

PART I

LETTER WRITING BASICS

Wherever you are today as a letter writer — good, bad, or indifferent — you can take your level of skill to the next level in a relatively short time.

The benefit of doing so is that you will write more effective letters: Letters that get your message across without the reader calling you for clarification. Letters that persuade your readers to accept your point of view, or take the actions you want them to take. Letters that get you the results — business and personal — you desire.

In this part, we cover some rules and tools for effective letter writing. They may seem like a lot of work right now — and maybe they will be, for now. But soon they will become a reflexive part of your letter-writing process. You won't have to think about most of them; you will just use them to make your letters sharper, clearer, and more convincing than ever.

Prewriting Planning

You would not start building an addition onto your home until you had an architect make a drawing to show you what it would look like, would you? And a manager in charge of a division or product line would not start marketing the products without a marketing plan, would she?

In the same way, doing some preliminary preparation — rather than just turning on the PC and starting to type, can help you craft better letters. Of course writing a letter is not as big a job as planning a marketing campaign or building a family room. But it is important. As the saying goes, “Anything worth doing is worth doing well.”

Besides, the “planning” you do for a small writing job, like a letter, need not and should not be elaborate or time-consuming. A few minutes spent thinking and following the steps that follow can help you write a better letter, and may actually save time rather than take more time.