Abbreviations in Business Correspondence

In business correspondence, a number of abbreviations are used, some of which are only suitable for informal communication, some even for electronic communication only (e.g. emoticons). In formal business letters, a clear, formal writing style should be used, however, there exist some instances in which the use of abbreviations is appropriate to save both space and time.

Formal widely used abbreviations:

- **ASAP** - as soon as possible
- **attn** - attention: to show that a letter is for the attention of a particular person
- **BYOB** - bring your own bottle: used on invitations to show that you should bring your own beverage to a party or get-together
- **cc** - used on a business letter or e-mail to indicate that a copy of a given letter is being sent to the person mentioned
- **c/o or c/-** - care of: used in the address on a letter or parcel that you are sending to someone at another person’s house
- **encl.** - enclosed or enclosure: used at the top or bottom of a letter to show that an attachment has been included in the letter
- **FAQ** - for the attention of: written in front of someone’s name on a document, letter, or envelope to show that it is intended for them
- **FYI** - for your information: written on a business letter or e-mail to show that it is being sent to someone for their information only; they are not expected to reply or take any action
- **pp** - on behalf of - written in front of someone’s name when you are signing a letter for them
- **PPS** - written before a note at the end of a letter, after the PS note
- **PS** - postscript: used for introducing some additional information at the end of a letter after you have signed your name
- **PTO** - please turn over: used at the bottom of a page to indicate that there is a second page (informal)
- **RE** - used in business letters to introduce their subject matter
- **ref.** - reference: used in a business letter when you are giving the numbers and letters that show exactly which document or piece of information you are writing about
- **RSVP** - used on written invitations to ask the invited person to confirm their attendance

Abbreviations in titles:

- **Mr.** - Mister - used when addressing men
- **Messrs.** - used when addressing two or more men, as in Messrs. Smith and Wesson
- **Mrs.** - Misses - used for women if you are sure that they are married and for those who do not prefer another title
- **Ms.** - used for women, regardless of their marital status. Usually the safest bet
- **Dr.** - Used with addressees who you know have earned a doctorate, not only in medicine

Abbreviations in time and date:

- **a.m. (am)** - ante merediem = before midday - used with a 12-hour clock
- **p.m. (pm)** - post merediem = after midday - used with a 12-hour clock
- **BC** - Before Christ - used to denote years prior to the birth of Jesus of Nazareth
- **AD** - Anno Domini - used to denote years after the birth of Jesus of Nazareth

Other often used abbreviations in business letters:

- **a/c** - account
- **appar.** - Apparently
- **bus.** - business
- **cf.** - compare (Latin: confer)
- **comm.** - commerce
- **Corp.** - Corporation
dt - date

e.g. - for example (Latin exampli gratia)
et al. - and other people (Latin et alii)
etc. - and so forth (Latin et cetera)
i.e. - in other words (Latin id est)
ibid. - in the same book, chapter, page, etc. (Latin ibidem)
Ltd. Limited
nb. - nota bene
NOO - not on original
P&P - postage and packing
pdd - probable date of delivery
PIN - postal index number or Personal Identification Number
SAE - stamped (self-) addressed envelope
yr - year
ZIP (code) - Zone Improvement Plan (used in US addresses after the state designation to assure delivery)

Related instruction:

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Other information and sources (International)

Macmillan Dictionary