



File Ref: SDE-32

**WORKFORCE (IMMIGRATION NEW ZEALAND)  
INTERNAL ADMINISTRATION CIRCULAR NO: 10/05**

To:	All Workforce (Immigration) Managers	Date: 25 May 2010
	All Workforce (Immigration) Staff	
	MFAT Posts	

**Improving the consistency and quality of communication by  
template letter**

Please read this information and ensure all staff members who may be affected are aware of what is required of them.

**Purpose**

1. The purpose of this Internal Administration Circular (IAC) is to provide guidelines for best practice for letter writing and to provide new template letters for the capped residence stream.

**Background**

2. This IAC responds to the 2009 Office of the Auditor General (OAG) report 'Inquiry into immigration matters (Volume 1): Visa and permit decision making and other issues'.
3. Recommendation 13 states that the Department of Labour should consider ways to improve sharing of good practice guidance about documentation standards throughout Immigration New Zealand (INZ).
4. This IAC is one of a series of changes being implemented by Phase 2 of the Business Process Diagnostics and Design project in response to this recommendation.
5. Providing guidelines on the best practice for letter writing and ensuring that templates are available for all categories of application will contribute to meeting this recommendation.

**Guidelines for Letter Writing Best Practice**

6. The guidelines for letter writing best practice are attached as Appendix A.

7. The guidelines incorporate the learning from the 'Writing for Immigration' and 'Letter Writing Basics' courses delivered by the INZ trainers.
8. Further information is available for staff in the 'Clear Writing Guidelines' and the 'Department Style Manual for Writing'.

### **Measurement**

9. Letter writing will be measured under the Quality Assurance Programme:
  - Was all relevant correspondence written in plain English and free from obvious grammatical and/or spelling errors?
  - 'Relevant' correspondence includes any letter, email or compliment slip that is material to the decision the officer is making/has made.
  - 'Obvious' means any error that could significantly distract the applicant from the message being conveyed in the correspondence.

### **New Template Letters**

10. Two new letter templates have been drafted:
  - Acknowledgment letter for the capped family stream
  - Advice to applicant under capped family stream that the decision target has been reached for the current financial year
11. If this IAC is inconsistent with any previous IAC, information or instruction, the instructions contained here prevail.

Andrew Lockhart  
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Immigration New Zealand

## Appendix A

### Guidelines for Letter Writing Best Practice

#### Basic tips

#### Don't use

- slang
- abbreviations (unless they're defined at the start of each section, e.g. "Department of Labour (DoL) ... at the DoL ...")
- symbols (such as ampersands [&]), or
- clichés.

Refer to IAC 10-04 Guidelines for Standard AMS input for acceptable abbreviations.

#### Always

- Take great care to spell the names of people and companies correctly.
- Use correct punctuation.
- Use correct grammar.
- Spell check.

#### Try to

- Keep sentences short.
- Use words that are familiar.
- Use words or phrases that have clear meanings.
- Avoid adjectives (such as good, bad).
- Remove unnecessary capitalisation (use capitals for proper names).
- Express numbers as words when the number is less than 10 or is used to start a sentence (example: Ten years ago, my brother and I...). The number 10, or anything greater than 10, should be expressed as a figure (example: My brother has 13 Matchbox cars.)

#### Clear and concise letters

Make sure your writing is clear and concise.

- Can you cut down on the number of words used?

For instance, don't use 20 words when you can use 10. While you do not want to be curt or abrupt, you do not want to waste the reader's time with unnecessary words or phrases.

- Is there anything in the written communication that could be misinterpreted?
- Does your letter leave unanswered questions or fail to make the point you need to get across?
- Is your written communication well organised?
- Does each idea proceed logically to the next?

Make sure your written communications are easy to read and contain the necessary information, using facts where needed and avoiding information that is not relevant.

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**Chunk your information**

- Group information into small, manageable chunks – sentences, paragraphs, and bulleted lists are all ‘chunks’ in their own right.
- Place like things together and eliminate unrelated topics from chunks of information.
- Label each new chunk of information with a heading.

Remember, people often scan letters for the key information – we may need to give them visual guides, such as headings to help them find the important information.

**Use plain English**

Plain English is about using the simplest and fewest words you possibly can.

Don't say "Make an adjustment in" when you can say "adjust".

Avoid the passive and encourage the active.

We do this in English by using the Subject-Verb-Object structure, i.e. Say "X wrote the letter" not "The letter was written by X".

**Look out for uses of the verb "to be"**, including "is, are, was, were, has been, have been, and had been". These are giveaways that you are using the passive voice.

**Be careful with the acronyms!**

An acronym is shortened version of a group of words, often drawing from the first letters of each word. A common example you will see is DoL!

Inside our organization, acronyms are a form of shorthand.

When sending letters to people outside the organisation, remember to remove any of these internal abbreviations.

In the case of letters from frontline staff to applicants, we see a lot of acronyms and inappropriate abbreviations used when we "copy and paste" AMS notes into a letter template. Always write the words in full followed by the acronym the first time you use it in a letter. e.g. Department of Labour (DoL)

**Phrases to avoid**

You know you're on the right track with your letter if you use the best practice wording

Poor practice	Best practice
acknowledge receipt of	We have received

anticipation	<i>Depends on context</i>
as per your request	as you have asked
as regards	about
at all times	always
at an early date	by (date)
at your earliest convenience	by (date)
attached please find	We have attached
beg to	Please/ask (depending on context)
come to hand	We have received
contents noted	We have read and considered
deem it advisable	You must
duly credited/entered/noted	We have recorded
enclosed please find	We have enclosed
for your perusal	For you to read
hoping to receive	<i>Depends on context</i>
in due course	By (date)
in lieu of	Instead of
in the near future	By (date)
kindly oblige	Please
of recent date	(date)
please be advised that	<i>Just tell them!</i>
referring to	<i>Depends on context</i>
according to our records	<i>Depends on context</i>
thanking you in advance	Thank you
take pleasure	We are pleased that
upon investigation	We have found out that

### Formatting

Remember – write your letter first, format it later. Don't worry

about how it looks while you're drafting it. Just get the wording and structure right.

Font –DoL uses 10 pt Verdana

Line spacing – try a spacing that's between single and 1.5

## Parts of a business letter

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- 1. Letterhead stationery** Letterhead stationery identifies your organisation, and usually includes postal address, telephone, fax numbers and web page. In large organisations it may be necessary to add details of the writer's department.
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- 2. Date** Day (number), month, year – no punctuation.
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- 3. Recipient's name and address** These may be referred to by job title only, but where the actual recipient's name is known it is better to use it.
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- 4. Attention or For** Where a letter is specifically intended for a particular person within that organisation, direct it by using either attention or for.
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- 5. Letter reference** Where appropriate these are used to aid identification. Our reference indicates the writer and Your reference relates to the letter being answered.
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- 6. Subject heading** Wherever appropriate, use a subject heading. This not only makes the subject of the letter obvious, but also helps with file retrieval. Set out in block capitals or underline with space above and below to highlight. It is no longer necessary to use "re".
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- 7. Salutation** Dear Sir  
Dear Sir/Madam  
Dear Madam  
Dear Mr Evans     *if name*  
Dear Mrs Evans    *and title*  
Dear Ms Evans     *is known.*
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- 8. White space** Allow white space between paragraphs for attractive presentation and easy reading.

Source: Writing for Work by Write Group Limited

Essential features of an effective document (designed and delivered by Write Group Limited). An effective document will have:

- A clear purpose and outcome
- An order that's logical for your reader
- A writing style that is clear and concise
- Language that's appropriate for the reader
- Correct content, grammar, and punctuation.

1. Consider your reader and your purpose
2. Know and apply four underpinning principles of plain English:
  - Use verbs to express actions
  - Avoid smothering your verbs
  - Prefer the active voice, but use the passive when you need to
3. Write clearly
4. Write concisely
5. Make your writing easy to read
6. Choose a style that creates an appropriate tone
7. Order the content to suit your reader and your purpose
8. Edit and proofread thoroughly

#### **Quoting Legal opinion:**

- It is ok to disclose in a communication with an applicant or their advocate that we have obtained legal advice and this will not mean we will forgo our right to withhold the advice on grounds of legal professional privilege.  
We should not provide a copy of the legal advice in full; supply a précis (summary) of it, or quote from it. Internal guidance refers to legal professional privilege as a reason for withholding the release of such advice under the OIA or PA.
- We should simply focus on the conclusion reached in the advice and say something along the lines of – “Taking that advice into account we have decided that Mr X does not meet (whatever policy requirement they need to meet)”

#### **Quoting Policy:**

- Policy should be referred to but not quoted in the body of the letter. The appropriate policy should be attached at the end of the letter as an appendix.