

Letter-writing skills

(A resource for community advice offices and community-based paralegals brought to you by NADCAO, from the Paralegal Manual published by the Education and Training Unit and the Black Sash.)

Always include in a letter:

- your own address (or the address that the person getting the letter must write back to)
- the address of the person to whom you are writing
- the date

Start your letter by saying that you are writing on behalf of your client.

Set out clearly in your letter the details of your client's complaint.

Say exactly what it is you want from the person you are writing to. In other words, say what the person you are writing to must do about the complaint.

Remember to include information that can help to identify your client, for example, identity number, work numbers, pension number, UIF number, Compensation for Occupational Injuries case number, and so on.

Make sure that your letter is signed and has the date on it before you send it out. If possible, get another person to check your letter before you post it.

Keep a copy of all letters written in your client's file, including any hand-delivered letters.

Some standard letters can be photocopied to cut down on typing load. Type the main part of the letter that always stays the same, leaving blanks to fill in the things that change like the client's name. Photocopy the standard letter and then every time you need this kind of letter you just fill in the blanks.

Examples of such letters are:

- letter asking client to call at the office
- letters of referral, for example to another assistance agency
- letters of referral to the Small Claims Court

There are standard MODEL LETTERS in this manual. These letters are there to give you some guidance on what to include in typical letters you may have to write. For example, you will often have to write a letter of demand asking someone to do something, like pay your client money that is owing.

Model letter showing layout of a letter

Upington Advice centre
(your address:) Room 9, Avocado Centre
Upington
0100

(your telephone number:) Telephone: (0555) 2345289

(date:) 15 June 2009

(some offices give every letter its own reference number:) Our Ref: 135/09

The Manager (the name or title of the person who must read the letter)
Tex Stores (Pty) Ltd
PO Box 1053 (the address you are writing to - then you have this on your copy
of the letter)
Upington
0100

Dear Madam / Sir

Ms Gerda Fortuin: Leave Pay

(the main thing that the letter is about: usually the client's name and the type
of problem)

(introduction:)

We are writing to you on behalf of Ms Gerda Fortuin. She was employed by you as
a checker at your Upington branch from 20/02/96 until 30/04/09. She resigned after
giving the necessary notice. Her wage was R610 per week. Ms Fortuin's work
number was 315. Her identity number is 4209050920088.

(give information to identify the client)

(what the problem is - setting out the details:)

Ms Fortuin says that when she received her final pay packet she was not paid out
for leave owing to her. She last took leave in September 2008.

(what the law says and applying the law to the facts:)

In terms of the Wage Determination for the Commercial and Distributive Trade a
worker may receive leave pay calculated according to the following formula:

(put in the formula and your calculations)

Ms Fortuin is therefore owed 7 months pro-rata leave pay.

(what the person you are writing to must do about it:)

Ms Fortuin requests that you forward the leave pay that is owing to her to the above
address within 14 days of receipt of this letter. Please contact our office if you
would like to discuss this matter further.

Yours faithfully

(sign your letter)

Mr P. Philander
(Adviser)