

E-MAILS AND LETTERS CHECK LIST

From http://www.ntnu.no/international/english_matters/

- 1. Always use a standard.**

There are differences between British English and American English customs in letter writing.
- 2. Always use a salutation (greeting) in English.**

In 99% of cases this will be with “Dear...”,. The exception is letters of recommendation that start: “To whom it may concern,”.
- 3. Always place the letter’s heading *under* the salutation.**
- 4. Always try to round off a letter with “-ing forms”.**

These stress that you have an on-going relationship and there is unfinished business. Some examples are: “We are looking forward to receiving your comments on this report, by the end of September”. “We are looking forward to discussing matters with you on 12 September”.
- 5. Always use the ending that matches the salutation.**

It is easy to make mistakes here, so follow the summary given in the box below.
- 6. Always write the month in letters or use the ISO standard for all-digit dates.**

Write the month in letters, e.g., 12 June 2003, or use the ISO standard for all-digit dates (CCYY-MM-DD) so that 12 June 2003 is 2003-06-12. Never write a date as 12/6/03 in English. To Europeans, this may mean 12 June 2003; but most Americans will understand it as December 6, 2003.
- 7. Never use a place-name in front of the date.**

Never write “Oslo, 12 December 2003” at the top. Just write the date.
- 8. Never use exclamation marks (!) in business letters.**

An exclamation mark in English is used to express astonishment or surprise. You are very unlikely to need them in normal business letters, faxes or e-mails.
- 9. Never use short forms like “I’m” and “don’t” in business letters.**

Only use these in informal, conversational writing and when reporting speech. Sometimes they are used in e-mails.
- 10. Never capitalize “you” and “your” in mid-sentence.**

Many people have told me that they were taught this in school. Capitalized “You” and “Your” in mid sentence disappeared a few hundred years ago, so there must be some old teachers around.

How to start and end e-mails and letters

1. Formal tone, to an institution or an unnamed person:

These start with the following salutations:

- **Dear Sirs**, (when writing to a company, organization, university)
- **Dear Sir**, (to an unnamed person, who is male)
- **Dear Madam**, (to an unnamed person, who is female)
- **Dear Sir or Madam**, (the safe option to an unnamed person)

These always end with **Yours faithfully**,

2. Normal business e-mail/letter, where you know recipient's name:

These start:

- **Dear Mr/Ms Jones**, (to a named man/woman. Never "Mister"/"Miss")
- **Dear Professor Jones**, (used for all types of professors: assistant, associate and adjunct)
- **Dear Dr Jones**, (can be used for someone holding a PhD, Dr. ing. or other doctorate)

These always end with **Yours sincerely**, (this is the same tone as "Hilsen", "Vennlig hilsen")

Note that in British English, you do not use a stop after abbreviations like Mr, Mrs, Dr or Ms.

3. E-mails and letters to colleagues, associates and friends etc.:

These start:

- **Dear Jim**, (if a person signs his letter with "Jim", use this in your reply. If you use "Dear Mr Jones", you signal coldness and distance to Jim)
- **Dear colleagues**, (useful in group mailings, but could be more personal)

There are many endings. Here are some on a scale from a business-like tone to close friendship:

- **Yours sincerely**, (this uses the same tone as "Hilsen", "Vennlig hilsen". Even though you start "Dear Jim," you show that this is a businesslike e-mail or letter)
- **Regards**, (although frequently used in e-mails and faxes, this is too informal for most business letters and is "warmer" than "Vennlig hilsen")
- **Kind regards**, ("warmer" than "Vennlig hilsen")
- **Best wishes**, (used to signal friendliness)
- **Warm regards**, (getting slightly "hotter", frequently used for friends)