This handout is also available online at the George Mason University Writing Center web site:
http://writingcenter.gmu.edu

Writing Business Letters

A good business letter is brief, straightforward, and polite. If possible, it should be limited to one single-spaced typewritten page. Because it is so brief, a business letter is often judged on small, but important, things: format, grammar, punctuation, openings and closings. A business letter is not the place to try out fancy fonts or experimental writing styles.

There are two main styles of business letters:
Full block style: Align *all* elements on the left margin.
Modified block style: Down the middle of the page, align the return address, date, closing, signature, and typed name; align other elements on the left page margin.

Below are the elements of a standard business letter and their functions:

Return Address:
Your address (or the address of the company you represent). If you are using preprinted stationary, there is no need to retype the information.

Date:
Leave two blank lines after the return address. Always spell out the month and include the day, a comma, and the year.

Inside Address:
Leave two blank lines after the date. Then type the address of the person or company to whom you are writing.

Salutation:
Type *Dear*, followed by the person's name. End the line with a colon. If you don't know the name of the person, use a title instead (i.e., *Dear Editor, Dear Madam*).

Body:
Align your message on the left margin. Skip a line before starting a new paragraph, but do not indent the paragraph's first line. Make sure that each paragraph is clear and concise.

Closing:
Leave two lines of space after your last body paragraph, then use a conventional closing, followed by a comma (i.e., *Sincerely*, *Sincerely Yours*, *Respectfully*).

Signature:
Your signature should appear below your closing. Unless you have established a personal relationship with the person you are writing, use both your first and last name.

Name and Position:
Four lines after the closing, type your full name. Do not include a title (*Mr. or Mrs.*). If you are writing on behalf of an organization, type your title on the next line.

Abbreviations at the end of a letter:
If you send a copy of a letter to someone other than the person addressed, use *cc:* and the person's name. Use *Enc.* or *Enclosure* if you enclose something with the letter. If someone else types it, put the writer's initials in capitals, then a slash and the typist's initials in lowercase: *MT/fjr*. Just one abbreviation should appear on a line.

On the back of this page is a sample business letter in Full Block style

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