zu hören.	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Vielen Dank im Voraus.	<i>closing (say thank you in advance)</i>
Im Voraus vielen Dank für Ihre Mühe.	<i>closing (say thank you in advance)</i>
Ich freue mich sehr darauf, Sie und Ihre Familie kennen zu lernen.	<i>closing (with looking forward to meeting)</i>



9: Grüße (greetings)

Typical greetings for a formal letter are:

German	English	explanation
Mit freundlich Grüßen	Yours faithfully	<i>the standard greetings which always fit</i>
Mit freundlichem Gruß	Yours faithfully	<i>also a standard greeting that always fits</i>
Hochachtungsvoll	Yours respectfully	<i>very respectful greetings (a bit old-fashioned)</i>

Consider:

The greeting starts with a capital letter and ends without comma.

10: Unterschrift (sign)

Don't forget to put your name at the end.

In business letters it's even common to put at first the handwritten sign and underneath again the full name with degree or title because most signs can't be identified.

For the B1-exam it's enough just to write clearly your full name (handwritten).