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Free guide · 6 min read

Make sense of an official letter with AI

For anyone who has opened a brown envelope and read the same paragraph three times. Eight prompts that turn an official letter into plain English and help you answer it. You take your details out first.

First, take your details out

Before any letter goes near an AI tool, remove anything that says who you are. It takes a minute, and the tool doesn't need it to explain the letter.

- ✗ Your name, address and date of birth
- ✗ National Insurance number, NHS number, tax reference
- ✗ Account numbers, sort codes and card numbers
- ✗ Reference numbers, case numbers and barcodes
- ✗ Passwords and security answers

The easy way is to type or paste only the paragraphs you don't understand. If you take a photo, first cover your name, address, reference numbers and any barcode, wherever they are on the page.

IS THE LETTER REAL?

Scam letters, texts and emails copy official ones. AI can't tell you whether a letter is genuine. If you're unsure, don't use any phone number, link or bank detail in it. Find the organisation's number yourself, from its official website or an older letter you trust, and ask.

IT EXPLAINS. IT DOESN'T ADVISE

AI can put a letter into plain English. It can also get details wrong, and it doesn't know your situation. For anything about money you owe, benefits, housing, immigration or court, speak to a free adviser such as Citizens Advice before you act. The deadlines in the letter still apply while you check.

Understand it

PROMPT 1

Say it in plain English

Start here.

Explain this letter in plain English, as if to a friend. Tell me: 1. Who it is from and why they wrote. 2. What they want me to do. 3. Any date I must act by. 4. What the letter says will happen if I do nothing. Use short sentences. If something in the letter is unclear, say so and do not guess. Letter, with my details removed: **[paste]**

PROMPT 2

What do these words mean?

The sentence makes sense until one phrase.

Explain these words and phrases from an official letter in plain English, one line each: **[e.g. "arrears", "liability order", "without prejudice", "statutory", "remittance"]**. Say what each usually means for the person who received the letter in the UK.

PROMPT 3

What I must do, in order

The letter asks for several things and you don't know where to begin.

From this letter, make me a checklist of what I need to do, in order, with the deadline beside each step and the documents I will need. Use only what the letter says. Letter, with my details removed: **[paste]**

PROMPT 4

Explain it in another language

You, or someone you're helping, read another language more easily than English.

Explain this letter in simple **[language, e.g. Bengali, Urdu, Polish, Arabic]**. Keep the organisation's name, the dates and the amounts exactly as they are written in English. Then list what must be done and by when. Letter, with my details removed: **[paste]**

Tip: Legal words don't always translate well. For anything serious, ask the organisation for an interpreter or a translated letter.

Answer it

PROMPT 5

Questions to ask on the phone

You'd rather ring, and you want to get it sorted in one call.

I need to phone **[type of organisation, e.g. the council tax office]** about a letter that says **[one-line summary]**. Give me a short list of questions to ask, what to have in front of me, and what to write down during the call: the name of the person, the date, and what was agreed.

Tip: Ring a number you found yourself, not one printed in a letter you're unsure about.

PROMPT 6

Write a clear reply

They've asked you for an answer or for documents.

Write a short, polite letter replying to **[type of organisation]**. Their letter said: **[summary]**. My answer is: **[what you want to say]**. I am enclosing: **[documents]**. Leave gaps in square brackets for my name, address and reference number. Plain English, under 150 words.

PROMPT 7

Ask for more time

You can do what they ask, but not by their date.

Write a polite letter asking for more time to **[pay, reply, send documents]**. The reason, briefly: **[reason]**. I can do it by **[date]**. Ask them to confirm in writing. Leave gaps in square brackets for my details and reference number. Under 120 words.

Tip: Send it before the deadline, not after, and keep a copy. The deadline stands unless they agree a new one in writing.

PROMPT 8

Say you think it's wrong

The amount, the date or the facts don't look right.

Write a calm letter saying I think there is a mistake in their letter dated **[date]**. What I think is wrong: **[explain]**. What I think is right: **[explain]**. Ask them to check, to reply in writing, and to tell me what I should do in the meantime. Facts only, no anger. Leave gaps in square brackets for my details. Under 150 words.

Tip: A letter like this may not stop a formal deadline to challenge a decision. For benefits, tax or fines, ask a free adviser first.

Before you act on it

1. Read the AI's summary next to the real letter. Do the dates and amounts match?
2. If it's about money, your home, benefits or a court, show the letter to a free adviser.
3. Keep the letter. Write on it what you did and when.
4. Helping someone else with their letter? Ask them first, and take their details out in the same way.

Ready for the next small step?

Tell doingit.today one thing you do every week, at work or at home. We'll turn it into plain steps, show where AI can help, and teach you each one in a short lesson. No tech background needed.

Free to start. No tech background needed.

Start free at doingit.today

Free help from a person

- ✓ Citizens Advice helps with benefits, debt, housing and more
- ✓ Our checklist: What never to paste into AI
- ✓ New to AI? A gentle start with AI

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