



preliminary note

Every letter is something special and unique. It's difficult to give strict rules how to write a letter. Nevertheless, there are guidelines how to start and finish a letter. Like in English we have typical standard expressions and there are clear features which distinguish a formal and informal letter.

I'd like to give some advice how to write an informal (private) letter.
I wrote this discription to help people to achieve the "Zertifikat Deutsch" (level: B1).

A word about the use of "du" and "Sie"

As you know, we've got two different forms in German to address people:

- du (you)
- Sie (you)

We call the use of du "duzen" and the use of Sie "siezen".

Du is used for children, friends, family members, colleagues and people at your age.

Sie is used for people who are older than you and people you are not familiar with.

The use of "Sie" is a sign of respect and if I used "du" for a 70 years old woman I've never met before it would be rather offending. If you are not sure about the age of your counterpart use "Sie".

The use of "Sie", however, has become less strict than years before. When I met my colleagues in our office for the first time and they were apparently at my age I used "du" even though I'd never met them before. Another example is my table tennis club where everybody is using "du". It doesn't matter if 8 or 80 years old. We all "duzen" each other.

In the B1-exam you will always write the informal letter to a close friend. So use "du".



example letter

Köln, 14.02.2009
place comma date

salutation Liebe Joy, comma small letter

introduction vielen Dank für deinen netten Brief. Ich habe mich sehr darüber gefreut.

main part
Wie ich höre, hast du eine neue Arbeit gefunden und verdienst dein Geld jetzt bei der Firma Nolte. Weißt du noch? Als wir noch an der Highschool waren, haben wir immer davon geträumt, eines Tages dort zu arbeiten. Wir wollten zuerst studieren und dann dort anfangen. Was machst du genau? Bist du im An- und Verkauf oder hast du es schon in die Chef-Etage geschafft?
In der Zwischenzeit habe ich auch eine Arbeit gefunden. Ich wollte etwas, wo ich am Anfang nur halbtags arbeiten muss, um mich nach der Geburt unseres Kindes wieder daran zu gewöhnen. Glücklicherweise haben sie bei H&M jemanden als Verkäuferin gesucht. H&M ist eine Ladenkette, die Kleidung verkauft. Die Arbeit macht mir großen Spaß, auch wenn es noch ziemlich anstrengend ist.

closing Ich hoffe, bald wieder etwas von dir zu hören. Vielleicht kannst du ja sogar bald nach Deutschland kommen und uns besuchen.

greetings Viele Grüße

signature Cathy



1: Adresse des Absenders und Empfängers (addresser of addressee)

Unlike in formal (business) letters there is no need to put your own address or the address of the receiver on the top of the letter. It's likely you and the receiver are quite close and you know your addresses. In Germany it's common to put your own address on the backside of the letter and the receiver's address on the front side.

2: Ort und Datum (location and date)

You start with the place, followed by a comma and the date.

Consider:

We write in German the date in the following order: **day | month | year**

3: Begrüßung/Anrede (salutation)

Typical salutations for an informal letter are:

German	English	explanation
Liebe Joy,	Dear Joy	<i>you are quite close to this person and you use "du"</i>
Liebe Joy, lieber Nelson,	Dear Joy, dear Nelson	<i>you are quite close to these 2 people and you use "du"</i>
Liebe Frau Fischer,	Dear Mrs Fischer	<i>you are quite close to this person but you use "Sie"</i>
Liebe Familie Puhlmann,	Dear family Puhlmann	<i>you are quite close to this whole family</i>
Hallo Doreen *,	Hello Doreen	<i>you write a friend or person at your age and you use "du"</i>
Hi Doreen *,	Hi Doreen	<i>you write a friend or person at your age and you use "du"</i>
Hallo Frau Fischer *,	Hello Mrs Fischer	<i>you write a close person older than you and you use "Sie"</i>

* If I write an e-mail to a friend or person at my age I almost always use "hallo" or "hi". I hardly use "liebe | lieber". It's getting a bit old-fashioned. In the the exam, however, you should use "liebe | lieber" to satisfy the examiner.

Consider:

The salutation ends with a comma.



4: Einleitungssatz (introduction)

Typical introductions for an informal letter are:

German	use
vielen Dank für deinen Brief. Ich habe mich sehr darüber gefreut.	<i>standard introduction to answer a letter</i>
wie geht es dir? Mir geht es (nicht so) super, da ...	<i>standard introduction to write a letter</i>
es freut mich sehr zu hören, dass ...	<i>introduction to speak immediately about an important event</i>
entschuldige, dass ich erst jetzt auch deinen Brief antworte, aber ich war in letzter Zeit sehr beschäftigt.	<i>standard introduction to answer a letter (belated answer)</i>
ich wollte dir schon lange schreiben, aber leider ist mir immer etwas dazwischen gekommen.	<i>standard introduction to answer a letter (belated answer)</i>
vielen Dank für die Bilder (das Buch die CD ...), die du mir geschickt hast.	<i>introduction to say thank you for a present</i>

Consider:

The introductions starts with a small letter!

5: Hauptteil (main part)

There are no strict rules for the main part.

In the B1-exam you will get 3 or 4 points you have to cover.

My suggestion:

- make at first some short keynotes to every points to make clear what you want to say
It's absolutly ok if you do it in your language.
- bring the 3-4 points in a logical order
- write 1 - 2 sentences about every point.
- structure your text: use e.g. for every point one paragraph
It makes it much easier to read the text.



6: Abschlusssatz (closing)

Typical closings for an informal letter are:

German	use
Ich hoffe bald wieder etwas von dir zu hören.	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Ich würde mich freuen, bald wieder von dir zu hören.	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Bitte antworte mir bald!	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Ich warte auf deine Antwort.	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Melde dich doch mal!	<i>standard closing (with request for an answer)</i>
Bitte grüß Kristine ganz lieb von mir.	<i>standard closing (with greetings)</i>
Bitte grüß deine ganze Familie von mir.	<i>standard closing (with greetings)</i>
Ich freue mich sehr darauf, dich wieder zu sehen.	<i>standard closing (with looking forward to meeting)</i>

7: Grüße (greetings)

Typical greetings for an informal letter are:

German	English	explanation
Liebe Grüße	Love	<i>you are quite close to this person and you use "du"</i>
Viele Grüße	Regards / Cheers	<i>standard greetings which always fit</i>
Gruß	Regards / Cheers	<i>standard greetings for a friend you are not so close</i>
Herzliche Grüße	Best regards	<i>standard greetings for a good friend</i>
Deine Cathy	Yours Cathy	<i>instead of greeting + sign you can summarise it in this form</i>

Consider:

The greeting starts with a capital letter and ends without comma.

8: Unterschrift (sign)

Don't forget to put your name at the end.