

Top 6 Ingredients of a Letter

Executive summary. Letters in the construction industry, during the course of a project, usually are reserved for contentious issues or to satisfy notification requirements. Here are six of the most important and common ingredients in these letters.



Why do we write letters? Emails are commonplace these days, but writing a letter is always a powerful and important document in the project record of a construction project. Write a letter when you have something important to say that you want to “stick” with the receiver.

The Top 6 Ingredients. As stated, these letters might cover some fragile subjects. The language doesn't have to be fragile. Here are the six:

1. Letter number – always have a letter number. I recommend one or both of the following numbering schemes: a sequential number (1, 2, 3,...) also known as a serial number, or a “From/To” combined with a sequential number (“SJCC/IBM-004” would be the fourth letter written by SJCC to IBM).
2. “We are in receipt of...” – this is a great way to start a letter which is a response to another document (whether the document is an email, field memo, et cetera). Example: “We are in receipt of your October 30th letter number ABC/XYZ-091 regarding notification...”
3. “Please be advised” – this always sounds better than “we’re gonna go ahead and do this” or some other unprofessional way of being direct.
4. “We are of the understanding” – using this phrase clarifies your interpretation. Example: “We are of the understanding that today you directed XYZ Company to procure two each 55 gallons of Sherwin-Williams Egg White #3432 paint for air delivery...” The bonus to this phrase is adding at the end of the sentence or in the following sentence the following: “Please immediately notify the undersigned if our understanding is incorrect so that we can cancel the order and avoid further time and cost impacts to the project.”
5. Reservation of rights – this language usually concludes a notification as follows: “XYZ Company hereby reserves its rights to assess the impacts to the project in both time and cost until such time that the effects of this change can be fully evaluated.”
6. Reservation of rights – yes, you just read it in #5 above, and it's important enough to list twice.

My Story. These were the first “six” ingredients that came to my mind. The letter numbering is so important for claims’ sake. It becomes especially important if you write more than one letter per day.

I had a \$230,000 project once wherein I wrote 341 letters. Point being, I’ve written a lot of letters. Easily thousands. There’s no reason to be nasty, just keep it professional, clear, and direct.

Work safe!

