



TALK SHOW 2.0

Gathered by Daniel Molagan accessible via Daniel.Molagan@gmail.com

Writing Formal Business Letters/Emails

Guide to Basic Business Letters



The Basics

The basics of good business letter writing are easy to learn. The following guide provides the phrases that are usually found in any standard business letter. These phrases are used as a kind of frame and introduction to the content of business letters. At the end of this guide, you will find links to sites that give tips on the difficult part of writing successful business letters – arguing your business objective. By using these standard phrases, you can give a professional tone to your English business letters.

The Start

Dear Personnel Director,

Dear Sir or Madam: (use if you don't know who you are writing to)

Dear Dr, Mr, Mrs, Miss or Ms Smith: (use if you know who you are writing to, and have a formal relationship with - **VERY IMPORTANT** use Ms for women unless asked to use Mrs or Miss)

Dear Frank: (use if the person is a close business contact or friend)

The Reference

With reference to your advertisement in the *Times*, your letter of 23rd March,
your phone call today,
Thank you for your letter of March 5th .

The Reason for Writing

I am writing to inquire about
apologize for
confirm

Requesting

Could you possibly?
I would be grateful if you could

Agreeing to Requests

I would be delighted to

Giving Bad News

Unfortunately
I am afraid that

Enclosing Documents

I am enclosing
Please find enclosed
Enclosed you will find

Closing Remarks

Thank you for your help Please contact us again if we can help in any way.
there are any problems.
you have any questions.

Reference to Future Contact

I look forward to ...
hearing from you soon.
meeting you next Tuesday.
seeing you next Thursday.

The Finish

Yours faithfully, (If you don't know the name of the person you're writing to)

Yours sincerely, (If you know the name of the person you're writing to)

Best wishes,

Best regards, (If the person is a close business contact or friend)

Sample Letter

Here is a sample letter using some of these forms:

Ken's Cheese House
34 Chatley Avenue
Seattle, WA 98765
Tel:
Fax:
Email: kenny@cheese.com

October 23, 2006

Fred Flintstone
Sales Manager
Cheese Specialists Inc.
456 Rubble Road
Rockville, IL

Dear Mr Flintstone:

With reference to our telephone conversation today, I am writing to confirm your order for: 120
x Cheddar Deluxe Ref. No. 856

The order will be shipped within three days via UPS and should arrive at your store in about 10 days.

Please contact us again if we can help in any way.

Yours sincerely,

Kenneth Beare
Director of Ken's Cheese House



The business-letter format is very important for communicating formally with a company. You shouldn't write in the same voice as when you write family or friends, a business letter needs to be more formal. These steps describe the full block format, in which all lines start at the left.

Instructions

Things You'll Need:

- Envelopes
- Computers
- Printers
- Printer Paper
- Postage Stamps

1. Step 1

Type the letter using a word processor. Formal letters should not be written by hand.

2. Step 2

Use your own letterhead. If you don't have letterhead, use formal, 8 1/2-inch-by-11-inch stationery with a matching envelope. Avoid store-bought note cards.

3. Step 3

If you don't have preprinted letterhead, type your name, title and return address four to six lines down from the top of the page.

4. Step 4

Type the [date](#) two to six lines down from the letterhead or return address. Three lines below is the standard.

5. Step 5

Choose your alignment: left aligned or justified on both sides.

6. Step 6

Skip two lines and type the recipient's full name, business title and address, aligned at the left margin. Precede the name with Mr., Ms. or Dr. as appropriate.

7. Step 7

Skip two to four lines and follow with your greeting, again using the formal name and closing with a colon "Dear Mr. Jones:" for example.

8. Step 8

Skip two more lines and begin your letter. Introduce yourself in the first paragraph, if the recipient does not already know you. Examples: 'We recently met at a seminar at the Biltmore' or 'I recently purchased an insurance plan from your company.'

9. Step 9

Continue with the body of the letter, stating your main purpose for writing. This may be to lodge a complaint, compliment the business on its products or services, or request information. Be as brief and concise as possible.

10. Step 10

Skip two lines and conclude the letter with 'Sincerely,' 'Thank you' or 'Best wishes,' followed by a comma.

11. Step 11

Leave at least four blank lines for your signature, then type your name and title. Sign the letter in ink in the space created.

Now all of that constituted the basic format of writing a business letter, however, applying that formula in emails requires a different approach.



If you're used to using e-mail to catch up with friends, writing a formal e-mail might feel pretty foreign to you. It's not quite the same as writing a business letter, but it's definitely a huge step in that direction. Clarity, conciseness and being correct are the keys!

Use a neutral e-mail address. Your e-mail address should be a variation of your real name, not a username or nickname. Use periods, hyphens, or underscores to secure an e-mail address that's just your name, without extra numbers or letters, if you can.

Use a proper salutation. Addressing the recipient by name is preferred. Use the person's title (Mr. Mrs. Ms. or Dr.) with their last name, followed by a comma or a colon. Optionally, you can precede the salutation with "Dear..." (but "Hello..." is acceptable as well). Using a last name is more formal and should be used unless you are on first-name terms with the recipient. If you don't know the name of the person you're writing to (but you really should try and find one) use "To Whom It May Concern".

Write the actual message. Be sure to get your point across and do not ramble on! Be direct and to the point. If it's fluffed to be longer the reader may glance over the important details.

- The email should be no more than 5 paragraphs long, and each paragraph should be no more than 5 sentences long.
- Follow the steps in [How to Avoid Colloquial \(Informal\) Writing](#).
- Insert a line break between each paragraph (indenting isn't necessary).

Use the correct form of leave-taking.

- Yours sincerely,

- Yours cordially,
- Respectfully,
- Best,

Sign with your full name. If you have a job title, include that in the line after your name, and write the company name or website in the line after that. If you do not have a job title but you have your own blog or website related to the content of the e-mail, include a link to that below your name. If the e-mail is about a job, only include a career-related website or blog, not hobbies or interests.

Come up with a brief and descriptive subject. E.g.

- Inquiry regarding sales position
- Request for volunteer application

Double-check your message to make sure that you have contained everything that you need in your message. Read your email out loud. Ask someone to proofread the e-mail for you as well.

How to Write a Formal Email



If you're used to using e-mail to catch up with friends, writing a formal e-mail might feel pretty foreign to you. It's not quite the same as writing a business letter, but it's definitely a huge step in that direction. Clarity, conciseness and being correct are the keys!

Steps

1.

Use a neutral e-mail address. Your e-mail address should be a variation of your real name, not a username or nickname. Use periods, hyphens, or underscores to secure an e-mail address that's just your name, without extra numbers or letters, if you can.

2.

Use a proper salutation. Addressing the recipient by name is preferred. Use the person's title (Mr. Mrs. Ms. or Dr.) with their last name, followed by a comma or a colon. Optionally, you can precede the salutation with "Dear..." (but "Hello..." is acceptable as well). Using a last name is more formal and should be used unless you are on first-name terms with the recipient. If you don't know the name of the person you're writing to (but you really should try and find one) use "To Whom It May Concern".

3.

Introduce yourself in the first paragraph. Also include why you're writing, and how you found that person's e-mail address, or the opportunity you're writing about.

- E.g. "My name is Earl Rivers. I'm contacting you to apply for the administrative assistant position listed on CareerXYZ.com."
- E.g. "My name is Arlene Rivers. I am writing about the traffic citation I received on December 31, 2009. I obtained your e-mail address for the Westchester County Clerk website."

4.

Write the actual message. Be sure to get your point across and do not ramble on! Be direct and to the point. If it's fluffed to be longer the reader may glance over the important details.

- The email should be no more than 5 paragraphs long, and each paragraph should be no more than 5 sentences long.
- Follow the steps in [How to Avoid Colloquial \(Informal\) Writing](#).
- Insert a line break between each paragraph (indenting isn't necessary).

5.

Use the correct form of leave-taking.

- Yours sincerely,
- Yours cordially,
- Respectfully,
- Best,

6.

Sign with your full name. If you have a job title, include that in the line after your name, and write the company name or website in the line after that. If you do not have a job title but you have your own blog or website related to the content of the e-mail, include a link to that below your name. If the e-mail is about a job, only include a career-related website or blog, not hobbies or interests.

7.

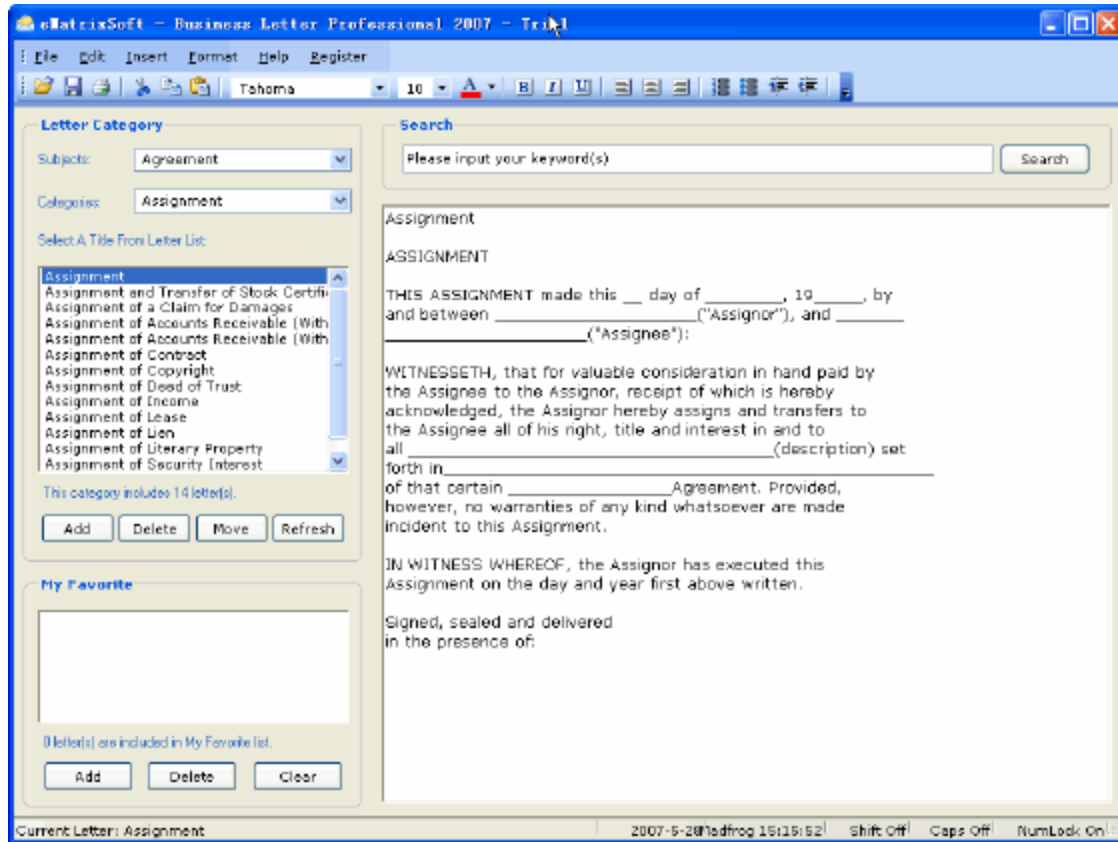
Come up with a brief and descriptive subject. E.g.

- Inquiry regarding sales position
- Request for volunteer application

8.

Double-check your message to make sure that you have contained everything that you need in your message. Read your email out loud. Ask someone to proofread the e-mail for you as well.

Writing Effective E-Mail: Top 10 Tips



Summary: This document offers 10 tips to help you write effective professional e-mails. E-mail etiquette asks you to put your reader's needs first, especially when you want the other person to do something (review a submission, extend a deadline, waive a fee) for you.

first posted 12 Dec 2000; original version by by Jessica Bauer (UWEC student); revised and maintained by [Dennis G. Jerz](#)

Some professionals get scores of e-mails a day. Follow these tips in order to give your recipients the information they need in order to act on your message sooner rather than later.

1. [Write a meaningful subject line.](#)
2. [Keep the message focused and readable.](#)
3. [Avoid attachments.](#)
4. [Identify yourself clearly.](#)
5. [Be kind -- don't flame.](#)
6. [Proofread.](#)
7. [Don't assume privacy.](#)
8. [Distinguish between formal and informal situations.](#)
9. [Respond Promptly.](#)
10. [Show Respect and Restraint.](#)

1. Write a meaningful subject line.

Recipients **scan the subject line** in order to decide whether to open, forward, file, or trash a message. Remember -- your message is not the only one in your recipient's mailbox. Before you hit "send," take a moment to write a subject line that accurately describes the content.

Subject: [Blank]

If you don't put a subject line on your e-mail, you are sending the message that your name in the "From" line is all your recipient should need in order to make it a top priority. That could come across as arrogant, or at the very least, thoughtless. Take advantage of the opportunity to get your recipient thinking about your message even before opening it.

Subject: **"Important! Read Immediately!!"**

What is important to you may not be important to your reader. Rather than brashly announcing that the secret contents of your message are important, write an informative headline that actually communicates at least the core of what you feel is so important: "Emergency: All Cars in the Lower Lot Will Be Towed in 1 Hour."

Subject: **"Quick question."**

If the question is quick, why not just ask it in the subject line? This subject line is hardly useful.

Subject: **"Follow-up about Friday"**

Fractionally better -- provided that the recipient remembers why a follow-up was necessary.

Subject: **"That file you requested."**

If you're confident your recipient will recognize your e-mail address, and really is expecting a file from you, then this would be fine. But keep in mind that many e-mail providers get scads of virus-laden spam with vague titles like this. The more specific you are, the more likely your recipient's spam-blocker will let your message through.

Subject: **"10 confirmed for Friday... will we need a larger room?"**

Upon reading this revised, informative subject line, the recipient immediately starts thinking about the size of the room, not about whether it will be worth it to open the e-mail.

2. Keep the message focused and readable.

Often recipients only read partway through a long message, hit "reply" as soon as they have something to contribute, and forget to keep reading. This is part of human nature.

If your e-mail contains **multiple messages that are only loosely related**, in order to avoid the risk that your reader will reply only to the first item that grabs his or her fancy, you could **number your points** to ensure they are all read (adding an introductory line that states how many parts there are to the message). If the points are substantial enough, **split them up into separate messages** so your recipient can delete, respond, file, or forward each item individually.

Keep your message readable.

- **Use standard capitalization and spelling**, *especially* when your message asks your recipient to do work for you.
 - If you are a teenager, writing a quick gushing "thx 4 ur help 2day ur gr8" may make a busy professional smile at your gratitude.
 - But there comes a time when the sweetness of the gesture isn't enough. u want ur prof r ur boss 2 think u cant spl? LOL ;-)
- **Skip lines between paragraphs.**
- **Avoid fancy typefaces.** Don't depend upon bold font or large size to add nuances. Many people's e-mail readers only display plain text. In a pinch, use asterisks to show **emphasis**.
- **Use standard capitalization.** All-caps comes across as shouting, and no caps invokes the image of a lazy teenager. Regardless of your intention, people will respond accordingly.

3. Avoid attachments.

To: All 1000 Employees
From: Eager Edgar
Subject: A helpful book everyone should read

Hello, everyone. I've attached a PDF that I think you'll all find very useful. This is the third time I sent it the file -- the version I sent yesterday had a typo on page 207, so I've sent the whole thing again. Since some of you noted that the large file size makes it a bit awkward, I've also attached each chapter as a separate document. Let me know what you think!

Attachments:

- Big Honking File.pdf (356MB)
- BHF Cover.pdf (25MB)
- BHF Chapter 1.pdf (35MB)
- BHF Chapter 2.pdf (27MB)
- [...]

Okay, raise your hands... how many of us would delete the above message immediately, without looking at **any** of those attachments?

To: Bessie Professional
From: Morris Ponsybil
Subject: E-mail tips -- a subject for an office workshop?

Bessie, I came across a book that has lots of tips on streamlining professional communications. Has anyone volunteered to present at the office workshop next month? Let me know if you'd like me to run a little seminar (20 minutes?) on using e-mail effectively.

Below, I'll paste the table of contents from the book. Let me know if you want me send you the whole thing as a PDF.

Table of Contents

1. Write a meaningful subject line.
2. Keep the message focused and readable.
3. Avoid attachments.
4. [...]

E-mail works best when you just **copy and paste the most relevant text into the body** of the e-mail. Try to reduce the number of steps your recipient will need to take in order to act on your message.

If your recipient actually needs to view the full file in order to edit or archive it, then of course sending an attachment is appropriate.

In general, attachments

- take time to download (and check for viruses)
- take up needless space on your recipient's computer, and
- don't always translate correctly for people who read their e-mail on portable devices.

4. Identify yourself clearly.

When contacting someone cold, always include your name, occupation, and any other important identification information in the first few sentences.

If you are following up on a face-to-face contact, you might appear too timid if you assume your recipient doesn't remember you; but you can drop casual hints to jog their memory: "I enjoyed talking with you about PDAs in the elevator the other day."

Every fall, I get e-mails from "bad_boy2315@yahoo.com" or "FuZzYkItTy2000@hotmail.com" who ask a question about "class" and don't sign their real names.

While formal phrases such as "Dear Professor Sneedlewood" and "Sincerely Yours," are unnecessary in e-mail, when contacting someone outside your own organization, you should

write a signature line that includes your full name and at least a link to a blog or online profile page (something that does not require your recipient to log in first).

5. Be kind. Don't flame.

Think before you click "Send."

If you find yourself writing in anger, save a draft, go get a cup of coffee, and imagine that tomorrow morning someone has taped your e-mail outside your door. Would your associates and friends be shocked by your language or attitude?

Or would they be impressed by how you kept your cool, how you ignored the bait when your correspondent stooped to personal attacks, and how you carefully explained your position (or admitted your error, or asked for a reconsideration, etc.).

Don't pour gasoline on a fire without carefully weighing the consequences. Will you have to work with this person for the rest of the semester? Do you want a copy of your bitter screed to surface years from now, when you want a letter of recommendation or you're up for promotion?

@!\$% &*@!! &(*!

Go ahead... write it, revise it, liven it up with traditional Lebanese curses, print it out, throw darts on it, and scribble on it with crayon. Do whatever you need in order to get it out of your system. Just **don't hit "Send" while you're still angry.**

From: Clair Haddad
To: Ann O. Ying
Subject: Re: Ongoing Problems with Project

I'm not sure how to respond, since at the meeting last week you told Sue that you didn't need any extra training, so I cancelled Wednesday's workshop. I can CC Sue in on this thread if you like, since she's the one who will have to approve the budget if we reschedule it.

Meanwhile, I can loan you my copies of the manual, or we can look into shifting the work to someone else. Let me know what you'd like me to do next.

---Original Message ---
From: Ann O. Ying

I tried all morning to get in touch with you. Couldn't you find a few minutes in between meetings to check your messages? I'm having a rough time on this project, and I'm sorry if this is last-minute, but I've never done this before and I think the least you could do is take some time to explain it again.

If your recipient has just lambasted you with an angry message, rather than reply with a point-by-point rebuttal, you can always respond with a brief note like this, which

1. casually invokes the name of someone the angry correspondent is likely to respect (in order to diffuse any personal antagonism that may otherwise have developed) and
2. refocuses the conversation on solutions (in this conversation, Ann has already dug herself into a hole, and Clair has nothing to gain by joining her there)



6. Proofread.

If you are asking someone else to do work for you, take the time to **make your message look professional**.

While your spell checker won't catch every mistake, at the very least it will catch a few typos. If you are sending a message that will be read by someone higher up on the chain of command (a superior or professor, for instance), or if you're about to mass-mail dozens or thousands of people, take an extra minute or two before you hit "send". Show a draft to a close associate, in order to see whether it actually makes sense.

7. Don't assume privacy.

Unless you are Donald Trump, **praise in public, and criticize in private**. Don't send anything over e-mail that you wouldn't want posted -- with your name attached -- in the break room.

E-mail is not secure. Just as random pedestrians could easily reach into your mailbox and intercept the envelopes that you send and receive through the post office, a curious hacker, a malicious criminal, or the [FBI](#) can easily intercept your e-mail. In some companies, the e-mail administrator has the ability to read any and all e-mail messages (and may [fire you](#) if you write anything inappropriate).

8. Distinguish between formal and informal situations.

When you are writing to a friend or a close colleague, it is OK to use "smilies" :-), abbreviations (IIRC for "if I recall correctly", LOL for "laughing out loud," etc.) and nonstandard punctuation and spelling (like that found in instant messaging or chat rooms). These linguistic shortcuts are generally signs of friendly intimacy, like sharing cold pizza with a family friend. If you tried to share that same cold pizza with a first date, or a visiting dignitary, you would give off the impression that you did not really care about the meeting. By the same token, don't use informal language when your reader expects a more formal approach. Always know the situation, and write accordingly.

9. Respond Promptly.

If you want to appear professional and courteous, make yourself available to your online correspondents. Even if your reply is, "Sorry, I'm too busy to help you now," at least your correspondent won't be waiting in vain for your reply.

10. Show Respect and Restraint

Many a flame war has been started by someone who hit "reply all" instead of "reply."

While most people know that e-mail is not private, it is good form to ask the sender before forwarding a personal message. If someone e-mails you a request, it is perfectly acceptable to forward the request to a person who can help -- but forwarding a message in order to ridicule the sender is tacky.

Use BCC instead of CC when sending sensitive information to large groups. (For example, a professor sending a bulk message to students who are in danger of failing, or an employer telling unsuccessful applicants that a position is no longer open.) The name of everyone in the CC list goes out with the message, but the names of people on the BCC list ("blind carbon copy") are hidden. Put your own name in the "To" box if your mail editor doesn't like the blank space.

Be tolerant of other people's etiquette blunders. If you think you've been insulted, quote the line back to your sender and add a neutral comment such as, "I'm not sure how to interpret this... could you elaborate?"

Sometimes E-Mail is Too Fast!

A colleague once asked me for help, and then almost immediately sent a follow-up informing me she had solved the problem on her own.

But before reading her second message, I replied at length to the first. Once I learned that there was no need for any reply, I worried that my response would seem pompous, so I followed up with a quick apology:

"Should have paid closer attention to my e-mail."

What I meant to say was "[I] should have looked more carefully at my [list of incoming] e-mail [before replying]," but I could tell from my colleague's terse reply that she had interpreted it as if I was criticizing *her*.

If I hadn't responded so quickly to the first message, I would have saved myself the time I spent writing a long answer to an obsolete question. If I hadn't responded so quickly to the second message, I might not have alienated the person I had been so eager to help.

--DGJ

Example 1: Formal

Hello,

I read on your web site that you offer Music CD copying for large quantities of CDs. I'd like to inquire about the procedures involved in these services. Are the files transferred online, or are the titles sent by CD to you by standard mail? How long does it usually take to produce approximately 500 copies? Are there any discounts on such a large quantity?

Thank you for taking the time to answer my questions. I look forward to your response.

Jack Finley
Sales Manager, Young Talent Inc.
(709) 567 - 3498

Example 2: Informal

At 16.22 01/07/2002 +0000, you wrote:

> I hear you're working on the Smith account. If you need any information don't hesitate to get in
> contact with me.

Hi Tom,

Listen, we've been working on the Smith account and I was wondering if you could give me a hand? I need some inside information on recent developments over there. Do you think you could pass on any information you might have?

Thanks

Peter

Peter Thompson
Account Manager, Tri-State Accounting
(698) 345 - 7843

Important Points to Remember

- Email is much less formal than a written letter. Emails are usually short and concise.
- If you are writing to someone you don't know, a simple "Hello" is adequate. Using a salutation such as "Dear Mr Smith," is too formal.
- When writing to someone you know well, feel free to write as if you are speaking to the person.
- Use abbreviated verb forms (He's, We're, He'd, etc.)
- Include a telephone number to the signature of the email. This will give the recipient the chance to telephone if necessary.
- It is not necessary to include your email address as the recipient can just reply to the email.
- When replying eliminate all the information that is not necessary. Only leave the sections of text that are related to your reply. This will save your reader time when reading your email.

References & Further Reading

- Alsop, Stewart. "My Rules of Polite Digital Communication." *Fortune*. 142.2 (10 July 2000): p 76. Online. Academic Search Elite. 9 October 2000.
- Cronin, Jennifer. "Netiquette, schmetiquette." *Des Moines Business Record* 16.24 (12 June 2000): p 11. Online. MasterFILE Premier. 9 October 2000.
- "Email Etiquette." I Will Follow Services. 1997. <<http://www.iwillfollow.com/email Etiquette.html>>. 9 October 2000.
- Nucifora, Alf. "Use etiquette when messaging via email." *Memphis Business Journal* 21.51 (14 April 2000): p23. Online. MasterFILE Premier. 9 October 2000.
- Thorton, Sam. "Rules and Regulations: Email Etiquette." 29 April 1998. <<http://www.lse.ac.uk/Depts/ITS/rules/email.htm>>. 9 October 2000.

TALK SHOW 2.0 via <http://talkshow2.blogspot.com/>

..... Copyright© 2010.....

The contents of this blog may not be republished without the permission of Daniel Molagan . The author does not endorse any particular organization, social or political party .The articles are written subjectively and could be altered should the material proves inaccurate