

CEE 321: Advice Table for Technical Letters

Technical letters are specialized business letters that focus on technical issues or content. They follow a conventional format. The letter you received as your assignment sheet gives you a model to follow.

Advice	Explanation
Respond to your reader's needs.	<p>Consider the factors that govern your reader's interest in your letter and address those factors in the way you organize your letter:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Has the reader asked for <i>specific</i> information?• What level of detail or evidence will the reader require to accept the content of the letter? <p>In this case you have been asked specific questions. Use those questions to organize your response.</p>
Give structure to the information.	<p>Make sure that headings, lists, and paragraphs reflect distinct groups of information arranged in an order that makes sense to your reader. (Yes, you can use lists and headings within a letter.)</p>
Understand the difference between a letter and a memo.	<p>You would use a letter to write to someone <i>outside</i> your organization; you would use a memo for <i>internal</i> documents. That external audience means you should proofread carefully; they will judge you and your organization by the quality of the letter. There is no excuse for even a single mistake in a technical letter.</p>
Use a direct, personal tone.	<p>Letters are written <i>by people for people</i>. Address your reader directly in a level of formality that is appropriate to your working relationship with the reader and your goals in writing the letter. Remember that all business letters (technical and otherwise) are documents through which you carry out professional relationships.</p>
Enclose the necessary additional information to meet your reader's request.	<p>Business letters <i>normally</i> run to one page. Extra data or supporting documents are usually attached as enclosures. (You do this for example, when you enclose a résumé with a cover letter). On the letter itself, note such enclosures with an Encl. mark at the bottom left of the letter beneath the typed signature. For example:</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Encl.: <i>Test Report</i></p> <p>In this case the <i>Test Report</i> you enclose should summarize the objectives and conclusions of the experiment and present graphs of the critical data.</p>