

## Example of a Formal Letter

F. Scott Fitzgerald  
481 Laurel Avenue  
St. Paul, MN 55104

January 10, 2009

Maxwell Perkins  
Charles Scribner's Sons  
2112 Fifth Avenue  
New York, NY 10034

Dear Mr. Perkins:

Enclosed please find a new manuscript for my novel, which you so adroitly rejected upon our last correspondence. I have made many of the changes you suggested and am confident that you will find the book to your liking.

Please let me know your opinion as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

F. Scott Fitzgerald

Enc: manuscript

F. Scott Fitzgerald  
fscott@fitzgerald.com  
651-523-2912

## Accessing More Information

- The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin – Madison: [www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook](http://www.wisc.edu/writing/Handbook)
- The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University: <http://owl.purdue.edu>

## Acknowledgments

Information for this brochure was adapted from:

“Writing the Basic Business Letter.” The Online Writing Lab (OWL) at Purdue University. 27 Jan. 2009.  
<<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/653/01/>>.

“Business Letters.” The Writing Center at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. 27 Jan. 2009.  
<<http://writing.wisc.edu/Handbook/BusinessLetter.html>>.

## Where to Find Help on Campus

Consultants at the **Hamline University Writing Center**, located in the basement of Bush Library, are eager to help you with all stages of your writing. We will work with you whether you have just received an assignment and have no idea how to begin or you have a finished draft and want help with revisions.

You can make appointments online at WC Online. Simply follow the instructions at:

<http://rich37.com/hamline>

We look forward to seeing you!



**The Writing Center**  
Hamline University  
Bush Library, Lower Level  
651-523-2026  
[writingcenter@hamline.edu](mailto:writingcenter@hamline.edu)

# Writing Formal Letters



As a graduate or undergraduate student, you have already written a formal letter applying for school. You may need to write formal letters in the future for other reasons.

- To make a request or inquiry
- To complain
- To apply for a job
- To issue an announcement
- To sell something
- To respond to a previous letter
- To acknowledge or thank someone

### **The Content of Formal Letters**

Some rules apply to any formal letter, regardless of its purpose.

- Know your audience.
- Establish the objective of the letter fairly quickly. Are you complaining? Inquiring? Thanking?
- Always use a tone that is friendly, courteous, and professional, not curt.
- Write multiple drafts of your letter until you are completely happy with the results. Make sure the content is organized, the grammar and punctuation are correct, and the text is free of typos. Write formal letters carefully as they are an expression of your professionalism and capabilities.

### **Formatting Formal Letters**

Formal letters normally use full block format; every line starts at the left margin. A letter with indented paragraphs is usually more informal.

The many format options appropriate for formal letters all include the following common elements:

#### *1. Heading or Return Address*

Contact information for the person who is sending the letter should be easily located, so it is usually placed at the top left-hand corner of the page. You may also use letterhead.

#### *2. The Date*

After the contact information, skip one line and include the complete date—month, day, and year.

#### *3. The Recipient's Name and Address*

After the date, skip another line and type the name and address of the person or organization to whom you are writing.

#### *4. Attention Line*

There are at least two instances where an attention line should be included:

- When you do not know the name of the person you are trying to contact

*Attention: Human Resource Manager*

- When you want the organization to respond even if the person to whom you are writing is unavailable. In such a case, type the name of the organization or division in the attention line.

#### *5. Subject Line (optional)*

Describe the contents of the letter using key words or a brief phrase.

#### *6. Salutation*

If you can, find a contact within the organization. This adds a personal touch. When addressing an unknown person use Dear Sir or Madam. Use courtesy titles such as Dr., Mr., Ms., Professor. Use a colon rather than a comma; it is more professional.

*Dear Professor McGonagall:*

#### *7. Body*

The body usually includes an introductory paragraph, one or more body paragraphs, and a concluding paragraph.

#### *8. Complimentary Close and Signature*

Capitalize the first letter of your closing, and follow all phrases with commas.

*Sincerely,  
Yours truly,  
Best regards,*

#### *9. Enclosure Lines*

Use the abbreviation *Enc.* to indicate any documents enclosed.

#### *10. Contact Information*

Include a way for the recipient to contact you.