Common Salutations and Openings

Salutations

Salutations or greetings can be formal or informal, depending on the situation or the relationship. And of course e-mail doesn't always follow the rules of formal business correspondence.

First name or last name?

Do bear in mind however that many English-speaking people will be quicker on first-name terms, whereas for German-speaking people it is less common to use one's first name in an e-mail message. Therefore be careful not to appear too distant in a culture which moves to first names easily because in addressing people with a more formal address, you do. And this could indicate you don't consider being friendly to your correspondent. Perhaps the reason lies in the fact that in the English language there is no difference between Sie and Du, as they both are translated with you.

A clear indication that it's all right to move to the first-person familiar is when a person signs her or his e-mail with the first name only. You may also wish to take the first step yourself by writing something like: “Dear Helen [if I may].”
**Formal or informal?**

Which salutation to use may also depend on your company’s e-mail policy. The table below gives an overview of the possible salutations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>English</th>
<th>German</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>You do not know who you are writing to:</td>
<td>– <strong>Dear Sir or Madam</strong></td>
<td>– Sehr geehrte Damen und Herren,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Dear clients</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Hi everyone</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You know the person but you’ve never written to or met this person</td>
<td>– <strong>Dear Mr Smith</strong></td>
<td>– Sehr geehrter Herr Müller,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Dear Mrs Wade</strong></td>
<td>– Sehr geehrte Frau Reusch,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Dear Dr Young</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person is a little bit closer</td>
<td><strong>Dear Sophie Reusch</strong></td>
<td><strong>Liebe Frau Reusch,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The person is a close business contact or she/he has signed her or his e-mail with the first name</td>
<td>– <strong>Dear Sophie</strong></td>
<td><strong>Liebe Sophie,</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– **Hello, Sophie ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– **Hi, Sophie ***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Sophie</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Hi,</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>– <strong>Hello,</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several persons / closer contact</td>
<td><strong>Hi everyone</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hallo zusammen</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Please note the extra comma!
Ms or Mrs? Ms is used more frequently in the meantime as this term does not disclose the marital status. Only if the addressee refers to herself as Mrs, do you assume this salutation. The English Miss is out of date just as is the German Fräulein. Dear Sirs or Dear Gentlemen also seems old fashioned nowadays.

Professions or positions in salutations
Just like it is possible in German to mention a profession or position in the opening without using a person’s name, this can also be done in English. In this case, the specific word must be written with a capital. For instance as in: Dear Colleague, Dear Webmaster, etc.

Non-gendered salutations / several persons
When sending bulk e-mail invitations, try to use non-gendered salutations like colleagues or friends. To whom it may concern still seems to function in e-mails, though its use appears to be on the decline. Nowadays e-mail writers prefer to use salutations like: Hi all, Hi there, Dear All, Dear Team, Dear Co-workers and so on.

Woman or man?
With certain languages you may not always be sure whether you are writing to a man or a woman. In cases where you aren’t sure, it is acceptable to write the full name in the salutation. For example: Dear Moriko Kira (this is a Japanese name, where Moriko is the female first name, and Kira is the family name). In Asian cultures (e.g. Japan, Korea, Vietnam, but also in Hungary) the family name comes first. Thus: Mrs.
Kira Moriko. Family names in Slavic languages often have masculine and feminine versions. The latter can be recognised by the female suffix, often ending with ‘a’ or ‘e’.

No salutations?
Is it necessary to always use a salutation or greeting? Not always, although it usually is. But in back-and-forth e-mail correspondence, for instance, salutations quickly seem to be disappearing. And perhaps there is no need to identify or reinforce the parameters over and over again. The same applies for a quick answer to a short question for people who know each other well. Also e-mails among colleagues that are part of an ongoing conversation do not require a salutation or greeting.

**Checklist: formal or informal salutations**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Is the addressee outside the organisation? Then you usually need a formal salutation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Is the addressee a colleague or a friend? Then you can use an informal salutation, or even begin with the person’s first name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Have you had previous contact? Then choose between formal and informal, depending on that contact.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Note how the sender addressed you. You probably want to return the same salutation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Punctuation marks and abbreviations

Should there be a colon, a comma or no punctuation after the salutation? The right answer depends on the country you are e-mailing to.

- no punctuation: Dear Mr Smith
- colon: Dear Mr Smith:
- In other English speaking areas a comma is used: Dear Mr Smith,

When using abbreviations there is another important difference you should pay attention to:

- Contractions in British English are generally written without a full stop, e.g. Mr, Mrs and Ms – American English usually uses a full stop however, called period in North America, e.g. Mr., Mrs. and Ms.
- Mrs / Mr
- Mrs. / Mr.

Vocabulary:
- colon: Doppelpunkt
- punctuation: Satzzeichen
- contraction: Zusammenziehung
- full stop / period: Punkt

Opening sentences

Use one of the following phrases to refer to earlier contact or to give the reason why you are writing.
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Formal: referring to earlier contact

- I am writing with regard to your recent e-mail.
- Referring to your request for information, ...
- I’m writing with reference to order number KULIP-1.
- Further to your last e-mail, ...
- I am mailing this via the ‘Contact us’ link on your web shop. I would like to ask you ...
- Your name was given to me by ...

Informal: referring to an earlier contact

- Just a quick note to say I really appreciated ...
- I got your name from Dr Stampstaaf.
- Re your e-mail ... (instead of formal: Further to your last e-mail ...)

Giving the reason for writing

- Our reason for contacting you is the following: ...
- Informal: I’m writing about ...
- As discussed this morning in our telephone conversation,
- It is our pleasure to inform you of ...
- As we agreed during ...
- As requested in your e-mail of ...
- I am writing in connection with ...
- We would like to inform you about ...
- We would like to draw your attention to the following: ...
Thank you for your e-mail and your interest in ...

Thank you for the enquiry you made via our website.

Note that in English the first phrase after the salutation always starts with a capital letter, whereas in German it starts with a small letter.

Small talk

Although the German translation for small talk is Geplauder, this social skill can have an important function in Anglophone cultures because small talk is not only the ability to conduct a conversation, but also a method of showing some friendliness. This naturally influences the way e-mails are written. People in North America tend to add a bit more of a personal or emotional note in their correspondence than people in German-speaking areas, although the actual choice of words depends of course on the social and professional hierarchy.

Example

Dear Thomas

I hope you had a pleasant trip and that your accommodation is fine. Although the weather can be quite cold at this time of year, I'm sure you will like the old city.

I'm writing to tell you how happy I am to hear the good news on the new business deal. My congratulations on the contract.

I'm sure that it's only the beginning of our work in the Baltic market. And how are Aynur and the kids? Please give them my warmest regards.

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