

Business Letter Writing: Mrs., Miss or Ms.?

How should you address a woman when you write a letter or email to her? Will she be offended if you write “Dear Madam” or “Dear Mrs. + surname”?

Over the last few years, there have been some changes in standard greetings, and here are some general guidelines to help you choose between the three standard titles: Mrs., Miss, Ms.

Mrs., Miss, Ms.?

The old distinction between married (“Mrs. + surname”) and unmarried (“Miss + surname”) is generally irrelevant in business letters. As it doesn’t matter if a woman is married or not, use “Ms. + surname”. Ms. is pronounced (Mizz) and is used for all women.

For example:

“Dear Ms. Jones”

Ms. vs Mrs.

If you are replying to a letter in which the woman has written her name as “Mrs. + surname”, then it is fine to reply to her using “Mrs. + her surname”.

For example:

“Dear Mrs. Jones

Thank you for your letter...”

However, as explained above, if you receive a letter where the first name and surname are given, reply with “Dear Ms. + surname”.

For example:

“Dear Ms. Jones”.

Dear Miss

We don’t generally write “Dear Miss + surname” to women – unless they have already written to you and ended their letter with this title. So, if you receive a letter from a woman who has signed it “Miss + surname”, you can also use “Miss + surname” in your reply.

For example:

“Dear Miss Jones

Thank you for your enquiry about ...”

Dear Madam

If you are writing to a person in a company whose name you don't know, you can start with “Dear Sir / Madam”. (This is because you don't know if you're writing to a man or a woman.)

For example:

“Dear Sir / Madam

I'm enclosing my CV for your attention...”

If you know for sure that the person is a woman (but you don't know her name) you can write “Dear Madam”.

Avoid these other mistakes

1. Don't write “Dear Mrs.” on it own without any name afterwards. Remember: after titles like Mr., Mrs. or Ms., we need a surname.
2. Don't write “Dear Ms.”, “Dear Miss” or “Dear Mrs.” followed by the first name.
3. Don't write “Dear Madame”.