

Popular Threads on Solosez

Form Of Address

Being new to solo practice, I would like to know how many people use the formal Mr/Mrs/Ms for the return address in a letter and how many just use the name. I am 50 and tell my clients to call me by my first name. I am just not a real formal person and wonder if it a choice to not use Mr./Mrs/Ms.

Peggi Moxley

I play to the audience. If I want a formal relationship, then I'm Mr. and the client is also Mr. If I want a closer relationship, then we both use first names. Some clients want to show respect. Others just want a jobdone. Some like formality, while others like to think of their lawyer as a friend. You'll find your own "personality" in the mix. Just be sensitive to the needs of the client....let the client define their comfort zone and you accommodate.

Bruce Dorner, Londonderry, NH

Using the formal Mr. is always proper and may be improper. That is aforma part of the letter. If you know the person well you can thenbegin Dear Jack ... as the case may be.

Marc Stern, Seattle

I don't use Ms with my name in the return address (or anywhere else I canthink of for work correspondence) and don't think I have ever seen anotherattorney do that either. I always address correspondence to Mr/Mrs/Ms and usethe same in the salutation. I'm not that formal a person and always tell myclients to call me Veronica (mostly because they cannot usually pronounce mylast name), but I feel the Mr/Mrs/Ms salutation is more professional and morepolite. Just my .02

Veronica Schnidrig, Portland, Oregon

Young lawyers, if they want to build their practice, are well advised to use Mr/Mrs/Ms. You never know.

Personally, at age 65, I wonder at kids who address me by my first name. Do they have no sense of social relationships?

Years ago, when I was 30 and working at Gillette where everyone was on



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a first name basis, I was smart enough NOT to address senior officers that way. I simply used no name in conversations with them.

Norman R. Solberg, Osaka, Japan

As you can see below, I use Ms. But it is because I practice in IP, and don't meet a lot of our clients (they are mostly from foreign countries). And my name is such that they address their letters to Mr. So my return address is to gently tell them who I am.

Ms. Ronni S. Jillions, Washington, D.C.

I should have made my question more specific. I am asking about the client's address in a letter. I generally call my clients by their first names and they call me by mine. So I generally start the letter with Dear Jane. But how common is the usage of Ms/Mrs Jane Smith and how common is Jane Smith?

Peggi Moxley

The salutation should read:

Dear Mrs. Smith:

or

Dear Ms. Smith:

or

Dear Jane:

but NEVER

Dear Jane Smith:

To be on the safe side, use "Mr." or "Ms." even if you use the client's first name in conversation. Always use "Ms." to address women unless instructed otherwise, or unless you are dealing with an older woman.

The inside address should read simply:

Jane Smith
123 Main St.
Denver, CO 93344

Jennifer J. Rose, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico

If you are not using the first name as a salutation you should always use the Mr./Ms. Smith form unless you are addressing a person with a title.

"Dear Jane Smith" is the kind of salutation you get in junkmail.

Nick Cobbs, Washington DC

In modern business letters, it is acceptable but not common to eliminate the salutation for various reasons, such as not knowing the marital status or chosen form of name.

Letters are usually so top-heavy, especially with a long subject line, that people don't even miss the salutation when it is absent.

Of course, you also must eliminate the complementary "yours truly" or whatever and just enter the author's name.

Modern, acceptable, but not in common use in legal letters.

Cheryl Stephens

If you graduated from high school in the mid 1960's, you came straight into the fire of the feminist revolution. For folks who date before that, only a small minority chose to use Ms. For folks from the mid-seventies on, most do, or will not be offended. In between, who knows. Then overlay for regional differences, class differences, and of course any clues from the subject, like she didn't change her name at marriage.

Rebecca K. Wiess

I believe that there is one more (at least) common convention, there is a customary salutation where (and I would always use) you begin "Dear Mr./Ms/Mrs etc. Smith:". Then use your pen (preferably fountain) and draw single strike through the last name diagonally (not obliterating the name), for someone with whom you feel the recipient will regard you as familiar, write the person's First name or nickname. Similarly in the closing use the standard format and closing, but strike your own name similarly and write your familiar name.

This convention first of all allows you to write familiarly to your client yet retain copies which do not reflect that relationship. Since many letters of lawyers have an unfortunate occasional introduction in evidence or in other filings, best to have all copies stick to protocol.

Dick Howland, Amherst, MA

The military does this all the time. I have a letter of appreciation from a Rear Admiral that is completed this way. As far as I know, I never met the man.

Jim Mills, Sarasota, FL

I'm not Jennifer, but I can tell you that Ms. is not a reference to a woman who is not yet too old, but to a woman who does not wish to identify herself by her marital status. Think of this:

Mr. - an adult male
Master - a young male not yet an adult
Ms. - an adult female
Miss - an unmarried woman
Mrs. - a married woman

So it can be proper to refer to a married couple as Mr. and Ms. or Mr. and Mrs.

I appreciate why Jennifer suggested that she might not use Ms. with an older woman, but one would be wise to ask the client how she would like to be addressed. Many "older" women would also prefer Ms.

Deborah Matthews, Alexandria, VA

I beg to disagree.

Mr. and Mrs. John Smith is correct. Mr. and Ms. John Smith is not. Now, if Mary Adams kept her maiden name when she married John Smith, the couple would be addressed as: Mr. John Smith and Ms. Mary Adams.

(Hey, I meant "older woman" to be at least 85 years old!)

Oh, and when you're addressing two brothers, the correct address is: Messrs.

Jennifer J. Rose

If I don't know the female addressee's marital status, I have always just used "Ms." Is that wrong? I mean it doesn't mean "Miss" and it doesn't mean "Mrs." It seems totally neutral but still respectful.

Richard O'Connor

I use Ms. in written communication if I am unsure about the marital status/preference of the woman.

Face to face, I use "Miss" or "Ma'am". I am tending to use Miss if there is any question about age or marital status. Back when I was in law school, a friend introduced me to his then-girlfriend. I said "nice to meet you, ma'am" Boy, was that a mistake;; she almost ripped my head off, replying "Do I LOOK Like a Ma'am? How old do you think I am, ANYWAY?!" Corey tried to smooth things over by going "uh, he didn't

mean anything by it, he's from the country and he's just trying to be polite, that's the way they talk up there".

So, unless they look over 40, it's "Miss". The worst I am implying is that they look younger than they are; sort of like being carded at a bar when you're pushing 30.

Ronald A Jones

"Ms." is actually a very old and respected form of address for either a married or unmarried woman. To my knowledge, it is not appropriate for a little girl, but I am really not sure. I do know that a woman cannot be too old for the title Ms., however there may be some women who so cherish their "Mrs." that they will be offended by its not being recognized. That does not, however, mean that it is improper.

"Ms." pre-dates the women's movement. It was adopted by Ms. Magazine, but not invented by it. If you consult an old secretary's manual, you will find it.

Jo Fray

No one has ever questioned, or complained about, my use of "Ms" when addressing females. I was a little surprised that anyone thought there was a question about it. And as to children, I seldom send legal communications to them (in fact I never have), so I will postpone the question of how to address them until some, hopefully, distant time in the future. In the meantime, Jo, I am saving your message in my file of office procedures just in case in the future someone may see fit to criticize my use of "Ms."

Richard O'Connor

That's interesting. My daughter, and family, live in South Carolina. They have someone come in to help with the kids, who are 5 and 1. And this person insists that the kids be polite, and therefore, when my nephew responds to her, he must say, "Yes, Ma'am." She's about 30 years old, unmarried -- I told her that in the north, that doesn't work as well. I remember the first time I was called "Ma'am," and I was ass hocked as the girl you wrote about, and I was about 35 and had 3 kids. Things are different in different locations.

Marion Chase Pacheco, New Rochelle, NY

"Ms." was invented for use when the marital status of a woman was unknown. Its use was taught as early as the 50s in stenographic courses for that purpose. In the 70s many woman began to prefer it to being labeled

"Mrs." or "Miss" for socio-political reasons. A youngster is undoubtedly a "Miss" except, I suppose, in certain Southern states. %^)

Cheryl Stephens

For some reason, "Sir" doesn't seem to connote age as much as "Ma'am."

Although there certainly are personal, regional and age preferences, I still believe "Miss" as opposed to "Ma'am" or even "Ms" provides a safeharbor.

An arbitrary belief on your part that a woman is over 40 (or 30 or 50 or whatever) could still result in a backlash - although I would hope it is not as uncomfortable as the one Ron experienced!

The first time someone referred to me as "Ma'am" it gave my whole being a shockwave. I think I was 25 and it was the first time I felt "old" in a negative vs. positive way.

At 51, I still shudder when called "Ma'am," and totally delighted when addressed as "Miss." It always makes me smile and I always say "Thank you!" . and it makes me feel GREAT!

Patricia M. Joyce, East Greenwich, RO

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